

Movie Titles that begin with “G”

The Galapagos Affair * The Gambler * Game Change * Game Night * Gangs Of New York * Gangster Squad * Garden State * The Gatekeepers * Georgia Rule * Get Him To The Greek * Get Low * Get On Up * Get Out * Get Smart * Ghost Town * The Ghost Writer * The Gift * Gifted * Gilbert * Ginger & Rosa * Girl * The Girl In the Cafe * Girl in the Picture * Girl Interrupted * Girl Most Likely * The Girl on the Train * The Girl Who Kicked The Hornet's Nest * The Girl Who Played With Fire * The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo-American version * The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo-Swedish version * Girl With A Pearl Earring * Girlfight * The Glass Castle * Gloria * Gloria Bell * The Glorias * Glory Road * God Bless America * God's Country * God's Own Country * Going In Style * Gone Baby Gone * Gone Girl * The Good Girl * The Good Liar * Good Luck to You, Leo Grande * Good Night and Good Luck * Good Night Oppy * The Good Shepherd * Goodbye Lenin * Goodbye Solo * The Good Nurse * The Goods: Live Hard. Sell Hard. * Gosford Park * Gladiator * Glass Onion * Gracie * The Graduate * Gran Torino * The Grand Budapest Hotel * The Grand Seduction * Grandma * Gravity * The Great Beauty * The Great Buck Howard * The Great Debaters * The Great Gatsby * The Great Raid * The Greatest Game Ever Played * The Greatest Showman * Green Book * Green Zone * Greenberg * Greenfingers * Greenland * The Grey * Grey Gardens * Grindhouse * The Guard * The Guardians * The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society * The Guest * A Guide To Recognizing Your Saints * The Guilt Trip

THE GLAPAGOS AFFAIR: SATAN CAME TO EDEN: (2013/2014) In 1929 a German couple left their spouses behind and settled on Floreana, a small, uninhabited island in the remote Galápagos archipelago, 575 miles west of Ecuador in the southern Pacific. Friedrich Ritter left a thriving medical practice to find paradise with Dore Strauch, who had been diagnosed with MS. In 1932, another German couple, the Wittmers, came to Floreana inspired by articles that appeared in German newspapers about Friedrich and Dore. They were destined to become neighbors, but never friends. The next to arrive on the island was an eccentric self-described baroness who was accompanied by her two lovers. When she announced her plans to build a hotel and declared herself the “empress of the island,” hostilities began to develop among the settlers. They came to find paradise, but, in 1934, they found something much darker. The filmmakers of this documentary used accounts written by Dore and Margaret Wittmer which tell markedly different stories. In their attempt to piece together the mystery of Floreana, they interviewed the Wittmer children and others who lived on the more inhabited island of Santa Cruz. The filmmakers actually met Margaret Wittmer in 1998, but she refused to talk about what happened on the island in 1934. “A closed mouth catches no flies,” she said. The lesson here is that, as one woman said, “Paradise is not a place; it is within you.” And when the trouble is within you, it doesn't matter how far you travel, you bring it with you. While the documentary is a bit long, the unsolved murder mystery of Floreana is quite compelling. **GRADE B**

THE GAMBLER: (2014) Mark Wahlberg is a compulsive gambler in this remake of a 1974 movie of the same title starring James Caan. I was never a compulsive gambler. I was more of an inveterate gambler, but I rarely miss a movie about Vegas or gambling. Wahlberg plays against type and the film has received mixed reviews. Quotes range from, “Brilliant performances” to “A bad remake of a bad movie.” Wahlberg plays Jim, a man who gets little sympathy from the audience or the people around him because his behavior seems so irrational and destructive. His behavior is considered by psychologists to be an addiction not unlike drug addiction. Gambling can stimulate the brain's reward system much like drugs. Simple minded solutions like “*Just say no*” are appealing, but ineffective. This film is a dark psychological drama and a suspense thriller in which Jim's compulsive gambling takes him into the dangerous underworld where there are always people ready to exploit irrational weakness just as Jim is willing to exploit those around him to support his addiction. One of the strengths of the film is a strong supporting cast that includes Oscar winner Jessica Lange and the always fun to watch John Goodman. I was delighted to see Brie Larson, a young actress who was very impressive playing the lead in one of my favorite films, *Short Term 12*. We also liked the scenes with Michael K. Williams who was so outstanding playing Chalky on HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*. Wahlberg was very good playing a college professor by day and a high stakes gambler by night, but the supporting cast brought the movie above mediocre. If memory serves, and it probably doesn't since it was 40 years ago, I liked the 1974 version of *The Gambler* a little better than this one. The filmmakers seemed to go to great lengths to make this version enigmatic and then tacked on an unlikely Hollywood ending. Still, I liked it and there were several outstanding scenes. Unsurprisingly, I liked it more than Barbara, but only marginally. **GRADE B/B-**

GAME CHANGE: (2012) This made-for-TV movie follows John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign, from his selection of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate to their ultimate defeat in the general election. Julianne Moore is Palin and Ed Harris is McCain. The story is told through the eyes of the advisers who developed the losing strategy, and Woody Harrelson plays Steve Schmitt, McCain's senior advisor. In spite of what Palin's supporters say, this is not a savage attack on the Alaska governor. It displays some pity for a woman who was rushed into a Presidential campaign without being fully vetted. She was out of her depth when it came to substantive matters, although she added an element of glamour and celebrity to the Republican ticket. One critic said that **Game Change** “explores how smart people make dumb decisions.” Another said, “That it works is testament to an astounding, Emmy-worthy performance by Moore, who plays Palin with nuance, and without a trace of parody.” We agree that Moore was very good and so were Harrelson and Harris. The movie received only a 63% on *Rotten Tomatoes* tomatometer, while audiences gave it 77%. Our grade: **GRADE B-**

GAME NIGHT: (2018) With an ensemble cast of talented actors and clever writing, this fast-paced dark comedy and sometimes violent farce is laugh-out-loud funny despite the many bullet holes, knife wounds and high body count. Some, or even a lot, of the jokes are stupid, but that is the nature of farce. You throw a lot of jokes at a wall and hope a few stick. A lot did for Barbara and me and we were glad we took a chance on this screwball comedy and sometimes violent farce with its numerous unexpected twists and nonstop shenanigans. Jason Bateman's Max and Rachael McAdams' Annie fell in love over their shared passion for games. Even after marriage the deeply competitive couple host a weekly game night with their friends at their suburban home. When Max's handsome and super-successful brother, Brooks (Kyle Chandler), arrives, he ups the ante with a murder mystery party complete with fake thugs and faux federal agents. As you might expect, things spiral out of control. This movie will never be in line for an Oscar, but if you like a fast paced comedy/mystery with a likable and talented ensemble cast, you should consider **Game Night**. **GRADE B+**

GANGS OF NEW YORK: Our country's history is a violent one and no place was more violent than the Five Points on the Lower East Side of New York City in 1862. Scorsese has set his testosterone-driven story of the conflict between native-born Americans and Irish immigrants in Five Points, and he has timed the climax of the film to coincide with the infamous New York draft riots. (*See NY Draft Riots, below.) In Scorsese's version of history, the "Natives," as they called themselves, are led by Bill The Butcher, one of the most colorful and villainous characters we've ever seen on film. Daniel Day-Lewis is unforgettable in a stunning, Oscar-worthy performance. You simply can't take your eyes off him. Leonardo DiCaprio is Amsterdam Vallon, the son of a man who was killed by Bill The Butcher in the historic gang fight of Five Points in 1846. Amsterdam vows revenge. It takes Scorsese rather a long time to get to their final confrontation. But, since it takes place along with the draft riots, it is spectacular. I think the film is weakened by its length, and would have been a great film at about two hours. At 165 minutes, it is merely a good film. For me, there were too many fights, too much blood, and too much macho posturing. I was interested in the history and awed by Scorsese's depiction of life in New York at the time of the Civil War. But there was nothing to inspire me here, and I never really got caught up in the story. Jim Broadbent appears as "Boss" Tweed, one of the more crooked of Tammany Hall politicians, and John C. Reilly is a Vallon family friend who becomes a crooked constable. (Just about everyone in this film is crooked!) Cameron Diaz appears as a woman who is loved by both Bill and Amsterdam, but her presence did little to mitigate the overwhelming testosterone. Gary thinks it deserves a B because of Scorsese's skill in bringing this story to such vivid life. I can go along with the grade, but if I were judging it based solely on my enjoyment, it wouldn't earn more than a **GRADE C**

GANGSTER SQUAD: (2013) This film is about saving Los Angeles from mobster Mickey Cohen. In the opening credits we are told the movie is "inspired by true events." That is Hollywood code for saying there is, maybe, a teeny resemblance between the screenplay and true events. It was the cast of gifted actors that drew Barbara and me to the theater and we had low expectations that were met. I think the director and writer couldn't decide whether to make a spoof or a serious drama so they fell somewhere in between. Think of a cross between *Scarface* and *Dick Tracy*. The cast included Sean Penn, Ryan Gosling, Josh Brolin, Ema Stone, Giovanni Ribisi, Robert Patrick, and Nick Nolte to mention a few. A few cops put their badges away and go after the wickedest gangster in LA. A quotable quote from the movie is "We're not solving a case here. We're going to war!" Some scenes bordered on the ludicrous and some were a little corny, but several played well and held our interest. This will probably not be the worst movie of 2013, but let's hope it's not the best. **GRADE C**

GARDEN STATE: Zach Braff wrote, directed and starred in this engaging film. He plays Andrew Largeman, a Los Angeles actor who supports himself by waiting tables. (Don't they all?) After a nine-year absence, Largeman returns to New Jersey for his mother's funeral. It's apparent from the opening scenes that he is seriously depressed, and, as the story unfolds, we begin to learn why. Ian Holm is Largeman's psychiatrist father and their relationship is strained and distant. Largeman reconnects with some of his high school friends and finds that one of them has made a lot of money with the development of "silent Velcro." They are a quirky bunch--Too quirky for some of the reviewers but not for us. However, it is Natalie Portman as the new woman in Largeman's life that really vitalizes the film. She is truly captivating in her role as Sam and may be the most adorable presence in movies today. Braff, so funny on TV's *Scrubs*, is equally good here. Ebert wrote that he has "one of those faces, like David Schwimmer's, that seems congenitally dubious." Even when deeply depressed, we found his face interesting. Gary had the film at A-, but so liked the ending that he elevated it to an A. I was thinking B+, but so liked Portman's performance that I elevated it to an A-. **GRADE A/A-**

THE GATEKEEPERS: (2012) This is a provocative Israeli documentary that was nominated for Oscar honors at this year's awards ceremony. It gives a brutal and unsettling account of the successes and failures of *Shin Bet* from the Six-Day War (1967) until now. *Shin Bet* is the country's clandestine internal security agency. Think of it as the Israeli version of our FBI, but even more clandestine. The only member of the *Shin Bet* whose name is known is that of its chief; every other member is anonymous. And the director, who is involved in every national security decision, answers only to the prime minister. There are six men who are living former heads of Shin Bet and how the film's director, Dror Moreh, gained their trust and cooperation is unclear. Barbara and I found the film to be gripping and very often informative but I seriously doubt that it will be seen by many people and I am quite certain that most would find it either boring or too disturbing to watch. One might expect former directors of *Shin Bet* to defend their often harsh treatment of terrorists. As one of the directors pointed out, "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." Amazingly, each of the six former directors has come to reconsider his hard-line position and advocate a conciliatory approach toward his enemies based on a two-state solution. If you are a political junkie, a history buff, or just one who is fascinated with the seemingly endless conflicts in the Middle East, you may want to consider finding *The Gatekeepers*. **GRADE B+**

GEORGIA RULE: Many critics were repulsed by this film. In fact the average grade given by multiple critics on Yahoo Movies was C-. Barbara and I liked the film far better than most critics. I have the suspicion that Jane Fonda and Lindsey Lohan will never be able to rise above their off-screen behavior in the eyes of many. Lohan plays a rebellious teen who is "acting out" as a means of coping with some pretty heavy incidents in her childhood. Her behavior may seem extreme, but it follows pretty closely the kind of behavior psychological studies would predict. Fonda and Felicity Huffman are both experienced and talented actors and very effective in playing, respectively, a hard-nosed grandmother and an alcoholic mother. Garry Marshal directs this honest hard look at a very messy family. It is not your typical romantic comedy, and I fear it will pay a price for that at the box office. The film is not without flaws, but we think the acting and directing is strong enough to recommend it. **GRADE B.**

Barb: *We first became aware of Lohan when we saw her in **Freaky Friday** (2003), and we were both impressed with her talent. In this film, she holds her own with Fonda and Huffman. I hope she can get her personal life straightened out and concentrate on her not inconsiderable acting skills. We also liked Dermot Mulroney who played the town veterinarian and Lohan's sympathetic boss. We both liked Fonda, too. Shirley MacLaine had better watch out, because Fonda may compete with her for feisty grandmother roles.*

GET HIM TO THE GREEK: Drug induced hilarity and copious up-chucking does not a movie make. Not for us, anyway. This latest Judd Apatow-produced comedy stars Jonah Hill and Russell Brand. If you saw *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, you'll remember Aldous Snow, the hilarious Brit rocker who stole Sarah from Jason Segel. Brand reprises that goofy role in this movie. It opens with a montage of Snow's downward slide from stardom to the disastrous release of his latest album—an album that was universally panned by music critics. We meet Aaron Green (Hill), who works for a record company run by a hard-driving megalomaniac, played convincingly by Sean

Combs. Hill is told that he must travel to London to escort Aldous Snow to a revival concert at the Greek theatre in Los Angeles. This turns out to be far more difficult than it sounds, as Aldous draws Aaron into the drug-fueled excesses of a rock star's life. We were pleased to see Rose Byrne (TV's *Damages*) as a rock singer and Elizabeth Moss (TV's *Mad Men*) as Aaron's hard-working doctor/wife. However, Russell Brand is the real star of this one. He is outrageous, but he is also talented and can be touchingly vulnerable at times. As A.O. Scott said in his review, *Even though he's narcissistic and self-destructive, he is also kind of fun to hang around with.* And that he is. He handles the serious scenes nicely, and those are the scenes we liked the most. The non-stop grossness of the first half of the movie is mitigated slightly by the rather sweet ending. Notice, I said "slightly." Gary felt that because of the ending, he could raise his grade to C-. For me, it's a C. **GRADE C/C-**

GET ON UP (2014, available *HBO on Demand*): *Get On Up* is a biopic starring Chadwick Boseman as James Brown, an entertainer known as the "Godfather of Soul." The main reason Barbara and I wanted to see this film was to see the recently deceased Chadwick Boseman. We were so impressed with his brilliant portrayal of Jackie Robinson and Thurgood Marshal that we had to see him playing James Brown, one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. As expected, he was electric. Boseman is joined in this energetic drama by a talented supporting cast including Viola Davis, Octavia Spencer, and Dan Aykroyd. Boseman, who did his own dancing and singing, has such energy and charisma that we forgive or at least understand all of James Brown's flaws and increasingly erratic behavior. I have to give Boseman's performance an enthusiastic "A", but the 138 minute uneven movie was not as good as we had hoped. Still, any of Boseman's tragically few films are worth seeing. **GRADE B**

GET LOW: If you want to see one of our finest actors at the top of his form, catch Robert Duvall in *Get Low*. I know of no other actor who so completely and immediately disappears into his character that you forget who your watching. Duvall becomes Felix Bush, a man who left society almost 40 years ago after a traumatic incident and has lived as a hermit ever since. When a friend dies, he decides to throw a funeral party for himself—while he's still alive. He wants everyone to come who has a story to tell about him. Enter Frank Quinn, the local undertaker, beautifully played by the always interesting Bill Murray. Add the wonderful Sissy Spacek and an excellent performance by the heretofore unknown to us Lucas Black, and you have an acting tour-de-force. Director Aaron Schneider does a good job creating the look of a small Tennessee town in the thirties. After that, he wisely lets the actors do their thing. The film is based on a real life story. When the actual event was held in 1938, the crowd was estimated at eight to twelve thousand people. Reporters and cameramen from the newspapers for Knoxville and Chattanooga covered the event. The Rev. Charles E. Jackson from Paris, IL, delivered the funeral sermon. The character of Rev. Jackson has been written into the movie story and is ably played by Bill Cobbs. Some critics have lowered their grades because they feel that, although the acting is outstanding, the story is slim. Roger Ebert thought that movie was not "*deeply moving or redemptive and uplifting.*" All I know is that it touched both of us, and were simply delighted to watch Duvall do what he does best. **GRADE A**

GET OUT: (2017) You might think of this film as a timely look at modern American race relations, or you might just think of it as a really well made horror flick with a touch of sci fi thrown in. Critics loved it. It earned 99% out of 163 critics. Barbara and I agree that it deserved the high rating. *Get Out* was written and directed by Jordan Peele who is making his writing and directing debut here. Peele is best known as one-half of the sketch comedy duo *Key and Peele*. That show had a very successful run from 2012 thru most of 2015. Ostensibly the story is about Chris and his girlfriend Rose. They have reached a dating milestone when Rose invites Chris for a weekend getaway upstate at her parents' wooded retreat. Chris warns her that it's a mistake that she hasn't told them he's black, but she tells him he's being silly, they're the least racist people in the world! And when he meets her parents (Bradley Whitford and Catherine Keener), they seem friendly and welcoming and pleased to have him. But, as you would expect in a horror film, things start to get weird and then darkly weird. If you like the horror genre and are up for a frightening night out that may also make you laugh as well as think, this may be the film for you. **GRADE B+**

GET SMART: I'm getting weary of all the mindless action and violence in movies today, even in those that purport to be comedies. In a recent *Entertainment Weekly*, Mark Harris wrote, "Movies are made for kids and young men who like things that move fast and go boom!" Oh, this film does include some laughs for the adults in the audience. In one scene, James Caan playing the US president mispronounces "nuclear," but we were the only people in the fairly sizable audience who laughed. The catch phrases and gadgets from the original TV series were far too dated to connect with most of the audience. But we did laugh several times. We enjoyed Steve Carell as the hapless Maxwell Smart, and we thought Anne Hathaway was adorable and surprisingly athletic as Agent 99. In fact, we liked all of the actors: Terrance Stamp is suitably evil, but also quite amusing, as the KAOS mastermind, Alan Arkin is funny as the Chief, and Dwayne Johnson (The Rock) shows some comedy skills playing a veteran CONTROL agent. The writers really let these actors down with a story that is dull and predictable. There was one action scene that keep my attention, but Gary and I thought most of them were boring. Because of the laughs, we'll give this one a C+. **GRADE C+**

GHOST TOWN: Ricky Gervais is Bertram Pincus, a dentist woefully lacking in people skills. During a routine colonoscopy, he dies for 7 minutes. Revived, he discovers that he possess the ability to see dead people—ghosts who are hanging around New York City because they have unresolved issues. They want Pincus to help them, but he is determined to avoid them. One ghost (Greg Kinnear) is persistent. He wants Pincus to break up the impending marriage of his widow, beautifully played by one of our favorites, Téa Leoni. Gervais is perfect at playing a loser who is a bit of a prick. He is also very funny, especially when he is trying to woo Leoni. Fairy tales are by nature rather hokey, and this film is no exception. However, it's entertaining hoke with some snappy dialogue and amusing situations. Gervais, Kinnear and Leoni are so much fun to watch, that we easily buy into the preposterous story. We even choked up a bit at the end. This is a solid B movie, but I have to say we enjoyed it a B+ worth. **GRADE B+**

THE GHOST WRITER: Roman Polanski, who was the director of this gripping political thriller, is best known for two things: (1) He is an Oscar-winning filmmaker with incredible credits and extraordinary talent. (2) He fled the U.S. in 1978 after pleading guilty to raping a 13-year-old girl and is under house arrest in Switzerland while the U.S. moves to extradite him. Although it in no way exonerates him, the actual charge Polanski pleaded guilty to was "unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor," and he fled the country when the judge went back on a pledge to limit Polanski's sentence to pre-trial time served. I will try to put this controversial case to the side while evaluating *The Ghost Writer*. Both Barbara and I give high marks to this atmospheric and nuanced story of deceit and betrayal. The writer,

brilliantly played by Ewan McGregor, is hired to rewrite the memoirs of Adam Lang (Pierce Brosnan) a Tony Blair-like former British Prime Minister. The plot takes a first step in the thickening process when we learn that the ghost writer's predecessor died under mysterious circumstances. Then we learn that the Prime Minister may be indicted for war crimes including sanctioning torture of accused terrorists. This is old-fashioned story telling set in the pressure cooker of today's political climate. Although it is definitely McGregor's movie, it is effectively helped along by a stream of actors playing smaller roles: Kim Cattrall, Olivia Williams, Eli Wallach, Jim Belushi, Timothy Hutton, and Tom Wilkinson. As we left the theater, Barbara commented that this was the best 2010 film we have seen. I agree, and it may be awhile before we see a better one. From the opening scene on a New England ferry to the brilliant final scene on a street in London, Polanski maintains tension and the last five minutes are film making at its best. While the film may not be as good as Polanski's **Chinatown**, it still earns our high praise. **GRADE A**

THE GIFT: (2015) This movie is a psychological thriller that leaves you guessing every step of the way. Australian actor Joel Edgerton wrote and directed this, his first full-length feature film. And if that isn't enough, he also appears in the movie as the high school friend who upends the lives of Simon (Jason Bateman) and Robyn (Rebecca Hall). The couple has moved to California to start a new job and a new life, although what they are escaping from is never fully explained. There's a lot that's left to the imagination in this artfully crafted movie. Gordo (Edgerton) runs into Simon & Robyn by chance, and at first, Simon doesn't recognize this face from his past. It appears that Gordo is overly anxious to make friends with the couple, leaving gifts on their doorstep and appearing, unannounced, at their door. But the audience feels uncomfortable, perhaps because the music and filming technique add to the tensions. Eventually, a 20-year old secret is revealed, leading Robyn to question whether she really knows Simon. There is one scene that made everyone in the theatre jump, but most of the horror is unseen and largely unknown. And that's the best kind. Allison Tolman, who was memorable in TV's *Fargo*, plays Robyn's next door neighbor in a fairly small role. It is Simon, Robyn, and Gordo who are center stage in this movie and all three are extraordinarily good in this excellent debut for writer/director Edgerton. **GRADE B+**

GIFTED: (2017) **Gifted** is one of those movies that leaves the critics lukewarm but delights audiences. I'm afraid I have to side with the critics this time. In **Gifted**, the child in question is a math prodigy, finding errors in a problem designed by an MIT professor at the tender age of 7. Mary (McKenna Grace) has been raised by her uncle, Frank (Chris Evans) who feels guilty that he wasn't able to prevent his sister's suicide. Mary's mother was also a math prodigy, raised by a mathematician mother who did everything to develop her daughter's gift, but little to develop the skills that would enable her to live a relatively normal life. Frank is determined that Mary will be raised as a normal child. A former professor of Philosophy, he left the teaching profession moved to Florida and became a free-lance boat repairman. He has home schooled his niece, but decides she needs social skills and some friends her own age. This movie begins with Mary starting first grade, and that starts the conflict. It is obvious that Mary is not at a first grade level, but Frank is unwilling to place her in a school for gifted children. Enter Evelyn, Mary's grandmother, and a court battle for custody that strained credulity. The introduction of Mary's absent father had been better left on the cutting room floor. It did nothing to enhance the movie or the court battle. It did provide the talented McKenna Grace with an admirably-performed crying scene. The challenge of raising a gifted child deserved a film that took that challenge seriously. Instead, **Gifted** was predictable and manipulative. It is only the undeniable charm of McKenna Grace that made the movie watchable and sometimes touching. She is a gifted actor, that's for certain. Evans as her uncle Frank, Jenny Slate as Mary's first grade teacher and Frank's eventual love interest, and Lindsay Duncan in the unenviable role of Mary's grandmother are all excellent. Octavia Spencer is always worth watching even in the rather throw-away role she is given in **Gifted**. The actors worked their magic more on Gary than they did on me. **GRADE C+/B-**

The film's heroine is extraordinarily gifted. The film itself, not so much.

...David Fear in his *Rolling Stone* review

GILBERT: 2017 (Film available for streaming on Prime Video--\$3.99 Rental) **Gilbert** is a 2017 American documentary about the life and career of an eccentric comedian, Gilbert Gottfried. Gottfried died earlier this month at age 67. I think it would be fair to say that many people were disgusted by and totally turned off by his over-the-top crude humor. It would also be fair to say that many people found him both mind-bendingly funny and disarmingly sweet. The film received 95% from critics on Rotten Tomatoes. Gottfried was one of those comedians who was often funny not for what he said but for how he said it. The film is a behind-the-stage portrait of a working comedian. It captures the immense affection in which he was held by his wife and children, his fellow comedians, and even strangers in the street. If you don't remember the name, you would probably remember the voice when you hear it. After a career of playing obnoxious creeps, Gilbert says he feels a bit like an intruder in the apartment he shares with his wife, Dara, and their two young kids. Having a healthy marital relationship and two loving children is a bit at odds with his personal brand. Dara drags an air-sealed case from beneath their bed to show off her husband's immense collection of stolen hotel supplies. More than just an eccentric touch, it's a way of visualizing the years that Gottfried spent traveling the country and telling the same jokes. If you aren't easily offended by off color jokes, you might find the hour and a half documentary worth your time. Barbara and I did. **GRADE B**

GINGER & ROSA: (2012) This is the kind of artsy independent film that critics love and most moviegoers avoid. We have great tolerance for independent films, so we took a chance. For the first fifteen minutes of quick and jerky hand-held camera shots with murky lighting, I began to long for some kind of plot. I had no trouble realizing that Ginger (Elle Fanning) and Rosa (Alice Englert) were born on the same day and grew up to be BFFs, but it was hard to sort out the other characters. Eventually, a plot began to emerge. Ginger's mother (Christina Hendricks from TV's *Mad Men*) was a typical 1960s London housewife and her father (Alessandro Nivola) was a self-professed anarchist who had served time in jail as a conscientious objector. Ginger, in an attempt to follow in her dad's footsteps, joins a "ban-the-nukes" group and participates in protest marches. She seems genuinely fearful of a nuclear holocaust, and the looming Cuban Missile Crisis increases her anxiety. In the midst of all this teenage angst, her father begins an affair that has devastating consequences. Fanning is outstanding and the camera lingers on her expressive face for good reason. We also thought Nivola, Englert and Hendricks were excellent. Timothy Spall, Oliver Platt and Annette Benning appeared as family friends. If you are an independent film fan, and if you're willing to have patience while the story slowly unfolds, you might enjoy **Ginger & Rosa**. We give it a B. **GRADE B**

GIRL: (2018) Barbara and I streamed this 100 minute controversial Belgian film on *Netflix*. **Girl** received a standing ovation at Cannes where it won the festival's Caméra d'Or for best first feature film, and later picked up a Golden Globe nomination for Best Foreign Film.

The movie is loosely based on the life of professional ballerina, Nora Monsecour. It follows a 15-year-old girl named Lara as she attends a prestigious ballerina academy. So what is controversial about a coming-of-age story? Well, Lara is transgender. He/she was born into the body of a boy and is preparing for gender reassignment surgery. Controversy began with news that there would be a gender-blind casting call for the lead role of Lara. Gender-blind casting may have been well-intentioned but it was a powder keg in this case. Neither the director nor the actor playing Lara is transgender. As you might expect from a controversial film, reviews were mixed. In addition, the ending is a little shocking and hard to watch. Lara's single father is sympathetic to her as she struggles with self-acceptance. But the film makes a point of the fact that transitioning isn't trouble-free even if most of the people around you are sympathetic to the undertaking. We found the movie informative and it was refreshing to see a film that speaks of tolerance without getting preachy. The pains of adolescence and the pressure of training as a ballet dancer on top preparing for a transgender operation combine to create an emotionally raw drama. Considering it is a debut for both its writer/director Lukas Dhont and its star Victor Polster and that it was released in a cloud of controversy, it is surprising that it did as well as it did from critics on the Tomatometer: 85%. It is a difficult film to grade. The filmmakers should get a high grade just for putting together a feature film on such a difficult topic. One of the problems for me was that the lead, Laura, was bordering on being pathologically non-verbal. I couldn't help feeling that the screenplay needed a couple of rewrites. **GRADE C+**

THE GIRL IN THE CAFÉ: (We saw this one on HBO in 2005, but it should be available for renting.) He's a shy, aging civil servant working for the British delegation to the 2005 G8 Summit. She's an attractive young woman he meets at a café and invites to the Summit on a whim. Together, this unlikely couple might just change history. Bill Nighy (*Love Actually*) is Lawrence and Kelly Macdonald (*Gosford Park*) is Gina. The film's fictional Summit involves a vote on whether to allocate sufficient money to help impoverished African countries. Gina becomes fascinated with the concept of ending world hunger and tries to make a difference by offering her opinions to the powers that be—opinions that are not well received. This causes problems for Lawrence, who must choose between his job and the woman he loves. The film is very timely, since the G8 Summit takes place for real on July 6th in Scotland. At that gathering, President Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the heads of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia will have the power to end world hunger. According to Bill Nighy, "The film is an attempt to lobby the eight men who will sit in one room and could literally save hundreds of millions of lives." It is an intriguing combination of romance and world politics. **THUMBS UP**

GIRL IN THE PICTURE: 2022 (Available on Netflix) This is a "twisty-turny" true crime documentary about a woman who is found dying by the side of a road. But it is no clear-cut hit-and-run accident. Soon the truth about the woman starts to unravel into a chilling mystery that no one could have predicted. It is one of the strangest criminal cases of the 1990s. What starts as a simple case unfolds into a decades-long mystery that perplexed veteran investigators. At first, the story is fascinating, but soon it becomes dizzying, then it turns sickening and eventually heartbreaking. I won't give too much away—because you really should experience these horrors and revelations for yourself if you choose to watch this haunting documentary. The young woman found by the side of the road in Oklahoma City was soon identified as 20-year-old Tonya Hughes an exotic-dancer dancer in a strip club. Her friends at the club find the name of the woman they believe to be Tonya's mother. The woman was called to tell her that Tonya had died from her injuries. The woman says, "This can't be right, my daughter died 20 years ago when she was only 18 months old." Critics liked the film a little better than audiences. Scores on the Tomatometer were 95% for critics and 85% for audiences. Barbara and I think this is one of the best crime documentaries we have seen. **GRADE A**

GIRL INTERRUPTED: This is another one of those movies in which the actors are better than the material. Winona Ryder is a young woman who is depressed and suicidal because she feels she doesn't fit in. And when you don't fit in the Sixties, you really have a problem! She signs herself into an expensive mental facility, but discovers she can't sign herself out. She has to wait until "they" decide she is well. Whoopie Goldberg is a sympathetic nurse who tells Ryder she is a lazy, spoiled girl who is driving herself nuts. Angelina Jolie is a girl who has been in the institution for eight years, diagnosed as a sociopath. Ryder and Jolie become friends, and it may be that friendship that helps keep Ryder in the hospital for a year. The film provides a look at a disturbed woman who eventually helps herself get better. The nurses and doctors are helpful and caring, so there is no real villain here, unlike such great nut house films as *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. We liked watching Ryder and Jolie, arguably two of our best young actresses, but found it hard to believe that some of the events in the film could have really happened. At times, I found the storytelling tedious. Jolie won a Golden Globe for her role as Lisa. **GRADE: B-**

GIRL MOST LIKELY: (2013) We like Kirsten Wiig and that's why we went to see this one in spite of dreadful reviews from most of the critics. Even audiences haven't been high on the movie. Wiig stars as Imogene, once a promising young New York playwright whose promise has fizzled. Distraught over having been dumped by her boyfriend, Imogene plans a fake suicide to lure him back, but, not surprisingly, that plan backfires. She winds up in the psychiatric wing of a hospital. Since beds are in short supply, the doctor contacts Imogene's ditsy mother (Annette Bening), a woman that Imogene has avoided for years. Enter the crazy mother, the strange brother and her mother's boyfriend, George/The Bousche (Matt Dillon), who seems to live in time-travel la-la-land. Quirky characters are fun for the actors, but quirky alone doesn't make a good movie. You also need smart writing, something *Girl Most Likely* has only in occasional spots. Wiig is making a career out of playing pathetic characters who manage to be likeable. She makes the movie mildly entertaining. Our local critic gave it 3-1/2 stars, but he was being more generous than most. Richard Roeper dismissed the movie by calling it "*Another movie about a woman falling into a deep funk because some narcissistic twit dumped her.*" I, too, am tired of this theme. **GRADE C+**

THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN: (2016) This movie is based on last year's run-away best seller by Paula Hawkins. I enjoyed the novel and read it in just over a day. It tells the story of Rachel, nicely played by Emily Blunt. Rachel's husband left her two years earlier for another woman, partly because she drank too much. In the two years since her divorce, Rachel has become a sloppy drunk. She pretends to take the commuter train every morning because she's too embarrassed to tell her friend and landlady that she has lost her job. Twice a day, she passes by her old house--the house that Tom now lives in with his new wife and baby daughter. She becomes fascinated by a couple she sees in a house only two doors away from Tom's. When the wife of her fantasy couple goes missing, she becomes involved in the mystery of what has happened. The movie seemed to emphasize how broken not only Rachel is, but everyone else in the story. Our local critic described it as "*a somber slog through the lives of one miserable wretch after another.*" Apparently other critics agree,

because the critics' score on *Rotten Tomatoes* is only 44%. When the novel was published, it was touted as being in the vein of the 2012 best seller *Gone Girl*. That one translated into a good movie by David Fincher; Sadly, *The Girl on the Train*, wasn't translated as well by Tate Taylor. The director's handling of the many flashbacks used to tell the story gave a disjointed quality to the movie. My recommendation: Read the book. **GRADE C+**

THE GIRL WHO KICKED THE HORNET'S NEST: (3rd Film) I'm sorry to say that this is the last time we'll get to see Noomi Rapace's electric performance as Lisbeth Salander, the feminist cyber-punk avenging angel from two previous films. When we last saw her in *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, she was near death: She had been shot three times by her father, buried alive by her half-brother, and still managed to plant an ax in her father's head. This episode opens with Lisbeth in a helicopter on her way to the hospital. Flashback scenes remind us of the ending of the previous film. Lisbeth doesn't get to kick much butt here because she is mostly healing from her injuries. When she has sufficiently recovered, she is moved to a jail cell to await trial for the attempted murder of her father. Meanwhile, Mikael Blomkvist works frantically to find evidence that will prove her innocence. The "hornet's nest" of the title is a secret group that was formed to protect a Russian spy. That spy was Lisbeth's abusive father, and, when she is 12-years old, she attempts to kill him. That gives the group the opportunity to declare her mentally ill and keep her institutionalized. The politicians who form the group are all culpable in the conspiracy to deprive Lisbeth of her rights, but the most villainous of all of them is the smarmy psychiatrist who signed her original commitment papers. He appears again to do the same thing to the adult Lisbeth. We saw the film with a large audience and we suspect that almost all were fans of the two earlier films. As Lisbeth recovers, we see her devoid of makeup and without her typical punk regalia. But when she walks into court, she looks like the Lisbeth we know and love, and the audience burst out in applause. Rapace, over the course of three movies, has fashioned a memorable and irresistible character, and, as noted by Manohla Dargis of the *New York Times*, this is remarkable since "Lisbeth leans to degrees of expressive inexpressiveness." It's true; Lisbeth doesn't say much, but with the intensity of her gaze she doesn't need words. I read the book upon which this movie is based, but it did not detract from my enjoyment of the film. The incredible detail of the book has been condensed into a riveting 2 hours and 28 minutes, and both Gary and I thought the time went quickly. Gary says B+, but I have to give it an A-. It is filmed in Swedish with English subtitles. **GRADE A-/B+**

We urge you to see all three films in the order in which they were made.

THE GIRL WHO PLAYED WITH FIRE: (2nd Film) It's difficult for us to evaluate the movie because we both recently read the book from which it was made. Consequently, we kept waiting for things we knew were going to happen and noticing things that were omitted. We never really got into this sequel the way we did with *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. That one was new to us because we had not first read the book. We were pleased once again with the two leads: Noomi Rapace brings Lisbeth Salander to vivid life. This second in the Steig Larsson trilogy centers more on Lisbeth's life and the events that made her the feminist cyber-punk avenging angel that she is. The filmmaker was faithful to the novel, but there is a richness to the book that's impossible to re-create in the film, and we missed that richness. Still, it's a good thriller and one that a viewer can enjoy even without having seen *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. We have the third book, *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*, on hold at the library and we can't decide whether to read the book first, or wait for the inevitable movie. We probably won't be able to resist reading the book. Perhaps with a bit more time between the book and the movie, we'll enjoy that movie more. **GRADE B**

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO (1st Film, American version): I'm not sure why anyone would remake a movie that was just about perfect the first time. Plus, it had the perfect Lisbeth Salander in Noomi Rapace. Rooney Mara does her best in this Hollywood version. She dresses the part, she has the tattoos and body piercings, and she drives a mean motorbike. But her face still looks too fragile and vulnerable. Then too, I was uncomfortably aware that she is not much older than Mikael Blomkvist's teenaged daughter. I know that in Hollywood, sex sells, so director David Fincher saw fit to include two graphic sex scenes between Lisbeth and Mikael. Totally unnecessary, in my opinion. They didn't add to the story and they were not consistent with Lisbeth's personality. She wears clothes as her armor against a hostile world. I didn't like seeing her unclothed so often. We are both Daniel Craig fans and we liked him here, although I tend to agree with Roger Ebert who felt he looked too comfortable in danger—too James Bond. The Swedish actor looked less like an action hero and more like a disgraced journalist who was uncomfortable investigating a 40-year-old murder. But then, we'd never seen that actor before, so we could immediately accept him as Blomkvist. I also had a quarrel with the ending of this version. In it, Lisbeth looks more like an unhappy girlfriend than a woman out to avenge any crimes against other women. Rapace had the right look; Mara, does not. The movie is expertly made and people who haven't seen the original will no doubt be caught up in it. Because we knew in advance what was going to happen, the suspense just wasn't there for us. Consequently, Fincher's film seemed too long. We will be anxious to hear from people who see this version without having seen the original. We gave the Swedish version an A. This Hollywood version gets a B. **GRADE B**

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO (1st Film, Swedish version): Corruption, murder, sexual abuse and revenge combine to make this a compelling thriller and, I suspect, one of the best movies of the year. Although long at two and a half hours, this movie had us totally engrossed from beginning to end. Mikael, a journalist who has been convicted of libel and Lisbeth, a solitary and troubled computer wizard, join forces to solve a 40 year old mystery. They find a trail of blood as they attempt to discover who in a rich and powerful family murdered a lovely sixteen-year-old girl. Harriet was the beloved niece of the family patriarch, and her uncle hires Mikael to unravel the mystery behind her disappearance. The Swedish actor, Michael Nyqvist is excellent as Mikael and Noomi Rapace is unforgettable as Lisbeth. With rings in her ears and nose and a dragon tattoo on her back, she is fierce and damaged and a genius on the computer. As Roger Ebert said in his review, *Lisbeth is as compelling as any movie character in recent memory*. The movie has considerable violence but all of it is integral to the story—a story of violence toward women. Not surprising that the original Swedish title was *Men Who Hate Women*. Those of you who avoid subtitled movies will miss something special here. There will be a Hollywood remake in 2012, but I doubt it will be as good as the Swedish original. And I can't imagine any other actress matching the riveting intensity of Rapace's Lisbeth. **GRADE A**

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING: Peter Webber has created a visual masterpiece, effectively re-creating the lighting and the look of Vermeer's paintings. Credit must go to cinematographer Eduardo Serra and production designer Ben van Os. Almost every frame of the film could be produced as a work of art. For centuries, people have wondered about the model in Vermeer's famous painting *Maiden*

With a Pearl Earring. Tracy Chevalier wrote a novel speculating about the model and the painting and that work of fiction is the source for this film. Scarlett Johansson plays Griet, a young woman who supposedly worked in the Vermeer household as a maid. Colin Firth plays Johannes Vermeer as an intense and quiet man who is totally absorbed in his work. Griet doesn't talk much either, so dialogue is not a major factor in this film. But so much is said without words, and both Johansson and Firth are very good at communicating with their eyes. Johansson was a perfect choice for the role because she does look remarkably like the girl in Vermeer's painting. Tom Wilkinson appears as Vermeer's lecherous patron. The New York Times reviewer said watching the film was like watching a painting dry. The story is told slowly and the film doesn't have any violence or overwrought dialogue, but we think that is a good thing. **GRADE A-**

GIRLFIGHT: (Seen on video) An angry adolescent, living in the projects, trains to be a fighter. That sounds like a typical prizefight movie, doesn't it? This one isn't typical, though, because the fighter is a woman. Michelle Rodriguez is intense as Diana, the high school senior who finds a home and respect in the ring. She is a powerful presence: You can't take your eyes off her when she is on screen, especially when she puts on her game face. Diana forms a romantic attraction to another fighter training at the gym and, inevitably, they must fight each other for the flyweight amateur title. Her boyfriend is capably brought to life by Santiago Douglas. The story is handled sensitively and the script is well written. In an interesting note, John Sayles, who is one of the producers, appears as a high school science teacher. The director and writer, Karyn Kusama, was named best director at Sundance for *Girlfight* and the film won the Grand Jury Prize. Roger Ebert spoke with Rodriguez at Cannes, and he commented that she was ideally cast in the movie, not as a hard woman or a muscular athlete, but as a spirited woman with a temper, and fire in her eyes. Rodriguez told him that she trained as a boxer for the movie, and enjoyed it, but finally "I had to stop the boxing because your ego flies all over the place and I started to actually welcome the challenge of someone in the street stepping up to me." She was, indeed, ideally cast. **THUMBS UP**

THE GLASS CASTLE: I read Jeannette Walls memoir several years ago after reading two of her books, which I loved. Here's what I wrote about her memoir: *What a childhood she had: An alcoholic father and a mother who would rather paint than take care of her kids. And yet, their life of "adventure," (which some would call poverty and child neglect) seemed to produce Jeannette, a gifted writer.* The movie, which is fairly close to the book, seems to focus more on the poverty and child neglect. There were some scenes which showed the excitement a child would feel living with a father who was bright and full of energy and dreams. He drew elaborate plans for a castle made of glass. It was never built, and the foundation that the children dug with their father, became a place to dump trash. But, as Walls says in the movie, "We had fun planning it." Brie Larson, who won an Oscar for her performance in 2015's *Room*, is Jeannette Walls. She is very good but the two actors who played her at younger ages are truly wonderful. It is Woody Harrelson, however, whose performance I will long remember. He is marvelous as the unpredictable and alcoholic father. His failure to provide for and protect his children infuriated me. The movie seems to focus on the horrible conditions in which Walls grew up, and the adult Jeannette's repudiation of her father. That makes it difficult to accept Jeannette's softening toward him at the end of the movie. As one critic wrote: *By laminating Walls' story with a Hollywood sheen, the narrative climaxes in an artificial and contrived manner.* Sad to say, I have to agree with him. I really can't remember much about the book, but I remember that I felt uplifted by it. The film didn't engender the same feeling. Gary agrees that our grade is somewhere between C+ and B-. **GRADE C+/B-**

GLORIA BELL: (2018) This movie is the work of Chilean filmmaker Sebastian Lelio who won the foreign-language-film Oscar last year for *A Fantastic Woman* which Barbara and I saw and liked. (See the Archives) *Gloria Bell* is an Americanized remake of a five year old low budget Lelio film titled *Gloria*. Simply put, Gloria Bell is a character study of a middle aged divorcee who, against all odds, remains optimistic. The movie rests almost completely on Julianne Moore's extraordinary performance in the title role. Gloria's lonely life is complicated when she finds herself thrust into an unexpected new romance filled with both the joys of budding love and the complications of dating, identity and family. Arnold (John Turturro) may not be the perfect mate, but Gloria's choices are limited. Love isn't easy for anyone in this movie and don't expect a Hollywood ending. We liked this film and especially the strong performance from Julianne Moore. **GRADE B+**

GLORIA: (2013) This was Chile's official entry for Best Foreign Language Film at the 86th Academy Awards and winner of Best Actress Award at last year's Berlin Film Festival. Foreign Language films are not to everyone's liking, and I can appreciate this. Barbara and I are often disappointed, but we are frequently rewarded and continue to seek them out. This one was given a lukewarm recommendation by two of our readers and a glowing review by another. The title role is inhabited by an acclaimed Chilean actress, director and playwright, Paulina Garcia, who is in nearly every scene in the film. She delivers a powerful performance as a post-middle-aged but pre-senior citizen who is still young enough to want a relationship with a man. She is not going to let a failed marriage and a few wrinkles hold her back. The director skillfully walks a line between poignancy and humor. While Gloria may never find the love she deserves, we left the theater with the feeling that she is an extraordinary woman who is armed with a strength that will easily carry her into her golden years. **GRADE B**

GLORIA BELL: (2018) This movie is the work of Chilean filmmaker Sebastian Lelio who won the foreign-language-film Oscar last year for *A Fantastic Woman* which Barbara and I saw and liked. (See the Archives) *Gloria Bell* is an Americanized remake of a five year old low budget Lelio film titled *Gloria*. Simply put, Gloria Bell is a character study of a middle aged divorcee who, against all odds, remains optimistic. The movie rests almost completely on Julianne Moore's extraordinary performance in the title role. Gloria's lonely life is complicated when she finds herself thrust into an unexpected new romance filled with both the joys of budding love and the complications of dating, identity and family. Arnold (John Turturro) may not be the perfect mate, but Gloria's choices are limited. Love isn't easy for anyone in this movie and don't expect a Hollywood ending. We liked this film and especially the strong performance from Julianne Moore. **GRADE B+**

THE GLORIAS (2020 on Amazon Prime): Gloria Steinem is played by 4 actors in this biopic. The young woman who came to New York hoping to be a journalist, is played by Alicia Vikander (*Ex Machina*). The mature Gloria is played by one of our finest actors, Julianne Moore. Another actor plays the teenager and the fourth plays Steinem as a little girl who loved her father (Tim Hutton). The screenwriter and director, Julie Taymor, obviously did not want to make a standard biopic. She inserted a lot of creativity but it wasn't successful, except for two scenes. Taymor used a bus as a metaphor for the travelling that Steinem did, frequently having all four actors on the bus

at the same time. Those scenes were always done in black and white. Occasionally the bus scenes worked, but mostly they just got in the way of the story telling. One creative scene we liked was when the mature Gloria interviewed the teenager about how she saw her future, but the *Wizard of Oz* bit was too much for us. We did like that Steinem herself appeared at the end of the film. She, too, was on the bus. Gary and I agreed that this movie was important and timely, and it reminded me what that surge of protest for women's rights felt like. Moore and Vikander were outstanding, but we can't give the movie higher than a B. We hope that won't dissuade anyone from seeing *The Glorias*. **GRADE B**

GLORY ROAD: (2006 Release) I'm a sucker for a good sports movie and this is a good one. The historic 1966 game was not just an NCAA Championship game; it wasn't just one of the biggest upsets in NCAA history; it was, as Pat Riley says during the final credits, "the Emancipation Proclamation of 1966." Josh Lucas is terrific as the legendary basketball coach, Don Haskins. Haskins went from coaching a high school girls' basketball team to Texas Western University. The University's basketball program was weak, but it was Haskins' chance to coach a Division I team. Because he couldn't afford to recruit the best players, he took the players that other teams were afraid to recruit—the black players. As in *Remember The Titans*, Haskins had to create a team of black and white players in a school that had never before had a black player on the court. The players are appealing, the basketball is exciting, and the social and political ramifications of the final game, when Coach Haskins sends five black players onto the floor against Kentucky's all white team, are emotionally stimulating. Jon Voight plays Kentucky's famous coach, Adolph Rupp. (Four years after the 1966 upset loss, Rupp signed his team's first black player.) Derek Luke (*Antoine Fischer*) is the team's star player, and Emily Deschanel (TV's *Bones*) is Haskins' supportive wife. Be sure and stay for the final credit role because you will see some of the real men portrayed in the film. Gary gives this one an A; I say B+. **GRADE A/B+**

GOD BLESS AMERICA: (2012) I applaud Bobcat Goldthwait's attempt to throw the spotlight on the rampant lack of civility and kindness in contemporary American culture. The problem with the movie was perfectly articulated by Roger Ebert. He wrote, "Here is a film that begins with merciless comic savagery and descends into merely merciless savagery. But, wow, what an opening." I agree that the opening is terrific. We see Frank, a mild-mannered ordinary guy (beautifully played by Joel Murray who is Bill Murray's younger brother) sitting in front of his television watching the parade of cruel, stupid and racist people that become celebrities on the big screen. Frank is not a happy man. He's unhappily divorced and living next door to a screaming baby. When Frank is fired from his low-level job, and learns that his young daughter refuses to visit him, he decides to kill himself. But then, with the gun in his mouth, he sees a reality show on his television screen and decides instead to kill its incredibly bitchy 16-year-old star. From there, Frank and his newly acquired partner, Roxy (Tara Lynne Barr), a precious and rebellious teenager, go on a rampage killing people that they believe need killing. And some of them really do need killing. But at this point, the movie goes from comic social commentary to, in the words of Roger Ebert, "an amoral movie about two psychopaths." Frank and Roxy turn into people who themselves, need killing. I can appreciate what Goldthwait is trying to do here, but neither one of us can recommend the bloodbath that the movie becomes. **GRADE C-**

GOD'S COUNTRY: 2022 (Streaming on Prime Video, Rental \$6.99) *God's Country* opens with a pictorial essay on life in a remote mountain area with a history of violence and lawlessness. The setting is an unnamed Montana town including its stark white mountains and stark white people. The movie is based on the short story "Winter Light" by James Lee Burke. Director and co-writer of the screenplay, Julian Higgins, transform the story by changing the protagonist from a retired white man in his sixties to a woman of color in her forties. Despite being a first-time feature director, Julian Higgins displays the sure hand of an old pro in guiding the story, allowing the escalation and conflict to grow in ways that feel natural and unforced. The woman, Thandiwe Newton who is in nearly every scene in this haunting and ultimately riveting thriller gives a powerhouse performance playing Sandra. Sandra is a black university professor living a solitary life in a canyon on the edge of a national forest. When two hunters park their truck on her property without permission, Sandra confronts them. Unfortunately, they don't heed her wishes, and the pair continues trespassing on her property. What transpires is an escalating battle of wills with catastrophic consequences. Critics loved the movie (89% on Rotten Tomatoes). Audience score was much lower, perhaps because it is a slow starter. Usually critics are more tolerant of that than audiences. Barbara and I agree with the critics and think Higgins has great potential as an up-and-coming filmmaker. **GRADE A**

GOD'S OWN COUNTRY: 2017 (Available for streaming on Hulu) The film's title is the common nickname for Yorkshire... think of it as the Texas of Britain, big, wild, and thoroughly convinced of its own greatness. 130 reviews yielded 98% on the Tomatometer. A young Yorkshire sheep farmer, Johnny Saxby, is stuck in a life of isolation and debilitating loneliness. He numbs his daily frustrations with binge drinking and casual sex, until the arrival of a Romanian migrant worker who forces him to reevaluate everything he knows about himself and the world. What begins as a testy relationship between the two young men, mostly due to Johnny's coldness and insensitivity, soon turns into a passionate romance. Rarely does a film do such an amazing job at saying so much with so little script. By the end of the movie Johnny has found some measure of happiness, but don't ask him to describe it. The actors were quite good, but they didn't do it with words. We aren't sure everyone would like this unique movie as much as we did, but Barbara and I, give it a high grade. **GRADE B+**

GOING IN STYLE: (2017) The original *Going in Style*, was a 1979 movie about three elderly, lifelong friends who decided to rob a bank for kicks. That critically-acclaimed, comic caper co-starred a trio of entertainment icons: George Burns, Art Carney and the legendary Lee Strasberg, the father of method acting. The remake of *Going in Style* is also about three elderly, lifelong friends who decide to rob a bank—but they do it for retribution. This time, the charismatic co-stars have a Very Noble Reason for robbing a bank: The steel factory they've worked at for years is being bought out, and their pensions are swallowed up in the process. Playing the leads are Oscar winners Morgan Freeman (*Million Dollar Baby*), Michael Caine (*The Cider House Rules*) and Alan Arkin (*Little Miss Sunshine*). They decide to step off the straight-and-narrow for the first time in their lives when their pension fund becomes a corporate casualty. If you are looking for a movie with nuance and profundity, this is not the film for you. But if you are willing to settle for an hour and a half watching three charismatic film legends having fun trying to be criminals, you may want to give *Going in Style* a chance. Critics were less than enthusiastic, but audiences were more forgiving. Barbara and I did not love the film, but we spent a pleasant 1½ hours and were glad we did. **GRADE B-**

GONE BABY GONE: This film boasts a star-turn acting job by Casey Affleck and a first time director who may have found his show business niche. Ben Affleck directs his brother with a sure hand as he brings Dennis Lehane's novel to life. Lehane, who also wrote the novel that inspired the Oscar-nominated 2003 movie, *Mystic River*, writes complicated stories that blur the lines between right and wrong. The story starts out as a straight-forward crime drama about a missing child, but it evolves into much more. It is bound to generate many discussions about the definitions of "right" and "wrong" and whether the end ever justifies the means. Casey Affleck is amazing. Slight of stature, he manages to evoke the toughness necessary for his role as Patrick, a private detective hired to help the police find a missing child. Patrick was born and raised in the tough South Boston neighborhood in which he works. It is a neighborhood well-known to the Affleck brothers and their familiarity with the rhythms and the people of this marginal society give a sense of reality to the film. Lehane has written four stories about Patrick Kenzie, a P.I. specializing in tracking down deadbeats, and I wouldn't mind seeing the Affleck brothers collaborate on another one. Gary and I agree on a B+. **GRADE B+**

GONE GIRL (2014) *Gone Girl* is based on the best-selling novel of the same name, written by Gillian Flynn. It's no surprise that the movie is a faithful adaptation, since Flynn wrote the screen play. I thought the book was terrific, so I knew all the surprise twists, and that often spoils my enjoyment of the movie. I was a bit distracted while watching *Gone Girl*, wondering if people who hadn't read the novel were enjoying it. Gary hadn't read the book, but he had read a couple of reviews, so he anticipated the first twist. I thought that Ben Affleck and Rosamund Pike were perfectly cast as Nick and Amy Dunn whose five-year marriage was unravelling. Director David Fincher, who one critic thought was the Alfred Hitchcock of the 21st Century, did an expert job with the story, keeping the tension throughout. The box-cutter scene was especially graphic and we questioned whether the blood wouldn't have been cleaned off at the hospital. It did make for a chilling shower scene, however, so it was, no doubt, the director's choice. One of my favorite characters was that of the detective, played nicely by Kim Dickens. I also liked Carrie Coon as Nick's twin sister. She currently can be seen in the TV series *The Leftovers*. I didn't enjoy the movie as much as I did the book, but I can't fault the production—it was excellent. However, strictly based on my enjoyment, I can't go higher than a grade of B. Gary agrees. **GRADE B**

THE GOOD GIRL: This film is an interesting mixture of humor and sorrow. Jennifer Aniston proves that she is a fine actress, creating a woman so believable that we forgot about her TV character, Rachel. Aniston is Justine, a depressed 30-year-old who hates her job at the Retail Rodeo, and thinks her house-painting husband, Phil (John C. Reilly), is a pig. She sees her life stretching out before her and she doesn't like what she sees. When a good-looking young man starts working at the store, she is attracted to him. Holden (Jake Gyllenhaal) is equally depressed, and the two of them feel a connection almost immediately. The story of what Justine does and what happens as a result of her actions is constantly engaging and always unexpected. The talented Mike White, who surprised us in 2000 with *Chuck and Buck*, wrote the screenplay for *The Good Girl*, and he appears in the film as a Bible-thumping security guard. (White also wrote *Orange County* which we loved and reviewed earlier this year.) Reilly, one of the best character actors around, is excellent, and we also liked Tim Blake Nelson (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*) who plays Phil's best friend, Bubba. Jake Gyllenhaal seems to be making a career playing the "younger man." In *Lovely and Amazing* he romanced Catherine Keener. The movie we most remember him for, however, is the boy who built a rocket in *October Sky*. *The Good Girl* opened in the one theater in Phoenix that shows independent and foreign films. It may not get wide release in your city, but we think it is worth searching for. Both Ebert and Roeper loved it, and we give it a **GRADE B+**

THE GOOD LIAR: (2019) Upon exiting the theatre, Gary said, "The movie had two things going for it: Helen Mirren and Ian McKellen." It was a delight to see these two consummate actors playing off each other. The story begins simply: two seniors, after forming a friendship online, decide to meet. We know that Roy is not being entirely truthful, because he wrote that he didn't smoke and didn't drink while doing both as he writes. We take Betty at face value, and their meeting is congenial. We soon learn that Roy is, at the very least, a con-man, but Betty is an unknown quantity, although several of her facial expressions indicate that she may be playing her own game. I won't go any further with the plot because I don't want to spoil it for you, but I can understand why audiences generally like it better than do the critics. As the Los Angeles Times critic, Kenneth Turin said, "*Mirren and McKellen never waver. Smooth at being smooth, their conviction always convinces us, and their ability to register multiple subtle changes of emotion is consistently impressive.*" We agree with him and give the movie a solid B. **GRADE B**

GOOD LUCK TO YOU, LEO GRANDE: 2022 (On Hulu) "There are nuns out there with more sexual experience than me..." So says Emma Thompson as Nancy Stokes, and she's determined to do something about it. Stokes is a widowed retired schoolteacher who is yearning for some adventure, some human connection, and some sex. Good sex. She never had that in her marriage. To that end, she decides to make an appointment with a stunning sex worker named Leo Grande (Daryl McCormack, from *Peaky Blinders*). The entire film is the two of them conversing about any & everything from sex to love to life and beyond. And yes, there is some sex--good sex. Thompson, who in real life is 63, made the choice to disrobe. Still, she says, it was the most difficult thing she's ever done in her four-decade career. She met the challenge with what she calls "a healthy terror." Thompson has appeared naked on camera only once: in the 1990 comedy *The Tall Guy*, opposite Jeff Goldblum. Gary and I both enjoyed this charming, sexy film about learning to love your body and enjoy the pleasures of sex. Have fun watching it. **GRADE A**

GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD LUCK: Beautifully directed, photographed and acted, this is one of the best movies of the year and must not be missed. It's the first movie we've seen in quite a while where the audience spontaneously and enthusiastically applauded when the film ended. To give you some background, by January, 1954, Joseph McCarthy was at the height of his popularity, and his Senate Subcommittee was holding the first ever televised hearings. McCarthy had burst into national prominence in 1950 by declaring that he had a list of 205 known communists in the State Department. Although he had never produced documentation for a single one of his charges, many people were so fearful of communist infiltration that they were willing to accept the Machiavellian principle that, in politics, the end justifies the means. Others were appalled at his assault on people's civil liberties. Edward R. Murrow, CBS news anchor, and his producer, Fred Friendly believed that McCarthy had repeatedly stepped over the line between investigating and persecuting. On March 9, Murrow took a stand and devoted his *See It Now* program to McCarthy. Using newsreel footage, Murrow was direct in his criticism of the Senator's methods saying, "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty," a statement that resonates as much today as it did then. This film is the story of that broadcast and of the courage of Murrow, Friendly and CSB chief, William Paley. David Strathairn is one of those actors who can completely disappear into a role and he does so here—brilliantly. You almost believe

you are looking at the real Murrow. George Clooney, who both co-wrote and directed the film, appears as Friendly, and Frank Langella is William Paley. Patricia Clarkson and Robert Downey, Jr. appear as news room employees. Joseph McCarthy appears only in actual newsreel footage. Clooney shot the film in spectacular black and white, which adds to the 50s mood. (We were struck by how much people smoked in the 50s!) The outstanding musical background in the film is provided by jazz singer Diane Reeves. **GRADE A**

GOOD NIGHT OPPI: 2022 (Available for streaming on Prime Video) *Good Night Oppy* tells the inspirational true story of NASA's Mars Exploration Rover program with a specific focus given to the Opportunity and Spirit rovers. Each rover, landing on opposite sides of the Red Planet, was designed to last 90 days, provided they survived the landing. They did. So, imagine the excitement when both rovers made it to day 91 and the disbelief when they hit the one year mark. Spirit lasted six years and Opportunity, Oppy for short, ceased transmission after nearly 15 years. The rovers sent reams of valuable data back to earth. It's a wonderful film telling a heartwarming story that is perfect for the holiday season....or any season for that matter because of its educational themes and the teamwork. The affection and care the humans felt for the robots was clearly part of what made the mission so successful. One of their hopes was to find geological evidence of past water, and therefore potential life on Mars. The film makers also focused on the many young students who were inspired when watching the launch of the mission. Several of them trained as aerospace scientists and engineers, and were later hired to work on the mission. *Good Night Oppy* is an all-around fantastic documentary and is an easy recommendation. It received a rare 100% Audience Score on Rotten Tomatoes. Barbara and I liked it too. **GRADE A**

THE GOOD SHEPHERD: There is an old saying, "keep your friends close and your enemies closer." The problem is knowing which is which. You will need to stay focused for the full length of this three-hour-long film and even then you may struggle with the twists and turns. The film focuses on the life and career of Edward Wilson (Matt Damon) from his college days at Yale when he is recruited to join the secret society Skull and Bones through his career as a government agent (OCC/CIA). There is a great deal of intrigue, but not a lot of excitement. Barbara and I were never bored with the film. We do not require chase scenes to hold our attention, but the film never quite moved past "good" on our thermometer of excellence. The supporting cast was filled with big name stars: Angelina Jolie, John Turturro, Alec Baldwin, William Hurt, Billy Crudup, Timothy Hutton, Joe Pesci, and Robert De Niro who also directed the film. As you would expect they were all excellent. In *The Good Shepherd*, government agents are like robots, colorless and humorless, and Matt Damon's controlled performance is fascinating to watch. The life of a government agent is not portrayed to be pretty. It is a life defined by mistrust. What may start as idealism can ultimately get sucked into a black hole of amorality justified as service to one's country. It is a thought provoking film. **GRADE B**

GOODBYE LENIN: (2003 Release) This is a German film with subtitles and it got some favorable reviews. It was a smash hit in Germany, but I'm afraid it lost something in translation and never won our hearts. The idea behind the film is clever. A loyal Communist in East Berlin before the fall of the Berlin Wall sees her son beaten by police. She has a heart attack and for some unexplained reason goes into an eight-month coma. During her coma, the wall falls and huge changes occur in Berlin. She miraculously regains consciousness, but the doctors warn the loving son that "the slightest shock could kill his mother." The rest of the movie is spent frantically trying to protect mom from learning of the changes that have happened while she was in the coma. The film never rose above the level of "C" for us. **GRADE C**

GOODBYE SOLO: In fairness let me open by saying that most of the critics liked this film more than Barbara and I. In fact, Ebert awarded it an "A" and wrote that it is a story of heartbreaking depth and power. We learn in the opening scenes that the story is going to be about a full-of-energy young man embracing life and an irascible old man nearing the end of his. We also learn, as does the title character Solo, that the old man is planning his own demise and doesn't want anyone trying to change his mind. Two endings come to mind: (1) A Hollywood ending which is heartwarming, and (2) and "Independent film" ending which is heartbreaking. The young actor playing Solo, Souleymane Sy Savane, is the main reason you might want to see this film. It is his first film and he has a bright future in the industry. He has a charming smile and a personality that the camera loves. I really wanted to like Goodbye Solo, but the plodding screenplay left me wanting more. Because of the performances by Savane and Red West, Barbara would rate it higher. **GRADE C+/B**

THE GOOD NURSE: 2022 (Netflix) This is a creepy serial-killer story based on the notorious case of Charlie Cullen, an American nurse convicted of murdering 29 people and who may have been responsible for as many as 400 deaths. That would make him the deadliest serial killer of all time. The film was adapted from Charles Graeber's 2013 book, "*The Good Nurse: A True Story of Medicine, Madness, and Murder.*" Although Cullen was active for 16 years, *The Good Nurse* focuses on the period of time right before his arrest and conviction. The movie stars Jessica Chastain and Eddie Redmayne who are excellent in their roles playing soft-spoken characters, at least for most of the film. Both Barbara and I liked the film, but I feel it could have been even better if it had spent a little more time focusing on the broken hospital system that allowed a serial killer to be shuffled from hospital to hospital to his next victims without the slightest warning of unexplained deaths in their own hospitals. The movie does make a good argument for how undervalued nurses often work in an underfunded healthcare system. Chastain, playing a single mom is "the good nurse" who saved countless lives by helping identify the serial killer but can barely pay a babysitter, let alone her own desperately needed health insurance because she must be on the job for a year before it kicks in. This tense true crime thriller may not be perfect but it is definitely worth seeing. **GRADE B**

THE GOODS: LIVE HARD. SELL HARD: This 2009 comedy is politically incorrect, exceedingly vulgar, and the jokes come thick and fast. Unfortunately, we saw it on Comedy Central where they bleeped out all the many (very many) vulgar words. Fortunately, we've become very good lip readers. We wouldn't exactly call it a good movie, but it did hold our attention. How could it not, with Jeremy Piven as a con-man car salesman and Wil Ferrell as an angel. It also has Ed Helms, Rob Riggle, Ving Rhames, and Ken Jeong (from *The Hangover*). In a rare movie appearance, James Brolin is Ben Selleck. His car dealership is in trouble and he resorts to a hired gun. Enter Piven and crew. Will they save the dealership? Will Piven fall in love and settle down? Will Ben Selleck win the object of his affections? Guess you'd have to rent the movie to find out. But do not, I repeat, do not rent this one if you are offended by vulgarity and language. Not all the jokes work, but some did make us laugh. And if you get it on DVD, you won't have to read lips. **GRADE B-**

GOSFORD PARK: This movie is a gem: beautifully directed and flawlessly acted. It is a complete delight. Robert Altman is at the top of his form in this Agatha Christie plot with a liberal dose of *Upstairs Downstairs*. The time is 1932 and the setting is a country estate near London. Wealthy guests have come to Gosford Park for a shooting weekend, and we see the action both upstairs and downstairs. We see the guests at dinner--the table setting scene is fantastic--shooting pheasants, and relaxing in the drawing room over a game of bridge. And we watch the hustle and bustle of the servants working tirelessly and mostly out of sight. What a wonderful glimpse into a way of life that is no more. Among the mostly titled guests is an American film director, Morris Weissman (Bob Balaban), and his valet, Harry Denton (Ryan Phillippe). Weissman is making a Charlie Chan movie that involves a murder at a country estate full of guests. He came to Gosford Park to absorb the atmosphere, but he gets a bit more. During the weekend, the host, Sir William McCordle, is murdered. Enter the inept Inspector Thompson played in hilarious bumbling style by Stephen Frye (*Wilde*). Who did it? I'll never tell! You'll have to see it yourself, and we hope you do. The cast list is exceedingly impressive: Maggie Smith, Emily Watson, Kristin Scott Thomas, Derek Jacobi, Alan Bates, Jeremy Northam, Helen Mirren and Clive Owen (*The Croupier*) as a valet with an attitude. All are splendid. **GRADE A**

GLADIATOR: This movie has epic scenery, epic battles, epic treachery, and epic heroism. Why, I think what we have here is an EPIC. Unfortunately for us it was also an epic bore. And much too long. If it weren't for Russel Crowe as Maximus, the general who becomes a slave and a gladiator, our grade would have been lower. We did like him. We also liked Oliver Reed as Proximo, Richard Harris as Marcus Aurelius, and Derek Jacobi as Gracchus, a roman senator. Jacobi is the Claude Rains of the 21st century. It was good to see Djimon Hounsou, the rebellious slave in Amistad, as Juba, a slave/gladiator who becomes a friend to Maximus. I suppose the opening battle scene was well done but it held no interest for me. We were both lukewarm on Joaquin Phoenix as Commodus the weasly emporer and Connie Nielsen, as his sister, did not delight us. (For strangeness, their sibling relationship rivals that of Angelina Jolic and her brother.) There were some big hunky guys in Gladiator but that wasn't enough to hold my interest for long. Gary didn't even have that diversion. **GRADE: C**

GLASS ONION: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY: 2022 (Available for streaming on Netflix) This old fashioned American mystery film is the sequel to the 2019 film, *Knives Out*. My review of that film is in the Movie Views Archives. Daniel Craig reprises his role as master detective Benoit Blanc who reminds us of beloved mystery icons like Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot as he takes on a new case. Edward Norton plays an eccentric billionaire, Miles Bron, who has sent a strange puzzle box to a number of people, Solving it provides an invitation to a private Greek island owned by him where they will participate in a game in which he will be faux-murdered. That plan is foiled when someone else is murdered for real. As in all the best murder mysteries, each character harbors his or her own secrets, lies and motivation and everyone is a suspect. The large ensemble cast includes many familiar names and at least one star walk-on that may surprise and amuse you. The film received 93% from critics on the Tomatometer as well as 93% Audience Score. So if you love highly entangled "whodunits," you may want to carve out the 2h 20m run time needed. "Whodunits" have never been on Barbara's and my favorites list and after sitting through *Glass Onion*, they may be moved to our "avoid it list". **GRADE C-**

GRACIE: Barbara and I have closely watched the career of Elizabeth Shue since 1995 when we were both overwhelmed by her Oscar-winning portrayal of Sera in *Leaving Las Vegas*. Now Elizabeth teams with her brother, Andrew Shue and her Oscar-winning director husband, Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*) to bring us this predictable but appealing story loosely based on the family's near obsession with soccer and Elizabeth's real-life experiences. It is nearly impossible to produce a sports film that does not seem derivative. *Gracie*, is set in 1978 New Jersey, a time young people today may have difficulty understanding. Title IX, the federal anti-discrimination act had been on the books a few years, but was often ignored by schools. When Gracie tried to join her high school all male varsity soccer team, she was told she should forget about it and do something more feminine, like girl's field hockey. Gracie is brilliantly played by Carly Schroeder and Elizabeth Shue plays her concerned but compassionate mother. The omnipresent and very talented Dermot Mulroney plays her father. You will not be surprised by the ending to this familiar underdog story, but we thought it was up lifting and with enough verisimilitude to recommend it. **GRADE B**

THE GRADUATE: 1967 (Prime video) Gary and I have been listening to Mike Nichols' biography ("Mike Nichols: A Life," by Mark Harris). When Harris discussed the making of *The Graduate*, we decided to revisit the movie. It was as good as we remembered! Based on the novel by Charles Webb, the story of Benjamin Braddock, a recent college graduate, was brought to the screen by Mike Nichols. He had help though, from a team of experienced people who provided a sounding board for Nichols. One of the members of the team was Buck Henry, who co-wrote the screenplay, and also appeared in the movie as the desk clerk in the hotel to which a nervous Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) brought Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft) for their affair. The movie earned Nichols an Oscar for Best Director, but the film, which was nominated for Best Picture, lost to *In the Heat of the Night*. In his acceptance speech, Nichols said that it was a team effort and he accepted the award on behalf of the team. In the more than 50 years since it first became a box-office phenomenon, *The Graduate*'s has earned the reputation as one of the great American comedies. The main theme of the movie is Benjamin's uncertainty about his direction in life, contrasted by the expectations imposed on him by the adults surrounding him. I think today's graduates can identify with that. Another theme is the story of a young man's initiation into the mysteries of sex at the hands of an older married woman. Who can forget that wonderful scene where Benjamin asks Mrs. Robinson, "You're trying to seduce me...aren't you?" I wonder how many boys fantasized about a Mrs. Robinson of their own. When Benjamin crashes Elaine's (Katherine Ross) wedding, fights off the angry guests with a cross, and runs away with the bride, Nichols told Hoffman and Ross to sit at the back of the bus and smile. Then he kept the cameras running as their smiles wore off and a what-have-we-done expression crossed both their faces. The music, by Simon and Garfunkel, was inspired and perfect. **GRADE A**

"Mrs. Robinson" became the duo's second chart-topper, hitting No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.

GRAN TORINO: From the previews, you expect Clint Eastwood to be Dirty Harry in retirement. That's not exactly what you get. Walt Kowalski looks a lot like a senior version of the cop Eastwood made famous, and he is every bit as tough, but never once does he say, "Go ahead, make my day." (Although he does say, "Get off my lawn!") Instead we meet an aging Korean war veteran who is dealing stoically with the death of his beloved wife. We see him not connecting with his two sons, resenting the Hmong immigrants who have taken over his neighborhood, and lovingly polishing his prized possession—a 1972 Gran Torino. When gang members attack his neighbor's son while at the same time committing the sin of stepping on his lawn, Walt reacts the way Dirty Harry would. As a result, he

becomes a reluctant hero to the neighborhood. Slowly he becomes friends with his Chinese neighbors. How racist attitudes can be replaced with friendship is the message of this film. Those who want to see an Eastwood version of *Death Wish*—a paean to revenge—may be disappointed. Those who like substance along with some satisfying retribution will like *Gran Torino*. I have read that this may be Eastwood's last turn in front of the camera. That would be a great loss. He is, as always, terrific. The actors playing his Hmong neighbors are also excellent, and we thought that Christopher Carley, playing the boyish Father Janovich, did a particularly nice job. **GRADE B+**

THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL: (2014) Wes Anderson makes unusual movies that probably are an acquired taste. Gary calls them "a more subtle version of the Three Stooges." Anderson's comedy is zany and physical, and those qualities aren't favorites of ours. That said, I thought that this new movie, which recounts the adventures of Gustave H, a legendary concierge at the famous Budapest Hotel, was quite entertaining. Ralph Fiennes is perfect at Gustave H, and his performance goes a long way toward making the movie an enjoyable treat. Stock Anderson performers, such as Ed Norton, Bill Murray, Tilda Swinton, Jason Schwartzman and Bob Balaban are joined by F. Murray Abraham, Jude Law, Adrien Brody, Willem Dafoe, Owen Wilson and Jeff Goldblum. Even Harvey Keitel appears as one of Gustave H's fellow convicts. Tony Revolori is the young lobby boy who participates in Gustave H's adventures and becomes his trusted friend. *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, is a modern-day fable: part love story, part thriller, and full of madcap and whimsical adventures. The settings and bold colors almost give the movie the look of an animated film. It's thoroughly Wes Anderson and, in this case, most entertaining. Gary was less enchanted than I, but he could go as high as a B. I say B+. **GRADE B+/B**

THE GRAND SEDUCTION: (2013) There is no new ground broken here since the movie is an English-speaking remake of a 2003 French film titled *Seducing Doctor Lewis*. Barbara and I never saw the original but we were won over by the cast of this Canadian made comedy and are glad we took a chance on it. To me it seems to be in the tradition of *Tight Little Island* and *Waking Ned Devine*. A tiny once robust fishing village in Newfoundland has dried up and its once-proud residents survive on unemployment checks. It looks like their only glimmer of hope is luring a petroleum byproducts company into building a lucrative factory in their harbor town. Sadly, one of the requirements is having a full-time doctor in the town and they haven't had that in years. They catch a break when a plastic surgeon on his way to LA has been busted with cocaine in his luggage and has to spend a month in Canada. You get the picture. The entire cast is charming, but the two most familiar names are Brendan Gleeson and Taylor Kitch. Kitch made a name for himself playing Tim Riggins on the popular NBC television show *Friday Night Lights*. Dublin born Gleeson has been in a ton of films, but I remember him most fondly from a 2008 film, *In Bruges*. Despite its predictability, we were seduced by the beautiful setting and the warm and wonderful residents. **GRADE B**

GRANDMA: (2015) The trailer for this movie typically uses scenes that emphasizes the comedy. It does have some genuinely funny moments, but the movie is so much more than that: It is about the relationships between mothers and daughters and the repercussions when a young woman finds herself pregnant before she is ready to have a child. (Right-to-lifers beware. This is not a movie for you.) Elle has just broken up with her latest girlfriend when her granddaughter, Sage (Julia Garner), shows up, pregnant and without the funds to pay for the abortion she has already scheduled. Elle and Sage set out to find the money but eventually have to ask Judy (Marcia Gay Harden), Elle's daughter and Sage's mom. Along the way, the two women visit Sage's boyfriend, Elle's girlfriend (Judy Greer), and Karl (Sam Elliot), a man who, for a very brief time long ago, was Elle's husband. Sam Elliot has become the go-to guy when the script calls for a sexy aging charmer. In *Grandma* he fills the bill beautifully and he and Tomlin have a scene together that tells quite a story with remarkably few lines of dialogue. The always excellent Judy Greer, Elizabeth Pena, in one of her last performances, and Laverne Cox, from *Orange Is The New Black*, add to this remarkably well acted and well-written movie. Writer/director Paul Weitz allows Tomlin, Garner, Hardin, Greer and Elliot the latitude to bring their characters to authentic life. In the end, though, it is Tomlin's movie. Her sarcastic and vulnerable, tough and wise Elle is in every scene. She is terrific. And the funny moments work because they come from truth. **GRADE B+**

GRAVITY: We read that this movie is what 3D was made for, so we decided to see it that way. When Sandra Bullock breaks loose from her tether and tumbles in space, the effect was stunning. I can't imagine how Alphonso Cuarón accomplished it, but the technical effects make you feel as though you, too, were tumbling in space. Once Bullock was inside the landing module, the 3D didn't add a lot, although when the capsule entered the Earth's atmosphere, the effects were again breathtaking. Bullock is terrific as a space engineer making her first mission. George Clooney is the mission commander. Both are outside the space shuttle when debris from an exploded satellite hurtles past them, killing their colleagues, damaging the shuttle and destroying all communication with mission control. The tension is palpable as the two, adrift in space, manage to connect and make contact with the shuttle. Clooney is his usual charming self, even in the impossible circumstances in which he and Bullock find themselves. But the real star of the movie is Cuarón and cinematographer, Emmanuel Lubezki. *Gravity* is, without doubt, technically brilliant, and we would have to give it an A for that. The story, what little there is, is more earth-bound and somewhat less than brilliant. Plus, some of the scientific flaws in the movie were troubling. For the movie as a whole, we decided on a B+. **GRADE B+**

THE GREAT BUCK HOWARD: John Malkovich seems equally at home on stage, in big-budget Hollywood films, and in low-budget Independent films. He inhabits the character he is playing with unerring accuracy. Barbara and I have loved him and followed his career since he left college to join Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago in 1976. Malkovich is the Great Buck Howard, an entertainer who has been playing to the back row both on and off stage his entire career. Buck Howard is loosely based on the Amazing Kreskin, former "superstar mentalist extraordinaire" who was himself inspired by a famous comic strip character, Mandrake the Magician. In better days Howard played to full houses and appeared 61 times for Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show*. His enthusiasm has not waned and his act has not changed, but he now plays to half-full theaters in places like Bakersfield. Co-starring with Malkovich is Colin Hanks, Tom Hank's son. Colin Hanks is handsome, lovable, and a credible actor. He even gets to play a couple of scenes in the film with his father. Barbara and I liked the film and if it doesn't appear in a theater near you, we recommend you watch for it when it comes out on DVD. When that happens we will remind you. **GRADE B**

THE GREAT DEBATERS: Both Barbara and I were moved by this powerful story inspired by actual events in 1935. Since I liked it even more than Barbara, I will share my thoughts, and hope I can motivate you to see a film directed by and starring Danzel Washington.

There seems to be no film role Washington can't comfortably play. Here he shares the screen with the powerful acting of Forest Whitaker, John Heard, and three young actors who hold their own with the best of the veterans. Washington plays Professor Melvin Tolson, poet, teacher, Union organizer, and passionate coach who leads an unlikely debate team from a small all-black college in Texas to national prominence. If you are old enough, or if you are a film buff, you may see some resemblance between Washington and Sidney Poitier playing an East London teacher in *To Sir With Love*. Be prepared to witness the harsh realities of prejudice in the Deep South in the 1930's. If a touching story has been known to move you to tears, I recommend taking a handkerchief or a handful of Kleenex to this film. **GRADE A-/B+**

THE GREAT GATSBY: F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote about lives of wealth and excess. In this movie version of Fitzgerald's novel, Baz Luhrmann went overboard in picturing the excesses of the roaring twenties. The spectacle of the lavish parties that Gatsby threw at his mansion was so extravagant that both Gary and I found it irritating. Perhaps Luhrmann had his mind on the 3-D version, or perhaps he really wanted to remake *Moulin Rouge*, but instead just crammed a lot of effects into this movie. We didn't see it in 3-D, but we felt that if we had, the excesses would have been even more annoying. The parties, the contrast between the rich and the poor, the huge billboard with the all-seeing eyes, and the fast cars were all overdone. Even the blowing white sheers outlining the windows of Daisy Buchanan's living room were exaggerated. For us, spectacle got in the way of the story. I doubt that anyone who hasn't read the novel would be inspired to do so after seeing this movie. We did like Leo DiCaprio in the title role. He brought a youthful enthusiasm and vulnerability to Gatsby that Robert Redford lacked in the 1974 version. And he looked right for the part, as did Carey Mulligan for Daisy Buchanan. Toby Maguire was OK as Nick Carraway, Daisy's cousin, Gatsby's neighbor and the narrator of the story. This is the fourth Hollywood version of *The Great Gatsby*. Enough, already! It's time to let the brilliant novel speak for itself. **GRADE C+**

THE GREAT RAID: The strength of this movie is that it tells the true story of the 6th Ranger Battalion who undertook a daring rescue mission in the Philippines in 1945. Traveling behind enemy lines, the Battalion, composed almost entirely of new recruits, liberated over 500 American prisoners-of-war from the notorious Cabanatuan Japanese POW camp. It was the most audacious and successful rescue in military history. The weakness of the movie is that it takes 90 minutes to set up the rescue, and that is at least 15 minutes too long. The raid itself is exciting, but the build-up is frequently too slow-moving. Benjamin Bratt plays Lt. Col. Henry Mucci, and James Franco appears as the Captain who conceived the rescue plan. The rangers were assisted by Philippine guerillas led by Capt. Juan Pajota, who is played by Cesar Montano, a local actor. Two Rangers and 21 Filipinos died in the rescue attempt. Joseph Fiennes is a Major interred in the prison camp—a fictional character—and Connie Nielsen plays a real-life nurse who helped smuggle drugs into the prison hospital. The film is based on two books: *The Great Raid on Cabanatuan* by William B. Breuer and *Ghost Soldiers* by Hampton Sides. The most moving thing for us was the newsreel footage shown at the beginning and end of the film. Roger Ebert said in his review: *It is good to have a film that is not about entertainment for action fans, but about how wars are won with great difficulty, risk, and cost.* **GRADE B**

THE GREATEST GAME EVER PLAYED: Francis Ouimet was 20 years old when, as an amateur, he won the 1913 U.S. Open Golf Tournament, beating British Champions Harry Vardon and Ted Ray. At that time, Vardon had already won 5 British Opens and 1 US Open and was considered the greatest golfer in the world. This movie is the story of that tournament. Shia LaBeouf (*Holes*) is Ouimet and Stephen Dillane (Leonard Woolf in *The Hours*) is very good as Harry Vardon. Ouimet, had a 10-year-old boy as his caddie for the tournament, and Stephen Spreekmeester adds a lot to the film. According to Roger Ebert, he steals many of the scenes. The basic story is the stuff of all sports movies: poor boy struggles to succeed and eventually wins big game/tournament/race/etc. This movie is no different, and the first half of the movie hammers home the point that golf was, at that time, a game for gentleman, and a former caddie whose father was a lowly laborer was not welcome on the course. After the 5th or 6th time we definitely "get it." The irony is that Harry Vardon came from the same kind of background, and was barred from membership in private golf clubs. However, his movie differs from other golf movies because here the actors playing the golfers have really good golf swings. It helps if the viewer knows that in 1913 golfers didn't use wooden tees, but teed their ball on a little pile of sand. Also, in those days there was a "stymie" rule: you didn't mark your ball on a green, and if someone's balls lay between your ball and the hole, you had to go around or over it. Gary loves all movies about golf and freely admits that he can't be objective. He gives this movie a purely emotional grade of A-. I, too, am an avid golfer and enjoyed the movie, but as a critic, I can't give it more than a B. I do think that director Bill Paxton did a good job making the tournament scenes exciting—at least for golfers in the audience. In several scenes he shows how important focus and concentration are to a golfer. And the pint-sized caddie gives Ouimet the advice that all golfers have heard over and over again: "Keep your head down." **GRADE A-/B**

THE GREATEST SHOWMAN: (2017) This is a rags-to-riches original musical in which the multitalented Hugh Jackman plays P.T. Barnum, an American showman, author, politician, and philanthropist who is best known for founding the Barnum & Bailey Circus. Barnum had a complex and intriguing real-life story, but musicals are not known for adhering to facts. *The Greatest Showman* is no exception. The thin story line merely provides good segues from one production number to the next. It is a dream for singers and dancers and appreciative audiences, but not so much for critics who often feel compelled to live up to their job description. A survey of 189 critics by Rotten Tomatoes earned the movie a modest 56% while a survey of nearly 4,000 audience members earned it a more impressive 90%. Michelle Williams co-stars as Barnum's angelic bride and mother to his two children, but she is given astonishingly little to do. Think of the film as a showcase for the many talents of Hugh Jackman. Know that it isn't a flawless piece of storytelling, but if you like musicals, it is a pretty decent show. I grade the effort just a little higher than Barbara. **GRADE B-/C+**

GREEN BOOK: (2018) Based on actual events, *Green Book* is about a white man chauffeuring a black man into the Jim Crow Deep South in the early 1960's. The film's title refers to "*The Negro Motorist's Green Book*," published annually from 1936-1966 to inform black travelers where they might not be turned away or made to feel uncomfortable when seeking lodging or a meal. The film is a buddy movie and a heartfelt drama. Incredible performances are delivered by Viggo Mortensen who ate his way to a 45-pound weight gain for his role as a bouncer at New York's famous Copacabana and Mahershala Ali who spent months learning to be believable playing a sophisticated classics-rooted jazz pianist. One of the more amazing production choices was giving the director's job to Peter Farrelly. Farrelly directed *Dumb and Dumber*, a movie with a title that sums up my evaluation of it. I must quickly concede that he did an

excellent job with this often heart-tugging movie. It is a feel-good movie sprinkled with considerable humor. Barbara and I were won over by the strong performances and touching message.. **GRADE A**

GREEN ZONE: If you love action thrillers and if you especially loved Matt Damon in the Bourne films, you won't want to miss this movie. If you hate the jiggly use of hand-held cameras, or if you don't want to be reminded of errors made in Iraq, you may want to skip it. The movie opens with the 2003 shock and awe campaign in Bagdad, but quickly jumps to the confusion and blunders that followed. Damon was the perfect choice to play U.S. Army chief warrant officer Roy Miller, who is assigned to help find the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that persuaded Congress to authorize the Iraq invasion. After Miller repeatedly comes up empty in his search for WMD, he begins questioning the reliability of the military intelligence and realizing that there are powerful interests that need to find evidence of WMD. The pace is frenetic and the questions provocative. The film is a marriage between fiction and fact and I feel quite sure many will see it as a troubled marriage. Damon is ably assisted in supporting roles by Greg Kinnear, Amy Ryan, and Brendan Gleeson. The film was brilliantly directed by Paul Greengrass who also gave us two of the Bourne films as well as **United 93**. I had the feeling that Barbara liked this movie better than I, but we came to an agreement on the grade. **GRADE B**

GREENBERG: This is a quirky romance between two lost souls and I feel fairly confident that many of our readers would hate it. Barbara and I are easier on small independent films plus we like the acting of Ben Stiller. Stiller is at home playing socially inept, whiney with bursts of hostility, self-centered and pathetic. Greenberg, who has done virtually nothing with his adult life, is now focusing on doing nothing. He spends a good deal of his idle time writing angry letters to the forces in the world that seem to conspire against him. He also spends time trying to make social contacts which he so desperately needs and then running from those same contacts which he so desperately fears. Strangely, Stiller succeeds in making his character, Greenberg, almost sympathetic. We were also delighted with the performance of Greta Gerwig who plays Florence, a young adult who is also adrift in her life. She aspires to be a singer, but she is terrible at it. She aspires to have a relationship with a guy who won't run away, but hasn't done too well in that department either. Gerwig succeeds in making Florence enormously endearing. The film was written and directed by Noah Baumbach who also wrote and directed *The Squid and the Whale*. (Barbara wrote an inspired review of this 2005 film that you might want to check out in the Movie Views Archives) Barbara and I agree that *Greenberg* earns an above average grade. **GRADE B**

GREENFINGERS: This enjoyable British film that is based on true events. It demonstrates the possibility of rehabilitation through gardening. The setting is one of Britain's alternative prisons, which houses men who have committed violent crimes but are still considered redeemable. One of them, Colin Briggs (Clive Owens-*The Croupier & Gosford Park*), thinks of himself as a prisoner--nothing else. But with the help of his roommate, Fergus (David Kelly, who took the immortal nude motorcycle ride in *Waking Ned Devine*) he discovers a talent for gardening. With the help of some other prisoners, Briggs creates a beautiful garden, eventually entering the Hampton Court Garden Show. Along the way, he even finds someone to love. The story was criticized as "overly romantic," and "the kind of movie you're content to wait for on your friendly indie cable channel." It is, however, a pleasant way to spend 90 minutes, and in addition to Owens and Kelly, it also stars Helen Mirren. And that's recommendation enough. (Seen on DVD) **THUMBS UP**

GREENLAND: 2020 (Recorded from HBO-- available on HBO Max) Gerard Butler burst upon the screen as the Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera* in 2004. In *Greenland* he plays John Garrity, a structural engineer, who is chosen, along with his wife and young son, for survival in when the entire earth faces a cataclysmic natural disaster. A planet-killing comet is hurtling toward Earth, and the government is protecting certain occupations that they will need to rebuild. Morena Baccarin (Jessica Brody, *Homeland*) plays his wife. When their son is rejected for protection because of his diabetes, the family is left on their own. Along their horrific journey, they get separated, meeting up again at Allison's father's house. We recognized Scott Glenn (Alan Shepard in *The Right Stuff*) playing her dad. Amid terrifying accounts of cities getting leveled, the Garrity family experiences the best and worst in humanity. As the countdown to the global apocalypse approaches zero, their journey culminates in a desperate and last-minute flight to a possible safe haven in a bunker in Greenland. My daughter and her husband recommended the movie, and we thank them for the exciting afternoon's entertainment. **GRADE B**

THE GREY: (2011) Barbara and I obtained this film through Netflix on the recommendation of Rick O, Scottsdale. It is a gripping tale of survival and death. Liam Neeson leads an unruly bunch of oil-rig roughnecks after their rickety plane crashes in a remote Alaskan wilderness. Surviving the merciless weather is complicated by a vicious pack of grey wolves either on the hunt or defending their territory. Neeson is terrific and there are many memorable scenes. We are reminded of how fortunate we are to be sitting in shirtsleeves in the comfort of home and not suffering frostbite, hypothermia, and being stalked by giant wolfs intent on ripping our innards out. I'm not sure why we missed this one in theaters, but we are glad we made the effort to see it. **GRADE B**

GREY GARDENS: In 1975, two documentarians were investigating the life of Lee Radziwill for a film and stumbled upon the eccentric aunt and first cousin of Jackie Onassis. Both aunt and cousin were named Edith Bouvier Beale, and were known as "Big Edie," and "Little Edie." The two women lived at Grey Gardens, a decrepit 14-room mansion in a wealthy neighborhood of East Hampton, New York. The resulting documentary turned the plight of these discarded society matrons into the stuff of living legend. In 2009, HBO produced a fictional account of their reclusive lives. It stars Jessica Lange and Drew Barrymore. The film attempts to fill in the missing pieces in the lives of the mother and daughter, and provides glimpses of the women when they were young. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP FOR BOTH FILMS**

GRINDHOUSE: It is with trepidation that I approach the review of Quentin Tarantino's and Robert Rodriguez's double feature ode to 70's low-budget exploitation movies. The films are intentionally scuffed and scratched and some reels are conveniently missing. As Ty Burr in the Boston Globe points out, "it is the cinematic equivalent of stressed jeans. As would be expected, the films are filled with blood, gore, and language that would make a celebrated swearer feel challenged. The first feature is "Planet Terror" by 'Sin City' director Robert Rodriguez. If you have seen any of the trailers, you may remember the lethal machine-gun prosthesis that replaces a shapely, but bitten off leg of Cherry Darling, a go-go-dancer. The action is non-stop and all the acting including from the hundreds of flesh-eating Zombie extras is "over-the-top." The second feature is "Death Proof" by "Kill Bill" director Quentin Tarantino. The action slows considerably and the focus is on cars, vintage music, and cool-chick dialogue. The biggest name actor in either film is Kurt

Russel, playing a charming/evil scar-faced Stuntman Mike who, after a thrilling car chase, gets his "cumupance" at the hands of three justifiably angry chicks. Barbara and I hesitate to recommend "Grindhouse," knowing many of our readers would hate it. Still, it probably accomplishes its goals and we give it a qualified B-. **GRADE B-**

(Just wanted to mention Rose McGowan who plays Cherry Darling in *Planet Terror* and Pam in *Death Proof*. She has real star potential. Also, Freddy Rodriguez (TV's *Six Feet Under*) is very good in *Planet Terror*. We also enjoyed seeing Sydney Poitier (Actor Sidney Poitier's daughter) in the Tarantino film. I particularly liked the fake trailers. In fact, Gary and Nathan thought one of them, called *Machete Man*, might make a pretty good movie.)

THE GUARD: Born in Dublin, fifty-six-year-old Brendan Gleeson didn't start his acting career until the age of thirty-four. But he has been pretty busy ever since. Barbara and I have come to look forward to seeing his chubby, bemused, Irish face whenever the opportunity comes along. I first came to appreciate his acting prowess in one of my favorite films, *In Bruges*. Gleeson plays an eccentric small-town cop with a heavy Irish brogue and his own off-center moral code. Costarring with him is the always excellent Don Cheadle playing a by-the-book FBI agent.. They bring the best out in each other as they grudgingly work together trying to solve the crimes that have made their way into a peaceful little seaside Irish village. There is a lot of humor woven into this black-white buddy cop film and the villains are not the stereotyped variety usually seen. You may notice the influence of Quentin Tarantino in the blend of humor and violence. This is the kind of film that may not receive the wide distribution it deserves. It opened in only one small theater in Phoenix, but it played to a packed house the day Barbara and I saw it. It is an entertaining film and we recommend it. **GRADE A-**

THE GUARDIANS: (2017/2018) This subtitled French film is a story of love, loss, and resilience. It is set almost entirely on a family-owned farm at a time when the men were absent except for brief leaves from the World War I killing fields. Unlike most war movies which focus on violence and bloodshed, this one is soothingly quiet and thoughtful. Widescreen images of the French countryside are like beautiful paintings on canvas coming to life. We are reminded, as one critic observed, that "even in times of conflict, life goes on." In times of war, people do what they must to survive. As the story unfolds, one is aware the First World War is raging elsewhere, but this segment of the country remains unspoiled and fertile—thanks to the hard work of the women who've been left behind. In a brilliant bit of casting, the mother and daughter in the film I later learned are played by real-life mother/daughter actors. Both excel as does the actor playing the red-headed orphan, Francine. It is her first film role. The 20-year old actress was planning on a career in library science until a chance meeting with the film's casting director changed everything. Barbara and I were impressed with this well-made film. The director, Xavier Beauvois, also co-wrote the screenplay. He received critical raves for an earlier film: *Of Gods and Men*. We hope to find it somewhere. If you are lucky enough to see *The Guardians* you may be surprised by the scarcity of dialogue. We were. But by the end we realized it was just the right amount. We also realized it might be the least violent movie ever made about World War I. **GRADE A**

THE GUERNSEY LITERARY AND POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY: (2018, Watched on Netflix) Reader Art S. IN said in his review of this movie that "*Imagination is sometimes better, though, than having something spread out for you on the large screen and 'prettied up.'*" He had read and liked the novel on which the movie was based, and the movie didn't show the killings, beating and near starvation that the people on the island of Guernsey suffered during the occupation by the Nazis during WW II. We had not read the novel, so we quite enjoyed the story of how the society got its unusual name and the people who founded it. We also enjoyed the love story, even though we could see it coming a long way off. The movie is peopled by familiar faces. Lilly James is Juliet, the author who is intrigued by a letter she receives from a pig farmer on Guernsey. Three of the actors are familiar from *Downton Abbey*. Juliet's publisher is played by Matthew Goode who married Lady Mary, and two of the original members of the society are Penelope Wilton, who played Isobel Crawley, and Jessica Brown Findlay who was Lady Sybil. The secrets that the society wanted to keep were also rather obvious, but, as Art said, the actors were so "*sincere and winsome*" that you really didn't mind the stereotypes. Guernsey is a beautiful island in the English Channel. It is self-governing British Crown dependency although, just off the coast of Normandy, it is closer to France than England. If you like charming characters, you will enjoy *The Guernsey Literary And Potato Peel Pie Society*. **GRADE B**

THE GUEST (2014) Professional critics are pretty high on this film, while acknowledging that the plot devolves into the ridiculous. As we left the theater, Barbara commented that with this genre of film, the ending rarely lives up to the promise of the set-up. We agreed that the first half of the film was really quite riveting. British actor Dan Stevens who is best known to us for his role in *Downton Abbey*, is outstanding playing a young soldier who shows up unexpectedly at the door of a grieving New Mexico family and declares himself to be a close friend of their dead soldier son. Any doubt about his authenticity is quickly dispelled by the mother when she sees him standing next to her son in a photo of military buddies on the mantelpiece. The young soldier soon becomes a perfect houseguest. He is polite, clean-cut, and seems almost too good to be true.... and of course he is. The audience starts getting hints that this charming houseguest may have a darker side. All this worked well for a time and the tension grew. Then the plot train careened off the track for us. Some might justify the ending as being "campy," but for us the idea of a military experiment gone bad and the unrealistic gun fights left us with wrinkled noses. **GRADE C**

A GUIDE TO RECOGNIZING YOUR SAINTS: It was hard to believe while watching this powerful and sometimes brutal film that it was the first directing effort of Dito Montiel. Dito was the director of the film, the author of the autobiographical book on which it is based, and the writer of the screen play. It is a coming-of-age film set in the mean streets of Astoria, Queens during the long hot summer of 1986. The action cuts back and forth between 1986 and the 20-year-later return of the author to the old neighborhood. The film won some well deserved awards at Sundance Film Festival and I have to say that the 98 minutes of running time actually left me wishing it had been a little longer. This is in sharp contrast to my more frequent reaction that a film could have been better if judiciously cut. The cast is uniformly good, but some of the performances just blew me away. Robert Downey Jr., playing the older version of Dito, is, as you would expect, terrific. Playing the younger version of Dito is an enormously talented actor named Shia LaBeouf.* Chazz Palminteri plays a tortured father in a role I think should earn him an Academy Award nomination. Dianne Wiest, Rosario Dawson, and Eric Roberts have small roles but turn in riveting performances. As you may have guessed by now, I was very moved by this film. I may have liked it more than Barbara. (He's right. Gary says A-, I say B+) **GRADE A-/B+**

*LaBeouf starred in the 2003 film, *Holes*. If you missed it, you might want to put it on your rental list. It is a Disney movie adapted from a popular book for young people, but equally appealing to adults. Sigourney Weaver and John Voight also appear in this entertaining family film.

THE GUILT TRIP: We almost didn't see this one because we were afraid it might be one cliché after another. But, when several critics gave it good grades, we decided to give it a try, and we're so glad we did. It is a delight: funny and warm and the humor is never forced. Barbra Streisand looks marvelous at 70, and she plays the mother perfectly. She and Seth Rogan have good chemistry together, and we totally bought both the mother and son relationship and the reason for their road trip. An added plus for us was the presence of Bret Cullen in the cast. Twenty years ago we played a round of golf with him in Tucson where he was filming the TV series *Young Riders*. We always thought he should have been a bigger star because he's tall, good-looking and a skilled actor. We appreciated that Director Anne Fletcher (*The Proposal*) used enviable restraint with the comedy and included some touching moments. We both enjoyed *The Guilt Trip*, and especially enjoyed the out-takes during the closing credits. The sight of two excellent actors having fun playing a scene together is always a treat. **GRADE B**