

Movie Titles that begin with “H”

Hacksaw Ridge * Hail Caesar! * Hail Satan? * Hairspray * Half Nelson * The Half of It * Hamlet 2 * Hancock * The Handmaiden * The Hangover * The Hangover Part II * Hanna * Happening * Happiest Season * Happy Accidents * Happy Endings * Happy-Go-Lucky * Happy People * Happythankyoumoreplease * Hard Times on Long Island * Harry Brown * Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone * Harriet * Hart's War * The Hate U Give * Hateship Loveship * Haywire * Headhunters * The Heart of the Game * The Heartbreak Kid * Heartbreakers * Hearts In Atlantis * The Heat * Heist * Hell Or High Water * Hello, My Name Is Doris * The Help * Henry Poole Is Here * Henry's Crime * Her * Here Today * Hereafter * The Hero * Herself * He's Just Not That Into You * Hidalgo * Hidden Figures * High Fidelity * Higher Ground * The Highwaymen * A Hijacking * Hillbilly Elegy * His Three Daughters * The History Boys * A History of Violence * Hit Man * Hitch * Hitchcock * The Hitman's Bodyguard * The Hoax * The Holdovers * Holes * The Holiday * The Hollars * Hollywood Ending * Hollywoodland * Home Again * The Homesman * An Honest Liar * Honey Boy * Hope Springs * Horrible Bosses * Horse Girl * Hot Tub Time Machine * Hotel Mumbai * Hotel Rwanda * The Hours * The House of Mirth * House of Sand and Fog * How About You * How Do You Know * How To Have Sex * How We Got To Know * Howard Zinn: You Can't Be Neutral On a Moving Train * Howl * Hugo * The Hulk * The Human Stain * Human Trafficking * The Humans * Hunger * The Hunger Games * The Hunger Games: Catching Fire * The Hunt * Hunt for the Wilderpeople * The Hunting Ground * Hustle & Flow * Hustlers * The Hurricane * The Hurt Locker * Hush * Hyde Park on Hudson * Hysteria

HACKSAW RIDGE: (2016) *Hacksaw Ridge* is based on the extraordinary story of Desmond Doss. Doss was a conscientious objector who believed that while the war was justified, killing was nevertheless wrong. In one of the bloodiest battles of WWII Doss evacuated wounded soldiers from behind enemy lines without ever firing a gun. He was the first conscientious objector to ever earn the Congressional Medal of Honor. The role of Doss is brilliantly played by Andrew Garfield and the movie was directed by Oscar winner Mel Gibson who is returning to directing after 10 years absence. Based on true events, the film tells a moving story about an unlikely American hero who braved unbelievable criticism and danger to remain true to his convictions. The movie received an 87% critic's score and 94% audience score. Barbara and I liked the film despite our misgivings about the extended graphic violence. No one denies that “war is hell,” but Gibson seems to revel in gore longer than is necessary to advance the story. **GRADE B**

HAIL CAESAR!: (2016) This is the Coen Brothers 17th feature film and it is a salute to the Golden Age of Hollywood. Any film buff of a certain age will recognize the singing cowboy movie, the Esther Williams aquatic ballet, the Busby Berkley dance spectacular, the submarine movie, the biblical epic, the British drawing-room mystery and the 1940's style film noir. In addition, we get a look at the communist threat of the 1950s, the studio habit of suggesting a romance between two budding stars who have never met, and the importance to Hollywood of the Hedda Hopper-type gossip columnist. Many of the Coen Brothers' favorite actors take part and we enjoyed them all. Alden Ehrenreich is a newcomer who seemed perfectly suited to the movie's style. He plays a singing cowboy star who shoots straight but doesn't talk much. When he is ordered to replace another actor in a British drawing room drama, he is woefully unprepared. The funniest scene for us was agonizing with the director, Ralph Fiennes, as he tries to direct this sweetly willing but inept actor. Josh Brolin is Eddie Mannix, a name he shares with a real person, *Eddie Mannix, a behind-the-scenes fixer who worked for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer when it claimed to have more stars than there are in heaven.* (Manohla Dargis, NY Times). When the star (George Clooney) of a Biblical epic is kidnapped, Mannix goes into the ultimate fixer mode. Brolin is excellent as the fast-talking studio executive who makes problems disappear before they can ruin a movie's shooting schedule or make it into the gossip columns. His solution for a desert epic drenched with unseasonable rains is priceless. All those movie bits are entertaining, especially to Gary and me, who have been going “to the movies” for longer than most of our readers. Unfortunately, we agree with the critics that they do not combine into a cohesive whole. Immediately exiting the theatre we both were disappointed with *Hail Caesar!*, and were leaning toward a B- grade. But on the way home, we had such fun recalling the movies within the movie that we elevated that grade to a B. It's not as funny as *Raising Arizona* (1987), nor as memorable as *Blood Simple* (1984) *Fargo* (1996) or *No Country For Old Men* (2007), but for anyone who has been enjoying movies as long as we have, it's worth seeing. **GRADE B**

HAIL SATAN?: (2019) If asked a week ago what I might see in a documentary titled *Hail Satan?*, I might have speculated, a film about devil worship, perversion, and maybe even blood sacrifices. Boy! Would I have been wrong. *Hail Satan?* is an informative and entertaining documentary about the Satanic Temple, a nontheistic religious and political activist group based in Salem, Massachusetts. It is not devoted to actual devil worship, but is an assemblage of atheists, secular humanists, outcasts, misfits and rabble rousers devoted to justice, reason, free expression and the separation of church and state. With their strong belief in separation of church and state, and a mischievous sense of humor the group has succeeded in changing what they consider offensive laws or practices that impose Christian values on non-Christians. For example, in Arizona the Phoenix City Council always opened meetings with an invocation delivered by various church pastors. The satanic group asked to deliver one of the invocations. The Council voted to do away with the invocation altogether rather than allow the satanic delivery. The group also does tangible good conducting blood drives, cleaning up highways and distributing women's hygiene products to shelters. Barbara and I found the movie thought provoking and at times humorous. **GRADE B**

HAIRSPRAY: It was impossible for me to watch this one without smiling. And my foot kept bouncing to the catchy music. What a delight! The enthusiasm and energy are irresistible. Director Adam Shankman brought out the very best in his actors. Christopher Walken and John Travolta are a couple for the ages. Travolta is especially delightful as the very large mother of a very chubby Tracy Turnblad. Although you can't really forget she's a he, Travolta creates such a real and sympathetic character that you begin to think of him as Edna Turnblad. And the dance number that he/she and Walken do is wonderful. This film is based on the Broadway musical, “Hairspray,” which was based on the original 1988 movie, *Hairspray*, written and directed by John Waters. The story is the same in all three versions: It's 1962 and highschooler Tracy dreams of dancing on The Corny Collins Show, a fictional American Bandstand. Along the way to fulfilling her dream, she is instrumental in integrating the TV show. Of course, there is a villain: It's Velma Von Tussel, the station manager, played hilariously by a great-looking Michelle Pfeiffer. The always entertaining Queen Latifa is the mother of one of Tracey's friends, a black schoolmate who teaches her some very special dance moves. Elijah Kelley is a standout in this role and his

little sister, played by Taylor Parks, is one terrific little dancer. Nikki Blonski is adorable as Tracy. Blonski had never acted or danced before this. She saw the musical on Broadway when she was 15 and totally identified with Tracy. She went to an open casting call and got the lead role. Now that's a real Hollywood story! Some of the actors from the 1988 version appear in this film. Ricki Lake was Tracy then and appears in this one as a talent agent. Jerry Stiller played Tracy's father in the original and is Mr. Pinky in this version. And John Waters, has a very brief appearance in the opening number as the flasher who lives next door. Gary enjoyed the movie as much as I did and we agree on a grade of A-. **GRADE A-**

HALF-NELSON: Director Ryan Fleck must have been influenced by the Dogma school of filmmaking. He used hand-held cameras, the film seemed grainy, and the lighting was murky—even the daylight scenes. This film has gotten some rave reviews and I can understand why critics were impressed with Ryan Gosling. He is, indeed, impressive as a drug-addicted high school History teacher. In spite of his drug habit, he seems to be a very good teacher—one who tries to get his student to think. Also, Shareeka Epps, as Drey, a girl in his History class and on the basketball team he coaches, is every bit his equal in this film. Drey discovers her coach's secret and the two become unlikely friends. Drey has her own connection to the drug world, but, so far, she has been able to steer clear of it. I can't say we enjoyed this film. There wasn't much to enjoy besides the acting. We've seen how drugs can destroy a life before and this movie didn't offer any new insights. It does get points for realism. Based on his enjoyment of the film, Gary gives the film a C. I might be persuaded to give it a C+ because I know it was a well-made movie, even though the jerky hand-held camera movement bothered me. **GRADE C/C+**

THE HALF OF IT: (2020 on *Netflix*) This movie is a modern take on *Cyrano d'Bergerac*. In this case, a young Chinese-American girl helps a boy woo a girl—a girl for whom she also has feelings. Ellie Chu (Leah Lewis) lives with her father, who doesn't speak English very well, so they talk in Mandarin. Ellie's father was a PhD engineer in China, but in the US, he took a job as a train station manager, hoping it would lead to better things. It didn't. Ellie is a very bright high school senior. She is a talented writer who writes papers for other students to earn a little cash. When Paul (Daniel Diemer) asks her to help with a letter he has written to Aster Flores, a girl he claims to love, Ellie at first refuses. Later, needing \$50 for the electric bill, she says she'll do it, but only one letter. Instead, she writes several letters and then texts to the girl she has a crush on for Paul. Aster (Alexxis Lemire) is puzzled that the boy who wrote so thoughtfully is tongue-tied in person, but chalks it up to typical teenaged boy-girl interaction. There is a not entirely believable confrontation at the end of the movie, but things get sorted out and everything turns out with hope for Ellie and Aster and Paul. Gary and I enjoyed this sweet teen romance, and thought that it was unpredictable and handled sexual orientation with a light touch. Critics must have agreed with us because it earned a 96% on the *Tomatometer*. **GRADE B+**

HAMLET 2: This is a story of a high school musical production that offends many in the community. Like the musical, the movie itself may offend some viewers. It is the story of a failed actor (Steve Coogan) who becomes a high school drama teacher in Tucson, Arizona. When the school's drama program is faced with the threat of cancellation, he decides to save it by presenting a musical that he has written—a sequel to Hamlet. When his wife (Catherine Keener) points out that everyone dies in the original *Hamlet*, he answers with "I have a device." The device is time travel, and involves both Hamlet and Jesus traveling back and forth in time. The school board tries to stop the production, especially because of its portrayal of Jesus. While some may find the song, "Rock Me Jesus," a tad offensive, it's actually quite an entertaining number. Coogan is a talented comic who can and will do just about anything to get a laugh. Gary felt some of the scenes were in the film for no other reason than to set up the comic punch line. I agree with him that the movie is uneven—some bits are hilarious while others fall flat. I thought the roller-skating bit—funny at first—was overdone. However, I laughed intermittently throughout the film. I especially liked Coogan's conversations with the school's pint-sized drama critic. Keener is always good. Here she makes the most out of a minor role. Amy Poehler is amusing as an ACLU lawyer who sees the school board's attempt to close down the musical as a first amendment case. We especially liked Elizabeth Shue playing none other than Elizabeth Shue. In the film, Shue is now a nurse in a Tucson hospital who left Hollywood because she got tired of the rejection. It's not easy to play yourself, but Shue is very good at doing it. Some of the funniest bits are the opening commercials in which Coogan, the erstwhile actor, appeared. Gary can't go higher than C+, but I say B-. **GRADE B-/C+**

HANCOCK: Barbara and I were both "underwhelmed" by *Hancock*. The concept is original and we are both Will Smith fans. Charlize Theron and Jason Bateman easily hold up their ends and director Peter Berg was more than adequate. Smith plays Hancock, a flawed superhero who is also a depressed drunk. Most superheroes are admired and respected, but not Hancock. He may lower the crime rates, but his image would have to be considerably improved, just for him to be merely disliked. To the image rescue comes Bateman (Ray), a struggling Public Relations man. Theron, Ray's wife, plays an interesting role which I will not give away. For us, the first half of the film, which has most of the laughs, plays better than the second half. Still, we liked it well enough to give it a respectable grade. **GRADE B**

THE HANDMAIDEN: (2016) This Japanese film by Chan-wook Park received 94% from critics on the *Tomatometer* and 91% from audiences. We are mystified. Was it the triple-cross story of lust and betrayal that intrigued them? Was it the girl-on-girl action that caught their fancy? Was it the perversion and brutality that interested them? Was it the admittedly gorgeous imagery that overwhelmed them? Gary and I thought this 145 minute film was tedious and couldn't wait for it to be over. Enough said. **GRADE F**

THE HANGOVER: If you are offended by language, off-color jokes, and raunchy antics, you may want to skip *The Hangover*. But if you do, you will miss what is, arguably, the funniest Vegas comedy ever made. Had I found the second half of the film as hilarious as the first half, I might rank it among the funniest comedies ever. Two days prior to his wedding, Doug, two friends, and a future brother-in-law head to Vegas for what they hope will be a memorable bachelor party. The aftermath left in the hotel suite the next morning suggest it must have been a legendary night, but Doug is missing and the hung over men remaining have absolutely no recollection of where Doug is or why there is a tiger in the bathroom, a chicken in the living area, and a baby in the closet. The fun is in the tension of trying to find Doug in time to return him to his wedding and to piece together the mystery of the forgotten bachelor party. The four leads are brilliantly played by Bradley Cooper, Ed Helms, Zach Galifianakis, and Ken Jeong. Heather Graham and Mike Tyson appear in cameos. Barbara and I both liked this farcical comedy and settle on the same grade. **GRADE B+**

THE HANGOVER PART II: I had strong mixed feelings when I read they were making a sequel to *The Hangover*. I regarded the original as one of the funniest comedies ever made and praised it in my review. It later turned out to be the highest-grossing R-rated comedy of all time. May, 2011 figures had it grossing a staggering 467.5 million worldwide. But I also warned that some of our readers might be offended by the language, raunchy antics, and off-color jokes. My fear was that the sequel might be a thinly veiled reprise of the original or that they might push the boundaries of taste beyond even my liberal standards. My fears were only partly realized. My liberal standards weren't pushed, but what was original and fun in *The Hangover* (shot in Vegas) seems predictable and a bit forced in *The Hangover Part II* (shot in Bangkok). It just doesn't cover the carbon copy nature of the film for characters to occasionally say, "I can't believe this is happening again." Barbara and I agree that if you missed the original, you shouldn't even think about seeing the sequel. And if you saw and liked the original and are looking for a few good laughs, see *Bridesmaids*. **GRADE C**

HANNA: Hanna has been raised by her father to speak several languages and possess both an encyclopedic knowledge and the fighting skills of a trained assassin. They live hidden in a forest in Finland until Hannah is ready to face Marissa, the woman who killed her mother and will not rest until she kills both Hanna and her father. Hanna's mission, when she chooses to accept it, is to kill Marissa. When Hanna is 16-years-old, she decides that she is ready. The reasons behind their vendetta are murky, but eventually we learn the whole story. Meanwhile, I enjoyed watching Saoirse Ronan, as Hanna, kick all kinds of butt. I also enjoyed Cate Blanchett as Marissa, a ruthless intelligence agent with a cool, calm approach to killing. Eric Bana plays Hanna's father, and he is no slouch when it comes to killing either. Gary had a problem with the script, which not only has a science fiction element, but also plays fast and loose with geography and never explains how Hanna, whose forest home didn't have electricity, learns how to use a computer. But many critics have like the pulse pounding action of the movie. Manohla Dargis of the *NYTimes* called the script, "a patchwork of action-movie themes — including storm-trooping soldiers in black helicopters and an intelligence agency with a covert program — that have been recombined along Grimm Brothers story lines. Roger Ebert thinks *Hanna* is a "first-rate thriller about the drawbacks of home schooling." If you enjoy chase thrillers, you'll like this one. If, like Gary, you are unable to suspend disbelief, you will probably avoid it. I liked it. Grade B from Barb; Grade C from Gary. **GRADE B/C**

HAPPENING: 2021 (Available for \$5.99 rental on Prime Video.) This film, based on a true story, won the top prize at the world's oldest film festival, the Venice Film Festival. It also scored 99% from 152 reviews on the Rotten Tomato's Tomatometer. It is slow starting, but ultimately a tough but rewarding watch from a powerful film that drives home the fact that outlawing abortions will not prevent people from getting them. It just means they will go to more dangerous lengths to do so. In 1963 France, Anne is a bright young student trying to establish a respectable career. But when she falls pregnant, she sees the opportunity to finish her studies and escape her working-class roots disappearing. Abortion was illegal in 1963 France. Of course, women face the legal consequences of abortion, never men. The movie catalogs the horrors Anne experiences while trying to terminate the pregnancy so that she can continue her education and chart her own fate. She explores options that may land her in prison, risking a life-long prison sentence or even death from a badly performed procedure. *Happening* could not be more staggering or more timely. I'd say the movie is not for the squeamish, but you know what? It is for the squeamish; especially those who hold power over women's bodies in this country but don't trust them to make decisions on their own behalf. Based on a semi-autobiographical French novel, this subtitled French film could not have arrived at a more opportune time. It serves as a warning of what many young women may face now that Roe v. Wade has been overturned by our Supreme Court. No matter your position on abortion, you must face one brutal reality. Mostly men dictate what women can legally do when faced with an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy. *Happening* brings compassion to a story many women have faced. The film is well acted, especially by the woman playing Anne, the lead. The female filmmakers don't judge anyone; they just let the action play out. Barbara and I agree that the film may be hard to watch at times, but worth the effort. **GRADE A**

HAPPIEST SEASON (2020 on Hulu): We wanted a Christmas movie for the Christmas issue of *Movie Views* and this seemed to fit the bill. Our local critic described the plot this way: "A spirited woman brings her decidedly un-festive partner home for the holidays to meet her family and misunderstandings cause some entertaining conflict before they're all cleared up." The cast is what attracted us to this movie headed by Kristen Stewart, who plays Abby, the un-festive partner. Harper, played by Mackenzie Davis, is desperate to keep up the fiction of a perfect family, so she convinces Abby to pretend that they are merely heterosexual roommates. Harper's parents are Mary Steenburgen and Victor Garber and they are perfect. Abby's friend and confidante is Daniel Levy, so wonderful in *Shitt's Creek* and equally wonderful here. It is the first holiday offering that revolves around a LGBTQ couple, and several in the cast, including director Clea DuVall, identify as LGBTQ. Although our local critic thought the heartwarming finale didn't seem authentic, it worked for us. We both reached for the Kleenex at the end. Gary was at a grade of B- halfway through the film, but he came around to a B+ or A-. Only a superb cast could capture us so completely. **GRADE A-/B+**

HAPPY ACCIDENTS: Yesterday we saw Kevin Spacey as a space traveler and today we saw Vincent D'Onofrio as a time traveler. That's two quirky semi-science fiction movies in one week. Both of them are worth seeing. *Happy Accidents* is a happy combination of romantic comedy and science fiction. Ruby (Marisa Tomei) has had bad luck with the men in her life. She and her friends keep pictures of old boyfriends in a box labeled "ex-files," and their discussions about men are very funny. When Ruby meet Sam (D'Onofrio) she thinks he is different and only later learns how really "different" he is. Sam seems unfamiliar with ordinary things, for example, he doesn't know the difference between roses and carnations. Sam finally admits that he is a "back-traveler" and has come to 1999 New York from 400 years in the future. Sam is very convincing, and Ruby decides to play along with what she thinks is a game. But is it a game? Or is Sam really a traveler from a future world. To tell you anymore would spoil this unpredictable, witty and thoroughly enjoyable film. Tomei and D'Onofrio have great chemistry and kept us engaged throughout the 110 minutes running time. The film was written and directed by Brad Anderson. Anderson is the nephew of Holland Taylor who appears in the film as Ruby's therapist. **GRADE B**

HAPPY ENDINGS: This 2005 film is about happy endings—both kinds. The Director, Don Roos, tries a quirky film technique: subtitles. A lot of the story is told in text printed at the side of the screen. At first, this was interesting, but after a while we wanted to say, "This is a movie, not a book." The cast is loaded with familiar faces: Lisa Kudrow, Laura Dern, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Jason Ritter, Bobby Cannavale, Steve Coogan and an uncharacteristically low-key Tom Arnold. The actors appears in three related stories and everything is tied up at the end—mostly in the text. This is very much an indie movie so it's no surprise that it was a Sundance selection. Todd

McCarthy of *Variety* thought it came off "like an undernourished Paul Thomas Anderson wannabe." Roger Ebert felt that most of the characters were not particularly engaging except for Gyllenhaal's Jude, a "seductive gold digger who realizes that the fastest way to a rich dad is through his gay son." But then, Gyllenhaal is always worth watching. I don't think she's capable of a bad performance. After watching the movie, Gary commented that it was almost, but not quite, a good movie. Some scenes work quite well and much of it is enjoyable, but it lacks the magic that occurs in a really good film. Yahoo critics and viewers gave the film an average grade of B- and we have to agree. **GRADE B-**

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY: In this delightful film, director Mike Leigh introduces us to Poppy, a London primary schoolteacher whose cheerful optimism is infectious, but can sometimes exasperate those around her. Poppy is a 30-year-old single woman who loves her life, and seems to like and care for almost everyone she meets. From the opening scenes of Poppy riding her bike to work through the North London streets, we are smitten. Sally Hawkins is marvelous: she is able to play a Pollyanna-type character with a natural sweetness and intelligence that never becomes cloying. Her relationship with a dour driving instructor is key to the film. Eddie Marsan is the tightly-wound instructor and he is the perfect foil for the peppy Poppy. (Sorry. Couldn't resist.) Mike Leigh used Hawkins in a small role in *Vera Drake* (2004) and was quick to recognize her appeal and her skill. Both critics on *At The Movies* felt she was destined to become a star. Roger Ebert said that he didn't think there were many actresses who could so successfully bring off the character of Poppy. We were completely charmed by Hawkins and by this happy-go-lucky film. As another audience member commented, "How nice to see something light and cheerful for a change." And something so well done. **GRADE B+**

HAPPY PEOPLE: A YEAR IN THE TAIGA: (2012) Werner Herzog directed and narrates this documentary about life in the village of Bakhtia located in the heart of the Siberian Taiga. (Taiga is a Russian word meaning a biome characterized by coniferous forests.) This remote wilderness can only be reached two ways, by helicopter, or, in summer only, by boat. Consequently, the daily routines of the 300 villagers have barely changed over the last century. The documentary focuses on the few men of the village who make their living by trapping, an activity that takes place in the winter. For the rest of the year, they are preparing for the winter's work by storing food, making canoes, preparing their trapping cabins and creating and setting their traps. The only modern tools they have are chain saws and snowmobiles. Everything else is made with the kind of simple hand tools used by our great grandparents. In the summer much time is spent fishing, for fish is the primary sustenance for the dogs. It is the dogs that these men depend upon. They consider their dogs as part of their family. Each trapper has his own and will travel many kilometers to spend the winter tending to his traps. His dog is his only companion. It is an exhausting and solitary life, but, as Herzog points out, they seem to be "happy people." Gary and I are partial to documentaries and we thought this one was outstanding. It is a striking look at a people who live a vastly different life than our own. It reminded us both of the mountain men of the old West. If you enjoy documentaries about unfamiliar places and people, you should search out *Happy People*. **GRADE B+**

HAPPYTHANKYOU MOREPLEASE: Yahoo users rate this romantic comedy A-. Professional critics aren't as kind. Stephen Holden with New York Times refers to it as "insufferable," and Kyle Smith with New York Post thinks it is "unbearably cutesy and hackneyed" and if it were better, might rise to the level of "insipid." Barbara and I do not agree with the harshness of the professional critics and we were both delighted with the film. It is an independent film that will probably not be able to afford a wide release, but when it becomes available through Netflix, you may want to watch for it. The film is a heartfelt ensemble comedy about relationships, commitment, and navigating that difficult time many face when trying to take a path that may define the rest of their lives. Josh Radnor (from TV's *How I Met Your Mother*) wrote, directed, and starred in the film and, in my opinion, he was up to the task in all three departments. Kate Mara, Malin Akerman and Zoe Kazan are not names that people recognize and rush to the theater to see, but they are every bit as talented. There are more memorable well played scenes in this film than in many far more successful films and if you get a chance to see it, please e-mail us your opinion. **GRADE B**

HARD TIMES: LOST ON LONG ISLAND: We thought this HBO special was very well done. It certainly belies the conservative claim that paying people for not working makes them lazy—that it makes them stop looking for work. Located on Long Island, the birthplace of the post-war suburban American Dream, this documentary follows the story of the long-term unemployed and the shrinking of the middle class by chronicling the lives of four families. They all look like they could be your neighbors. They are, in most cases, educated and have always done well at their jobs. But now, they can't find work, their unemployment is running out and their houses are in foreclosure. Blowback productions has said that they hope to restore respect and dignity to the struggle of those who have suffered as a result of the economic downturn. I think they have done so. It is a sobering and sad look at what used to be the middle class, but is now the unemployed and underemployed poor. And there are 25 million of them! I was sobered by the statement, "The suburbs are now the fastest growing poverty area in America." These people thought they were living the American Dream, but, as one of the men profiled said, "The American Dream is over." **GRADE B**

HARRY BROWN: Think Charles Bronson in *Death Wish*; think Clint Eastwood in *Gran Torino*; think about any vigilante revenge movie you've ever seen and you'll have the plot of this British import. The best thing the film has going for it is Michael Caine, and he elevates what would otherwise be a C movie. Caine is Harry Brown, an aging ex-Marine living on a pension in what we would call a housing project. The residents of the project are terrified of the young hoodlums who pursue drug deals and commit violence with no apparent interference from the authorities. When Harry's best friend is killed, the police know who is likely responsible, but they are unable to find enough evidence to prosecute the killers. Harry finally decides to enact some badly needed retribution on his own. The director uses hand-held cameras and even a cell phone video to bring the formulaic plot up-to-date, and there is a gritty reality to the film. Emily Mortimer is, as always, excellent in the role of the police detective who begins to suspect that Harry might be responsible for the sudden increase in the deaths of local gangbangers. As with most of these vigilante movies, while you're watching, you applaud the actions of the lone warrior, since the people he kills are people who definitely need killing. But there is a lot of killing in the film, and we were glad that the running time was relatively short. We can't go higher than B- on this one, and it's only that high because of Michael Caine. **GRADE B-**

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE: Kids will love this film. Adults who read and loved the books, will like the film but may have concerns that it loses something in its translation to film. I am afraid I neither loved nor liked the film. Perhaps I should

disqualify myself since I never read the books and I don't really care much for kids films. Shreck is one of the few exceptions. Having said that there are many things about the film worth mentioning. The little boy who plays Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe) is extremely appealing. The monsters and ogres and elves (oh my!) are creatively produced and the special effects are dazzling. It was also fun to see John Cleese as Nick, the ghost of a knight who "almost" lost his head. Barbara enjoyed the movie more than I did. She particularly liked Maggie Smith as Prof. McGonagall, the "living" portraits on the wall, the moving staircases, and the mirror that showed Harry his mom and dad. She also liked Robbie Coltrane as Hagrid, the gentle giant. However, we both thought that Quidditch is a stupid game, although the sequence was stunningly created. On the Ebert and Roeper show, they referred to **HARRY POTTER** as "**The WIZARD OF OZ** of the 21st Century." That may prove to be true for the younger generations, but it won't for us. I can't go higher than a C, but Barb gives it a B-. **GRADE: C/B-**

HARRIET: (2019--Amazon Prime Video) This inspirational film tells the extraordinary tale of Harriet Tubman's escape from slavery and transformation into one of America's greatest heroes, whose courage, ingenuity, and tenacity helped change the course of history. Born into slavery, Tubman at age 27 escaped her monstrous owners in Maryland, and trekked 100 miles with hounds often literally at her heels to reach freedom in Pennsylvania. In the years that followed, she risked her hard-won liberty by returning to rescue members of her family and at least 70 other slaves. She also worked with the Union Army during the Civil War. The diminutive Tubman is brilliantly played by Cynthia Erivo, a London-born actress with Nigerian parents. Erivo won a Tony in 2016 for her lead role in the Broadway revival of the musical **The Color Purple** and was nominated for an Oscar for her role in **Harriet**. Barb and I streamed this entertaining and educational film on Amazon Prime. We were moved by the quality of the film, especially given that they made it on a budget of seventeen million dollars which is extremely small by Hollywood standards. **GRADE B+**

*Harriet Tubman was the first African American woman to appear on a U.S. postage stamp

HARTS WAR: (2002 release seen on DVD) Good WWII film about Americans in a prisoner of war camp. With Colin Farrell and Bruce Willis. **THUMBS UP**

THE HATE U GIVE: (2018/2019 HBO) I didn't read the book of the same title by Angie Thomas because I knew there was a movie coming out. I don't know if it opened anywhere, but we caught it on HBO. It's the story of a young black girl named Starr who witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend, Khalil, at the hands of a police officer. At a routine traffic stop, Khalil made the mistake of reaching in his car window for his hairbrush and the officer, fearing a gun, shot him. Starr faces pressure from all sides of the community: the police, the drug-dealer who employed Khalil, and her mother who wants to keep her safe. Keeping her kids safe is a priority for Starr's mom (Regina Hall). Starr and her half-brother are enrolled in an all-white high school in a better part of town, and Starr finds herself playing two roles, one at school and with her white boyfriend, and one in her neighborhood among the people with whom she grew up. The tragedy of Khalil's death forces her to find her voice and stand up for what's right. The story is pulled right out of the news and the Black Lives Matter protests. The title refers to Tupac's THUG LIFE acronym (The Hate U Give Little Infants F*cks Everyone.) Amandla Stenberg, who plays Starr, is a very appealing heroine. There is some sentimentality in the movie that may have turned some critics off. Two LA critics thought the all-Black, inner-city neighborhood in which Starr resides was "replete with all kinds of stereotypical Black pathologies," and that Starr's white friends exhibited stereotypical racisms. Gary and I were more generous and are glad we saw this powerful and relevant movie. If you have a subscription to Hulu, you can stream it there. **GRADE B+**

HATESHIP LOVESHIP: (2013) Alice Munro is known as a writer who has revolutionized the architecture of short stories. Her stories explore human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style. This movie, based on one of Munro's short stories, probably excels on the page. On the big screen, however, critics and audiences alike have been underwhelmed, although our local critic liked it quite a bit. I enjoyed seeing Kristin Wiig in an uncharacteristic part. Her Johanna is not a funny person. She doesn't talk much and so withdrawn that she speaks barely above a whisper. Johanna earns her living taking care of others. When an elderly woman she was taking care of dies, she accepts a job as housekeeper for Mr. McCauley (Nick Nolte). She is supposed to also look after his granddaughter, Sabitha (Hailee Steinfeld). The girl's father, Ken (Guy Pearce), is visiting when Johanna arrives, and although he is obviously a flawed character, he is kind to Johanna. When he sends her a friendly note, she responds and an email correspondence and a relationship between the two begins. It is unfortunately not real, but is instead a cruel prank by a couple of teenagers. Johanna changes her life because of the fictional relationship, and when she discovers the truth, she does the only thing she knows to do—she takes care of things. The acting is uniformly naturalistic and understated. Audiences not used to small independent films may be disappointed. Wiig is excellent, but her performance is incredibly subtle, and that is not what audiences expect from her. Perhaps that is why the audience rating on Rotten Tomatoes is only 48%. I enjoyed the movie and think it deserves a B grade. Gary, who had some difficulty hearing the often faint dialogue, can only go as high as B-. **GRADE B/B-**

HAYWIRE: (2011) Both Barbara and I were delighted with this high-powered action-thriller directed by Steven Soderbergh. Jot down the name Gina Carano. We predict we will be seeing a lot more of her. Not only can she hold her own as a Hollywood beauty, but she was once ranked the #3 female fighter in the world in her weight class. Barbara admits to being partial to movies where a woman "kicks butt," and in this film I think Carano could have done just that to any one of her impressive supporting male cast: Ewan McGregor, Michael Fassbender, Antonio Banderas, Bill Paxton, and Michael Douglas. Carano performs her own high-adrenaline stunts in the movie and Soderbergh uses her skills creatively. She plays Mallory Kane, a highly trained operative who works for a government security contractor. As would be expected it is a dirty job and it takes her to some of the more dangerous corners of the world. She is the target of assassins who seem to know her every move. Hey, if you have a professional martial arts expert, why wouldn't you use her skills in kickboxing, wrestling, taekwondo, karate, and judo, just to mention a few. The plot is generic and characteristic of that genre, complicated and not very memorable. But combined with the amazing skills of Carano, it was good enough to hold our attention. Some critics have praised her martial arts skills, but been critical of her acting. We disagree. For us she had charisma and a natural screen presence. **GRADE B+**

HEADHUNTERS: We saw this subtitled 2011 Norwegian movie on DVD from Netflix. It is based on a crime novel by Jo Nesbø the writer of nine internationally acclaimed crime novels featuring Detective Harry Hole, several of which I have read. *Headhunters*, published in 2008, is not one of Nesbø's Harry Hole series. Instead, it introduces us to Roger Brown, a charming villain who is Norway's

most successful corporate headhunter. He owns a magnificent house, is married to a beautiful art gallery owner, and plays at the dangerous game of art theft. When Brown undertakes what appears to be an uncomplicated theft of an original Rubens, things get complicated very quickly. The headhunter soon becomes the hunted. The plot is a labyrinth of murder, betrayal and mayhem and it kept us on the edge of our seats. If you are a fan of Nesbø's writing or if you like dark intricate crime dramas, you'll like this one. We recognized one of the actors from his role as Jamie Lancaster in TV's *Game of Thrones*. **GRADE B+**

THE HEART OF THE GAME: Most people who occasionally attend films never have the opportunity or inclination to see documentaries. Often it is just as well but, *The Heart Of The Game* is different. It is exciting, heart warming and, in my opinion, one of the best films of the summer. It took seven years to film this gem and when they started, the makers had no idea of where the story would take them. The film captures the passion of a Seattle high school girl's basketball team and focuses on their unorthodox coach and an incredibly talented girl's fight to play the game she loves. The film has everything: humor, excitement, drama, suspense. If you miss this film in the theaters, watch for it at Blockbusters or Netflix. **GRADE A-**

THE HEARTBREAK KID: If you are old enough, this title may sound familiar. It is a remake of a 1972 film with the same title. The '72 version starred Charles Grodin and Cybill Shepherd and was directed by Elaine May. The 2007 version stars Ben Stiller and Michelle Monaghan and is directed by the Farrelly brothers who also brought us *There's Something About Mary*, *Shallow Hal*, and *Fever Pitch*. Barbara and I were pretty much in agreement on this version. We laughed frequently and were completely won over during the first twenty minutes. Sadly the next hundred and twenty minutes were very uneven. There were a few laughs, but not as many as one would hope for or come to expect with the amusing opening. Ben Stiller seems to have made a career playing insecurity and humiliation but I think he does it well. M. Monaghan is charming in her role and Malin Akerman with her bikini-perfect-body showed outstanding comedy talent in her role as the new bride. In supporting roles, Jerry Stiller and Rob Corddry deserve special mention. The plot is built around the intriguing question, "What might it be like if, on your honeymoon, you realized you married the wrong person?" Our local reviewer liked this film a lot, but we have to agree with the more negative reviews of most of the other critics. Since we liked the final eighteen minutes of the film, Barb and I give it a probably generous C. **GRADE C**

HEARTBREAKERS: This film is sort of a *Grifters-Lite*--very light! The mother-daughter team of Max (Sigourney Weaver) and Page (Jennifer Love Hewitt) use their sex appeal to con men first into marriage and then into an expensive divorce. One critic compared this movie to *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* but this one is a far cry from the Michael Caine, Steve Martin effort. *Heartbreakers* has some very funny moments, but it's too long and much of its farce falls flat. Gene Hackman is amusing as a rich, retired tobacco company owner. With his constant smoking, horrible cough, and tobacco stained teeth he is a walking advertisement for smokers anonymous. He has some great throwaway lines. At one point he talks about how smoking is for kids. His company worked with a group of nine-year-olds, he mutters, and "after they got over the puking you couldn't keep them away from the cigarettes." Ray Liotta is also funny as a con victim and he knows how to throw away a line. When he re-entered the action toward the end of the movie, my interest picked up considerably. While Weaver has some comic ability, she's no Glenn Headley. One critic said that the problem with the movie is that the main characters are never quite likable, but neither are they ever all out wacky. Hewitt has no comedic talent so it's fortunate that she isn't burdened with many funny lines. Anne Bancroft also appears. We saw this with Movie Viewers Bill and Will E. from Scottsdale. They wouldn't give the film more than a C-, but, because we did laugh some of the time, Gary and I can go up to a C. **GRADE: C**

HEARTS IN ATLANTIS: Stephen King likes to put some mysticism in his novels, even in his coming-of-age stories. It is this mysticism that keeps me from being completely enthusiastic about most of King's stories. In *Hearts In Atlantis*, Bobby Garfield (Anton Yelchin), 11, becomes friends with an older man named Brautigan (Anthony Hopkins). Bobby and his mother, Liz (Hope Davis) rent their upstairs apartment to Brautigan but are unable to get much information about him. He'll only say that he comes from someplace "not as nice as here." When Brautigan hires Bobby to read the newspaper to him, they form a sort of father/son relationship. Brautigan asks Bobby to look out for the "low men"-- bad people who are looking for Brautigan-- although we aren't sure if these men are real or imagined. Perhaps they symbolize all the frightening adult things that children face as they grow up. In *Hearts*, the "low men" look like FBI or CIA operatives who presumably want Brautigan because he is psychic and can help them in their fight against the "Red Menace." Did I mention that this takes place in the 50s? We liked the mood of the movie and the amazing ability of Anton Yelchin to hold his own with Sir Anthony Hopkins. The friendship between Bobby and his best friend, Carol, is very sweet, and the ending touched us. Roger Ebert gave the film thumbs up, and ended his review with this comment: So, should you therefore read the book after seeing the movie? I would recommend the audiobook; William Hurt's reading is one of the best audio performances I have ever heard. The New York Times reviewer hated the film and called it "a shameless, nostalgic fiasco," and felt that the film conveyed "no genuine emotion." We liked it better than that. In fact, Gary is willing to go as high as a B+. Scott Hicks is the director and William Goldman wrote the screenplay. **GRADE B/B+**

THE HEAT: (2013) The critics are right: This is just another cop-buddy movie, but in this case, the cops are female and Melissa McCarthy is one of them. McCarthy is a foul-mouthed and formidable Boston cop paired with an uptight by-the-book FBI agent (Sandra Bullock) forced to work together on a special assignment. McCarthy and Bullock are two of the most likeable actors ever to grace the screen, and their pairing makes the film enjoyable. McCarthy is without question one of the funniest women in movies today. What's more, she can handle the serious and touching scenes with equal skill. And, of course, no one does up-tight better than Sandra Bullock (see *Miss Congeniality 1 & 2*), and no one comes loose better than she does. Naturally her uptight FBI agent eventually loosens up because, after all, this is boilerplate cop-buddy fare. Their characters may not get along, but the chemistry between the two actors is impressive and carries the movie. However, I could have done without the drinking scene. Is there no other way to show people bonding than for them to get falling-down-drunk together? In the final analysis, we enjoy Sandra Bullock and Melissa McCarthy makes us laugh, and laugh we did while watching *The Heat*. **GRADE B**

HEIST: This intricately plotted heist film has lots of things going for it: A script by David Mamet (he also directed), one double cross after another, tight pacing, and Gene Hackman. Joe Moore (Hackman) and Bobby Blane (Delroy Lindo) are thieves who have worked together for years. Ricky Jay plays the third member of the group. He is David Mamet's favorite character actor. Rebecca Pidgeon rounds out the cast as Fran, Joe's wife. It's hard to create an innovative heist movie--they are all pretty much the same, but this did hold

our attention. The movie opens with a jewelry heist during which Joe is caught on the security camera without his mask. This creates a problem. The group had agreed to do another job for Mickey Bergman (Danny DeVito), but Joe feels it would be best for him to retire. Bergman doesn't agree and withholds Joe's share of the jewelry take until Joe and his friends follow through on "the Swiss thing." Don't try too hard to figure out the sequence of events because there are some logical loopholes. Just enjoy the action and the interaction. In the beginning of the movie you'll notice some of Mamet's characteristic dialogue, particularly in some of Pidgeon's lines, but the movie has more action than dialogue so I don't think you'll find it distracting. The best thing in the movie is Hackman, arguably one of the best actors working today. I agree with the New York Times critic who said, "Mr. Hackman . . . works by sleight of eye, voice, face and soul he's so cool that this critic would stay awake to watch him take a three-hour nap." **GRADE B**

HELL OR HIGH WATER: (2016) This is a well-acted old-fashioned heist thriller with generous elements of humor. Our local critic gave it five out of five stars and it scored an impressive 99% from Rotten Tomatoes based on 82 reviews. Two brothers in West Texas (Chris Pine and Ben Foster) seek economic revenge by holding up a bank that is threatening to foreclose on their family land. Soon they are being pursued by a grizzled veteran Texas Ranger (Jeff Bridges) who is on his last week before retirement and is looking for one last collar. You may think you have seen it all before, but with this cast and screenplay, it is worth seeing again. Against a backdrop of dusty streets, long empty country roads, rusty cars and trucks, desert skies, and active oil well pumps, a mesmerizing story unfolds. After seeing so many bank-heist films that try their damndest to outdo preceding attempts, it is amusing to see one so successfully staged on a smaller and more realistic scale. It becomes even more interesting once we understand that there is more going on than immediately meets the eye. And because Pine and Foster are caught up in a rigged economic system, you may find yourself rooting for both sides. Barbara and I loved this film and hope it gets wider distribution than the one theater in greater Phoenix where it opened. *Hell Or High Water* is one of the best movies released so far this year. **GRADE A**

HELLO, MY NAME IS DORIS: (2015/2016) Sally Fields looks like you'd expect Gidget to look at 60—a few wrinkles but still cute. Her Doris is quirky and totally adorable in this movie. She is not, however, adorable enough to attract, in *that* way, a young man in his late twenties. It stretches the imagination to accept that Doris believes such a romance is possible, but Doris is a very naïve 60. She has sacrificed her life to take care of her mother, and when her mother dies, Doris, who has adopted her mom's penchant for hoarding, feels a bit lost. So, it's not much of a surprise that Doris develops a crush on a young man recently transferred into the company where Doris has worked most of her life. After all, they meet cute in a crowded elevator and he tells her he likes her glasses. That's enough for Doris. Max Greenfield is very likeable as the object of Doris's affections. Doris's best friend, Roz (Tyne Daly) is afraid she will get hurt, but Roz's 13-year-old granddaughter encourages Doris to go for it. The story relies on misperceptions piled upon misunderstandings, but Field is able to bring an authenticity to the role. She is genuine in even the most improbable scenes, and you wish her well as she struggles to find her place in life. Gary thinks that most of the 98% of viewers who liked the movie on *Rotten Tomatoes* were probably women—women of "a certain age" if our audience was any indication. I enjoyed *Doris* a bit more than Gary did. **GRADE B/B-**

THE HELP: The story is based on Kathryn Stockett's 2009 best-selling novel with the same title. Barbara read and loved the book while I plan to read it later. It is about African American maids working for white families in Mississippi during the early 1960's. I doubt that young people will be drawn to this film about the dawn of the Civil Rights era, but those who lived through that time will be reminded of just how much has changed, and, sadly, how much hasn't. The film is historically relevant, but stays with relatively safe material in the tradition of *Driving Miss Daisy*. A powerful and talented cast lead by Emma Stone, Viola Davis, and Octavia Spencer take us through an interesting story to an emotional ending that easily brought tears to my eyes. Backing up the leads is an impressive supporting cast which includes Allison Janney, Cicely Tyson, and Sissy Spacek. Bryce Dallas Howard is notable in the thankless role of Hilly Holbrook, the racist Junior League President. Segregation can be a serious subject, but the author has managed to work considerable humor into the screenplay. The film is two hours and seventeen minutes long and takes a while to get rolling, but it does build to a powerful second half. Barbara thinks the film is faithful to the book and we both recommend the movie. **GRADE B+/A**

HENRY POOLE IS HERE: Barbara and I found it refreshing to see a full-length movie without car chases, explosions, or even gunfire. Henry Poole, effectively played by Luke Wilson, is going to die. We are all going to die sooner or later, but Henry has been told it will be sooner, not later, and he is understandably depressed. It is predictable that before the end of a Hollywood comedy, Henry will get a reprieve and learn his time has been extended. But an intelligent script and outstanding acting makes the journey to the ending credits worthwhile. This warm-hearted love story could easily have become maudlin, and I am sure some critics will say it did. While true believers who want to reinforce a conviction that faith can literally move mountains will love this film, yet it is ambiguous enough to satisfy hard-nosed skeptics like me. **GRADE B+**

HENRY'S CRIME: It's a heist story and a love story in a theatre setting. What could be more entertaining? Keanu Reeves is Henry, a plodding toll booth worker who lives an unremarkable life. When his friends prevail upon him to substitute in a baseball game, they neglect to mention that they intend to rob a bank on the way. Everyone escapes except for Henry who is sitting patiently in what has become "the getaway car." Refusing to name the bank robbers, he goes to prison where he is put in a cell with Max (James Caan) and finds a friend. An off-hand comment by Max, who talks a lot, convinces Henry that since he has done the time, he should do the crime. I won't explain how he winds up playing a part in a local theatre production of *The Cherry Orchard*. I'll let you discover that for yourselves. Vera Farmiga is delightful as an aspiring actress, James Caan almost walks away with the film, and Reeves proves that he really can act. You probably won't recognize the bearded play director with the Russian accent, but Peter Stormare was the thug in *Fargo* who stuffed his friend into the wood chipper. We enjoyed the chemistry between Reeves and Farmiga and, of course, the theatre scenes. We liked this one a lot. **GRADE B+**

HER: I can't imagine falling in love with my operating system. Of course, Windows 7 never talks to me, even when I holler at it/him/her. In the future world that Spike Jonze has created in *Her*, all the men wear 1940-style high-waisted trousers, and operating systems have been designed to communicate and have feelings. They can even have cybersex. Joaquin Phoenix is recently divorced. He is depressed and very lonely. When he installs a new operating system (OS) with the voice of Scarlett Johansen, it isn't long before he has fallen for her, and spends all his time talking with her. This means there are long scenes where you see Phoenix's face and little else. Phoenix is sweet and vulnerable and very good, but the static scenes made the two hour running time seem longer to us. I thought

the scenes between Phoenix and his friend, played by Amy Adams, were the most interesting. I wonder if our future will be this lonely and sterile. Will electronic communication replace human interaction? It's ironic that in this cyber-centric world Phoenix works for a company that writes letters. He talks into his computer and out comes a letter in cursive and on real stationary. He is much better at writing these letters than he is at communicating with the women in his life. Is this the future we can expect when electronics completely take over our lives? It is a topic worthy of discussion, and we appreciate the creative idea behind the movie. For us, however, it would not be a best picture contender. We saw it with my sister and the three of us agreed on a grade of B-. **GRADE B-**

HERE TODAY: 2021 We saw this new Billy Crystal comedy in a theatre with masks and social distancing. The film was produced, directed and co-written by Crystal. A score of 93% from audiences on Rotten Tomatoes indicates it was loved by them, but critics were not as enthusiastic with a score of 48%. Crystal plays Charlie Burnz, an aging comedy-writing legend in the early stages of dementia. Crystal is 71 years young and clearly hasn't lost his knack for delivering a punch line. Tiffany Haddish (41) plays Emma, a New York singer. They develop an unlikely, but touching friendship. Many critics saw the relationship as hopelessly old-fashioned and manipulative whereas typical audiences more likely saw it as redefining the meaning of friendship, love, and trust. As octogenarian film reviewers, Barbara and I tend to fall somewhere between the two extremes. The core of the movie is the infectious chemistry between Emma and Charlie which nobody, including them, seems to quite understand. After meeting cute, they get off to rocky start, but gradually develop a bond that overcomes the generation gap. As expected, there are a lot of laughs. There are also a lot of tears, but I can require a handkerchief when reading a well written phone book so I can't use that as a criterion when evaluating a film. **Here Today** is no **When Harry Met Sally**, but a couple of hours spent with Billy Crystal never felt wasted. **GRADE B**

HEREAFTER: When director/producer Clint Eastwood, who has given us **Unforgiven**, **Million Dollar Baby**, **Mystic River** and **Invictus**, releases a new film, expectations tend to run high. **Hereafter** opens with a spectacular scene: A tsunami destroys an Indonesian beach community, sweeping everything in its raging current. A young French woman is swept away in the torrent and has a near-death experience, seeing visions of an afterworld before she comes back to life. Next we meet a San Francisco man who has taken a factory job to escape from his past as a well-known psychic—he connects with dead people. He feels that what others see as a gift is, in reality, a curse. The final character is a young British boy devastated by the loss of his twin brother. We know that these three will eventually come together, but getting there, which comprises most of the movie, seemed interminable. For me, the ending was almost worth the wait, although I wanted the ending, which seemed rather abrupt, to last longer. We saw the film with friends, Pam and Jim, and Pam thought that the slow pace of the long middle part of the movie made it seem more real. Jim thought that too much "reality" can be boring and that it was just beginning to get interesting when it ended. Eastwood composed the haunting music for the film, and we all thought it was effective. Plus, we all appreciated the acting: Matt Damon as the psychic, Cecile De France as Marie, the French TV journalist from the tsunami scene, and Frankie and George McClaren as the twin brothers are all excellent. Cecile De France, well-known Belgian actress, is captivating and I'd like to see her again. Ron Howard's daughter, Bryce Dallas Howard is intriguing as a woman Damon meets in a cooking class. Gary thought the scenes between Howard and Damon were the best in the movie. He was bored by most of the film. Gary and I are skeptics when it comes to supernatural phenomena, but this movie doesn't attempt to convince anyone, it merely speculates. The critics range from A to C— on the movie. Roger Ebert (*Chicago Sun-Times*) thought Eastwood considers "the idea of an afterlife with tenderness, beauty and a gentle tact." A. O. Scott (*New York Times*) felt the film has the power to "haunt the skeptical, to mystify the credulous and to fascinate everyone in between," while Michael Phillips (*Chicago Tribune*) doesn't think it's one of Eastwood's masterpieces and graded it a "C." Gary feels he could go as high as C+. I liked it a bit better and say B. **GRADE B/C+**

THE HERO: (2017) I don't know whether co-writer/director Brett Haley developed **The Hero** with Sam Elliott in mind to play the lead, but regardless, it was perfect casting. Sam Elliott with his lanky frame, thick white hair, shaggy white moustache, jet black eyebrows, and his honeyed baritone voice make him the man to carry this low-key but absorbing little movie. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival early this year and was quickly picked up for wider release. Elliott has been playing supporting roles in Hollywood for decades. One of his first was in **Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid** playing the coveted role of "Card Player #2". One of his few flaws is that he makes acting seem almost too easy—it isn't. You can think of this movie as a beautiful love letter to one of our most cherished actors. Elliott plays Lee Hayden, an aging Western icon with a golden voice whose best performances are decades behind him. He spends his days reliving old glories and smoking too much weed with a former-co-star-turned-dealer (Nick Offerman). He strikes up a relationship with a witty stand-up comic, Charlotte, played by Laura Prepon who first came to Barbara's and my attention playing Alex in TV's **Orange Is the New Black**. Lee also attempts to reconnect with his estranged daughter played by Krysten Ritter first noticed by us in **Breaking Bad**. **The Hero** may not be remembered as a great movie but it is pretty darned good and is a welcome tribute to an actor we have come to love. **GRADE A-**

HERSELF (2020 on Amazon Prime): This moving story is co-written by Clare Dunne, who also brilliantly stars as Sandra. Sandra escapes her abusive husband with her two young daughters. However, she is trapped in temporary accommodations in a hotel where she isn't allowed to enter through the lobby. She and her girls must take the back stairs. Trapped in a broken housing system, she decides to build a small but affordable home by herself. She is offered the land by a woman she cleans for, and with some effort, finds a building contractor who reluctantly agrees to assist. Calling on a couple of friends, she assembles a team of people willing to give up their weekends to help. The house building scenes are joyful, but when her ex-husband sues for custody, she is distraught at the idea of losing her daughters. Can Sandra rebuild her life along with her house? I won't divulge the ending. You'll have to watch **Herself** yourself, but Gary and I were totally caught up with Sandra's story. If it sounds a bit clichéd to you, Dunne's incredible performance roots it in reality, and we think you will enjoy the award-winning movie as much as we did. **GRADE A**

HE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU: This film is predictable, shallow, and will probably be labeled a "chick flick," but I loved it and so did Barbara. Researching the title, I find it was a book featured on the Oprah show and it has been flying off the book shelves ever since. Written by former *Sex and the City* writers Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccillo, the book debunks many of the myths that women create about men and dating. The film assembled an all-star cast: Ben Affleck, Jennifer Aniston, Drew Barrymore, Jennifer Connelly, Scarlett Johansson, Ginnifer Goodwin, and Kris Kristofferson, just to mention a few. The film follows several interconnected stories, some sad,

some funny, and, we thought, all entertaining. There are at least a dozen scenes that would stand alone as acting exercises in an acting class. I thought the opening scene of the film, not only set up the flavor of the movie, but was one of the all-time best opening scenes I can remember. Watching twenty-and-thirty something kids trying to navigate the turbulent waters of young love and read the ambiguous signals of the opposite sex was just the "no car chases" kind of movie we were looking for. I am sure we will grade the film higher than typical critics will and my grade is higher than Barbars's. **GRADE A-/B**

Barb: Worthy of mention is Rhada Mitchell (*The Children of Huang Shi*). The lovely Australian actress provides some appealing love interest, and Morgan Lily, who plays her daughter, is adorable. We also liked Adrianna Barraza, who was so good as the housekeeper in Babel. She plays Poole's next door neighbor and is the first to see the "miracle" on the wall of Henry's house. Luke Wilson's brother, Owen, enjoyed a burst of success a few years ago, but we think Luke is by far the better actor and should have an excellent film career. Because *Henry Poole Is Here*, is a sentimental film with a happy ending, I'm certain that Gary is right--the critics will dismiss it. However, our new local critic, with whom we often agree, gave it 4 out of 5 stars. We're with him.

HIDDEN FIGURES: (2016) Both critics and audiences loved this heartwarming and inspirational film. So did Barbara and I. It is a story that needed to be told. I certainly never learned it in history classes. It is the untold true story of three remarkable African-American women who played important roles in the NASA 1962 launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit. Glenn was a groundbreaking American hero, but so were the people behind the scenes who helped get him into orbit and bring him safely back to earth. The film focuses on the work of three female mathematicians who crossed gender and racial barriers to help win the space race against the Russians. Just watching a reenactment of this slice of American history will make you want to stand up and cheer. *Hidden Figures* is based on a non-fiction book by Margot Lee Shetterly, and I wish the resulting film could be shown in every Junior high and high school across the country. The movie was directed by Ted Melfi who also directed the equally sentimental *St. Vincent* (2014) which starred the talented Bill Murray. The star of this film is Taraji P. Henson who plays the role of Katherine Johnson, a physicist and mathematician who calculated flight trajectories for Project Mercury and the 1969 Apollo 11 flight to the Moon. Johnson was awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015. Henson is brilliant playing the role. I first became aware of her acting talent in the popular T.V. Series "Empire" in the role of Cookie. Kevin Costner excels in the male lead playing a fair-minded NASA engineering boss. Also playing important roles were Octavia Spencer, perhaps best known for her memorable role in *The Help*, and Janelle Monáe who is a singer, song writer, and actor. As the movie ran, I kept wondering, "Why haven't I heard this story before?" **GRADE A**

HIDALGO There are some exciting moments in this "Seabiscuit-in-the-desert" action movie. Unfortunately, there are some fairly routine moments in between. The two most memorable performances are from Omar Sharif as a wealthy Sheik and the horse that played Hidalgo. Hidalgo is the horse that Frank Hopkins (Viggo Mortensen) rode in the fabled Arabian 3000 mile race across the desert. The movie plays fast and loose with the facts. For example, Hopkins actually won the race by 33 hours, rather than by a nose as the movie contends. But, this is an adventure created for the kids, so we can forgive Disney for making it more dramatic.* There is a sand storm that looks like it was left over from *The Mummy* and lots of recycled dialogue from a host of previous adventure films. The subplots take a lot of time, and they look like something from *Raiders of The Lost Ark*. Mortenson, sporting his usual scruffy beard, looks like a real cowboy and he can ride. Sharif's scenes always manage to energize the movie. Peter Mensah is Jaffa, a slave dedicated to protecting the Sheik's daughter. He is impressive in the rescue scene. We can't give this more than a C+, but if you like desert scenery and horses, you may enjoy it. **GRADE C+**

J. Frank Dobie, who introduced many to Frank T. Hopkins in his 1934 book, *The Mustangs*, quotes Aristotle in his introduction, "The artistic representation of history is a more serious pursuit than the exact writing of history, for the art of letters goes to the heart of things."

HIGH FIDELITY: Top five reasons we liked this movie: (Sorry, I just couldn't resist writing the review this way.)

1. John Cusak: He always delights. Here he has created a quirky likeable character in Rob, a commitment-phobic man who struggles to understand why he has such difficulties with women by making a list of his top five breakups.
2. Jack Black: He is Barry, a goofy and very funny music-obsessed clerk in Rob's record store who will surprise you in the end. The other supporting characters are equally interesting, especially Then Hjele, Rob's girlfriend, Laura.
3. The script: It's intelligent, clever, funny, and always unpredictable. I like that in a script.
4. The direction: It's cool, man. And we liked the Chicago settings.
5. The top five lists: Rob and his two clerks have many esoteric and hilarious conversations about music. When the father of Rob's girlfriend dies, Barry immediately makes a list of the top five songs about death. **GRADE: B+**

HIGHER GROUND: (2011 seen on DVD) Vera Farmiga directs and stars in this movie about faith. It tells the life story of a Corinne, a woman who becomes a Christian but gradually begins to have doubts. We see her as a small girl, raising her hand in church to indicate that she has let Jesus into her heart. As a young adult, she joins a paternalistic though devout and well-meaning church and becomes a fervent member. At the end, we see her as a woman, mother of three children, who says that she's left the porch light on, but Jesus isn't at home in her heart. The movie never denigrates those who believe but simply presents faith as a decision that each person must make for him or herself. Corinne is played as a girl by McKenzie Turner, as an adult by Vera Farmiga and as a teenager by Farmiga's sister, Taissa. (No wonder the teenager looked so much like Farmiga.) The story is based on a 2002 memoir by Carolyn S. Briggs titled, *This Dark World*. Farmiga shows promise as a director. She handles the characters and story with confidence, grace and dignity. *Rolling Stone's* Peter Travers gave her high praise, calling Farmiga a "stunner of an actress who makes her directing debut with the same bold instincts for sharp humor and harsh truths that mark her performances." **GRADE B**

THE HIGHWAYMEN: (2019 on Netflix) Kevin Costner and Woody Harrelson play former Texas Rangers who are hired by the governor of Texas to "get" Bonnie and Clyde. The celebrity killers have gunned down many lawmen, and Governor Ma Ferguson (Kathy Bates) hires Frank Hamer (Costner) and Maney Gault (Harrelson) to catch them. The two men were Rangers who were legendary for how many men they had killed in the line of duty. The 1967 movie *Bonnie and Clyde*, starring Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty, romanticized the two criminals. But in the 1930s, the real couple had many fans--fans who likened them to Robin Hood and Marion. Bonnie Parker's funeral drew 20,000 fans and Clyde Barrow's funeral had 15,000 mourners. This movie does not cast them as heroes of the people. In fact, we never see them until the end, when they and their car are shot to pieces. (You can see the bullet-ridden car at

Whiskey Pete's Casino in Primm, Nevada.) Costner and Harrelson are terrific as the aging ex-Rangers. As we follow them on their journeys through several states, we learn a bit about their history. Over the credits, we see photos of Bonnie and Clyde and when the actors are given credit, the picture shown is of the real people they portrayed. Gary and I recommend this one for those who can stream Netflix. **GRADE B**

A HIJACKING: (2012) This tense, gripping, subtitled Danish thriller is definitely not a "feel-good film." People who say they only go to movies to be entertained would hate it. But it is a well written, masterfully directed, and superbly acted story of modern-day piracy. The story will sound familiar, like it was taken from the headlines of international newspapers: Somali pirates storm a commercial vessel and hold the crew for ransom. With the demand for a ransom of millions of dollars a grueling four-month psychological drama unfolds between the CEO of the shipping company and the Somali pirates. Nail-biting scenes are so realistic you may feel like it is a documentary film. Especially convincing in their roles are the ship's cook who is used as a pawn by the pirates and a Chief Executive Officer who is highly skilled at negotiating normal business deals but who may be over his head trying to negotiate with pirates. Barbara and I fear you may be troubled by the unpredictable ending, but are sure you will be on the edge of your seats for most of the 1 hr. 39 min. running time. **GRADE A-**

HILLBILLY ELEGY (2020 Available on Netflix) As measured on Rotten Tomatoes, this film was disliked by most critics: 26 % on the Tomatometer. On the other hand, audiences rather liked it: 83%. The film is a true story based on the 2016 memoir with the same title by J.D. Vance. The book reached the top of The New York Times Best Seller list in August 2016 and January 2017. Directed by Ron Howard, the movie focuses on a family trapped in a circular pattern of dysfunction, and how one son, J.D., escaped it. Through an extensive use of flashbacks, we get a better understanding who he is and where he came from. The movie is understandably preoccupied with the key women in J.D.'s life, his mother Bev (Amy Adams) and foul-mouthed grandmother Mamaw (Glenn Close). J.D. keeps insisting that his mom is a "good person," but her abusiveness toward her kids and others fails to elicit much sympathy. But you do come away from the film admiring the acting skill of Amy Adams, especially her handling of the mother's history of drug addictions and failed relationships. Realizing how many critics hated this film, Barbara and I were surprised at how much we liked it. I believe that may be partly because we were asked to understand a fractured family so different from our own experiences of growing up in a loving middle class family. It may not be an A movie, but we think many of our readers will like it. **GRADE B+**

HIS THREE DAUGHTERS: 2024 (Netflix) I was the eldest of three daughters, so you can see why the movie appealed to me. I knew that my sisters knew their parents in different ways, but not as different as in this movie! The bittersweet story of this movie is an elderly patriarch and the three grown daughters who come to be with him in his final days. Katie (Carrie Coon) is a controlling Brooklyn mother dealing with a wayward teenage daughter; free-spirited Christina (Elizabeth Olsen) is a different kind of mom, separated from her offspring for the first time; and Rachel (Natasha Lyonne) is a sports-betting stoner who has never left her father's apartment--much to the chagrin of her stepsisters, who share a different mother and worldview. Continuing his astute exploration of family dynamics in close-knit spaces, Azazel Jacobs follows the siblings over the course of three volatile days, as death looms, grievances erupt, and love seeps through the cracks of a fractured home. RT's Critics Consensus is: Dealing with thorny family dynamics while remaining warm as a throw blanket, *His Three Daughters* is a compelling showcase for Natasha Lyonne, Elizabeth Olsen, and Carrie Coon. The sisters are excellent! On Roger Ebert's website, (He is deceased but his website still exists), the reviewer says: *Grief tears down what we think of ourselves. It's cruel. It's harsh. It's inevitable. It shatters the walls we put up around our personalities that so often reduce us to easy descriptions like sister, daughter, and mother. Azazel Jacobs' stunning His Three Daughters opens with a scene that defines its title characters, then spends 100 minutes revealing how those definitions don't really capture who they are. Yes, they are sisters and daughters (and two are mothers). But in the days leading up to their father's death, they're reminded of the complexity of human emotion, behavior, and understanding.* An interviewer asked Jacobs why he chose three sisters. He responded, "I've been getting this question [a lot]--It doesn't always happen but in this case, it poured out of me in a way that I just didn't question anything." Making it was cathartic, he says. "People have spoken to me about how they related to this sense of loss but also how it gives them comfort, in the way it did for me. Knowing that is amazing." Gary and I give this insightful movie a grade of A. **GRADE A**

THE HISTORY BOYS: (2006 release seen on DVD) We enjoyed the movie which is based on the Tony Award-winning play by Alan Bennett. It's set in a boys' school in northern England in 1983. We meet eight teenage schoolboys preparing to apply to Oxford and Cambridge and the teachers who help them prepare for their interviews. Richard Griffiths is outstanding as Hector, the poetry-spouting eccentric teacher who does his best to instill a love of literature in the young men. We also liked Frances de la Tour as Dorothy Lintott, the boy's History teacher, especially when she observes, *History is a commentary on the various and continuing incapacities of men. History is women following behind with the bucket.* The film handles the homosexual theme with understanding and compassion. **THUMBS UP**

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE: The title makes this film sound like a documentary, or perhaps an educational film. It is neither. It is an excellent piece of film making by Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg ("The Fly" and "M. Butterfly). Viggo Mortensen, Maria Bello, Ed Harris and William Hurt are interesting and believable actors who move a thriller along in a way that will rivet your attention. It is the story of a seemingly average American family being torn apart by cataclysmic violence. We are all part of a culture that has historically used violence as a means of settling disputes and continues to do so. And for hundreds of thousands of years "survival of the fittest" has shaped our evolution. This film was a big hit at the Cannes Film Festival and I predict it will do well at the box office. Some will say it is propelled by gratuitous sex and violence. Perhaps. But it forces us to examine violence in a visceral way that will not be easily dismissed or forgotten. Barbara particularly liked Maria Bello (*The Cooler*), an actress that is rapidly becoming one of our favorites. **GRADE B+**

HIT MAN: 2023 (Available in some local theaters and for streaming on Netflix.) *Hit Man* is very loosely based on the true story of Gary Johnson, a psychology professor who discovers he has a hidden talent. He posed as a contract killer for the Houston police during the late 1980s and 1990s. He assumed false identities to entrap criminals for the local police. In Richard Linklater's new film, *Hit Man*, it is also the basis for a breezy comedy-romance crime story. If you enjoy quirky movies, director Richard Linklater may be your guy. His goal is to make us laugh, not disturb us, and he succeeds, whether in satirical caricature or coyly toying with irony. 194 critics rating the

movie on Rotten Tomatoes resulted in a score of 97%. Gary starts to assume false identities to entrap criminals for the local police, but the situation becomes tricky after he meets a prospective client named Madison (Adria Arjona). Even though the film may be advertised as an action thriller, I will think of it at heart to be a romantic comedy. Barbara and I enjoyed **Hit Man** but we can't quite give it an A. **GRADE B+**

HITCH: (2005 release) We think this romantic comedy starring Will Smith is a winner. It's funny and sweet—too nice, apparently, for some of the critics. Our local critic said that Will Smith has enough charisma for two movies, and we couldn't agree more. Here he is a Date Doctor who consults with nice guys who want to make a good impression on a "special" woman. Kevin James is Albert, a chubby, nice tax accountant who wants to go out with a rich, famous client. He's incapable of even talking to her, until Hitch gives him the benefit of his knowledge. James, so funny in TV's *The King of Queens* and in his standup routines, is equally funny here. And eminently likeable, too. Hitch definitely knows all the moves for romancing a woman, but he never falls in love himself. Until he meets Sara, that is. Sara, (Eva Mendes--**Training Day**) writes a gossip column for a New York Newspaper, and she may be the one woman for Hitch. However, both of them are afraid of falling in love. Gary thinks that whoever did the movie trailer deserves an award because the trailer makes you want to see the movie without giving anything away, and without spoiling the funny bits. We both enjoyed the film immensely and give it an A-. **GRADE A-**

HITCHCOCK: Alfred Hitchcock was nominated for the Best Director Oscar six times in his over fifty years of filmmaking in Hollywood. He never won for Best Director but he did receive the Lifetime Achievement Oscar and is now acknowledged as one of the most creative movie makers in Hollywood history. This entertaining biopic focuses on the making of **Psycho**, Hitchcock's insecurity, and the fascinating marriage and creative partnership between Hitchcock and his talented and tolerant wife, Alma. The film serves up juicy roles for two of the best actors working today: Anthony Hopkins and Helen Mirren. As you would expect, both are fantastic in their roles. Scarlett Johansson, Danny Huston, and Toni Collette are also excellent in supporting roles. Reviews have been mixed so Barbara and I went to the movie with modest expectations. We liked it better than we thought we would even though we were both underwhelmed by the portions of the film showing some of Hitchcock's inner demons. Hitchcock's softer and more vulnerable side are emphasized in this film, while other treatments of his life portray a different side. I remember his defense of one of his publicized quotes, "Actors are cattle." In his slow and measured manner he responded, "I never said 'all actors are cattle', what I said was all actors should be treated like cattle." If you have fond memories of Hitchcock's feature films or of his long running TV series, you may want to put **Hitchcock** on your "see" list. **GRADE B**

THE HOAX: In the early 1970s, writer Clifford Irving stunned the publishing world by claiming that he had been appointed by Howard Hughes to help him write his autobiography. (We remember the incident and perhaps that is the major reason for our enjoyment of the film.) Irving's chosen publisher, McGraw-Hill was naturally suspicious, since the reclusive billionaire had not appeared or spoken in public for years. However, when a hand-writing expert declared that the note authenticating Irving's claim was indeed written by Hughes, they were convinced. Convinced enough to advance Hughes \$1,000,000, and to give the check to Irving. Of course, it was all a hoax. Irving, unable to get his recent novel published, had concocted the scheme and convinced his friend and researcher, Dick Susskind, to go along with it. Together, they produced a manuscript and delivered it to McGraw-Hill. It was only after the book was being printed that Hughes finally put an end to the hoax by stating in a telephone interview that he had never heard of Irving. Irving spent over two years in prison and upon his release, wrote *The Hoax*, the book upon which this movie is based. Richard Gere is very impressive as Irving, showing us how Irving became obsessed with Hughes, even mastering his handwriting so perfectly that it fooled a handwriting expert. Irving convinces himself that Hughes's silence is actually tacit approval. Irving was a truly inspired liar—so inspired that he even began to believe his own lie! Alfred Molina is also wonderful as Susskind, a terrible liar but a brilliant researcher. Hope Davis is Irving's editor and Marcia Gay Harden is his wife. I was delighted to see Julia Delpy (**Before Sunrise & Before Sunset**) in a small role as Irving's lover. The film was directed by Lasse Hallström who did such a fine job with **The Cider House Rules** and **The Shipping News**. **GRADE B**

THE HOLDOVERS: 2023 (Available in some theaters and for purchase on Prime Video \$19.99.) The year is 1970. The place is Barton Academy, a fictional but on point amalgamation of every prestigious New England boarding school you've ever heard of before, full of poor little rich boys flush with generational wealth and daddy issues. The movie follows a cranky History instructor, Paul Hunham, played by well known actor Paul Giamatti, who is disliked by both students and faculty, and is forced to remain on campus during Christmas break to babysit the handful of students with nowhere to go for the Holididay. He is so harsh with his students in fact that he assigns homework on the very last day of class (December 17th). Also remaining on duty is Mary, the school's head cook who has just lost a son in Vietnam. The third main character in the story is Dominic Sessa in his film debut as Angus Tully, a student at the school. He is a smart, damaged, troublemaker but a good kid underneath who's just trying to make his way. The film reunites acclaimed director Alexander Payne with Paul Giamatti. Payne directed Giamatti in a 2004 film, **Sideways**, which turned out to be a career defining role for Giamatti. Barb and I gave **Sideways** a grade of A. (See review in the Movie Views Archives) Critics loved **The Holdovers** as evidenced by a score of 96% from 235 reviews on Rotten Tomatoe's Tomatometer. Audience Score was also good at 91%. The movie is funny and very moving. I thought it was a slow opening but you may need a handkerchief before it is over. **GRADE A**

We thank Art S., IN for alerting us in last month's Readers Views to this charming film."

HOLES: This Disney movie is a good old-fashioned adventure story and we both enjoyed it. It was adapted for the screen by the author of the original novel. I'm told that the book is very popular with young people, and I can see why. The story has some interesting characters and good triumphs in the end. The cast of the movie is first rate. Sigourney Weaver is The Warden of a detention camp for young boys who have run afoul of the law. Jon Voight has great fun playing the very odd Mr. Sir, the manager of the camp. He's just on the edge of over-acting, but doesn't cross the line. Tim Blake Nelson (**Oh Brother, Where Art Thou**) plays the camp counselor. The philosophy of Camp Green Lake is simple: *You take a bad boy, make him dig holes all day long in the hot sun, it makes him a good boy.* Stanley (Shia LaBeouf) is sent to the camp because he is convicted of stealing a pair of sneakers. Of course, he didn't do it. At the camp, Stanley befriends a young boy named Zero (Khleo Thomas). Both young men are outstanding. Henry Winkler is quite funny in the role of Stanley's father--an inventor working on a preparation that will neutralize foot odor. The story of Stanley's stay at Camp

Green Lake is told amid flashbacks that describe a family curse, and others that tell the story of the town that once existed on the camp site. The editing and the photography are excellent. We were totally caught up in the story and thought it was better than most films we've seen so far this year. It may be geared toward young people, but these two old people liked it a lot! **GRADE B+**

THE HOLIDAY: Director/writer Nancy Myers obviously loves the movies. Three of the characters in her new holiday romantic comedy work in the movie industry—a writer, a sound track composer and a producer of movie trailers. Plus, her story is full of movie cliches. It's totally predictable, but then, aren't most romantic comedies? This movie is not as good as Myers' 2003 romance, ***Some Things Gotta Give***, but we thought it was a pleasant diversion with some lovely houses and people. Cameron Diaz and Kate Winslett, both unhappy in love (if you can believe that) agree to exchange houses for two weeks over Christmas. I think Winslett gets the better of the house bargain. Her typical English cottage is charming, but the Diaz house in Los Angeles is spectacular! However, Diaz gets the better of the "man" bargain. She gets Jude Law while Winslett gets Jack Black. Myers must have worked hard to get Black to tone down his usual hyper performance. I'm afraid, she overdid it to the point where his character doesn't have much personality. On the other hand, the director must have encouraged Diaz to hype up her performance. Which she definitely does, although we thought it fit her character. Eli Wallach is enormously appealing in the role of an old-time movie writer who is ninety years old—Wallach's exact age. If you like romantic comedies, or what some would call "chick flicks" then you will enjoy *The Holiday*. We both give it a B-. **GRADE B-**

THE HOLLARS: (2016) This hour and a half comedy received mixed reviews from critics. Comments ranged from "a sweet movie full of genuine performances" to "a perfect storm of boredom." John Krasinski, who many will fondly remember playing Jim on TV's ***The Office***, directed and also played the male lead. Barbara and I were pleasantly surprised that we liked the film much better than most of the critics. Krasinski brought together an impressive ensemble cast including Margo Martindale, Richard Jenkins, and Anna Kendrick all of whom we think are enormously talented. John Hollar (Krasinski) plays a struggling NYC wannabe graphic artist who is called back to his Middle America hometown on news of his mother's serious illness. He is immediately enveloped in family interactions and bizarre problems played mostly for laughs. The movie is full of laughs, but not without poignant moments. We are going to break with the professional critics on this one and give Krasinski credit for putting together what we found to be an entertaining film experience. The only reason we didn't grade it even higher was we felt the role of the brother was written to be more inept than we could easily believe. **GRADE B+**

HOLLYWOOD ENDING: This could have been a very funny movie. The idea is good: A neurotic has-been director is hired to direct a potential block buster movie, but suffers psychosomatic blindness on the first day of the shoot. Woody Allen wrote and directed this film, and it has the typical funny Allen one-liners. It also has a terrific cast. Tea Leoni is Ellie, Allen's ex-wife. Ellie is currently involved with the studio head making the picture, and she has gone out on a limb to get the job for Allen. Consequently, when she finally discovers that he has been directing the picture blind, she covers for him and helps him finish the film. The reasoning behind her decision is shaky, but Leoni is good enough to make it work. Debra Messing, from TV's ***Will and Grace***, is Allen's current bimbo girlfriend and she is quite good in the role. Treat Williams is the Studio head, and Mark Rydell plays Allen's agent. The movie starts out well, but bogs down in the middle. One problem is that Allen doesn't play blindness very well. Even a recently blind person could manage to hear a voice and determine what direction it's coming from. But Allen consistently looks in the wrong direction when talking with someone. It's not realistic and it's not funny. The comic potential of the basic idea is not realized here, in spite of some funny moments. We can't give this one more than a **GRADE C+**

HOLLYWOODLAND: Ben Affleck was the perfect actor to portray George Reeves. Both actors hit it big with one role—Affleck in ***Good Will Hunting***, and Reeves as Superman on TV, and neither was able to duplicate that success in subsequent endeavors. The saddest thing about Reeves' life is that he hated playing the man of steel. He felt ridiculous. Affleck projects the charm necessary to bring Reeves to life, and he also does a good job projecting the weary resignation that marked the last years "Superman's" life. Affleck's much praised performance here may actually revive his career. He won a Best Actor award at the Venice Film Festival. When George Reeves died in 1959 from a gunshot to the head, the LAPD quickly ruled it a suicide, but there those who doubted that the actor took his own life. Since no one knows for certain what happened, his death remains a Hollywood mystery. ***Hollywoodland*** explores that mystery. Adrien Brody is Louis Simo, a P.I. hired by Reeves' mother to find the truth. The movie cuts back and forth between Simo's personal troubles and his investigation of Superman's death. Diane Lane is Toni Maddox, the wife of a studio head and the woman with whom Reeves was involved, and Bob Hoskins is her husband, Eddie Maddox. The movie advances three murder theories without coming to any conclusion. We thought Brody did an excellent job as the smart-alec P.I., and Lane and Hoskins were terrific. The film reminded Gary of ***L.A. Confidential***. It isn't quite as good as that film, but we did enjoy ***Hollywoodland***. **GRADE B+**

HOME AGAIN: (2017) On the *Internet Movie Database*, they describe ***Home Again*** this way: *Life for a single mom in Los Angeles takes an unexpected turn when she allows three young guys to move in with her.* That's a good single sentence synopsis of a movie that is pleasant, though slightly boring. Reese Witherspoon is the single mom, and, after separating from her husband (Michael Sheen) has moved across the country with her two daughters. She is living in the home in which she grew up with her famous director father and her beautiful movie star mother. Her mom is played by Candice Bergen, and she and Witherspoon are two reasons you might enjoy the film. Oh, and the three young guys are trying to get a film made and are good-looking and quite charming. Everyone is beautiful and the house is amazing, although there is nothing unique about the story except that it doesn't have a typical Hollywood ending. The critics on *Rotten Tomatoes* have mostly been disparaging about ***Home Again***, although *Entertainment Weekly* did give the film a generous "B." We aren't quite so generous, and Gary and I hover between B- and C+. **GRADE B-/C+**

THE HOMESMAN: (2014) It is hard to resist a Tommy Lee Jones movie, especially one he also directed. As first, the movie seems to be about Mary Bee Cuddy (Hilary Swank), but by the end, it's more about Jones. I guess we should have believed the title. Mary Bee lives uncommonly alone on the Nebraska prairie. She is eminently capable, but, as we learn in an early scene, she would like to be married. When three women who have suffered greatly lose their minds, the local church decides that they must be taken back to Iowa so that their families can look after them. Mary Beth draws the short straw and prepares for the journey back East. When she happens upon a man (Jones) who has been left on his horse with a noose around his neck, she cuts him down in exchange for his promise to accompany her on the mission of mercy. He tells her his name is George Briggs, but we aren't inclined to believe him. We learn a bit

about the three unfortunate women and what brought them to their present state, and those scenes, both troubling and touching, give a realistic picture of what life was really like on the prairies of the old West. On the journey, we learn more about Mary Bee and her disreputable companion. Swank and Jones are both formidable actors at the top of their form. The movie has some memorable scenes, and the acting is uniformly impressive, especially from Grace Gummer, Miranda Otto and Sonja Richter who play "the crazies." However, there were two scenes for which the motivation seemed mysterious, and those scenes drastically changed our perception of the two central characters. We both thought the ending was weak. Perhaps this story was better served in the novel upon which the movie was based. **GRADE B-**

AN HONEST LIER: (2015) This is a fascinating ninety minute documentary focusing on the colorful life of a world famous escape artist and magician, James Randi. Now in his high 80's, he is better known as "*The Amazing Randi*," and *An Honest Liar* is a well-deserved tribute to the long career of a man devoted to exposing tricksters who aspire to enrich themselves by making false claims. I remember being mesmerized by the early TV appearances of Uri Geller, an Israeli illusionist and self-proclaimed psychic, who gained notoriety claiming to have paranormal powers. He "*proved*" his claim by mentally bending spoons and keys using only his extraordinary gift. Then I remember being even more delighted when The Amazing Randi appeared on national TV shows soon after Geller, performing the same feats — only explaining that a magician's tricks, not psychic gifts, were responsible for the results. Randi believes magicians are the most honest people on Earth, because they deceive only to entertain. But, he loathes con-artists, mediums, faith healers, psychic surgeons, and anyone who he believes uses acts of deception for harm or self-gains. Randi is a bit of a deceiver himself. One of his secrets he kept well-guarded most of his life. He "*came out*" at the age of 81. Given the punitive nature of our culture during most of his life, it is hard to find fault with that decision. Both Barbara and I were disappointed when at about the 2/3s mark, the film took an unexpected turn. The focus shifted from Randi to his partner of 25 years. For us the last act of the film lost its momentum and took away what had the potential to be an "A" movie. It is still worth seeing and is a fine tribute to a man worth remembering. **GRADE B**

HONEY BOY: (2019) Memories often come in bursts, triggered by sights and sounds, and that's the way Shia LaBeouf has written the screenplay for *Honey Boy*. It tells the story of a young actor's stormy childhood with a father that was only present because his son paid him to be his on-set companion. It is LaBeouf's story to tell, although in the movie, he plays the father and Noah Jupe plays Otis, the child actor. (You might remember Jupe as the son of Ken Miles in *Ford V Ferrari*.) Lucas Hedges plays Otis at 22 in court-mandated rehab struggling to deal with the fallout of his childhood. (Hedges so impressed us in 2016's *Manchester by the Sea* and has not once disappointed us since.) It's hard to watch the movie without wondering how closely *Honey Boy* parallels LaBeouf's own story. By all accounts, it was very close. LaBeouf did receive at least one pie in the face as a child actor, and chickens, drunken arrests, and robot stunts of the actor's past are faithfully chronicled. As to the older Otis, the up and coming leading man, I refer you to the Slate article that states, "The real-life LaBeouf started earning a reputation for being a bad boy, or at the very least, with his attempts at performance art, an odd duck. Similarly, Hedges' character is also shown seemingly on a spiral, drinking alone in his trailer and dealing with anger and isolation." The story may seem familiar--a child-actor had a rough childhood--but the writing and filmmaking lift the story creatively and leave an indelible impression on the viewer. Gary and I remember LaBeouf's performance in *Holes* (2003) and the recent *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, and are glad the man has weathered the storm of his young adulthood to become a force in Hollywood today. **GRADE B+**

HOPE SPRINGS: It is not often we get first rate films written for an older audience and perfectly cast with A-List stars of impeccable magnitude. Earlier this year was *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and now we have *Hope Springs* starring Tommy Lee Jones, Meryl Streep, and Steve Carell with brief cameos from Jean Smart and Elisabeth Shue. Streep and Jones play Kay and Arnold, an older couple whose 31 year marriage has drifted into tedious routine. Carell abandons his usual comedic instincts to play a down-to-earth therapist who hopes to put a spark back into their marriage with an intensive weeklong program. Barbara and I found the film a refreshing break from the loud and noisy films of a typical summer. Some will go to this film expecting a sex farce. Although there is a great deal of humor, the focus is a candid look at a real couple working through real problems in an honest and sometimes painful way. This film is not likely to draw heavily from the under 40 demographic, but we have hopes that it will be the sleeper sensation among the over 40 crowd. **GRADE B+**

HORRIBLE BOSSES: This is a raunchy and sometimes hilarious comedy set in hard economic times when one does not just walk out on a job because finding another might prove impossible. A trio of likeable losers put their empty heads together looking for a way to cope with a trio of "bosses from hell." One of the best things about this film is the inspired casting. Jennifer Aniston seems to be having a ball playing against type in the role of an oversexed predatory dentist who spends her days harassing her male technician. Colin Farrell, whom you may not recognize at first, plays a sleazy coked-up amoral greedy bastard who has just inherited the chemical business from his kindly father (Donald Sutherland). Kevin Spacey plays a sadistic slave-driving supervisor who even Ghandi might have concluded "needed killin'." The three longtime buddies who have taken all they can stand from their respective bosses are effectively played by Jason Bateman (Arrested Development), Charlie Day (It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia), and Jason Sudeikis (Saturday Night Live). Jamie Foxx is hilarious in his role as "a murder consultant," and what may sound like a dark plot produced abundant laughs. There is a sense of fun that is evident here and also a bunch of good actors obviously having a great time. As so often happens in crude over the top comedies, many jokes don't have the intended effect, but for Barbara and me the overall result was positive. **GRADE B**

Horrible Bosses wraps with some blooper footage that is worth staying for.

HORSE GIRL: (2020 on Netflix) Sarah (Alison Brie) is a clerk in an arts and crafts store. She doesn't appear to have any friends except for Joan, her boss (Molly Shannon). She has a roommate and goes to Zumba classes and appears to be a normal, although a painfully lonely, young woman. She is inordinately fond of a sci-fi series on television, and she loves a horse, although we're never sure why. She apparently sleepwalks and sometimes finds herself in strange places and has no knowledge of how she got there. When Sarah begins to have bizarre dreams, and decides she is a clone of her grandmother, the movie gets really weird. Gary and I decided the writers wanted the audience to experience a girl descending into mental illness, and Brie is impressive to watch. She and her director, Jeff Baena, collaborated on the script. One critic said, "*By the end, viewers have whiplash and a distinct sensation that the script*

needed several more drafts, but they aren't bored. We weren't bored, but we struggled to give meaning to the film. We also were mystified by the title, because the horse was an incidental character. The ending wasn't satisfactory for us since it was blatantly sci-fi. Brie's performance should put it in the B range, but only barely. **GRADE B-/C+**

HOT TUB TIME MACHINE: John Cusack almost makes this movie worth seeing, emphasis on the "almost." Gary said that anyone who goes to a movie with the title *Hot Tub Time Machine* can't expect much, and he was soooo right. Science fiction is always implausible, but there's usually some consistency within the implausibility. Not here. And did I mention NOT FUNNY? We can forgive some grossness in a funny comedy like *The Hangover*, but when it's not funny it's just gross. The story is simple: Three forty-something loser friends return to a ski resort that was important in their young lives, and a malfunctioning hot tub takes them back to 1986. Our local critic thought it was funny and gave it 3½ stars, but he's much younger than we are. I suppose for someone who grew up in the eighties all that colorful spandex and raucous music would be nostalgic. I should also warn you about the repeated use of the "F" word. Roger Ebert said in his review, "I can't be sure, but I think the density of the f-word reaches the saturation point . . . I may have heard it employed as three different parts of speech in the same sentence." There were a few things that made me laugh—the one armed bell hop, for example, but I don't think Gary, who loved *The Hangover*, ever cracked a smile at *Hot Tub Time Machine*. Cusack brings some credibility to his role, and it was nice to see Craig Robinson (TV's *The Office*) in a feature film, but Rob Cordrey is, as far as we are concerned, too manic and over-the-top to be particularly amusing. But that's just us. We're somewhere between a D– and an F+. **GRADE D-/F+**

HOTEL MUMBAI: (2018) This film is based on a gripping true story of the most horrific acts of terrorism ever....a 2008 four day attack in India resulting in more than 160 deaths and 300 wounded. It is not an easy viewing experience especially if you are sensitive to gun violence, violence in general, and bloody imagery shown on screen. The violence is graphic, sudden, and startling. *Hotel Mumbai* is part survival thriller, part docudrama, and a powerful reminder of the madness of terrorism. In the opening sequence, we see the terrorists arriving on rafts, listening to a pep talk from their leader (who is never seen in the film), assuring them that God is on their side, and nobody in Mumbai deserves to live. We hear snippets of orders and words of encouragement throughout the film. The attacks covered a several day period in half-a-dozen locations but the film focused mainly on the tragic events in a five-star luxury hotel: The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel. It is a pulse-pounding 125 minutes which some critics described as gratuitously exploiting bloodshed. I can't agree with their evaluation and thought the directing and powerful performances were excellent. Dev Patel, who was so good in his breakout film, *Slumdog Millionaire* is especially memorable. The Mumbai terror attacks of 2008 took place over a decade ago but it is a story that is sadly relevant today. It could have come out of this morning's headlines. Barbara agrees, but only gives it a B+. **GRADE A-/B+**

HOTEL RWANDA: Is there is no limit to man's inhumanity? This film tells the story of Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), the manager of a luxury hotel in Kigali, Rwanda during the genocide of 1994. Through his heroic efforts, the lives of over 1,000 refugees were saved. He sheltered them at his hotel and did whatever had to be done to feed and protect them. Nick Nolte is Col. Oliver, the head of the U.N. peacekeeping force. Peacekeeping soldiers are not allowed to fire their weapons, so they weren't much help. When the bloodshed reached epic proportions, all the white people were given safe passage out of the country. The West and the U.N. deserted the country, and the Rwandans were left to fend for themselves. Rusesabagina was a Hutu, but his wife was Tutsi. For many years, the Tutsi had been the ruling class in Rwanda, but when they lost power after the 1959 revolution, the Hutu took over. Eventually, the political climate pitted these two groups against each other, and the hatred that developed resulted in violence. Years ago they had lived together in harmony, but by 1994, the Hutu ruling party declared that all Tutsi and Tutsi supporters were the enemy and must be destroyed. The Hutus determined to kill all Tutsi, even the children. By the time the conflict was over, there were over a million dead in Rwanda. You cannot watch this film without thinking of the genocide happening today in the Sudan. And today, the World Food Program and the U.N. are scaling back their activities in the Sudan even as the number of civilians requiring assistance has grown to more than 2.2 million people. (From an article in the Washington Post: 2005 January 8.) Cheadle deserves, at the very least, an Oscar nomination for his brilliant portrayal of Paul Rusesabagina. This is a must-see movie. **GRADE A**

THE HOURS: Our local critic began his review this way: *The film opens with a suicide...and then we meet people who are really depressed.* He called it a "morose" movie, and it certainly is dreary. In a creatively conceived plot, we meet three women who are having difficulty handling their lives. The first is Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman), who, as you probably know, eventually committed suicide. In fact, the movie does begin with her suicide, but quickly goes back in time to a day in Woolf's life in the year 1923 when she was writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. We also meet Laura Brown (Julianne Moore) and watch her struggle through a day in the Los Angeles suburbs in 1951. The third woman is Clarissa Vaughan (Meryl Streep) who is planning a party for Richard, a former lover and dear friend who is dying from AIDS. Her day is in New York City in the year 2001. The action cuts between the three women and many themes connect them. Depression, feminism and sexual orientation seem to be predominant themes. None of these women is comfortable in her own life. Each handles it in a different way. Kidman is unrecognizable in her prosthetic nose. (I think it was the nose that won her the Golden Globe.) Moore is fantastic in a very difficult role. Her Laura is so repressed and depressed that she can barely speak. And Streep, well of course she is terrific. John C. Reilly is excellent as Laura's clueless husband, and Ed Harris gives his usual intense and affecting performance as Richard, the dying poet. I can't say I enjoyed this movie. A story can be depressing yet exhilarating to experience. *Leaving Las Vegas* is an example of a film that many found depressing, but I was stunned by its emotional power. We did not find this movie either exhilarating or emotionally stunning. However, we did spend much time afterwards searching for unifying threads in the story and trying to figure out the "meaning," of it all. That speaks well for any film. We have to give *The Hours* a grade of B for the creativity of the plotting and the skill of the actors. It was not an A movie for us and I am surprised that it won the Golden Globe. I don't think it will garner an Oscar. **GRADE B**

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH: (2000 release seen on Video) This movie is based on the classic novel by Edith Wharton. It depicts wealthy New York society in the early 1900s when the language used was terribly proper, but the feelings expressed were mostly insincere. The story begins in 1905 when Lilly Bart (Gillian Anderson) is poised on the brink of making a good marriage. She loves an attorney (Eric Stoltz), but he doesn't have enough money for a proper husband. The men who have enough money don't interest her. She longs to be independent--to have a flat of her own--but all her upbringing has prepared her for is marriage. She doesn't make good decisions, and

we watch as her reputation is gradually ruined, not by her own actions, but by the actions of her "friends." I should mention that for a movie called **The House of Mirth**, there is little mirth in it. However, I woke up the next morning thinking about Lilly Bart. There aren't that many movies that make that strong an impression. I **really** liked this one!) **THUMBS UP**

HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG: Ben Kingsley is a magnificent actor. He is like a blank slate upon which each of his characters can be perfectly drawn. He totally inhabits the role of Col. Massoud Behrani, a man who fled Iran when the Shah was deposed. He has been working several menial jobs here in the United States to support his family in a style far above their present means. When he buys a bargain house at a tax sale auction, he believes that it is God's blessing and the beginning of a new life for his family. Kathy Nicolo is the owner of the house. She inherited it from her father eight months earlier. A recovering addict, she has been so depressed since her husband left her that she failed to open any of her mail. It is a shock when the Sheriff's deputy comes to evict her. Kathy can't believe that in eight months she lost the house her father worked for thirty years to own. Connelly is stunning in the role--she gives a performance every bit as mesmerizing as Sir Ben's. The whole real estate transaction is a terrible mistake--the County's mistake. They confiscated and sold the house because of her failure to pay a tax that she never owed in the first place. The County bureaucracy is the only villain in this film. These are decent people and you can sympathize with them: Kathy wants her house back, and Behrani doesn't believe he should be penalized for the County's error. In fact, you can sympathize with everyone in the film--Behrani's wife and daughter and Ron Eldred, the deputy who comes to evict Kathy and becomes involved in her problem. Eldred is excellent, as is everyone in this emotional film. We predict that **House of Sand and Fog** will keep you totally engrossed until the inevitable tragic ending. It is based on the novel by Andre Dubus III and was directed by Vadim Perelman. We think this powerful film is one of the best of the year. **GRADE A**

HOW ABOUT YOU: We watched the DVD of this Irish film, released in the U.S. in 2008, on the recommendation of reader Seth W., and we thought it was delightful. The beautifully photographed film is based on a short story by Maeve Binchy. It is about a retirement home—quite a grand one—and the crew of demanding residents who rule the roost. The curmudgeonly foursome consists of Vanessa Redgrave, Brenda Fricker, Imelda Staunton and Joss Ackland who are all terrific and their interplay makes a rather sentimental and predictable tale worth watching. The setting is Christmastime and all the residents, except for these four, leave to spend the holidays with their families. When the home's proprietor is called away, it is up to her younger sister, Ellie, to care for things. Her methods for handling the difficult group are unorthodox, but effective. Staunton had what I thought was the best line: "I thought when I got old things would be different, but they're just the same." The title of the movie comes from the familiar song—I *Like New York in June/How about you?* If you're in the mood for a gentle movie about some interesting elders, we recommend it. **GRADE B**

HOW DO YOU KNOW: This romantic comedy was written and directed by James L. Brooks. Brooks is famous for off-beat romcoms such as **Broadcast News**, **As Good As It Gets**, **Terms of Endearment** and **Spanglish** (One of Gary's all time favorites.) The story line is, naturally, formulaic: Boy meets girl, something keeps them apart, boy and girl get together. Brooks tries to enliven the formula with quirky scenes, some of which work, some of which do not. The first half of the movie seemed disjointed and missing on most levels. Paul Rudd is George, a corporate guy under federal investigation; Lisa (Reese Witherspoon) has just been cut from the USA softball team and doesn't know what to do with her life; Matty (Owen Wilson) is a rich, star baseball player who may or may not be falling for Lisa. They form the triangle inevitable in any romantic comedy. Added to the mix is George's obnoxious father, Charles, played by Jack Nicholson. Charles is the head of George's company and is probably responsible for the crimes of which George stands accused. Brooks has a history of working with Nicholson, but here he has given him a character who is not funny or appealing in any way. That's a problem. It looks like bad acting on Nicholson's part, but the writing may have a lot to do with that. Ultimately, a romantic comedy works when you know the boy and girl are made for each other and want them to get together. George and Lisa definitely belong together, and we both thought that the last half of the movie improved considerably. Rudd and Witherspoon are always appealing, but Wilson is the surprise here. His Matty has a multi-layered personality and is not the typical "other man" in the formula. The best performances are given by two character actors, Kathryn Hahn, who plays George's assistant, and Lenny Venito, as her boyfriend. They both shine in a beautifully acted hospital scene. There is some good stuff here, but I wish there had been more. I can give it a qualified B, but Gary thinks B- is a more appropriate grade. **GRADE B/B-**

HOW TO HAVE SEX: 2023 (Available for streaming on Prime Video \$4.99 rental) **How to Have Sex** is a 2023 coming-of-age drama written and directed by British cinematographer Molly Manning Walker, in her directorial debut. Three British teenage girls go on a rites-of-passage holiday to Malia, Greece -- drinking, clubbing and hooking up, in what should be the best summer of their lives. Tara, the only virgin in the trio, feels pressure to match the sexual experiences of her friends. While it should be the best summer of their lives, for Tara it takes a dark turn, raising uncomfortable questions about peer pressure, the expectations placed on teens and, more importantly, sexual consent. **How to Have Sex** navigates consent and assault with respect and honesty. The film had its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival winning an award. On Rotten Tomatoes 143 critics' reviews are mostly positive earning the film 97%. I started watching this film knowing little about it. I have to confess that half way through the movie, it had not risen above a grade of **C**. But by the end, I was much more generous. Barbara and I agree on a grade. **GRADE B**

HOW WE GOT TO NOW: From the NY Times review: *Everyone who loves history encountered, somewhere along the line, a teacher who connected the dots, who imparted the revelation that history isn't memorizing dates and names but seeing how one thing influenced another until we arrived at today.* The author Steven Johnson fills that role engagingly in **How We Got to Now**. The six-part series appeared on PBS and is available from Netflix. (We got our copy from the Phoenix Library.) The six parts are titled, *Clean, Time, Cold, Sound, Light* and *Glass*. It sounds deceptively simple, but each episode is fascinating as Johnson shows how the ideas of many ordinary men and women sparked the inventions that have made our world what it is today. He tells some fascinating stories, e.g., how Galileo came up with the idea of the first pendulum clock or how, in the 1850s/60s, central Chicago's buildings were all raised from the ground with jacks to build a sewage system. For everyone who loves history or science or both! **GRADE B**

HOWARD ZINN: YOU CAN'T BE NEUTRAL ON A MOVING TRAIN: (2004 release seen on DVD): Howard Zinn is a teacher, historian, political activist and a wonderful human being. Using archival materials and interviews and narration by Matt Damon, you will

be introduced to the thinking of one of the most interesting thinkers alive today. H. Zinn was very active in the Civil Rights movement and in protests against the Vietnam War. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

HOWL: If you aren't aware that **Howl** is a free-verse poem written by Allen Ginsberg and especially if you don't care much for poetry or events that date back to the Beat Generation, I think I can say with near certainty that you are unlikely to be drawn to this independent film. I must confess that I was fascinated by the film and Barbara and I were curious enough to see it the day it opened at only one theater in Phoenix. I liked the film and was at first amazed at how neutral or harsh many critics were. But then I realized that critics who personally loved the poetry of Ginsberg would never feel a film treatment could do him justice. And critics who never liked Ginsberg or the period would be unmoved by a film extolling his work. James Franco plays 29 year-old Allen Ginsberg who gave a first public reading of **Howl** in San Francisco in 1955. The film brings the poem to life through wildly psychedelic and often surrealistic animated sequences. Ginsberg's poem with its now famous opening line ("I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness") would probably have faded into obscurity had it not been catapulted to fame by the now famous obscenity trial in which prosecutors tried to protect our nation's morals from obscene publications. We thought Franco was fantastic in his portrayal of a young Ginsberg, but he was ably assisted by a supporting cast that included David Strathairn, Jon Hamm, Jeff Daniels, Mary-Louise Parker, and Bob Balaban. The film moves between dramatization of a 1957 trial in which Lawrence Ferlinghetti was forced to defend himself for publishing and selling copies of **Howl** and Franco's reading of the poem over colorful and creative animated sequences. All this was interspersed with words from Ginsberg from a now-decades-old interview. Call me nostalgic, but I liked it. **GRADE B+**

HUGO: Martin Scorsese celebrates his love of movie-making in this film that is quite a departure for the director of **Goodfellows** and **Raging Bull**. **Hugo** is part fiction, part fact. The fiction story concerns a young orphan boy, Hugo, who lives in the bowels of the Montparnasse train station and spends his time winding the stations many clocks and avoiding the Station Master and his dog. The Station Master, amusingly played by Sacha Baron Cohen (**Borat-2006**), likes to catch homeless orphans and send them to the orphanage. We meet some of the station shop owners, one of whom is a stern old man who sells toys, played by Ben Kingsley. This is where fiction meets fact, for Kingsley is portraying Georges Méliès, a French filmmaker famous for leading many technical developments in the earliest cinema. He was one of the first filmmakers to use multiple exposures, time-lapse photography, dissolves, and hand-painted color in his films. He is often credited with being the father of special effects and with making the first science fiction films*. In flashbacks, we see him directing and acting in a few of his movies. His most famous film, **A Trip to the Moon (Le voyage dans la Lune-1902)** figures significantly in Scorsese's story. Hugo eventually discovers the true identity of the old man and all ends well, as it should in a movie made, ostensibly, for children. Even the Station Master finds love with a pretty flower-seller (Emily Mortimer). Asa Butterfield is Hugo and Jude Law plays his father, seen only in flashbacks. Chloë Grace Moretz is charming as the fictional godchild of Geroge Méliès. Scorsese based the movie on a book, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* written by Brian Selznick, a relative of David O'Selznick, another famous director. We saw the 3D version and, for me, the effects did nothing to enhance the storytelling. I wish I had seen it in 2D. One of the problems that I had was that the glasses the theatre provided were not designed for someone who wears glasses. Gary didn't have that problem, although he agrees that the story really doesn't need the 3D effects. **GRADE B**

*In addition, horror cinema can be traced back to Georges Méliès's **Le Manoir du diable** (1896). A print of the film was acquired by Thomas Edison, who then duplicated and distributed it in the United States, where it achieved financial success; however, Edison did not pay any revenues to Méliès.

THE HULK: This is an incredibly long movie and it is incredibly slow getting started. Once Bruce Banner morphs into the green monster, things do get going. Some of the effects are quite stunning. I liked watching the Hulk leap among some of the Southwest's most majestic scenery and I was impressed with the final battle between the Hulk and his father (Nick Nolte). Nolte was good in a bizarre role, Jennifer Connelly was beautiful in a nothing role, and Eric Bana was properly tortured as the scientist/creature who is living proof that it isn't easy being green. Director, Ang Lee, emphasized the psychological aspects of Banners strange condition, and also gave the film some heart with a love story. BUT, science fiction is very low on our list, and comic book movies aren't much higher, so the combination is deadly for us. We took grandson, Nathan, and he also thought the beginning was slow, but he liked the action sequences. He gives it a B, Gary says D, and I would have to say C, because there were some parts I liked. **GRADE C/D**

THE HUMAN STAIN: (2003 release seen on Video) The is the story of Coleman Silk (Anthony Hopkins), a classics professor at a university who resigns in a rage when he is accused of making a racist remark in class. Unexpectedly, he soon thereafter begins an affair with a much younger woman (Nicole Kidman). Both of them have secrets—secrets we learn by the movie's end. Gary Sinise also appears. The film is compelling and the acting is superb. **THUMBS UP**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: (2005 release seen on DVD) This film puts a much needed spotlight on the third most profitable criminal business after drugs and guns—human trafficking. Modern slavery is a multi-billion-dollar industry and, sad to say, the United States is it's biggest customer. Robert Carlyle (**The Full Monty**) is excellent as the mastermind behind an international sex slave ring. Mira Sorvino and Donald Sutherland play agents for a specialized team of Immigration and Customs Enforcement called ICE. **THUMBS UP**

THE HUMANS: 2021 (In theaters & streamed from Showtime Anytime) We streamed it, and all I can say is thank God for subtitles! It may have been a "fantastic work of theater," but it makes for an awful movie. Here's the plot: "*Set inside a pre-war duplex in downtown Manhattan, **The Humans** follows the course of an evening in which the Blake family gathers to celebrate Thanksgiving. As darkness falls outside the crumbling building, mysterious things start to go bump in the night and family tensions reach a boiling point.*" The daughter and her partner haven't moved in yet, and the apartment is essentially empty, but as they wait for the movers, the family celebrates Thanksgiving. Stephen Karam adapted it from his Tony award winning play, but it left us puzzled and confused. Light bulbs keep burning out in the apartment leaving us literally in the dark. People talk but we don't see them because the camera is focused on an empty room. The way it's staged and filmed intentionally replicates the atmosphere of a horror movie, and **The Humans** reminded us of why we avoid horror movies. Rotten Tomatoes critics loved the movie. We didn't. In their synopsis, RT said, "***The Humans** explores the hidden dread of a family and the love that binds them together.*" We got the hidden dread, as Eric (Richard Jenkins) and his daughter's partner, Rich, (Steven Yeun) talk about their nightmares, but this nightmare of a movie left us cold. **GRADE D**

"The Humans is a fantastic work of theater. Is it a good movie? Well. It's a fantastic work of theater."
One of the critics on RT

HUNGER This is a 2008 movie by British director and film maker Steve McQueen starring Irish/German actor Michael Fassbender. Barbara and I were so impressed by these two in **Shame** (2011) that we felt compelled to go back to McQueen's first full length feature film. This is a very dark film depicting the events surrounding a hunger strike staged by a group of IRA prisoners during their 1981 incarceration in Britain's Maze Prison in Ireland. It is a brutally realistic film. If you chose to see it, be prepared for a realistic treatment of urine, feces, rotting food, maggots, rats, blood, and torture. Then in the second half of the film prepare to witness the slow and painful death by starvation of the hunger strike leader, Bobby Sands (Fassbender). I won't pretend this is an easy film to watch and I don't believe I can grade it without misleading our readers. It is a well-made film and one I won't soon forget, but you need to be a devoted history buff or film buff to spend the 96 minutes needed on this one. **GRADE: UNAVAILABLE**

THE HUNGER GAMES: The young-adult book, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins was a publishing sensation in 2008. The movie, directed by Gary Ross, is faithful enough to the book to please its many fans. However, for me, watching the story wasn't as exciting as reading it. Watching 24 young people kill each other in a futuristic reality show didn't have the page-turning pulse of the book. The story is set in a future North America known as Pamen, a country divided into 12 districts and lead by the privileged few who live in the Capitol. As punishment for a past uprising, the government has decreed that each district will send two teenagers, chosen by lottery, to the Capitol for a televised fight to the death. When Katniss Everdeen's 12-year-old sister is chosen, Katniss volunteers to take her place. Jennifer Lawrence (**Winter's Bone**) is outstanding as Katniss. James Verniere of the Boston Herald.com, who only gave the movie a C+, said, "Whatever they paid Lawrence was not enough, since it is she who makes the film work at all." Katniss is from District 12, a coal mining district that looks like a 1930s-style mining town. In her district, the people are mostly starving in sharp contrast the Capitol where people live as befits the 1% and dress in a style reminiscent of the land of Oz. Stanley Tucci is the TV host of the games, Elizabeth Banks (unrecognizable in her bizarre wig and makeup) flutters around, and Woody Harrelson plays an alcoholic former winner who has been assigned to help prepare Katniss for the Games. Josh Hutcherson plays Peetra, the other "tribute" from District 12 with whom Katniss forms an alliance. The movie is rated PG13 and the killing is done mostly off-screen. There are no guns. The teenagers fight with knives, swords and bows and arrows. I think perhaps it would have been a better movie if they had gone for an R rating, but then the multitude of young fans wouldn't have been able to see the movie. Gary, who didn't read the book, enjoyed it less than I did, but agrees with my grade of B. **GRADE B**

THE HUNGER GAMES: CATCHING FIRE: Jennifer Lawrence is an amazing actress. From her breakout role in **Winter's Bone** to her most recent turn as Katniss Everdeen, she has always been terrific. Plus, in interviews she is intelligent and adorable. We are fans. However, Gary is not a fan of the **Hunger Games** series, probably because he's never read the books. I have read all three, and, while Gary thought this movie would never end, I liked it. As with the first one, I got a kick out of Elizabeth Banks with her wild hair and outrageous costumes as Effie Trinket, and Stanley Tucci, almost unrecognizable in his wig and makeup, as Caesar Flickerman. Donald Sutherland is back as the evil Panem President Snow. For winning last year's Hunger Games, Katniss has become a hero to the people of Panem, and Snow is worried that people see her as a symbol of hope—hope that could lead to revolution. He decides to destroy Katniss by enacting a special Hunger Games wherein previous winners will compete again. Things don't go according to his plan, however, and by the end of the movie, revolution and the third of the Hunger Games trilogy, seem imminent. Gary left the grade for this movie to me, and I think it deserves a B. **GRADE B**

THE HUNT: (2012/2013) This is a highly acclaimed subtitled 2012 Danish drama starring Mads Mikkelsen (**A Royal Affair, Casino Royale** and NBC's *Hannibal*). It is a mesmerizing performance by Mikkelsen who won a Best Actor Award for this role at the Cannes Film Festival. The story is set in a small Danish village around Christmas and follows an innocent Kindergarten teacher who becomes the victim of mass hysteria after being wrongly accused of sexual misbehavior with one of his female students who is also the daughter of his best friend. Once a false rumor takes root, lives can be torn apart. The film is a powerful thought provoking study of mob mentality and the suggestibility of both children and adults. Barbara and I were moved by the powerful acting by the entire cast and fascinated with the subtle cultural differences between Denmark and the United States. It will be hard to find this riveting drama in a close theater, but you may want to watch for it when it becomes available on Netflix. **GRADE B+**

HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE: (2016) At a time of year when a good movie release is hard to find, along comes **Hunt for the Wilderpeople**. Filmed in wild New Zealand backcountry, this touching offbeat coming of age story received universal acclaim from the first 96 professional critics responding to Rotten Tomatoes. 100% is rare on Rotten Tomatoes. Barbara and I add our hearty enthusiasm to the already glowing reviews. Veteran actor Sam Neill playing a cantankerous foster uncle is joined by newcomer Julian Dennison playing a rebellious 13 year old foster child who has never found a suitable home in "the system." Neill is always good and Dennison is completely believable, a huge compliment to a young actor. Of course the two leads are supported by a solid cast of talented actors and good direction by Taika Waititi who also wrote the screenplay. Laugh-out-loud funny one minute and achingly sad the next, the audience is taken on a rollicking adventure through beautiful New Zealand wilderness. There is even a climactic car chase which brings back fond memories of **Thelma and Louise**. We think this is a movie worth seeking out. **GRADE A**

THE HUNTING GROUND: (2015) Critics say that watching this movie will make you angry. They are right. I felt anger at the colleges and universities that not only refuse to admit that there is an epidemic of rape on their campuses but do nothing when women report that they were sexually assaulted. The documentary presents some alarming statistics, particularly those which contrast the number of complaints with the number of perpetrators who were subsequently expelled. I also felt admiration for Annie Clark and Andrea Pino, two women who were raped early in their careers at the University of North Carolina. Both were essentially ignored when they filed their complaints, but, refusing to go away quietly, they became activists. They have pioneered the use of Title IX to bring attention to the epidemic and to hold the schools responsible. Their efforts have brought national attention to the problem and have prompted the Department of Justice to launch investigations into 95 colleges and universities. (I'm sorry to say that Arizona State University is one of the schools being investigated.) This is an extremely well-made documentary. Seldom have talking heads, newsreel footage and statistics been so powerful. The first person stories are chilling, especially when women say that their treatment at the hands of their

schools was worse than the rape itself. Especially harrowing is the report by a Florida State University woman of her brutal rape at the hands of a football star. Even when another accuser came forward, nothing was done to punish Jameis Winston, the school's star quarterback. He won the Heisman trophy and is expected to be a high pick in the 2015 NFL draft. His accuser has dropped out of school. Every parent and every college-bound student should watch ***The Hunting Ground***. So should everyone else. **GRADE A**

HUSTLE & FLOW: This movie almost made me like rap music. I would have thought that was impossible before seeing Craig Brewer's remarkable film. In it, we meet people who, at first glance, seem to be urban Black stereotypes. But as we get to know them, they all become fully realized, complicated characters who ultimately win our respect and understanding. Terrence Howard is Djay, a small time pimp and drug dealer who is intelligent, thoughtful, and considerate of his "women." He desperately wants to make something out of his life and chooses music as a way to accomplish his dream. He meets an old school buddy, Key (Anthony Anderson from TV's *The Shield*), who dreams of being a big-time record producer. With some help from their friends, they produce a rap number—one that we actually enjoyed listening to. Shug (Taraji P. Henson), Djay's main woman, finds some self worth by singing backup on the demo tape. Djay pimps Nola (Tyran Manning) from the back of his car, but she, too, wants more out of life. That Djay understands this is to his credit. Manning and Henson are both memorable in their roles and Ludicris, a rapper who plays a rapper in this film, is also very good. I've admired Anderson on *The Shield* and he is equally admirable here. But it is Terrence Howard's performance as a pimp-with-a-soul who took our breath away. He is an incredible actor. (See back page for more on Howard.) **GRADE A-**

HUSTLERS: (2019) Destiny (Constance Wu) is making a living as a stripper when the 2008 financial crisis hit. Wall Street clients disappeared from the club and that interfered with Destiny's livelihood. After several years of not stripping, she returned to the club and renewed her friendship with Romona (Jennifer Lopez). The two women, along with two other strippers, decided to hustle some of their former clients by meeting them at a bar, and luring them to the strip club where the women would get a cut of the men's spending. To sweeten the men's mood and to mess with their memory, Romona and Destiny perfected a concoction of MDMA and ketamine which they would slip into the men's drinks. Sometimes, they would charge thousands of dollars on the man's credit card, confident that he would remember only that he had had a "good time." They justified the hustle by telling themselves that the men deserved it. All went well and the women's friendship flourished, until one man decided to fight back. The movie is inspired by a 2015 New York article by Jessica Pressler, played in the movie by Julia Stiles. Destiny and Romona's characters are based on two New Yorkers who were eventually arrested. If breasts and bottoms are your thing, there's plenty to go around, but even those beautiful bodies could not save the film for us. Gary and I agree that we can't give ***Hustlers*** higher than a grade of D+. **GRADE D+**

THE HURRICANE: Denzell Washington is powerful as Ruben Carter, a troubled youth who became a champion boxer only to be accused of a bar shooting. It's important to remember that the crime took place during the turbulent sixties when racial tensions were everywhere. One of the prosecutors later referred to "The depth of racial antipathy that existed in Paterson in June, 1966..." It appears that Carter was the victim of that racial antipathy by the police force and the prosecutors. Two black men walked into a bar in Patterson and began shooting at everyone. Carter and Artis, who was driving Carter home that night, were stopped by the police because they were in a car similar to one seen driving away from the scene of the shooting. At the time of the crime, no one at the crime scene identified Carter and Artis as the killers. The police took the pair to the hospital where two injured men could also not identify them. Both Carter and Artis passed lie-detector tests and were released about 7 p.m. on June 17th. It was only later that they were arrested, and, at that time, two witnesses changed their stories and did identify them as the shooters. Carter spent twenty years in prison for the crime he insists he did not commit. Some have argued that the movie plays fast and loose with the facts. Most of the discrepancies concern details that have more to do with dramatic effect than with whether he was guilty or innocent. One of the discrepancies is the invention of a fictional villain: a detective that is determined to "get" Carter. Whether or not you believe in Carter's innocence, the film is powerful and Washington richly deserves his Golden Globe Award. **GRADE: B+/A-**

THE HURT LOCKER: In my not always humble opinion, this is the best war story since the terrific TV series, ***Band of Brothers***. ***Hurt Locker*** has been highly praised by critics. Of the 96 reviews gathered by Rotten Tomatoes.com, 93 were positive with an average rating of 8.6 out of 10. The film ignores the politics of war and focuses on the day to day life of soldiers who risk their lives trying to disable IED's (Improvised Explosive Devices) in Baghdad. Were you aware that IED's have caused more than half the American deaths in Iraq? Much attention has been given to the fact that this macho war film was directed by (take a deep breath) a woman, Kathryn Bigelow. My 25 years of marriage to Barbara has made me immune to the staggering impact of this revelation. Bigelow has made all the right choices in putting together this riveting film. Three relatively unknown actors play the leads, but I hope their outstanding performances will assure their future in the film industry. Jeremy Renner plays Staff Sergeant William James who is a compulsive risk taker, but extraordinarily skilled in what he does. Anthony Mackie and Brian Geraghty add believability and diversity to Bravo Company, the squad of bomb technicians who are in the final few weeks of their tour of duty. Few would quibble with the old adage, "War is Hell," but you might get some disagreement with "War is a drug." Many soldiers can't wait for their tour of duty to end. Some, like Staff Sergeant James, get hooked on the constant adrenaline rush of danger. The psyche is complex and Bigelow explores this with deft mastery. Barbara and I agree that this is one of the best films of the year. **GRADE A**

HUSH: 2016/2020 (*Netflix*) This is a heart-pounding thriller available on *Netflix*. With a runtime of only 87 minutes it is well worth your time. The setup is simple: Maddie is a deaf author, living in a remote house in the woods, trying to finish her latest novel while avoiding distractions. But there's someone outside: a twisted psychopath who appears to enjoy mind games before killing his victims. It appears Maddie is at the killer's mercy, but he may have underestimated his prey. Barbara and I were reminded of a 1967 thriller, ***"Wait Until Dark,"*** starring Audrey Hepburn as a blind woman trying to survive an intruder. We were a little skeptical, but decided to watch for fifteen minutes and then decide if we wanted to see it all. After the first fifteen minutes there was no hesitation. ***Hush*** earned 93% on Rotten Tomatoes. We both liked it, but are split on the grade. **GRADE B+/B**

HYDE PARK ON HUDSON: This movie is a slow-moving slice of history and a human side (some would say sordid side) of an FDR we haven't seen played out on film. Actor and comedian Bill Murray gives an interesting portrayal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, America's 32nd president who led us through the Great Depression and WWII. This 95 minute indie film was given a very cool reception by critics and is likely to be distributed only in smaller art film theaters. Barbara and I went with low expectations, but enjoyed it more than we

expected. The movie is set in the summer of 1939, when England was on the brink of war with Germany. But the politics here are thin and the focus is on the indiscretions and the lighter side of FDR. Laura Linney plays Daisy, a distant cousin of FDR who quickly moves beyond the "kissing cousin" relationship and helped him "forget the weight of the world." It was Daisy's private journals found after her death in 1991 that inspired the film. Providing a lighter side and worth the price of admission are the scenes spent with the King and Queen of England. A talented British actor played King George VI, the stuttering King who made film history in the Oscar winning ***The Kings Speech***. Another talented British actor played the Queen and provided a large share of the film's humor. Despite the low opinions of the professional critics, you may want to give ***Hyde Park on Hudson*** a try. **GRADE B-**

HYSTERIA: (2012) For at least two thousand years of European history hysteria referred to a medical condition particular to women and caused, doctors thought, by disturbances of the uterus. In the mid 1800s, one physician compiled a 75-page list of rather vague hysteria symptoms such as faintness, nervousness, insomnia and outbursts of emotion. In reality, the term was used in Victorian times as a catchall to explain a variety of what men thought of as "women's ailments." The list also included such "unnatural female characteristics" as aggressiveness, and "a tendency to cause trouble." In its most egregious state, 19th century hysteria was treated by a court-ordered hysterectomy. In milder cases, doctors determined that the best treatment for female hysteria involved "pelvic massage" or stimulation of the "most sensitive area of a women" until she experienced a "paroxysm." Not surprisingly, the treatment became very popular with the women of that repressed era. When manual "stimulation" caused fatigued wrists and hands, doctors turned to a new invention, the mechanical vibrator. Around 1880, Dr. Joseph Mortimer Granville patented the first electromechanical vibrator, and this movie is about Dr. Granville and his wonderful invention. Hugh Dancy is very good as the doctor and so is Maggie Gyllenhaal as a young woman who doesn't fit the Victorian mold. It won't surprise you that, although Dr. Granville is briefly engaged to Gyllenhaal's more sedate and acceptable sister, the two do wind up together. The cast also includes Rupert Everett, Jonathan Pryce and Felicity Jones. The women in our theatre audience, both young and old, got quite a kick out of the movie. It is, however, more than just a titillating comedy: It is also an examination of the changing gender politics and sexual climate of the late 19th century. We enjoyed both the humor and the information. **GRADE B**

(Note: It wasn't until 1980 that hysteria was removed from the DSM: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. I find that quite appalling!)