

## Movie Titles that begin with “D”

Da 5 Bloods \* The Da Vinci Code \* The Dallas Buyers Club \* The Damned United \* Damsel \* Dan In Real Life \* A Dangerous Method \* The Danish Girl \* Danny Collins \* Danny Deckchair \* Dark Blue \* Dark Horse \* The Dark Knight \* Dark Waters \* Darkest Hour \* Date Night \* David & Layla \* De Palma \* The Dead Girl \* Deadpool \* Deadwood: The Movie \* Dear Evan Hansen \* Dear Frankie \* Death At A Funeral \* The Death of Stalin \* Death To Smoochy \* The Debt \* A Decade Under The Influence \* The Deep Blue Sea \* The Deep End \* Deepwater Horizon \* Defiance \* Definitely, Maybe \* The Delivery Man \* De-Lovely \* Denial \* The Departed \* Departures \* Derailed \* Derek DelGaudio's In & of Itself \* The Descendants \* Detroit \* The Devil Wears Prada \* Diane \* The Diary Of A Teenage Girl \* Dick Johnson Is Dead \* Die Another Day \* The Dig \* Diner \* Diner \* Dinner Rush \* Dirty Harry \* Dirty Pretty Things \* The Disaster Artist \* Disconnect \* The Dish \* Disobedience \* Disturbia \* Divergent \* The Divine Order \* The Divine Secrets of The Ya-Ya Sisterhood \* The Diving Bell and the Butterfly \* Django Unchained \* Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story \* Dogville \* Dolemite Is My Name \* Dom Hemingway \* Don Jon \* Don't Breathe \* Don't Look Up \* Don't Say A Word \* Don't Think Twice \* The Door In The Floor \* Doubt \* Down With Love \* Downfall \* Downsizing \* Downton Abbey \* Downton Abbey: A New Era \* Draft Day \* Dream Horse \* Dreamgirls \* Dreamer \* The Dreamers \* The Dressmaker \* Drinking Buddies \* Drive \* Driving Lessons \* The Drop \* Dr. T. and the Women \* Drumline \* Drunk Stoned Brilliant Dead \* The Duchess \* Due Date \* The Duke \* Dummy \* Dunkirk \* Duplicity

**DA 5 BLOODS:** (2020) This is Spike Lee's latest movie and it is available for streaming on *Netflix*. In the words of Barbara's and my favorite local critic, Bill Goodykoontz: *"It's not a classic---it's too long and the story telling isn't tight enough, and there's enough plot for three movies."* But he did give it 4 out of 5 stars and it earned a 91% evaluation from critics on *Rotten Tomatoes*. It is the story of four African-American Vets who were comrades-in-arms in the Vietnam War. They return to Vietnam searching for the remains of their fallen Squad Leader. The plot is a lot more complicated than that, but it is a history lesson wrapped in an adventure. The biggest name in the cast is Delroy Lindo, but it is an ensemble effort and the cast is excellent. Spike Lee always likes to give us plenty of movie for our money and *Da 5 Bloods* is no exception. He has built a long career telling us soul-stirring stories about the experience of being black. This film may not be as influential as his 1989 *Do The Right Thing*, but if you like Lee's work, you will want to see this one. **GRADE B+**

**THE DA VINCI CODE:** I know it's a cliché, but, for us, this story makes a better book than a movie. Because we are both fans of Dan Brown's novel, the movie did hold our attention. Director Ron Howard has done a good job of making a film that is faithful to the book, and at the same time, making the mystery easier to understand. Tom Hanks, Audrey Tautou, Ian McKellen, and Paul Bettany are all excellent. However, the film didn't hold much intrigue for us because we knew how it would end. I will be very interested to hear from people who did not read the book—there must be a few out there. I am curious how the movie plays for them. Brown was not the first to write a novel on the theory that Jesus was not divine, but human, and that he had a relationship with Mary Magdalene. Nikos Kazantzakis explored the same theory in his book, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In 1988, Martin Scorsese made an excellent movie from that novel. It, too, was greeted with much controversy. Both books are fiction, and make no claim otherwise, and yet people get very upset by any idea that conflicts with their beliefs. I can't think that anyone's faith will be shaken by this fictional mystery, but the Catholic Church does not agree. If it does nothing else, *The Da Vinci Code* may awaken an interest in history. The other day we watched with great interest a two hour History Channel presentation on the Knights Templar. Ron Howard had a good suggestion for people who might be offended by this movie: Don't go see it. **GRADE B**

**DALLAS BUYERS CLUB:** Matthew McConaughey has certainly enhanced his movie career. A few years ago, it looked like he would be known only for his shirtless appearances in several lame romantic comedies. Recently, however, he has had a string of beautifully acted appearances in *The Lincoln Lawyer*, *Bernie*, *Killer Joe*, *Mud*, and *Magic Mike*. Now, in *Dallas Buyers Club* he is a bona fide Oscar contender for his portrayal of Ron Woodruff, an electrician who was a part-time Rodeo performer and a full-time hustler. In 1987, Woodruff was diagnosed with full-blown Aids and given a month to live. In response, he researched the HIV virus and found there were alternatives to AZT, the drug being tested in clinical trials. Having experienced the toxicity of AZT first-hand, his search for alternatives took him to Mexico, Japan and several European countries. The movie details his battles with doctors, pharmaceutical companies, and the FDA, the government agency he believed to be in cahoots with big Pharma. He incorporated as the Dallas Buyers Club, so that he wouldn't be selling un-approved substances, but instead would be selling memberships. The drugs were free to members. A raging homophobe in his former healthy life, he partnered with a transgendered woman known as Rayon. Ray, as Woodruff called her, is played by Jared Leto in another Oscar-worthy performance. Jennifer Garner plays a sympathetic doctor who gives Woodruff emotional support and some assistance. The acting of McConaughey and Leto is definitely worth an A+, but we decided on a grade of A- for the movie. **GRADE A-**

**THE DAMNED UNITED:** This is an unusual sports movie. Rarely does such a film take its hero from success to failure. Roger Ebert calls it a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions. In the late sixties, Brian Clough (rhymes with puff) was the manager of the Darby football team, close to last place in the second division of British football, or what we Americans call soccer. In five years, he took his team up into the first division and eventually to the top when Darby defeated England's premier team, Leeds United, coached by the legendary Don Revie. Clough was propelled by a burning desire to be better than Revie, partly out of boundless ambition and partly because he felt Revie had disrespected him when they first played each other back in 1969. What Clough forgot, was that his success was due, in no small part, to the genius of his assistant manager and close friend, Peter Taylor. The two men part ways when Clough agrees to manage Leeds United, and this factor, combined with Clough's arrogance and insecurity, signal his failure. He lasts only 44 days before being sacked. Ebert says that "today in Britain all you have to do is mention 'the 44 days' and everyone will know you mean Clough's brief tenure at the damned Leeds United." Michael Sheen, who so brilliantly portrayed Tony Blair in *The Queen* and David Frost in *Frost/Nixon* is equally brilliant here as a flawed man with huge ambition and little or no tact. Timothy Spall, although not as handsome as the real Peter Taylor, is excellent. Once again, during the closing credits you see the real Clough and Taylor who, partnering once again, go on to success. **GRADE B**

**DAMSEL:** (2018) Shot mostly on location in Utah with a few scenes in Oregon, this is an indie film with a beautiful background and a clever gimmick. It is a black comedy with an off-kilter sense of humor in a kooky Old West setting with a definite bent toward feminism. But as one critic observed, "there is only so much a Western written by men can do to rectify the wrongs of other Westerns written by men." It may not have rectified all the wrongs of earlier Westerns and it may not have reached the "A" level, but Barbara and I liked it. It was unique and we will probably remember it even longer than films that rank higher. It was written and directed by the Zellner brothers, David and Nathan, who also have roles in *Damsel*. After a wonderful opening scene with Robert Forster playing a tired disillusioned preacher who came to the Wild West to convert "savages" to Christianity but found they weren't especially interested. Then the camera turns to Samuel Alabaster (Robert Pattinson), an affluent pioneer venturing across the American frontier to marry the love of his life, Penelope, played by the talented Mia Wasikowska. He travels with a miniature horse named Butterscotch intended as a wedding gift for his future wife. Penelope turns out to be the toughest character in the movie. I will not tell more of the plot in case you are fortunate enough to see this charming film that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. **GRADE B+**

**DAN IN REAL LIFE:** There should be a production photo from this movie next to the word "charming" in the dictionary. The gentle and, I'll say it, charming love story introduces us to Dan Burns, an advice columnist and widower with three charming daughters. He's doing his best to raise his motherless girls, but his 17-year-old wants to drive and his 15-year-old is madly in love. Both are problems for Dan. Then, to complicate his life further, he falls in love while at a family reunion. (And I really am forced to say that the family is charming.) Unfortunately, Dan falls for his brother's girlfriend. Steve Carell has made quite a career playing nice guys who aren't particularly smooth, but are sweet and sincere. And did I mention, funny? Marie, the object of Dan's affections, is beautifully played by the adorable and, here's that word again, charming Juliette Binoche. How could he not fall in love with her. She's perfect, and his three daughters prefer her to him. This is a lovely movie that made us laugh and put a lump in our throats. Not a bad way to spend an afternoon. **GRADE B+**

**A DANGEROUS METHOD:** Barbara and I were intrigued with this film about the early days of psychoanalysis. Director David Cronenberg, who brought *us Eastern Promises* and *A History of Violence*, shows restraint in this sometimes wordy historical drama. Viggo Mortensen plays Sigmund Freud and Michael Fassbender plays Carl Jung. Keira Knightley plays a profoundly disturbed young woman who is placed in the care of Jung. He tells her he would like to try the "talking cure" pioneered by Freud. Considerable screen time is spent with intellectual discussions of psychoanalytical ideas. Freud is adamant that psychoanalysis be based purely on science and reason while Jung is drawn by his interest in mysticism and other supernatural elements he wants to pursue. The film is not without action. In fact one reviewer suggested a title of "Sex, Lies, and Conversation." Although we were won over by the film, I fear many of our readers might find it less fascinating than we did. Let us know your views. **GRADE B**

**Barb's Note:** I wanted to add my praise for Keira Knightley's performance as Sabina Spielrein. Both Mortensen (a favorite) and Fassbender were excellent, but Knightley blew me away!

**THE DANISH GIRL:** Remember British actor Eddie Redmayne last year in his brilliant Oscar-winning performance playing Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything*? Well, just a year later he has the chance of winning another Oscar for a physically and emotionally demanding role. In *The Danish Girl*, he plays a transgender male (Einar) who makes history as one of the first recorded recipients of experimental sexual reassignment surgery. It was performed in the early 1930's. This is a period of history when most of the world labeled such people insane. Based on a true story, the film showcases the incredible talent of Eddie Redmayne, but there are two memorable acting performances here. Playing Einar's loving wife is Alicia Vikander who first came to Barbara's and my attention when she was so believable in the role of a beautiful robot in *Ex Machina*. Here she plays Gerda, a wife who loves her husband so much that she helps him on his painful journey to becoming Lili. The movie is about the courage to find and be one's self, but at its heart it is also a powerful love story. Redmayne is captivating as he slowly transitions from Einar to Lili, but Vikander is equally captivating as she makes the emotional journey with her husband. The most memorable quote came from a friend who said to Lili, "I've only liked a handful of people in my life, and you've been two of them." I believe Redmayne and Vikander deliver two of the best performances of the year, but I doubt that this film will receive the accolades that showered *The Theory of Everything*. **GRADE: B+**

**DANNY COLLINS:** (2015) Danny (Al Pacino) is an aging rock star, still touring, still singing the forty-year-old songs that made him famous, still taking drugs and still drinking. When he gets a surprise birthday gift from his manager and long-time friend (Christopher Plummer), he decides to make some changes: To quit touring and to quit taking drugs, although his resolve doesn't extend to quitting alcohol! The gift that changes Danny is a letter from John Lennon to the young singer just starting out in the business. It had Lennon's private phone number and an invitation to "call me." The letter, inspired by a long-ago radio interview, was sent to the radio station and never forwarded. The letter was eventually sold to a collector and found its way to Danny, forty years too late. If only it had been mailed to Danny's home, it might have kept him from sliding down the path that so many rock legends have followed. Danny's efforts to start writing songs again and to connect with a grown son he has never met provide the vehicle for Al Pacino to shine, and shine he does. Pacino is charming in the role, and believable as a rock star in spite of a lack of any discernable vocal talent. Annette Benning, Jennifer Garner, and Bobby Cannavale round out the excellent cast. *Danny Collins* is kind of, sort of based on a real story. There was a real letter from John Lennon that is similar to the letter in the movie. Lennon wrote it to British folk musician Steve Tilston in 1971, but Tilston never saw it until 2005. Tilston is the real-life inspiration for Pacino's Collins. While some critics were hard on the movie, we agree with those who enjoyed Pacino and company. We didn't mind the shameless manipulation because we were engaged in the story and the characters. **GRADE B**, maybe even a **B+**

**DANNY DECKCHAIR:** (2003 Release seen on video) This charming romantic comedy stars Rhys Ifans, who was so funny as Hugh Grant's friend in Notting Hill. Ifans is the Danny of the title. He is a concrete worker forced to spend his yearly holiday at home because his girlfriend won't leave her job. He gets a wild idea and ties a bunch of helium filled balloons to a deck chair, just to see if it will fly. It does. Unfortunately, he neglects to take along the shears he planned to use to lower himself. He travels quite a distance and becomes sort of a celebrity in Sydney. What happens to him on his life-changing adventure is great fun to watch. **THUMBS UP**

**DARK BLUE:** This is one good bad-cop movie. Kurt Russell is outstanding as Eldon Perry, an LA cop who has seen and done too much and whose personal life has suffered as a result. At the behest of his boss, Jack Van Meter (Brendan Gleeson) Perry has done

some heinous things. In the corrupt world of the LAPD, those actions have ensured his promotion to Lieutenant. The primary action takes place just before the jury verdict in the Rodney King beating case and 5 days before Perry's promotion ceremony. The climax takes place during the riots that ensued when the four policemen who beat King were declared Not Guilty. It was a brilliant choice to place this story in that infamous context. We admired the film because, although the basic plot is one we are familiar with, the execution is creative and not one bit hackneyed. The dialogue rings true and the characters are believable. The telling of the story never lags, and our attention didn't either. We were particularly impressed with Russell. He proves here that he is a fine actor. We also liked Lolita Davidovich as Perry's wife and Ving Rhames as a good LA cop. The very lovely Michael Michele (*E.R. and Homicide*) is credible as a police sergeant and the love interest for Perry's young partner, Bobby (Scott Speedman). The film has been compared to Denzel Washington's *Training Day*, but I liked this one much better. We applaud Director Ron Shelton for a great job. He previously directed two of our favorite sports movies--*Bull Durham* and *Tin Cup*. James Ellroy, who wrote the novel on which the film is based, also wrote the novel that was the basis for another great cop movie, *L.A. Confidential*. Screenwriter, David Ayer also wrote the screenplay for *Training Day*. **GRADE B+**

**DARK HORSE:** (2016) Careful!! There are two 2016 movies that could be confused: *Dark Horse* and *The Dark Horse*. *Dark Horse* is a thoroughly likeable real-life story that is heartwarming and inspirational. If it weren't true you might say it could never happen and certainly the odds were against it. The film is, in fact, a documentary with a horse at its center. A group of people from an unlikely background: a working-class community that dared to take on the elite 'sport of kings' and breed themselves a racehorse. The horse was named "*Dream Alliance*," and as you might guess did quite well. The champion racehorse started out as the dream of Jan Vokes, a barmaid in a former mining village in Wales. Vokes rallied a group of villagers behind the idea of participating in a sport that has traditionally been reserved for elites. Breeding and training a race horse can be expensive. Vokes secured the money needed by selling shares to working-class villagers. Those appealing shareholders made this film a success. They were charming and told a fascinating story. The film was a hit at last year's Sundance Film Festival and the theater where we saw it was surprisingly packed. It earned 96% on the Tomatometer and we agree with the positive reviews of the critics. **GRADE B+**

**THE DARK KNIGHT:** As we left the theater, I commented to Barbara that the film takes "convoluted" and "interminable" to new heights. Most professional critics loved *The Dark Knight*, so while reading this review be warned that I have a low tolerance for this genre and the only recent film in this category I really liked was *Iron Man*. Even so, I was in awe of the performance turned in by deceased actor Heath Ledger playing the role of The Joker. I think audiences needed Ledger to be at least as good as the memorable performance of Jack Nicholson and he did not disappoint. Since I would feel bad if I discouraged readers who might love this film, I will turn the task over to Barbara to complete. . . **Barb's comments:** I, too thought Ledger was terrific. I also liked Christian Bale, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Aaron Eckhardt and Gary Oldman. And Michael Caine and Morgan Freeman make watching it worthwhile, but I agree with Gary that film was too long. It was also devoid of humor, although The Joker did provide a dark chuckle or two. The scenes of Batman flying through the Gotham skies are my favorite, and there weren't enough of them to suit me. The title says it all: it's dark, dark, dark. It's also quite sad. I can't really be more positive than Gary, although I think the film held my interest a bit better than it did his. Based purely on his enjoyment, Gary would give it a C, but because of the quality of the acting and the filmmaking he would elevate the grade to a B-. That's about where I am. **GRADE B-**

**DARK WATERS:** (2019) Inspired by a shocking true story, a tenacious attorney named Robert Bilott, well played by Mark Ruffalo, uncovers the misdeeds of one of the world's largest corporations, DuPont. For decades DuPont got away with poisoning a West Virginia town with toxic chemicals used in the making of Teflon, the non-stick miracle substance of modern times. Bilott is a still living 54 year old environmental attorney spending a lifetime trying to deliver the truth about the dumping of toxic chemicals onto an unsuspecting public. After seeing this amazing film, you may see DuPont's old slogan "*Better Living Through Chemistry*" in a brighter more critical light. The film is based on Robert Bilott's 2019 book, *Exposure*. It is simply mindboggling how our country protects for-profit businesses in ways that allow them to accrue astronomical profits with little to no oversight. Barbara and I are deeply troubled by the ramifications of this film which are based on a real and ongoing horror story. **GRADE B+**

The grade of B+ does not convey the importance of this film or our hope that it will be viewed by many.

The importance of the message deserves an A+ film, but complex material based on years of difficult research just doesn't always translate into an almost perfect film.

**DARKEST HOUR:** (2017) Gary Oldman's electrifying performance brings Winston Churchill to life as Great Britain faces its darkest hour. At a time when Nazi forces seem unstoppable, Churchill must either negotiate with Hitler in an attempt to save the British people at a horrific cost or rally the nation to fight against incredible odds. His decision changed the course of world history. While Oldman's phenomenal work as Winston Churchill has been justifiably heralded, it is equaled by the film's achievements in direction, screenwriting, cinematography, and even makeup. He spent over 200 hours undergoing a radical transformation that necessitated heavy makeup and 'fattening' his body with prosthetics weighing half his own weight. I am a fan of Oldman and realize he is a bit of a chameleon playing roles as varied as Sid Vicious, Beethoven, and Lee Harvey Oswald. Still, in playing Churchill I could not recognize a single Oldman feature. The movie has an excellent supporting cast, but *Darkest Hour* is a one man showcase. The film only covers a month long period from May to June in 1940, when Churchill was elected prime minister of Great Britain and rallied both its government and its people to fight Hitler to the death. At the time Hitler was seen by many as an effective authoritarian ruler rather than a murderous madman. Churchill's decision predated the coming slaughter of so many of the continent's Jewish population. Barbara and I are usually in near complete agreement when grading a film. I was blown away by *Darkest Hour*. Unlike me, she was at times impatient with the slowness of some scenes when Churchill was showing indecision. **GRADE A/B**

**DATE NIGHT:** Tina Fey and Steve Carell make a believable—and very funny—married couple. The two of them make this an enjoyable film in spite of a car chase scene that goes on far too long. Of course, the plot is implausible, but they make it work. Plus, there are some very funny lines. Claire and Phil Foster (Fey and Carell) are a suburban couple slogging through their daily lives and marriage. Even their "date nights" have become routine. To bring some spark back into their lives, they visit a trendy Manhattan bistro, where a case of mistaken identity brings them together with a couple of corrupt cops, a top-level mobster and an adventure they will never forget. Someone said, after seeing this film, that there should be a law requiring Mark Wahlberg to appear shirtless in every

movie. I couldn't agree more. (Although, like Carell, Gary wonders if anyone actually needs muscles on his shoulders.) James Franco and Mila Kunis have an amusing scene and Kristin Wiig and Mark Ruffalo are friends whose impending divorce motivates the Fosters to invigorate their marriage. Ray Liotta appears in an uncredited role as the above-mentioned mobster, and William Fichtner is a corrupt city official. We laughed often enough to give this one a B. **GRADE B**

**DAVID & LAYLA:** (Released in 2006) This small independent film follows the real-life love story of public-access TV personality David Fine and the woman who is now his wife. It is an offbeat cross-cultural romance that ends with a positive message about getting along together. David is Jewish and Layla is a Kurdish Muslim. You can imagine the reactions of their families when they hear about the romance. The writer/director, Jay Jonroy, is a Kurdish-American and he has mixed broad comedy with cultural and political statements. There are pratfalls and testicle jokes mixed in with stories of Saddam's atrocities against the Kurds. We didn't think the mixture worked well. What's more, the film had a very amateurish quality. Not the acting, however. That was uniformly good. Callie Thorne (**Rescue Me**) was particularly amusing as David's high-strung sort-of fiancée—the woman David dumps when he meets Layla. David Moscow and Shiva Rose play the title characters and they do the best they can with the material. (**Note:** Moscow played Josh, the young Tom Hanks in 1988's **Big**) We liked the concept of the film: Can a Jewish man and a Kurdish woman find happiness together, but we aren't enthusiastic about the execution. Our local critic said it best when he wrote in his review that the film was *proof, if proof be needed, that good intentions just aren't enough*. **GRADE C-**

**DE PALMA:** (2015/16) This film is not for everyone or possibly not even for most. But if you are a film buff or you just want to learn more about making movies, this may be the film for you. Barbara and I found it informative and entertaining. It is as simple as a documentary can get. Director Brian De Palma sits in front of a fireplace for nearly two hours and talks. He talks about his film career and choices he has made in his life. De Palma is a charming storyteller and seems to have an endless supply of fascinating anecdotes. He has had his share of hits: **Carrie, Dressed to Kill, Body Double, "Scarface, The Untouchables** and more. He has also had some big flops; **The Bonfire of the Vanities** bombed so badly it inspired a book *The Devil's Candy*, whose subtitle is *The Anatomy of a Hollywood Fiasco*. He doesn't shy away from talking about his flops or his critics, or anything else, really. And while he talks about a film or film personality, clips are shown. Personalities he worked with and broke into the film industry with include such names as George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro, and many, many others. Barb is not as enthusiastic about this film as I am and I can only whole-heartedly recommend it for the few who would put it high on their "must see" film list after reading this review. **GRADE A-/B**

**THE DEAD GIRL:** (2006) A young woman is found dead and we see how her death affects the lives of seemingly unrelated people in this 2006 film written and directed by Karen Moncrieff. All the stories are grim, but we thought it was well-written, well-directed and beautifully acted by a stellar cast. Toni Collete, Rose Byrne, Mary Beth Hurt, Marcia Gay Harden, Brittany Murphy, Piper Laurie, James Franco, Mary Steenburgen, Giovanni Rabisi and Bruce Davison. This is the antithesis of a "feel-good" movie, but Moncrieff has crafted a gripping narrative. **THUMBS UP**

**DEADPOOL:** (2016) We went to see this Marvel comic book movie over Gary's protest. I wanted to see it because I read an article about Ryan Reynolds titled "Welcome to the Ryan Reynolds Renaissance." (See excerpt below) I was also interested that there was considerable humor in the movie and that added to the appeal of **Deadpool**, billed as a raunchy adventure. And there is humor: some of it R-rated, some of it over my head, and some that made me chuckle. The movie opens with a predictable fight scene. Wade Wilson/Deadpool has only 12 bullets but manages to kill many more than that. After the mayhem scene, Wade Wilson explains that this is a love story, and, in flashbacks, tells how he came to the opening scene. The woman in the love story is Vanessa, played by the beautiful Morena Baccarin. We first noticed her as Damien Lewis's wife in the first few seasons of TV's *Homeland*. She and Wade Wilson fall in love, but are soon devastated to learn that he has terminal cancer. He undergoes a bizarre treatment at the hands of the evil Ajax/Francis (Ed Skrein) that leaves Wilson disfigured but immortal. Some tradeoff! There is a wonderful CGI character, a teenager who, when she isn't texting has a unique fighting style, a super-strong villainess, and through it all, Deadpool manages to keep talking. One of the co-writers of the movie said that "Being able to laugh at himself is one of Ryan's greatest gifts." It's what makes **Deadpool** worthwhile. The mayhem bores me, but the characters and the story are intriguing. Gary's grade is considerably lower than mine. My son, who went to the movie with us, agrees with my grade of B-. **GRADE B-/C-**

**DEADWOOD: THE MOVIE** (2019) (HBO) The movie was a fitting end to the series which ran only three years (2004-2006) and ended abruptly. Series creator, David Milch, also wrote the movie. Those of us who were delighted with the series always hoped it would return. For those who never saw the series, it was set in the late 1800s, revolving around the characters of Deadwood, South Dakota; a town of deep corruption and crime. The series starred Ian McShane, as Al Swearengen, owner of the Gem Saloon and Timothy Olyphant as Seth Bullock, the Sheriff of Deadwood. McShane's character was as corrupt as they come, but as charming and likeable as he was dastardly. The other stand-out characters are too numerous to mention, but a couple of my favorites were Robin Weigert as Calamity Jane and Paula Malcomson as Trixie, the prostitute with a heart of gold. In the movie, almost all of the characters are reunited after a decade to celebrate South Dakota's statehood. Former rivalries are reignited, alliances are tested and old wounds reopened. The series can be streamed on Amazon Prime. I suspect that the movie will find a home there eventually. **GRADE A**

**DEAR EVAN HANSEN** 2021 (We saw it in a movie theatre.) This coming-of-age movie is adapted from the tony award-winning play. As Evan, the movie stars Ben Platt who originated the role on Broadway. Some critics on Rotten Tomatoes said that Platt was too old to be believable as a 17-year-old, but we don't agree. (Of course, at our age everyone looks young!) The movie stars Julianne Moore as Evan's mother, and Amy Adams and Danny Pino (**Law & Order: SVU**) as the parents of the boy (Conner) who commits suicide and Evan pretends was his friend. Kaitlyn Dever (**Justified**) plays Zoe, Conner's sister. Evan had a crush on her forever and, thanks to his lies about her brother, he eventually gets involved with her. There are always differences when a play is adapted for the screen. Frequently screenwriters downplay the humor and emphasize the serious aspects. A notable example is **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?** The movie sucked all the humor out, especially from the first act. The screenwriter of the movie, **Dear Evan Hansen**, made that same mistake. We could have used a bit more humor. In the play, Evan sees visions of Connor after his death, who encourages him to keep his memory alive. The film does not include this element. I think this is a mistake, too. It would have gone a long way toward

explaining why Evan goes to such lengths to prove that he and Conner were best friends. The play was criticized for the lack of accountability Evan faces at the end of the show. The public never finds out what he has done. The movie corrects this by having Evan confess his lies to the world, but that's where the movie bogged down for Gary. He felt the movie was too long, and I don't think he would have felt that had we seen the play. But, we forgive more onstage than we do in a movie. The critics on RT were hard on the movie, giving it only 33%. Audiences liked the movie a lot better giving it an average of 89%. We enjoyed the movie, but it wasn't an A for us. **GRADE B**

**DEAR FRANKIE:** (2004 Release seen on video.) Emily Mortimer is Lizzie, a single mother who has never told her son, Frankie, that they have run away from his father. Lizzie has instead invented a fantasy that Frankie's father is away at sea. She picks up Frankie's letters to his father at a post office box and answers them. When the fantasy father's ship actually comes into port, Lizzie hires a stranger to pretend to be Frankie's father for a day. The stranger is played by Gerard Butler (*Phantom of the Opera*). It's a sentimental story, especially since Frankie is deaf, and the film got mixed reviews. We agree with the critics who liked the film. It's a heart-warming story, simply told. It is well worth renting the DVD if you missed *Dear Frankie* in the theater. **THUMBS UP**

**DEATH AT A FUNERAL:** Farce done poorly can be painful. Farce done well can be hilarious. The farce in *Death At A Funeral* is done well, and it is hilarious. In spite of hearing only 85% of the dialogue, Gary still thinks it's the funniest movie he's seen in years. Discussing the plot of a farce is pointless, and what's more, it would sound ridiculous, so all I'll say is that it has to do with a funeral gathering, a psychedelic drug, a surprise guest and a variety of interpersonal relationships, both serious and amusing. Frank Oz (*The Stepford Wives*, *Bowfinger*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*) directed with a sure hand and the pacing was everything a farce should be. All the actors were perfectly cast. Matthew Macfadyen, who was Mr. Darcy in the recent *Pride and Prejudice*, is the dutiful son who is agonizing over delivering his father's eulogy. Rupert Graves, who I remember best from the TV miniseries, *The Forsyte Saga*, is the selfish, successful son who comes from New York for the funeral. Alan Tudyk (*Knocked Up*, *Dodgeball*) is wonderful as a man who spends the entire film high on a hallucinogenic. And four-foot-tall Peter Dinklage (*The Station Agent*), is excellent as the surprise guest. I think the reason the Brits excel at farce is because they take it quite seriously. The actors never look like they are trying to be funny: They just respond to real-life situations in crazy, but believable, ways. Gary gives this film an enthusiastic A. I say B+. **GRADE A/B+**

**THE DEATH OF STALIN:** (2018) Promoted as "an audacious comedy that is a biting funny takedown of bureaucratic dysfunction performed to the hilt by a sparkling ensemble cast." That it was banned in Vladimir Putin's Russia made it an even more appealing choice for viewing.. Add to that the fact that the film was directed and co-written by Amando Iannucci who created and wrote the popular T.V. series *Veep*. Barbara and I found it interesting, but not the raucously hilarious killer comedy that many of the critics touted. The film focuses on the events immediately before and after the death of Josef Stalin in March 1953. More specifically it focuses on the ensuing frantic power struggle with men tripping over each other in the race to be the next Soviet leader. Among the contenders are Georgy Malenkov brilliantly played by the always funny Jeffrey Tambor. But less obvious was the casting of Steve Buscemi in the role of Nikita Khrushchev. He is one of the last people that would come to my mind for the role, yet he was excellent as was the ensemble cast. In the unlikely event you decide to seek out this movie, I think it would be better to go expecting a tongue-in-cheek view of a sliver of Russian history, than expecting an uproarious, fall-out-of-your-chair comedy. **GRADE B**

**DEATH TO SMOOCHY:** This is a black comedy from the odd mind of Danny DeVito. It's about two kid show hosts, but it's not exactly a movie for kids. It deserves it's R rating because of the language used by all the characters except Smoochy. Robin Williams is Rainbow Randolph, the popular host of a kid show who is caught in a bribery scheme. The network fires him and hires squeaky-clean Edward Norton who has created a character called Smoochy, a purple Rhino. Norton is so "nice" he won't even eat animals: his favorite repast is a soy hotdog on a gluten-free bun. Rainbow hates Smoochy for taking his time slot, and decides he must die. As the movie progresses, several other people decide Smoochy must die, for various reasons. There are a few laughs in the movie, but most of them, as *Hollywood's Indie Voice* pointed out, "came from the audience when Robin Williams smashes his head into concrete and from the 'dick' jokes." The film does prove that Ed Norton can play just about any part believably. Jon Stewart does not distinguish himself as the Programming Chief, although Catherine Keener is interesting as the Smoochy show's producer. Michael Rispoli, who we so liked in *Two Family House*, appears as a punch-drunk ex-fighter. Ebert ended his review by saying, "In all the annals of the movies, few films have been this odd, inexplicable and unpleasant." I didn't think it was quite that bad, although Gary would put it in the "D" range. We don't really recommend it.

**THE DEBT:** In 1965, three young Mossad agents were sent to East Germany to find and capture Dr. Vogel, the notorious Surgeon of Birkenau, who conducted unspeakable procedures on his Jewish captives during WWII. In 1997, Sarah, the daughter of Rachel Singer who was one of the Mossad agents, writes a book about their legendary exploits which culminated in the death of Dr. Vogel. The book is met with great success, and Sarah's mother is once again a public figure. The 1997 agents are played by Helen Mirren (Rachel Singer), Tom Wilkenson, and Ciarán Hinds: Their 1965 counterparts are played by Jessica Chastain, Marton Csokas and Sam Worthington. The younger versions were picked well, because you can imagine that they grew into the older faces. When an old man in a Soviet hospital announces that he is the infamous Dr. Vogel, the three agents are forced to face the truth of their now famous intelligence mission. This thriller is a re-make of a 2007 film titled *Ha-Hov*. I agree with the critics who felt the movie would have been better if it had stayed with the 1965 story, for, except for the ending, it is the more interesting story. However, there is no doubt that the older actors are the more interesting actors. We were impressed with Jessica Chastain (*Tree of Life*, *The Help*), who seems able to transform herself to fit any character she is playing. We also thought that Jesper Christensen, who played the infamous Surgeon of Birkenau was excellent. However, we were never totally enthralled by the action. In fact, Gary was a bit bored in the first half of the movie. While we appreciated the performances, we can't grade this one higher than C+. **GRADE C+**

**A DECADE OVER THE INFLUENCE:** (2003 release seen on video.) This documentary about the dramatic transformation of cinematic storytelling in the 70s is interesting for anyone who likes films about moviemaking. Directors and actors talk about the daring independent films made by young directors in the 1970s. The audience of that decade was no longer interested in the escapism or

fantasy of earlier Hollywood movies. Instead, they wanted to see something that they recognized from their own lives. These independent films gave rise to a new Hollywood and mainstream movies that emphasized realism and social consciousness. Francis Ford Coppola, William Friedkin, Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda and others appear in the full-length version of a three part series shown on the Independent Film Channel last August. Many clips from the great films of the 70s are shown. We enjoyed it. **THUMBS UP**

**THE DEEP BLUE SEA:** (2011) When a movie begins with a suicide attempt, you're pretty sure it isn't going to be a comedy. We didn't, however, expect unrelenting despair, yet that is what we got. Set in 1950 in a very dark still bombed-out London, it tells the story of Hestor (Rachel Weisz) who left her older titled husband for a young lover whose best days were as an RAF fighter pilot. Her life with Sir William was comfortable, but without passion, plus she had an awful mother-in-law and an unsympathetic father. She is aware that Freddy will never love her with the same passion with which she loves him, but he is her whole life and she doesn't hesitate to exchange her life of privilege for one of penury. Everything in the movie is brown: the buildings, the clothes, the furniture, the books, everything! The scenes are dimly lit and ever so slightly out of focus. (At first, I thought my eyes were going, but Gary agreed that everything looked slightly blurry.) Weisz is marvelous even when she is playing depressed, but she couldn't save the movie for us. I'm writing the review because Gary said he wanted to forget the movie as quickly as possible. Oh, and I should mention that the music at the beginning and end was intrusive. Now, aren't you anxious to see this one? Critics, however, seem to like *The Deep Blue Sea* with many giving it high marks. They must see something we didn't. **GRADE D+** (The + is for Weisz.)

**THE DEEP END:** I liked this one better than Gary did. A couple of plot holes bothered him, but they didn't keep me from enjoying this tension-filled crime movie. Tilda Swinton (ORLANDO) is Margaret Hall, an ordinary housewife and mother living with her family in Tahoe City. Her husband is in the Navy and spends much of the time away from home. During one of his absences, Margaret becomes worried about her seventeen-year-old son, Beau. He has been hanging around with an older man, Darby Reese (Josh Lucas), and frequenting a Reno nightclub. She tries to handle the situation, but she fails miserably. When Reese shows up at their house one night, he and Beau have a fight. The next morning, Margaret finds Darby's body. She assumes that Beau is responsible for his death and does what she thinks she must to protect her son. Step by step, she gets deeper and deeper into trouble. Eventually, a blackmailer, Goran Visnjic (From TV's ER), enters the picture. The contrast between the horrible events and Margaret's ordinary family chores--taking her daughter to ballet lessons, for example--make this a most unusual film noir. It is never predictable, and I like that in a movie. I was totally engaged with Margaret's desperate attempts to extricate herself from a situation she cannot control. We both thought that Swinton and Visnjic were excellent. The movie is based on a 1947 novel, *The Blank Wall*. The story was filmed in 1949 as *The Reckless Moment* with James Mason and Joan Bennett. **GRADE B+/B-**

**DEEPWATER HORIZON:** (2016) On April 20th, 2010, more than forty miles off the coast of Louisiana, one of the world's largest man-made disasters occurred on the Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico. I remember hearing the news on television and reading about the tragedy in newspapers. The story of the environmental disaster following the initial loss of the oil rig went on for weeks as more than 200 million gallons of oil spilled into the Gulf of Mexico. It was the worst oil spill in American history. I remember all this as well as the shocking arrogance of the British Petroleum (BP) executives who were more interested in profit than safety, but in truth I only had a cold intellectual memory of a few of the facts. It wasn't always pleasant watching this movie, but it left me with a vicarious visceral memory that will be difficult to forget. The film, directed by Peter Berg, focuses on the men and women who were on that oil rig and the conflagration that took lives and changed the survivors' lives forever. The movie received generally positive reviews and after only a couple of weeks in theaters it has grossed over \$66 million worldwide so it may recover the \$100 million it cost to bring to the big screen. An impressive cast including Mark Wahlberg, Kurt Russell, John Malkovich, Kate Hudson, Gina Rodriguez, and many others bring this disaster film to life. I will say that trying to follow over thirty minutes of total chaos shot with hand held cameras is difficult if not impossible and I cannot fault those who dislike the film for that reason. Barbara and I think the film is worth seeing for the insight it provides, though I do wish a little time would have been spent on the environmental impact of the spill. **GRADE B-**

**DEFIANCE:** The true story of WWII survival and heroism told in this film deserves an A. It is a story I had not heard before, but now will never forget. When the Nazis begin raiding Belarus villages to collect Jews for the camps, four brothers, one of them only a child, escape to the forest. Others come to join them and soon the word of their camp spreads and more and more displaced Jews arrive. As Tuvia Bielski, the eldest brother, Daniel Craig becomes the leader of the group. Zus (Liev Schreiber) is consumed with revenge for the slaying of his parents and is more interested in killing Germans than in saving Jews. Eventually he leaves the forest settlement with some of the group's best fighters to join the remnants of the Russian Army who are hiding in the forest and attacking the Germans wherever and whenever they can. Tuvia and Asael (Jamie Bell) stay behind to form a community of people for whom the best revenge is staying alive. When the Germans get too close, they are forced to flee and build their camp deeper in the forest. But the Germans were never able to destroy the group that came to be known as the Bielski Partisans. Ultimately, 1200 people were saved from certain death by the resourcefulness and bravery of the brothers. Their descendants number in the thousands. There is a lesson here for our military leaders: It is impossible to defeat an entrenched group of partisans who are fighting for their lives and their motherland. However we cannot rate the movie as high as we do the story it tells. While all the actors are excellent, especially Liev Schreiber, I never felt as intimately involved in their story as I was, for example, in *Schindler's List* or *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I was more of a sympathetic observer. For me, the most emotional moments in the film came at the end as we saw photos of the real Bielski brothers and learned what happened to them after the war was over. **GRADE B**

**DEFINITELY, MAYBE:** This is a love story mystery that has likeable actors and an engaging story. Ryan Reynolds is Wil, a soon-to-be divorced father who discovers that his 11-year-old daughter Maya (Abigail Breslin) has just had her first sex education class. Not surprisingly, Maya has a lot of questions: questions about sex and questions about relationships—specifically her dad's relationship with her mom and with his other girlfriends. He decides to tell her the story of his three serious relationships, but changes the women's names so that Maya won't know which one is her mother. (That's where the mystery comes in.) Of course, this means flashbacks. We first meet his college girlfriend (Elizabeth Banks), who he left behind in Wisconsin when he went to New York in 1992 to work on the Bill Clinton campaign. In New York, we meet the other two women in his life played by Rachel Weisz and Isla Fisher. Because the story covers a 15-year time span, some critics seemed to think it was slow-moving, but we disagree. The movie gives us time to get to know and like the characters and we appreciated the laid-back pace. Reynolds is quite charming—sort of a Tom Hanks type—and all three

women are delightful. Breslin is equally appealing as the inquisitive pre-teen. She appears to be one child actor whose appeal won't diminish as she matures. Kevin Kline is scruffy and terrific as an aging gonzo writer and journalism professor. Reviews have been somewhat mixed, perhaps because critics are often hard on romantic comedies. A.O. Scott of the NY Times liked the film and said that "it navigates the choppy waters of modern courtship with commendable, understated honesty." Our local critic also like it and called **Definitely, Maybe** a chick-flick that men could enjoy. Gary would agree. He liked it as much as I did. We both give it a B+. **GRADE B+**

**THE DELIVERY MAN:** Hollywood remakes of successful foreign films rarely gain the favor of critics and this film is no exception. **Starbuck**, on which this movie is based, was a subtitled French-Canadian feel-good comedy that Barbara and I thought was charming. It is the story of an affable underachiever whose life is turned upside down when he finds he has fathered 533 children through anonymous sperm donations he made twenty years earlier. When 142 of his offspring bring legal action to find the identity of their father, a life changing journey starts for David Wozniak (code name: Starbuck) who is convincingly played by Vince Vaughn. It is a sentimental film that can bring tears to your eyes between chuckles and that almost always seems to rankle professional critics. We are more tolerant of films like this and we are fond of the work of Vince Vaughn. Interestingly, the movie was directed by Ken Scott who also directed **Starbuck**. The movie certainly falls short of perfection and is undeniably predictable, but we liked it. **GRADE B**

**DE-LOVELY:** I expected the music to be de-lightful, but I had no idea that the love story would so very sad. Kevin Kline is splendid as the oh so sophisticated Cole Porter and Ashley Judd does admirably as his loving and tolerant wife. This is, as Movieviewer Peg C. said, an unusual treatment of a biography. It reminded me a bit of **All That Jazz**, because Porter seemed to be looking on as his life was replayed before his eyes. The treatment was interesting and creative. Another star of the film is the makeup. Both Kline and Judd aged beautifully and realistically. We thought the musical numbers were mostly good although I'm not sure why they thought they had to update the arrangements. Some of new versions worked well, others not so much. Alanis Morissette's diction is no where near crisp enough for a Cole Porter song. And I was surprised and disappointed that Sheryl Crow's rendition of Begin The Beguine varied so markedly from the original melody. That bothered both of us. But the ending was terribly sad and, I thought, terribly drawn out. It didn't bother Gary, but I thought the sorrow would never end. Consequently, I can only give the film a B. Gary says B+. It was directed by Irwin Winkler who also directed Kline in **Life As A House**. **GRADE B+/B**

*"I wanted every kind of love that was available,  
but I could never find them in the same person,  
or the same sex." . . . Cole Porter*

**DENIAL:** (2016) "All opinions are not equal." So says Deborah Lipstadt after the 1996 trial in which she took on David Irving, the infamous British Holocaust denier, who had accused her of libel. Lipstadt was an American Holocaust historian who had been vocal in lectures and in print about Holocaust deniers and revisionists. She discovered that in Great Britain there is no presumption of innocence in cases of libel. It was up to her and her legal team to prove that, when she labelled Irving a Holocaust denier who had falsified evidence or deliberately misinterpreted it, she was telling the truth. Suppressing her natural urge to testify and put Holocaust survivors on the stand, she acquiesced to her high-end defense team who wanted to keep the focus on David Irving rather than to put the Holocaust on trial. The movie provided us with a fascinating look at the British system of Justice. Rachel Weisz was terrific as Lipstadt who said, "Rachel was intent on getting it right and wanted me on set. I tried to stay out of the way...but I'm sure I was a pest to the crew." Timothy Spall, who was outstanding as the artist in 2014's **Mr. Turner**, took on the unenviable role of Irving and absolutely nailed it. He was properly odious. In Britain, solicitors prepare the case that barristers try in court. Tom Wilkinson donned white wig and robes of Richard Rampton who was the barrister who plead Lipstadt's case. Wilkinson is always brilliant, but it was the humanity he brought to this role that made him such a standout. Except for a moving visit by Lipstadt and her legal team to Auschwitz, the movie focused on the particulars of the legal case. Fans of legal dramas will be attracted to the movie, but Gary doubts it will have much appeal for the average movie goer. It is, however, as *The Atlantic* put it, "A Drama for the Misinformation Age." **GRADE B**

**THE DEPARTED:** Martin Scorsese knows the mean streets, and in this film, he returns to the genre he does best. The film is violent and profane and quite wonderful. You never anticipate the plot turns and the fast pacing assures that you are constantly caught up in the tension. Plus, the casting of Jack Nicholson as Frank Costello, a ruthless mob boss, was inspired. He makes the degenerate Costello interesting and, sometimes, even humorous. (Although I was occasionally aware of Jack doing his "Jack" thing.) One critic called **The Departed "Goodfellows** with cell phones. It's an accurate description. One of the best scenes involves two cell phones and no dialogue. Matt Damon is a criminal pretending to be a cop and Leonardo Di Caprio is a cop pretending to be a criminal. Both actors are excellent. I wasn't surprised that Damon could reproduce a South Boston accent, since he did it in **Good Will Hunting**, and he is a "southie," but DiCaprio also sounded like he was born and bred in South Boston. Mark Wahlberg and Alex Baldwin are officers in the organized crime unit and they come on strong in every scene. Both Damon and DiCaprio are involved with the same woman, a police shrink played nicely by Vera Farmiga. Everyone in the film is outstanding, but I was especially impressed with DiCaprio. His intensity combined with vulnerability make for an unforgettable character. **GRADE A**

**DEPARTURES:** (**Okuribito**—2008) A devoted cellist in an orchestra that has just been dissolved finds work as a "Nokanski," a funeral professional who prepares deceased bodies for burial and entry into the next life. That is a one sentence summary, but it doesn't begin to describe the beautiful Japanese film that won the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar last year. Daigo is at first appalled when he discovers that the classified ad he answered, which offered a job in "Departures," wasn't the travel agency job he expected. To join him on his journey of discovery and to watch him become a gentle gatekeeper between life and death is an experience we will not soon forget. In last month's issue, Peg C. called **Departures** an "exquisite film. . .one of the best I've ever seen. Wonderful comedic moments, touching beautiful moments, and touching poignant moments." The audience with us in the theatre must have been similarly impressed, because no one moved though out the entire closing credits. And they were in Japanese. If this remarkable film comes to a theatre in your town, we urge you to see it. **GRADE A**

**DERAILED:** Jennifer Aniston and Clive Owens are both excellent actors playing against type in this exciting thriller. Critics often go far out of their way to criticize this genre of film. They demand exacting logic and magnify the smallest flaw. As you can tell, Barbara and I were rather taken by this film. Owens plays a successful ad executive and family man who meets an alluring and sexy woman. If you

think the film will be predictable from this start, you would be wrong. It is anything but predictable. With a strong supporting cast and scenes that keep you on the edge of your seat, we believe the film will engage you if you are willing to let it. Try not to be too critical until you have seen the whole film. We especially enjoyed the powerful portrayal of the villain by Vincent Cassele, one of France's most arresting and exciting new actors. **Gary GRADE B+/Barbara GRADE B**

**DEREK DELGAUDIO'S IN & OF ITSELF** 2020 (a filmed theatre piece on Hulu) Derek DelGaudio gives an intimate and powerful performance that uses art, illusion, slight-of-hand and storytelling to search for the nature of identity. It's magical how it captures your attention and makes you ponder that age-old question, "Who am I?" It arouses laughter and tears as he involves the audience on his journey. You occasionally find yourself wondering how he does the things he does, and by the end of the piece, you really don't care. You are mesmerized by the once-in-a-lifetime experience. Granted, seeing it at home can't compare with seeing it a live theatre production, but the movie is, for now, a good alternative. One critic on *Rotten Tomatoes* said that the filming techniques "give the film audience a behind the scene view of the audience's experience and reaction." Gary and I urge everyone who has a subscription to Hulu to see *In & Of Itself*. If you do, please let us know how it affected you. The experience definitely affected us. **GRADE A**

**THE DESCENDANTS:** This is a wonderful movie! It's a funny, moving and completely original story of a family in crisis. George Clooney is terrific as Matt King, a formerly uninvolved father who has to take care of his two daughters while his wife lies in a coma after being critically injured. The setting is Hawaii, and it made me wonder why more films aren't made on those gorgeous islands. There is a companion story about whether or not to sell a breathtakingly beautiful piece of land on Kauai that the King family has owned for generations. So at the same time King is dealing with his dying wife, he has to deal with his many cousins, some of whom are opposed to the sale. Added to these difficulties, is the discovery that his wife had been cheating on him. As good as Clooney's performance is in this complex role—Ebert thinks it is the best of his career—he is matched by Shailene Woodley who plays King's older daughter, Alexandra. Sent to a boarding school because of her misbehavior, Alex must return home and help deal with the crisis. In the process, she is forced to grow up. Woodley makes her character utterly believable and sympathetic. The film was directed and co-written by Alexander Payne, who also gave us *Sideways* (2004) and *About Schmidt* (2002). Peter Travers of Rolling Stone calls *The Descendants* "damn near perfect," and A.O. Scott of the NY Times praised it saying that "every moment of the movie feels utterly and unaffectedly true." Our local critic gave the movie 5 stars and gives credit to the director for capturing "the complexity of emotional reactions that grief stirs." We are equally enthusiastic and give *The Descendants* our top grade. **GRADE A**

**DETROIT:** (2017) Kathryn Bigelow who directed this gut-wrenching story of one of the darkest moments during the civil unrest that shook Detroit in the summer of 1967 is the only woman ever to win an Oscar for Best Director. That was for *The Hurt Locker* in 2010 which in addition to earning her the Oscar also won the Academy Award for Best Picture. Bigelow is no stranger to telling true stories. *Zero Dark Thirty*, a film about tracking down Osama bin Laden, was another highly acclaimed film coming from her direction. *Detroit* is an important film for this moment in our country's history and it is a well-made film. But I do not believe it is a film all our readers would enjoy. There is a high level of violence and a large portion of the film realistically shows unrelenting police brutality with no justification. And, of course justice is nowhere to be found in the justice system. One reviewer, Sean Burns, noted that ironically this film was released on a day when the President of the United States advocated roughing up suspects while uniformed police cheered on live television. Barbara and I were both moved by this film. "Moved" is a more accurate description than "we both enjoyed" the film. I wish it would be viewed by those most in need of its observations. Sadly, that will not happen. **GRADE B+**

**THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA:** Just about the only reason to see this movie is Meryl Streep. Streep and, maybe, the clothes. It's a trite plot with mostly stereotyped characters, but Streep is so much fun to watch that you don't mind. She plays Miranda Priestly, the tyrannical managing editor of a trend-setting fashion magazine. Streep is marvelous in the role. You can't help but like her even when she's at her bitchiest best. Anne Hathaway is Andy, the would-be journalist who settles for a job as Miranda's second assistant. Miranda never remembers Andy's name and refers to her as "the fat girl," because she's a size six. Nigel (Stanley Tucci), Miranda's loyal lieutenant, becomes Andy's friend and protector. He informs her that size zero is the new 2, six is the new 8, and 8 is the new 14. Adrian Grenier (TV's *Entourage*) is Hathaway's boyfriend, and the charming Australian, Simon Baker (*Something New*) is the "other man." I want to call attention to Emily Blunt who is excellent as Miranda's first assistant. The film is based on a best-selling novel by Lauren Weisberger, who knows whereof she speaks: She worked for Anna Wintour at Vogue Magazine, although she insists that Wintour is not the model for Miranda. I saw this movie with some friends in Chicago and we all agreed that the movie itself wasn't worth more than a C+, But, because Streep is so sensational, I have to give this one a B. **GRADE B.**

**DIANE:** (2018) Mary Kay Place plays the title middle-aged woman who seems to spend most of her time caring for her loved ones. She has a drug addicted son and a cousin dying of cancer whom she visits daily. In addition, she cares for three aging aunts, bringing them casseroles and spending time with them. Diane also works in a soup kitchen caring for those less fortunate. As we see her interact with others, we learn something about them and a lot about Diane. We learn that there is an event in her past that she remembers with regret, and we think that perhaps her caring for others is a way to atone for her past sin. Or perhaps, she is simply a good woman who truly cares about others. It is interesting that when she is trying to get her son into rehab for the umpteenth time, he says "Why can't you leave me alone." When he shakes his drug habit, exchanging for religious fervor, and is trying to nag her into joining his fundamentalist church, she echoes back those same words. But another scene offers some hope that she has bonded anew with her son. In the final scene, she is elderly. All her beloved aunts are gone, but now she cares for birds, putting food out for them in winter. Director Kent Jones, who wrote the screenplay as well, has several documentaries to his credit, but this is his first feature. Gary and I agree that Place is wonderful in the role, and that she is surrounded by some fine actors. The movie was a film festival favorite and, like many festival favorites is a bit slow to find its way. The slowness of the film may be the reason that audiences grade it lower than did the critics on *Rotten Tomatoes*. I was delighted by *Diane*, but Gary thought there was a bit too much wallowing in depression, so his grade is slightly lower. **GRADE B+/B**



**THE DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL:** (2015) We went to see this movie because it has gotten rave reviews from most critics. It got 93% on *Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer*. However, we were underwhelmed. The best part of the movie, for me, was the incorporation of animated cartoons to punctuate Minnie's thoughts and internal conversations. That kept me involved for a while in the story of Minnie's preoccupation with boys and sex. (Fifteen-year-olds must have changed dramatically since I was that age!) *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* is set in 1978 San Francisco and the sex and drugs that apparently were part of that culture are rampant. Bel Powley is believable as a fifteen-year-old, which is no small feat for a 23-year-old actress. Alexander Skarsgård is good as Monroe. We first meet him as Minnie's mother's boyfriend, but soon the 35-year-old begins an affair with the teenager. It's to the actor's credit that we didn't view him as quite the creep that he is. We always like Kristin Wiig, and she is characteristically excellent as Millie's mom. For those who avoid movies with nudity, four-letter-words and drugs, they should avoid this one. We did think the sex itself was handled rather tastefully. "Honesty," "audacity," and "achingly apt" are words of praise the critics used, but Gary and I were eventually bored with Minnie's story. The poster has a quote that calls the movie "hilarious." We consider that an exaggeration, although some in our theater audience seemed to find it funnier than we did. Perhaps our younger readers might find it so. **GRADE C**

**DICK JOHNSON IS DEAD:** (2020 on Netflix) I was drawn to this movie because it holds an impressive approval rating of 100% on Rotten Tomatoes based on 53 reviews. The film premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Special Jury Award for Innovation in Non-fiction Storytelling. *Dick Johnson Is Dead*, now streaming on Netflix, is definitely an eccentric documentary, but it is also deeply moving and humorous. Kirsten Johnson, longtime documentary cinematographer, co-wrote and directed the movie which stars her elderly dad, retired clinical psychologist Richard Johnson. He is not dead, but in real life he is dying of natural causes and suffers early signs of dementia which worsen during the film making. He thought the film was a great idea and seemed to have fun making it. I think he will coax grins from even the most stoic audiences and the camera loves him. Filming a series of death enactments seems like a strange way of coping with actual impending death, but it is clearly cathartic for both father and daughter. But it is so much more than a few creative death scenes and a filmmaker's fanciful vision of afterlife. And it is more than a filmmaker's love letter to a dying father. It is as much a tribute to a long dead mother. Barbara and I agree it is a strange movie like no other we have seen and is a movie we cannot put a grade on. We have to join the long list of critics who approve this unorthodox film. **GRADE !?!**

**DIE ANOTHER DAY:** For pure escapist entertainment filled with creative fights and spectacular explosions give me Bond, James Bond every time. However, I can only take so much of that kind of entertainment. If this movie had been only 90 minutes long, I might have given it a B, but it goes on and on and on--over two hours long. That's a few too many fights and explosions. Pierce Brosnan is, without doubt, the second best Bond ever, and the addition of Halle Berry as Jinx, the American Super Spy, is inspired. The double entendres come with regularity and they make me laugh. The opening sequence is very exciting and the visuals under the credits are the best thing in the movie. But, the my-car-has-more-gadgets-than-your-car chase scene got ridiculous, and, after Iceland, everything seemed repetitive. Gary even dozed off during one special effects sequence! We liked John Cleese as Q and Judi Dench as M, and the North Korean with diamonds imbedded in his face was interesting. The film has been directed by Lee Tamahori, whose credits include *Once Were Warriors* and *Mulholland Falls*. As Roger Ebert said in his review, Tamahori has tilted the movie away from humor and toward pure action. I would have appreciated more humor. **GRADE C+**

**THE DIG:** (2021 available for streaming on Netflix) Don't let the title scare you away. *The Dig* is an endearing story adapted from a work of fiction by John Preston which itself was based on real events. Two amateur archaeologists uncover one of the greatest finds of the twentieth century. The acting elevates this already fascinating story. Ralph Fiennes plays Basil Brown, a humble self-taught archeologist, and Carey Mulligan plays Edith Pretty, a widowed landowner who hires Brown to excavate some mysterious mounds on her estate. It is the 1930s and war is right around the corner. The film is a reminder that the past lives on through the things we leave behind. As you might expect, there's a lot of digging in *The Dig*. That could be boring; But Barbara and I didn't find it so. The excavation of an Anglo-Saxon ship from the Dark Ages, the wealth of treasures found on board, and the added urgency of a looming war helped. But a well written screenplay, masterful direction, and a talented cast earned the movie 86% from both critics and audiences. **GRADE A-**

**DINER:** (1982) Watching a movie you remember fondly from years ago is sometimes disappointing. *Diner*, the first of Barry Levinson's Baltimore trilogy, is definitely not disappointing even when viewed 32 years later. We watched it on cable and enjoyed it every bit as much as we did in 1982. Tim Daly, Steve Gutenberg, Paul Riser, Kevin Bacon Daniel Stern and Mickey Rourke are old friends who hang out in a Baltimore diner. Stern is the only married one—Ellen Barkin plays his wife—although Gutenberg is planning to get married provided his fiancée can pass a test on her knowledge of the Baltimore Colts. It's fun but also a little sad to see these actors when they were oh, so young. We may have to watch the other two movies in the Baltimore trilogy, *Tin Men* (1987) and *Avalon* (1990). Give *Diner* another look. We think you'll like it.

**DINNER RUSH:** (2000 release that we saw on video.) This film is all about cooking, Italian restaurants, an arrogant chef, bookmaking, and the mob. The story unfolds between scenes of frantic activity in the kitchen of a popular restaurant in Tribeca. Danny Aiello is the owner and bookmaker. One of his sons is the celebrated chef and the other is the sous chef. We rented the DVD on the recommendation of reader Berwyn F., IL. He particularly liked the cooking scenes, as did I. Gary wasn't as engaged by the activity in the kitchen, and thought it got in the way of the story. However, the ending tied things up nicely, and he liked the film almost as much as I did. However, he thinks people who enjoy the cooking scenes will like it best. Sandra Bernhard appears as an irritating food critic, and Marc Margolis is an insufferable art critic. John Corbett also appears as a guy who works on Wall Street. **THUMBS UP**

**DIRTY HARRY** 1971 (HBO Max) The original *Dirty Harry* movie stands up fairly well, thanks to Clint Eastwood. At times, though, it does seem rather amateurish, and the mayor, in particular was a terrible actor. But the opening montage with the credits superimposed over it, was great. Not a word was spoken, but it set up the killer and San Francisco Inspector Harry Callahan. Callahan got in trouble with his department higher-ups because of his brutal use of excessive force, and we hope that he wouldn't have a job today. The movie probably encouraged police to use excessive force and torture, which would no longer be tolerated, but it was 50 years ago when the movie came out. Critic Roger Ebert wrote, "*If there aren't mentalities like Dirty Harry's at loose in the land, then the movie is irrelevant. If there are, we should not blame the bearer of the bad news.*" It makes today's viewer wonder how many police officers are dirty Harry

fans. Eastwood delivers the signature *Dirty Harry* line. "Do you feel lucky, punk" with relish. There were four sequels made with Inspector Harry Callahan as hero: *Magnum Force* in 1973; *The Enforcer* in 1976; *Sudden Impact* in 1983; *The Dead Pool* in 1988. We pondered what/how to grade this movie. We both remember being impressed in 1971. Although Gary thought it held up rather well, we decided in today's atmosphere, we couldn't give a rogue cop story a high grade. We decided to cop out (pun intended) and leave a grade up to anyone who watches it.

**DIRTY PRETTY THINGS:** This is a well-crafted movie that puts interesting characters in a compelling situation. Stephen Frears, who directed the film, obviously enjoys looking at the lives of people who exist under the radar of conventional society. Two of his American films are *The Grifters* (1990) and *High Fidelity* (2000)--movies that we particularly liked. He also directed *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) about Pakistani immigrants in London. In *Dirty Pretty Things* we meet a cab driver from Nigeria and a young woman from Turkey, both trying to get along in a London that doesn't make it easy for illegal immigrants to survive. Okwe works two jobs: driving a cab by day, working as a night clerk in a hotel at night, and dodging immigration authorities all the time. He is sharing a room with Senay (Audrey Tautou, *Amelie*)--she sleeps there at night and he sleeps there when she is at work as a hotel maid. A grisly discovery one night in a hotel room plunges Okwe into the midst of a mystery. It is a pleasure to see a film in which all the characters are interesting and the mystery is tightly plotted. It is never predictable, always intriguing. We give it a B+. **GRADE B+**

**THE DISASTER ARTIST:** (2017) *This is a satisfying movie about the making of a really dreadful movie. When The Room* was released in 2003, some critics called it the worst movie ever made, but it gradually gained a cult following. Like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, it is often screened at midnight and the audience is encouraged to wear wigs, interact with the dialogue and throw footballs around the theater. *The Room* was produced, directed, and financed by Tommy Wiseau, who also played the lead. His friend, Greg Sestero played the second lead. It is an understatement to say that Tommy Wiseau was a strange character. He was a terrible actor who lied to everyone about his age and where he was born, and to this day, no one knows where he got the 6 million to make the movie. Sestero, who has remained friends with Wiseau, published a book in 2013 titled *The Disaster Artist*. He said that it was his goal in writing the book to see it made into a movie. He achieved his goal. A bare three weeks after being published James Franco and Seth Rogan called him to express interest in making the book into a movie. Fifteen years ago, Sestero was making a movie he didn't want anyone to see. Ten years ago, a reporter told him that the movie had become a cult hit. Five years ago he wrote his memoir, and in March he might be going to the Oscars. Wiseau and Sestero are thrilled with the film and with the way James Franco and his younger brother, Dave, portrayed them in *The Disaster Artist*. James Franco gets kudos for his directing, which, his brother reports, he did as Tommy Wiseau. Franco never broke character when he was on the set. If you see the film, be sure to stay when the credits begin to roll because there are scenes that demonstrate how faithful *The Disaster Artist* is to that original. Gary and I particularly enjoyed those final scenes, but only give the movie a grade of B. **GRADE B**

**DISCONNECT:** (2012) As we become more connected in cyberspace are we becoming more disconnected in our personal lives? It isn't a new question, and the movie doesn't give an answer, but they pose the question in a gripping screenplay with superb performances. Last week we had an example of how social media helped the authorities identify the men responsible for the Boston Marathon Bombing. That's the plus of social media. This film shows the flip side. In three loosely interconnected stories we meet three families whose lives are affected by the Internet. In the first, a young loner who appears "weird" to his classmates is humiliated in a cyber prank. Jason Bateman, outstanding in his first dramatic role, plays the boy's disconnected father and Hope Davis is his clueless mother. Of course, teenagers didn't communicate well with their parents before the Internet, but the impersonal nature of chat rooms allows them to divulge everything to strangers, thereby insuring that their parents will be the last to know. In the second story, a young couple has their identity stolen. It might be because the wife, who can't connect with her husband and is grieving over the death of their infant son, spends time in a grief chat room. In the third story, a journalist convinces a young man who provides internet sex for a price to submit to an interview—an interview that has dire consequences for both of them. Perhaps the best line in the film is when the young man tells the reporter that she, and not he, is the one who exploits people. Max Thieriot is terrific as the young man. In fact, we thought all the teenagers were outstanding. Some critics feel that the subject matter is old news and that the film is old fashioned. That may be, but we like "old-fashioned," and we thought the movie was powerful. **GRADE A-**

**THE DISH:** (A 2000 film) Why can't Hollywood make films that are as funny, moving and heartwarming as this Australian movie? *The Dish* earned nine nominations from the Film Critics Circle of Australia and placed second for the People's Choice Awards at the 2000 Toronto Film Festival. The story is set in Parkes, New South Wales, a small town that is the site of the largest radio telescope in the Southern Hemisphere. When the Apollo 11 astronauts landed on the moon on July 20, 1969, the television pictures were relayed to us from Parkes. This movie introduces us to the men who manned the radio telescope: Cliff (Sam Neill), the manager, Mitch (Kevin Harrington) the engineer, Glenn (Tom Long), the shy computer engineer, and Al (Patrick Warburton--Puddy from TV's SEINFELD) a NASA scientist assigned to assist the Australians. We worry with these men when it looks like the transmission will fail. We also meet some of the proud townspeople--the mayor and his children, the visiting American Ambassador, a bumbling security guard and other assorted characters. The humor is gentle, and the emphasis is on personal relationships. But, there is also the thrill of Apollo 11 and the teamwork that made it possible. I guarantee that if you see this movie you will remember the pride and exultation of that "giant leap for mankind." **GRADE: BARBARA B+, GARY B**

**DISOBEDIENCE:** (2018) Starring Rachel Weisz and Rachel McAdams this is a story of forbidden love that is as devastating as it is skillfully crafted. A successful New York photographer (Weisz) returns home after learning of the death of her estranged father. She is returning to the same London Orthodox Jewish community that shunned her decades earlier for her attraction to a childhood friend (McAdams). This is the first English-language film for Chilean filmmaker Sebastián Lelio who directed and co-authored the screenplay. Lelio also co-authored and directed *A Fantastic Woman*, a film about a transgender woman, that won an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film earlier this year. (See Archives under *F*) *Disobedience* is a slow moving independent film with a paucity of dialogue that could never be mistaken for a typical Hollywood effort. It is remarkable how much of the story is told without words. Thanks to two standout leading performances, and a great supporting one, the effort works and at times is powerful. Exploring freedom and the right to choose in an Orthodox Jewish community added to Barbara's and my enjoyment, but we agree that it might not be the best introductory film if you have not developed a taste for international films. **GRADE B**

**DISTURBIA:** In spite of a rather preposterous climax, this is a pretty good thriller. Many critics have compared it to Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, albeit inferior to that classic film. Ever since we saw the young actor, Shia LaBeouf, in *Holes*, we have watched his career with interest. Here he is Kale, a high school student who is troubled because of his father's death in a car accident. Because Kale was driving when the accident occurred, he blames himself. Depressed and sullen, an off-hand remark in Spanish class causes him to attack his Spanish teacher. Charged with assault, an understanding judge sentences him to three months house arrest, complete with an ankle bracelet that restricts him to his house and yard. Bored out of his mind, he starts watching his neighbors. A sexy new neighbor named Ashley (Sarah Roemer) and a strange and possibly sinister man named Turner (David Morse) attract most of his attention. Soon, Ashley, and Kale's goofy friend Ronnie join in the surveillance. The three adolescent detectives begin to suspect that Turner may be a serial killer. The suspense builds and there are some truly frightening moments before the over-the-top ending. But the real reason the film works is because LaBeouf is an incredibly appealing young man who is developing into a terrific actor. One critic recently referred to him as "the new Tom Hanks." (That probably doesn't thrill Mr. Hanks. I know it makes me feel very old.) Of course, David Morse is a marvelous villain, so soft-spoken and at the same time, so malevolent. Carrie-Anne Moss is Kale's mother. We think you might enjoy this one. **GRADE B**

**DIVERGENT:** (2014) We didn't go to the movie theatre to see this when it came out, but watched it recently on HBO. We liked it. Shailene Woodley, who stunned audiences in the Oscar-winner, *The Descendants*, gained a following among young people with this movie, adapted from a dystopian book series by Veronica Roth. Most critics thought it was a pale imitation of *The Hunger Games* series, and criticized it as "bland" and "banal" with a pat romance designed for teenagers. We, however, thought it was interesting, sometimes exciting and almost always entertaining. We do agree that it was a bit long, and a shorter running time might have heightened the suspense. The story describes a future walled city, formerly known as Chicago, where everyone is divided into factions according to their tested virtues. The smartest are in "Erudite," the bleeding-heart liberals are in "Abnegation" and the warriors are in "Dauntless." There are two other factions and some homeless types who belong to no faction. Everyone's motto seems to be "Faction before blood." The love story is capably provided by Woodley and Theo James, who is best known for dying in Lady Mary's bed in the first season of *Downton Abbey*. They are both easy on the eyes. Woodley's Tris, had chosen Dauntless as her faction, but she is really a Divergent. She had the qualities of all the factions and that is seen as a threat to the powers that be. I won't go into the twisted story, but you can bet that at some point Woodley will lead a small band bent on eliminating the powers that want to take control over all the factions. The cast includes Kate Winslett, Ashley Judd, Tony Goldwyn and Miles Teller (so good in *Whiplash*). Gary, who normally dislikes anything close to Science Fiction, enjoyed this one. We give it a B. **GRADE B**

**THE DIVINE ORDER:** (2017) This subtitled film is Switzerland's official entry for the Academy Awards in the Best Foreign Language category. It is not only entertaining but a shocking reminder that as recently as 1971, women could not vote in all democratic countries. *The Divine Order* is about Swiss women's struggle to convince men that they should be given a right they considered a human right. 1971 was eight years after Iran and Morocco, nine years after Algeria, and more than half a century after the United States passed the 19th Amendment acknowledging women's right to vote. Nora is a young housewife and mother who lives with her handsome husband and two sons in a quiet Swiss village. The village and family peace, however, change when Nora begins to work for women's voting rights. It is probably no accident that the protagonist of this movie was named Nora, as was the oppressed protagonist in Henrik Ibsen's legendary play, *A Doll's House*. In Switzerland in 1971 men were men and women were only what men said they could be and the consensus was that females belonged in the bedroom and the kitchen. The film is not without humor. In one scene Nora announces to her husband, sons and nasty live-in father-in-law that from now on they can get their own milk and take their own dishes to the sink. Her son looks at her with genuine puzzlement. "But ... we're boys." *The Divine Order* has a lot going for it: an appealing women's-rights theme, humor, likeable characters, and great cast. Barbara and I liked the film even though we agree it is unlikely to win the Oscar. **GRADE B+**

**THE DIVINE SECRETS OF THE YA-YA SISTERHOOD:** Barbara asked me to write the review on this one because it sounds like a woman's film and perhaps needs a male viewpoint. Roger Ebert hated the film and gave it only half a star. Both Barbara and I loved it, giving it a solid "A." Either Roger is off or we are, and I am willing to say that Ebert had an off day. To our way of thinking, this heart-warming film is blessed with excellent acting and outstanding writing. In the opening scene, four little girls bond for life in a campfire ritual set in rural Louisiana. The all-star cast includes Sandra Bullock, Ellen Burstyn, Maggie Smith, Shirley Knight, Ashley Judd, and James Garner. Also notable are Irish actress Fionnula Flanagan and Scottish actor Angus MacGadyen. The film marks the directorial debut of Callie Khoari, who wrote the screenplay for *Thelma & Louise*. The richly textured story (or muddled story, depending on your viewpoint) covers a period from 1939 through the mid 1990s. We laughed, we cried, and we thoroughly enjoyed this one. Let us know your view.

**THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY:** This film has gotten rave reviews mostly, I suspect, because it's a true story of exceptional heroism. When *Elle* France editor Jean-Dominique Bauby was 43 he suffered a massive stroke that paralyzed his entire body, except for his left eye. The doctors called it "locked-in syndrome," meaning he was alive and conscious but unable to communicate. A dedicated speech therapist devised a way for him to communicate by blinking his eye. Later, an assistant, with great patience and caring, helped him write the book about his experience upon which the film is based. We see through Bauby's one good eye as he lies motionless in his hospital bed, but we can hear his thoughts. Since the only other two things—besides his left eye—that still worked were his mind and his imagination, he used them to create an amazing world. The film is in French with subtitles and the only familiar face is that of Max Von Sydow who plays Bauby's father. Gary said he felt curiously unmoved by the film, mostly because he kept thinking of improvements that could have been made to the communication system they used. While we greatly admire the man and his accomplishment, we can't go higher than a B for the film. **GRADE B**

**DJANGO UNCHAINED:** Some say that screenwriter/director/producer Quentin Tarantino is an acquired taste. But Barbara and I were impressed with his brilliant screenplay from the time we saw *True Romance*, his first. His reputation grew quickly and we were blown away by the genius of *Pulp Fiction*. *Kill Bill* and *Inglourious Basterds* made Tarantino one of Hollywood's hottest writer/directors. *Django Unchained* is his latest release and torrents of fake blood and quirky humor, for which he is famous, continues. It is hard to put

a descriptive label on his films, but I would call with this one a "Slavery Revenge Western Fantasy Melodrama." The movie opens in 1858 just two years before the Civil War started. Oscar winner Jamie Foxx is a terrific choice to play the title role of Django who has lived the horrors of slavery. Another Oscar winner, Christoph Waltz, nearly steals the film playing an immensely likable German-born bounty hunter while Leonardo DiCaprio gives an inspired interpretation of Calvin Candie, owner of an infamous plantation called "CandyLand." Samuel Jackson, shows us a side we haven't seen, playing Candie's "house slave." Playing the small but important role of Django's wife, who was torn from him in the slave trade, is Kerry Washington. It must be nearly impossible for any Hollywood actor to turn down an opportunity to appear in a Tarantino film for in the cast, albeit sometimes hidden in makeup and costume, are Kevin Costner, Kurt Russell, Don Johnson, Sacha Baron Cohen, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Jonah Hill, Bruce Dern, Robert and Keith Carradine, Treat Williams, Anthony La Paglia, and even Quentin Tarantino himself. Some of the scenes are as brilliant and entertaining as any Tarantino has brought us in the best of his films. But Barbara and I both felt the 2 hours and 46 minutes running time was too long. Some scenes dragged and some seemed superfluous. There was also a degree of realistic brutality that was almost too intense to watch. Restraint is difficult if not impossible for Tarantino. But the movie is exciting and, at times, explosively funny. It may not be as good for us as **Pulp Fiction**, but it still earns a high grade. **GRADE B+**

**DODGEBALL: A TRUE UNDERDOG STORY:** Based on glowing reviews by both Ebert and Roeper and our admiration for the talents of both Ben Stiller and Vince Vaughn, we decided to take a chance on this comedy. After fifteen minutes, we feared we had made a tragic error. But the film picked up from there and even had some "laugh out loud scenes." Barbara and I think it was supposed to be a wickedly funny satire about sports movies, but it fell a little short. Gary Cole and Jason Bateman as a sport commentator and the color guy on ESPN 8 are rarely mentioned in reviews of this film, but we thought they were quite funny. If you are desperate to see a film in a summer drought of films and you are looking for a couple hours of absurd humor, take a chance. Even though it works at times, we couldn't rate the film higher than a C. Watch for a cameo from a famous sports figure near the end of the film. **GRADE C**

**DOGVILLE:** (2003 Release) This is an allegorical tale told by Lars von Trier, a filmmaker who is nothing if not provocative. The film looks like a play with the tiny town of Dogville laid out in chalk lines on a black soundstage floor. The inhabitants move in and out of their houses opening and closing invisible doors. It looks a bit like a set for *Our Town*, and even has an unseen narrator (John Hurt) who talks much like the stage manager in Wilder's play. The film is divided into a Prologue and nine chapters, each one with a descriptive title, a la Charles Dickens. The narrator introduces us to the townspeople in the Prologue: they are unremarkable, hard-working and poor. Tom Edison (Paul Bettany) seems to be the moral leader of the town, although he is a would-be writer not a preacher. He calls town meetings and lectures the residents. Grace (Nicole Kidman) arrives in town one night. She seems to be running away from someone or something. Tom persuades the people of Dogville to give Grace two weeks to make a place for herself in the community by helping each family. The townspeople do befriend her, but as it becomes more and more apparent that there is some danger in protecting her, their attitudes begin to change. The acting is uniformly excellent and the cast features Patricia Clarkson, Chloe Sevigny, Ben Gazzara, Philip Baker Hall, Stellan Skarsgard, Lauren Bacall and Blair Brown. Kidman and Bettany are outstanding.

This film has been criticized as an Anti-American polemic and a denunciation of our Midwest. That seems to be a rather narrow view, in our opinion. We saw it as a cynical view of all human nature--not just American human nature. Over the closing credits are a series of photographs from the depression, the civil rights struggle, and of the homeless. That does seem to put it our laps. The people of Dogville give voice to moral values, but don't always act in a moral way. That reminded me of a line from a recent Daily Show--the "fake" news show on Comedy Central. In a segment about the prisoner abuse in Iraq, a "correspondent" said, "Others shouldn't judge us by our actions, but by our principles. Just because we abused prisoners in Iraq doesn't mean we would do it."

One critic called it a Christian allegory, and I can see that point of view. The film does present a conflict between New Testament forgiveness and Old Testament vengeance. It asks this question: Should human beings be forgiven for doing what human beings do? Or is that arrogance? I also found myself thinking of Diogenes, who walked the streets of Athens with his lantern looking for an honest man. The film is very long--177 minutes running time--but it didn't seem long to us. We were fascinated. It is challenging viewing and, we think, quite brilliant. Grades from the critics have ranged from A to F. The grade from us is A, although we suspect many who see Dogville will not enjoy it. We went to the film on the recommendation of Movieviewers Diane and Lee U. They thought it was a significant film that we should definitely see. We're glad we did. **GRADE A**

**DOLEMITE IS MY NAME:** (2019--*Netflix*) Rudy Ray Moore, was an American comedian, singer, actor, and film producer. He developed the character Dolemite during his early comedy records. The recordings often featured Moore delivering profanity-filled rhyming poetry, which later earned Moore the nickname "the Godfather of Rap". Moore spent most of his earnings from the records to finance the movie **Dolemite**, which appeared in 1975 and has been described as "one of the great blaxploitation movies" of the 1970s. The movies that followed were **The Human Tornado**, **The Monkey Hustle**, and **Petey Wheatstraw: The Devil's Son-in-Law** plus a sequel to his first film, **The Return of Dolemite**. Eddie Murphy, in an Oscar-nominated performance, played Moore with boundless energy. We watched the entire movie (*Netflix*) without realizing that Murphy was playing a real person. Critics loved **Dolemite Is My Name**, giving it 97% on the *Tomatometer*, with audiences not far behind. We were not that enthusiastic. We didn't find anything very funny in the movie, except for the making of Moore's first movie. That movie itself was truly awful, but black audiences loved it and made Moore a star, although little of his work reached the mainstream white audience. I guess our "whiteness" colored our reaction to **Dolemite Is My Name**, but we can appreciate the history. In the 1970s, black audiences weren't seeing anyone that looked like them in the movies that came out of Hollywood, hence the popularity of blaxploitation movies. The history deserves a higher grade than Gary and I can give this film. **GRADE C+**

**DOM HEMMINGWAY:** (2013) The long opening monologue by the title character tells us a great deal. Dom Hemmingway is loud, vulgar, garrulous, insecure, and vulnerable. In the hands of Jude Law it is a magnificent performance. Law plays a larger-than-life safecracker who has just been released after twelve years in prison and is intent on making up for lost time. He has a short fuse and to say he has anger issues is severely understating it. Hemmingway is equally scary and funny and he is not a nice chap. In his own cockney words he will "gut you with a dull cheese knife and sing Gilbert and Sullivan while doing it." This is a high energy film that will keep you off balance. It is the kind of movie that many will hate and others will passionately love. Though it is not a movie for everyone, Barbara and I agree that if you are a Jude Law fan, it is one you should put on your "to see" list. **GRADE B**

**DON JON:** Another movie about sex addiction, but in this one, Jon (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is compulsive about jerking off to internet porn. He finds it more satisfying than sex with a real live woman, although he has no trouble enticing hot #10s into his bed. Jon is compulsive about several things: His gym workouts, his apartment, his car, his church, his friends and his family. He attends clubs on the weekends with his best friends, and the three objectify every woman they see, rating them on a scale of 1 to 10. Every Sunday he attends church with his parents (Tony Danza and Glenn Headley) and his sister Monica (Brie Larsen, so good in *Short Term 12*). In an amusing recurring bit, we see John in the confessional booth receiving absolution for his sins of the flesh. After church, the family has Sunday dinner together. John and his dad in twin wife-beater undershirts, Monica absorbed in texting on her phone, and his mom obsessing about her non-existent grandchildren. When he meets Barbara (Scarlett Johansson), Jon begins to think about developing a relationship with one very hot woman. Barbara makes him wait for over a month before they have sex, and even with the long buildup, sex with her is not as satisfying to Jon as porn-sex. It takes a friendship with an unusual woman (Julianne Moore) for Jon to learn something about real relationships. In addition to starring in the movie, Gordon-Levitt also wrote and directed it. The actor shows a unique perspective about the appeal of internet pornography and the dangers of objectifying everything in your life. **GRADE B**

**DON'T BREATHE:** (2016) I'm not sure I could articulate the difference between a horror film and a thriller. I know I tend to avoid horror films, but not thrillers. I read one report that said *Don't Breathe* straddles the line between thriller and horror while *Rotten Tomatoes* lists the genre as Horror, Mystery, and Suspense. So we took a chance. Set in a mostly deserted and rundown section of Detroit, the film evolves into a home-invasion thriller that pits three teenage thieves against an aging Iraq War veteran who was blinded in combat. It sounds predictable and easy to guess where your sympathies will lie. But the movie is well written and predictability does not accurately describe it. It would be a travesty to reveal any of the surprises in case you decide to see this thrill ride. It received positive reviews (87%) from critics based on 106 reviews. The film's shifting moral complexities don't make it easy to keep your sympathies in focus. I think anyone who loves horror/thrillers will rate the film higher than Barb and I. But we did like it and think it is well written and acted. **GRADE B**

**DON'T LOOK UP:** 2021 (Netflix) It's a satire about the global climate crisis and the stupid people who don't believe the scientists. It's also about our current state of politics, technology and celebrity culture. Critics didn't care for the movie because it attempted much but most of the barbs didn't consistently land. But enough landed for us to give it a B. One Critic called it "a blunt instrument in lieu of a sharp razor." The setup is simple: Kate Dibiasky (Jennifer Lawrence), an astronomy grad student, and her professor Dr. Randall Mindy (Leonardo DiCaprio) make an astounding discovery of a comet orbiting within the solar system. The problem: it's on a direct collision course with Earth. The other problem is that no one really seems to care. With the help of Dr. Oglethorpe (Rob Morgan), Kate and Randall embark on a media tour that takes them from the office of an indifferent President Orlean (Meryl Streep) and her sycophantic son and Chief of Staff, Jason (Jonah Hill), to the airwaves of *The Daily Rip*, an upbeat morning show hosted by Brie (Cate Blanchett) and Jack (Tyler Perry). Blanchet and Perry are very good at being the vacant, celebrity-obsessed hosts. With only six months before the comet makes impact, managing the 24-hour news cycle and gaining the attention of the social media obsessed public before it's too late proves shockingly comical. But when the comet is visible to the naked eye, some people do look up. Other people (substitute "stupid" for "other") chant "Don't look up," encouraged by their President. Cate Blanchet and Mark Rylance, who plays a tech giant with similarities to Jeff Bezos, Steve Jobs and Elon Musk, sport blindingly white, oversized teeth, which makes them both almost unrecognizable. One of the critics on RT said, "Ultimately, *Don't Look Up* is more than just mean-spirited and smug. It's aggressively those things -- that is, until that sentimental coda." We liked that sentimental coda, and we liked the movie, in spite of it being too long for a satire that pokes fun at everything. **GRADE B**

**DON'T SAY A WORD:** I have to agree with Movieviewer Denny G. (See Readers' Views) on this one: It is truly "preposterous." That it managed to keep us reasonably engaged is a tribute to the acting and the stylish filming techniques. Although I must admit I'm getting tired of films shot almost exclusively with a blue/gray palette. So far this month we've seen this film, *Training Day* and *The Last Castle* and all have that gloomy color scheme. How I long for someone in a red outfit! And some sunshine! But to get back to the movie under review, this one is a standard child-in-danger-father-must-save-her plot. Here, the criminals kidnap Douglas's daughter because they want him to discover the secret locked in the mind of a young mental patient. Brittany Murphy is the semi-catatonic patient who either cannot or will not give up the information. Murphy is very good here. She made a splash with her role as a fashion-challenged teen in *Clueless*, and also appeared in *Girl Interrupted*. I expect we will see a lot more of her. We also liked Jennifer Esposito as a detective who stumbles on a related crime, although her part is a bit of a throwaway. Oliver Platt appears as a colleague of Douglas's. In his review of the movie, Roger Ebert made an interesting observation about Douglas's acting style. He said, "'Douglas has made roles like this his own, and redeems them by skirting just barely this side of overacting--which is about where a character in this plot should be positioned. Shame that his subtler and more human work in movies like *Wonder Boys* is seen by smaller audiences than his fatal/basic/instinct/attraction/disclosure movies." **GRADE C**

**DON'T THINK TWICE:** (2016) This amusing movie is surprisingly touching. *Don't Think Twice* is about a group of friends who are members of a popular New York improv-comedy troupe called "The Commune." One of the members (Keegan-Michael Key) is tapped for a SNL-type TV show, and the rest of the troupe, though happy for his success, is forced to re-evaluate their own careers. They have to face the realization that not everyone is going to have a big break. This is especially poignant for Miles (Mike Birbiglia) who started the group and taught the people who have gone on to greater things. The troupe's improve performances are funny and clever, but the off-stage scenes acquaint us with the real people behind the performers. Gillian Jacobs, Kate Micucci, Tami Sagher and Chris Gethard round out *The Commune* and each gets a chance to shine. We were particularly impressed with Jacobs whom we recognized from a couple of TV series. I was raised in Chicago and remember going to "The Second City" when it was fairly new, so the references to Del Close were particularly nostalgic for me. When Gary moved to the Chicago area, he, too, became a fan of improve-comedy, Second City-style, especially after seeing John Belushi and Harold Ramis on the Chicago stage. Writer/Director Mike Birbiglia said on his *Daily Show* interview, "The movie is about what happens when your dream is being lived by someone else." But that's not all it's about. *Don't Think Twice* asks three profound questions: What is family? What is friendship? What is success? We were pleased with the answers. **GRADE B**

**THE DOOR IN THE FLOOR:** I didn't think *A Widow For One Year* was one of John Irving's better books, but both of us liked this movie which is based on the first third of that novel. Jeff Bridges is one of our favorite actors and in our eyes can do no wrong. He is particularly good at investing flawed characters with humanity and humor. He does this beautifully here. Ted Cole has many unworthy traits, yet you can't help but like him. Kim Basinger has a more difficult job in this film because Ted's wife, Marian, is emotionally dead. She cannot get over the death of their two teenage sons who died in an accident. Ted and Marian have moved to a new place and have a new child--Ruth (Elle Fanning, Dakota's younger sister), but both are still in mourning for their lost sons. On the surface, Ted appears to be moving on, but Marian is overwhelmed by her grief. Ted is a well-known writer and illustrator of children's books. When he hires Eddie (Jon Foster), an aspiring writer to be his assistant, the young man walks into a difficult situation. Ted and Marian have decided on a trial separation and Eddie, who hoped to learn about writing, learns quite a bit more. Basinger must convey her feelings and emotions with her facial expressions because Marian doesn't talk much. We thought she did an excellent job. Elle Fanning looks remarkably like her older sister and may turn out to be every bit as good an actor. Foster is also good, and Mimi Rogers is interesting in a small but pivotal part. But the real reason for seeing this film is Jeff Bridges. A.O. Scott, the New York Times reviewer said, "Jeff Bridges offers perhaps the wittiest and richest piece of screen acting by an American man so far this year." We second that The film was written and directed by Tod Williams.. **GRADE B+**

**DOUBT:** It's 1964, and the students at a Catholic grade school in the Bronx are terrified of their Principal, Sister Aloysius (Meryl Streep). And that, believes Sister Aloysius, is exactly as it should be. The sister doesn't believe in long fingernails, ball point pens, sugar, or any kind of disobedience. No wonder, then, that she is at odds with Father Flynn (Phillip Seymour Hoffman), a likeable Priest who believes in progressive education and a welcoming Church. Sister Aloysius is suspicious of the friendly attitude the Father displays toward the students, and asks a young nun, Sister James (Amy Edwards) to keep her eye on him. When the Father seems to be particularly sympathetic toward the school's only black student, Sister Aloysius becomes convinced that the Priest/student relationship is improper, and the battle begins. John Patrick Shanley is both the writer and director of this screen version of his Pulitzer and Tony winning play. The conflict between Aloysius and Flynn is the conflict between old and new, between status quo and change, between certainty and doubt. Shanley uses the windy weather as a metaphor for the winds of change brought by the 1960s. Shanley doesn't try to resolve the conflict between infallibility and uncertainty. He leaves us doubting. The performances are outstanding. What a pleasure to see such talents as Streep and Hoffman light up the screen. Adams is superb as the young nun, and Viola Davis, as the mother of the student Father Flynn befriends, deserves an Oscar nomination. The scene between Davis and Streep is one of the film's best. We agree with the comments that closed Roger Ebert's review of the film: *Doubt has exact and merciless writing, powerful performances and timeless relevance. It causes us to start thinking with the first shot, and we never stop. Think how rare that is in a film.* We gave this on an A. **GRADE A**

**DOWN WITH LOVE:** The naughty innuendo of those Rock Hudson & Doris Day movies of the late 50s and early 60s were as close to sex as films got in those days. I remember enjoying *Pillow Talk*, *Lover Come Back* and *Send Me No Flowers* then, but I'm not sure I want to spend the time watching one of them today. And I certainly wish I hadn't spent the time watching this sendup of those so-called sex comedies. The fact that I knew where the film was headed didn't bother me. What bothered me was that it was so tedious and boring getting there. There were a couple of funny bits, but only a couple. Many of the attempts at parody fell with a thud. About the only thing I enjoyed were the costumes and the sets. Midway through the film Gary turned to me and said, "I'm incredibly bored." Gary also thought that Renee Zellweger was miscast--he just doesn't think she is cute or pretty enough to play a surrogate Doris Day. And Ewan McGregor, who has demonstrated tremendous talent in other films, looks pretty good here, but he is no Rock Hudson. To quote the *Washington Post*: "It (the film) makes anyone with a long memory see how good an actor Rock Hudson was. I mean that quite sincerely; to get anywhere near Hudson's ebullience, confidence and sexual magnetism, poor li'l Ewan must work overtime." David Hyde Pearce does his best to fill the sidekick role with limited success, but we thought Jeri Ryan (from TV's *Boston Public*) did a nice turn as a stewardess. Loved the hairdo! Gary liked Sarah Paulson as Vicki Hiller, the cigarette-smoking editor who discovers Novak's work. We agree with the *Washington Post* reviewer who said that the film's greatest flaw was the strain of sustaining the parody over the long haul. "It's like a "Saturday Night Live" sketch on a \$60 million budget." We just can't recommend this one. Grade C-, and that's being generous. **GRADE C-**

**DOWNFALL:** (2004 release that we saw on video.) This German film chronicles the last days before Nazi surrender in 1945. Hitler is holed up in the infamous bunker with a handful of staff and loyal followers. The film is based partly on a memoir a secretary wrote about her experiences. Bruno Ganz is extraordinary as Adolph Hitler. We see a man who has descended into madness. He can be kind and caring on a personal level but is a raging lunatic when confronted with the reality of the German collapse. Until the very end, Hitler insists that his armies will vanquish the Russians. He is brutal and vicious in the way he deals with anyone who suggests that the war is over. This film reminds us of the power of racism and xenophobia. We must not forget. **THUMBS UP**

**Downsizing:** (2017) You hear "downsizing" a lot these days whether it's empty nesters moving to a smaller house or companies divesting themselves of holdings to increase profits. But the word has a vastly different meaning in this movie. A team of Norwegian scientists discovered a method for miniaturizing the human body. They could successfully shrink people to 0.0364% of their normal size. As a solution to overpopulation, the scientists decided that downsizing was the best hope for the planet. After ten years, villages of small people have spring up all over the world, and Paul (Matt Damon) and his wife (Kristin Wiig) are interested. When they discover that their net worth of \$150,000 becomes \$12 Million in the downsized community of Leisure Land, they sign on the dotted line. It's a clever idea and Alexander Payne, who directed and shares writing credit, has much to say about environmentalism and man's precarious future on our planet. Too bad the movie isn't as good as the idea. Is it a dark fable about how man is destroying the planet, or a cautionary tale of how things never change, or is it a love story? Or all three? It's not clear because it goes in several different directions. However, when Hong Chau appears as a Viet Nam woman who was forcibly downsized and lost her foot in the process of escaping, the movie picks up considerably. Christoph Waltz is Paul's eccentric neighbor who may or may not be involved in something illegal. The movie is a bit of a mess, and Gary thought the ending was unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, it did hold our attention and we enjoyed the actors' performances. What's more, we applaud the creative idea of the movie, so we graded it accordingly. **GRADE B-**

**DOWNTON ABBEY:** (2019) If you loved *Downton Abbey* on the small screen, you are almost sure to love it on the large screen. The story picks up where it left off back in 2015, and introduces a few new characters as the beloved Crawleys and their equally beloved staff prepare for a Royal visit from King George V and Queen Mary. Expect the same plot ingredients that made the fifty-six episode six-season run on TV so popular: conflict, scandal, intrigue, romance. Several subplots give the many fan-favorite characters a chance to display their talent and charms. In this lavishly produced movie, roughly four dozen major and minor characters, both royals and servants, bustle about the screen for two hours. By the end all the loose ends are nicely tied in happy bows. I predict *Downton Abbey* TV fans will flock to the big screen theaters and make this film a box office hit. Barbara and I liked it at least as well as well as our memory of the TV original. **GRADE B+**

**DOWNTON ABBEY: A NEW ERA:** 2022 (Prime Video rental \$5.99) All characters were present in this new Downton Abbey movie sure to please everyone who loved the series. Gary and I are devoted fans, and we loved the movie. Unless you are similarly devoted, you probably won't get what all the fuss is about. Halfway through, I thought that the Downton well had run dry, but the final scenes made me reconsider. There are two stories: One, a film crew wants to use Downton as the setting for a silent movie. And two, the dowager countess has inherited a villa in the South of France, and the Crawley family goes on a grand journey to see the villa and to uncover the mystery of why the Marquis left it to the countess. Lady Mary remains at Downton to oversee the filming while part of the family, and some of the staff, leave for France. The film crew story, in a twist reminiscent of *Singing in the Rain*, provided a glimpse of the late 1920s when audiences wanted "talkies," and explored the problem of a silent era star who had a voice that was not made for talking movies. (It also provided Mr. Mosely with another career and the courage to propose to Phyllis Baxter.) And, although the dowager countess (Maggie Smith) leaves the Downton world, all's right with the rest of the family: the Earl finds out who his father is, his wife finds that her illness isn't fatal, and Tom Branson and his new wife (oh yes, the movie begins with a wedding) have a baby. Even Lady Mary is tempted, but doesn't succumb to an indiscretion. Downstairs, Carson is returning and Thomas Barrow is going off with a movie star. We loved the movie and probably will watch the next one! **GRADE A**

As Holly V. said in the June issue:

"I think like most of us we can't get enough of those delightful characters."

And Denny G. said in the July issue:

"I've adored the brilliant cast over the years - Thank You, Julian Fellowes!"

**DRAFT DAY:** (2014) If the name Ryan Leaf means nothing to you, this football movie may not mean much either. But I am an avid football fan and I remember when Ryan Leaf was drafted, so I really liked *Draft Day*. Of course, it doesn't hurt that I am also a Kevin Costner fan. Costner is Sonny Weaver the general manager of the Cleveland Browns, and is famous, or rather infamous, for having fired his father, a legendary Brown's coach, last year. This year, he is facing draft day with pressure from the Brown's owner, played by Frank Langella, who warns him to "make a splash," or risk being fired. Other pressures include the recent death of his father and the news that his colleague and girlfriend, played by Jennifer Garner, is pregnant. But the girlfriend and his father and mother (Ellen Burstyn) issues are just window dressing. The real story is being "on the clock" for the NFL draft and the wheeling and dealing that goes on before and during the actual draft. I thought it was fascinating. I liked the shots of some of the NFL stadiums, and got excited watching the draft through Sonny's eyes and through the eyes of a couple of the draftees. Gary is enough of a football fan to feel that excitement too. He and I agree that, for us, the movie is a B+, but realize that for non-football fans it may be a C movie. **GRADE B+**

**DREAM HORSE** 2020 (Prime Video a \$0.99 rental) Gary and I saw many previews of this movie when we were going to theatres in early 2020, but never saw the actual film. We have remedied that thanks to Prime Video and friends who reminded us of *Dream Horse*. There is nothing like a movie about a racehorse to quicken the heart of a viewer. I have watched *Seabiscuit* several times and it never fails to bring tears when that amazing horse wins the big race. *Dream Horse* is based on a true story about a horse named Dream Alliance and the Welsh town that was revitalized. (It had to be a true story because otherwise you would never believe it!) Owned by a syndicate of 20 people, it was the dream of checkout clerk Jan Vokes. With no experience, Jan convinces her neighbors to chip in their meager earnings to help her breed and raise a racehorse in the hopes it can compete with the racing elites. The always remarkable Toni Collette plays Vokes, who, with the help of Howard Davies (Damian Lewis), who had some experience with racing syndicates, breeds and raises Dream Alliance to compete and win. At the end, we are told that Jan, Howard, and Brian, Jan's husband, are starting again to raise a racehorse. We hope they will be successful as they were with Dream Alliance who retired in 2012. In his career, he ran 30 races and won £138,646 in prize money. But, the people in the syndicate weren't in it for the money. As Davies told them at the outset, there was less than 1% chance that their horse would ever race. Have you ever felt stirred by a warm sense of connection to the world around you? Well, the Welsh have a word for that precious sensation: "hwyl", and that sense of connection spreads to the whole town. While 2003's *Seabiscuit* will always be an A movie for us, this one comes close. **GRADE A-**

**DREAMGIRLS** Our local critic didn't much care for this one. He thought the musical numbers were terrific, but that it should have stayed on Broadway. It's true that this movie is a filmed version of a hit Broadway musical, but I don't think that's a bad thing. While I can't rank *Dreamgirls* as high as *Chicago*, I did enjoy it. It has great style and energy. I agree with our local critic that the musical numbers were outstanding, but, for me, they weren't worked into the story as creatively as were the songs in *Chicago*. Jennifer Hudson is spectacular as the original lead singer of the trio. The story, loosely based on the career of Diana Ross and The Supremes, is fairly standard show business stuff. It's Hudson's character, Effie, that is the heart of the musical. Replaced as lead singer and spurned romantically by the group's manager/promoter (Jamie Foxx), Effie eventually leaves the group to find herself. Effie's solos are dynamite, especially the show-stopping "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going." Equally good is Eddie Murphy as a James-Brown-type soul singer. He handles the performing of his over-the-top character as capably as he handles the dramatic moments. He sings well, too. Foxx is excellent playing an unsympathetic character (patterned after Motown's Barry Gordy). Beyoncé Knowles projects star-like quality as Deena Jones, the Diana Ross of *Dreamgirls*. She is gorgeous. Anika Noni Rose rounds out the musical trio and she is very good, especially in her dramatic scenes with Eddie Murphy. If you enjoy big Hollywood Musicals, you won't be disappointed in *Dreamgirls*. **GRADE B+ (Barb) A-**

**DREAMER:** Inspired by a true story: Kid falls in love with horse. Horse gets hurt. Horse heals. Kid enters horse in a big race. No one besides the kid thinks the horse can win. Horse wins. I've seen this plot many times before and I've loved it every time. Remember when your kids were little and they wanted the same story read over and over? They appreciated the pleasure of the familiar. I'm like

that with this kind of movie. While *Dreamer* doesn't quite have the drama of *Seabiscuit*, it does have Dakota Fanning. She is remarkable: a child actor who never tries to be cute. She never mugs or pushes. She's just her natural adorable self. Kurt Russell, who plays Fanning's father in the film, told the director John Gatins, "Listen, I've worked with them all. I've worked with Meryl Streep! I guarantee you, [Dakota] is the best actress I will work with in my entire career." I think he's right. Fanning is nicely supported here by Russell as her father, Kris Kristoferson as her grandfather, and Elizabeth Shue as her mother. It was nice to see Shue in a role that fit her so well. She looks like she could be Fanning's mother. Rounding out the excellent cast are Freddy Rodriguez (Six Feet Under), Luis Guzmán, and David Morse as the villain of the piece. The movie is based on the true story of Mariah Storm, who broke a bone and came back to race again. She was the winner of the 1995 Turfway Breeders' cup. In *Dreamer*, the horse is named Soñador, which is Spanish for "dreamer." This is not an A movie, and probably is, as Gary thinks, a B movie, but I'm such a sucker for this kind of film that I have to say B+. **GRADE B+/B**

**THE DREAMERS:**(2003 Release) I could not recommend this Bertolucci film to any but the most ardent foreign film buffs. Bertolucci is an Italian director whose 1972 *Last Tango In Paris* starring Marlon Brando made a tremendous impact in the filmmaking world. I hated *Last Tango*, so I was more than a little curious about how I would react to *The Dreamers*. I liked it quite a bit better than *Last Tango*, but that still only elevated the grade to about a C+. The film is set in Paris in 1968 and deals with the passion and folly of youth. If you have continued reading this far, you probably consider yourself somewhat of a film buff. The main characters in this film have a ravenous passion for movies that reflects their youth as well as the unique historical moment. I recognized many of the film clips and film references, but I'm sure many passed me by. The film is sexually explicit which earns it an NC-17 rating. (Gary wrote this review because I really disliked this movie. Grade D for me.) **GRADE C+/D**

**THE DRESSMAKER:** (2016) "Fashion is the best revenge." That should be the tagline for this rather strange movie starring Kate Winslet and the wonderful Judy Davis. We first saw Davis in *My Brilliant Career* in 1979, enjoyed her in *The Ref* (1994) and every time we have seen her since. That includes *The Dressmaker* in which she plays Winslet's mother, Crazy Molly. Tilly Dunnage (Winslet) has returned to her home town after a long absence to find her childhood home and her mother in an awful state. Tilly was sent away to boarding school when she was 10 after a schoolmate's death for which she may, or may not, have been responsible. She returns an accomplished haute couture designer, determined to get her revenge on the people who made her childhood miserable. I should mention that the film is set in the early fifties when Dior and Balenciaga reigned supreme. Teddy, one of Tilly's schoolmates, has grown up into a gorgeous hunk, appropriately played by Liam Hemsworth. The leads and all the bizarre characters that inhabit the small Australian outback town of Dungatar are excellent. Director Jocelyn Moorhouse has described the movie as "Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* with a sewing machine." The themes of revenge and creativity play out in ways that are unexpected, although I hesitate to comment on the twists and turns of the plot. I can give *The Dressmaker* an A for originality, but this overlong movie deserves only a B from me. Gary agrees. **GRADE B**

**DRINKING BUDDIES:** This is definitely not your typical romantic comedy. In the first place, it's not very funny, and in the second place, it has an ambiguous ending. I doubt that it will be widely distributed in spite of a first-rate cast. Kate (Olivia Wilde) and Luke (Jake Johnson from TV's *New Girl*) are best friends who both work in a Chicago brewery. Apparently, employees are able to drink a glass of beer whenever they want. They regularly have beer with their lunch, and after work Kate and Luke, and some of the other employees, routinely stop at a bar for some more beer. Kate and Luke seem like soul mates, but each is involved with someone else. Kate has been dating Chris (Ron Livingston) and Luke and his girlfriend, Jill (Anna Kendrick) have been skirting around the issue of marriage. The will-they-get-together tension is present here, but it doesn't follow a predictable pattern. That may be why critics like the movie. We did enjoy the natural acting style and realistic dialogue, but we can understand why audiences aren't as enthusiastic as the critics. For example, on Rotten Tomatoes, the critics score is 80%; the audience only 59%. It's just a snapshot of these people over a short period. Nothing much happens and nothing much gets resolved, although they do consume a large quantity of beer. However much we appreciated the naturalness of *Drinking Buddies* we can't give it more than a B-. **GRADE B-**

**DRIVE:** Ryan Gosling is a stunt driver by day and a get-away driver by night. It seems he would rather drive than do anything else. His character is never named: he's simply referred to as "the driver." His after-hours driving skills bring him into contact with two crime bosses played by Ron Pearlman and, in an inspired bit of casting, Albert Brooks. When an attractive neighbor (Carey Mulligan) comes into his life, it leads to an explosive chain of events. The movie has a European feel: the emphasis is not on dialogue but rather on facial expressions. But the measured pace is punctuated by sudden shocking violence that is almost heart-stopping. The violent scenes are incredibly vivid. One, which takes place in an elevator, will be hard to forget. We are never told anything about the driver. What we learn about him is all there on the screen, and when the face on the screen is Gosling's it's impossible to take your eyes off him. The man has incredible screen presence. Anyone who can be memorable as a romantic lover in *The Notebook*, a man in love with a doll in *Lars and the Real Girl*, and the mysterious driver in *Drive* is destined to be a star. We agree with Roger Ebert who thought that the entire film "seems much more real than the usual action-crime-chase concoctions we've grown tired of." We liked it. **GRADE B+**

**DRIVING LESSONS:** Ben is 17 and an only child. His father is a pastor who retreats every night to his bird books. His mother is nuts. She is also controlling, manipulative, domineering and adulterous. Every day she gives Ben a driving lesson which consists of him driving her to her lover's house and then waiting in the car for her to come out. Ben is very shy and because he writes poetry, he is considered a bit weird by his classmates. When he gets a part-time job working for a retired actress, he finds a kindred spirit and a friend. The always delightful Julie Walters (*Educating Rita*, *Calendar Girls*) is the eccentric actress and Laura Linney is Ben's mother. In the hands of a less-skilled actress, this flawed woman could be a caricature, but Linney manages to give her depth and makes her interesting. Ben is played by Rupert Grint (the *Harry Potter* series) and he is excellent. This is a charming little coming-of-age film that has quite a bit to say about friendship and being true to yourself. The Brits seems to have cornered the market on this kind of sentimental comedy. **GRADE B**

**THE DROP:** (2014) This unpredictable dark crime thriller has a lot working for it, not the least of which is the incredible acting talent of Tom Hardy. Our local syndicated reviewer, Bill Goodykoontz, wrote an article touting Tom Hardy "as the greatest actor working today." Everyone has a favorite candidate for greatest actor so I wouldn't want to get into that argument, but given what Barbara and I have



seen from Hardy, we would have to place him high on a short list. The film also has an outstanding supporting cast including James Gandolfini in the last film he completed before his death in 2013 as well as Noomi Rapace the fantastic Swedish actress who originated the role of Lisbeth in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2009)*. That's a powerful cast backed by a brilliant screenplay from novelist Dennis Lehane who also gave us *Mystic River*, *Shutter Island*, and *Gone, Baby, Gone*. This film is based on his novel with the same title. Then there is the Academy Award nominated director, but let's get to the crime drama. The story is set in Brooklyn as are Lehane's three previously mentioned films. Brooklyn is a big place and bad things go on there including, would you believe, various illegal activities. Bob played by Hardy is a kind-hearted bartender who lets the down-and-out drink for free and even takes in an abandoned injured puppy. He soon finds himself at the center of a robbery gone awry and entwined in an investigation that digs deep into the neighborhood's past. There are plot twists that command your complete attention, but you will be rewarded in the end. Without delving into the plot I can tell you that both Barbara and I liked the film, but Barb liked it even more than I. **GRADE A-/A**

**DR. T AND THE WOMEN:** Robert Altman's first movie, M\*A\*S\*H, exploded on the movie world in 1970. His unique style of overlapping and simultaneous dialogue has influenced all subsequent filmmakers. Unfortunately the Altman technique, so fresh and creative in 1970 has now become tired and irritating. This film looks like a Saturday Night Live parody. Dr. Travis is a Dallas gynecologist. His life is overwhelmed with women: a wife, two daughters, a sister-in-law with three little girls, four nurses, and a patient list that seems to include all the upper-class women of Dallas. The opening credits are shot over a chaotic scene in Dr. T's waiting room. It is vintage Altman and it is far too long. Richard Gere comes off the best in this film. Gary thought he was as good as he's ever been. Farrah Fawcett as Dr. T's wife, is also quite good. She plays a woman who is reverting in her mind to a child-like state--a mental illness apparently brought on by having a life that is too perfect. Shelley Long is funny as the doctor's nurse and protector. Kate Hudson, Tara Reid and Laura Dern make up Dr. T's family. They are all fine actors, but, given the Altman technique, we never get to know much about their characters. Helen Hunt doesn't come off as well. She plays an LPGA golf professional. They never should have shown her swinging a club. I have seen golf professionals and this woman is no golfer! To contrast her character with the other Dallas women, she looks rather drab. She wears little makeup and her costume consists of off-white pants that stop at her ankles combined with a baggy white blouse. Not attractive! I'm sorry to say we can't recommend this Altman film even though it has one of the most realistic birth scenes ever shown in a Hollywood movie. **GRADE: C-**

**DRUMLINE:** "One Band, One Sound." That's the goal of the fictitious Atlanta A&T marching band. To achieve that goal, each musician must learn to love the sound of the band more than the sound of his or her instrument. There is no place for individual ego in a championship marching band. It takes tremendous training and discipline to become one band with one sound. If you like marching bands, you will like this movie. Yes, the story is formula and predictable, but the subject makes it unique. Devon (Nick Cannon) is the newcomer to the band. He is a cocky kid who has been given a full four-year scholarship to college because of his skill with the snare drum. He soon butts heads with Sean, (Leonard Roberts) the drumline leader and, until Devon arrived, the best drummer in the band. Orlando Jones is Dr. Lee, the Atlanta A&T bandmaster. Dr. Lee has his own problems: the college president wants him to forsake musicianship for razzle-dazzle, something he is unwilling to do. Throw in a bit of romance between Devon and Laila (the very pretty Zoe Saldana) and you have an entertaining film. The band music, especially the drumming, is exciting, and you will gain a new appreciation of the skill and athleticism present in a marching band. **GRADE B**

**DRUNK STONED BRILLIANT DEAD: The Story of the National Lampoon:** (2015) If you were a teen or older in the 1970's you may remember the irreverent wit, bawdy humor, and exceptional creativity of the *National Lampoon*. Even though the magazine's humor pushed far beyond the boundaries of what was generally considered appropriate and acceptable, it had a far-reaching impact on American humor. Associated with *National Lampoon* was a generation of comedy writers, directors, and performers. Parodying everything from politics, religion, entertainment and the American lifestyle, the *Lampoon* eventually branched into successful radio shows, record albums, live stage revues, TV, and movies, including such winners as *Animal House* and *Caddyshack*. Its influence can be felt every time you turn on the TV and watch "Saturday Night Live" or almost anything on Comedy Central. The film includes great archival footage of early National Lampoon troupe members like Bill Murray, Gilda Radner, John Belushi and Harold Ramis performing. But the main focus of the documentary is the history of the magazine from its rocky beginning through its triumphant peak to its sad end. As we left our seats, I predicted to Barbara that the movie would receive high marks from anyone who read and loved the magazine, but that people who were unfamiliar with *National Lampoon* would find it mediocre at best. This prediction was supported by testimony of a stranger who commented as we left the theater that he absolutely loved the film and that he had fond memories of the magazine. Barbara, who has no memory of ever having seen a copy of the magazine, but appreciated parts of the filmmaking, grades the film a little lower than I do. So, for those readers who fondly remember the *National Lampoon*, I will paraphrase the words on one of the magazine covers which features a cute dog with a pistol to its head: "Go to this movie or we'll shoot the dog." **GRADE B/B-**

**THE DUCHESS:** I am partial to historical costume dramas, especially when they contain a love story, so I very much enjoyed this film. Keira Knightly is Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire. Married at 16 to William Cavendish, a man who seemed able to love his dogs, but was incapable or unwilling to express any love to his wife. Her responsibilities in the marriage were to provide a son and to be loyal. Her one friend, Bess Foster, became the Duke's mistress and the threesome lived together for all of Georgiana's life. Early in the film, The new Duchess tells her husband that while men have many ways to express themselves, women have only their hats and their dresses. In an age when women were little more than chattel, that was a true statement. The costumes were indeed gorgeous and the hairdos not to be believed. Georgiana became famous for her clothes, but she also was renowned for expressing her political opinions. Georgiana's love affair with Charles Grey, a rising politician in the Whig party, became the talk of London. Dominic Cooper, the bridegroom from *Mamma Mia!*, is a suitably handsome and dashing Grey and it's easy to understand his appeal for the sexually repressed Duchess. Charlotte Rampling plays Georgiana's mother and Hayley Atwell is very good as Bess Foster. We were also impressed with Ralph Fiennes. The Duke is an unsympathetic man, but Fiennes was able to show that he was a prisoner of his time and his upbringing. If you like historical dramas told from a woman's point of view, you'll enjoy this one. Gary liked it, but a bit less than I. **GRADE B+/B**

**Note:** *The Duchess of Devonshire was the great-great-great-great Aunt of Princess Diana.*

**DUE DATE:** When I heard that Todd Phillips, director of *Hangover*, arguably the funniest movie of 2009, was bringing out another comedy and it had Robert Downey Jr. in the leading role, I thought it would surely be good. When I learned that Zach Galifianakis, the hottest comedian in Hollywood right now was co-starring, I knew it would be great. Sadly, I was sooo wrong. Barbara and I thought that a movie patterned after one of our all time favorite films, *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, couldn't go too far off track. Opps...wrong again. We agree that the main problem is painful lack of humor in this film. Downey plays a high-strung father-to-be trying to get back to LA to be at his wife's side for his child's birth. A chance encounter with an aspiring actor (Galifianakis) leads to a long cross country road trip in a small car, which someone thought would make a good "buddy" movie. It didn't!!! **GRADE D**

**THE DUKE:** 2022 (Available for \$4.99 rental on Prime Video.) This is a witty comedy/drama that would be easy to overlook, but a lot of fun for those who invest a little time. Runtime 1h 36m. In the lead is British character actor Jim Broadbent playing Kempton Bunton, a gentle but scheming miscreant who believes crime is justified if it serves a greater purpose. Helen Mirren is cast as his endlessly exasperated wife, Dolly Bunton. She works as a charwoman and baby sitter to support the household. This must be the only movie in Helen Mirren's filmography in which she can be seen scrubbing a toilet. You can never go far wrong with Jim Broadbent and Helen Mirren as your leads. The film tells an entertainingly improbable uplifting tale that happens to be absolutely true. In 1961, Kempton Bunton (Broadbent), a 60-year old taxi driver, confessed to stealing a Goya portrait of the Duke of Wellington from the National Gallery in London. It was the first (and remains the only) theft in the Gallery's history. Kempton anonymously let it be known to the authorities that the painting would be returned in exchange for the elderly no longer having to purchase a government license in order to own a TV set. *The Duke* isn't just British, it's Birmingham British, with thick accents that swallow entire sentences before our dull American ears can understand what we just heard. Fortunately Prime Video provides easily read closed captions. The National Gallery theft was the talk of the town, and a media sensation, especially when Bunton's anonymous ransom notes demanded Free Television for Old Age Pensioners and War veterans. Barb and I agree that if the first half of *The Duke* were as good as the second half, it would easily be an A film. But we did like it. **GRADE B+**

**DUMMY:** (2002 release that we saw on video) Steven (Adrien Brody) is a shy sweet and somewhat simple man who, at 30, still lives with his parents (Jessica Walter and Ron Leibman). But he has a dream: He wants to be a ventriloquist. So he quits his job, buys a dummy and practices all the time. He's actually quite good. (And Brody did all the ventriloquist work himself.) Along the way he meets and falls for his employment counselor (Vera Farmiga) who is a single mother with a young daughter. Her daughter thinks the dummy would make a great father. Ilenna Douglas is Heidi, Steven's sister who also lives at home with her parents and is trying to make a career as a wedding planner. Milla Jovovich is Steven's friend, Fangora, who wants to be a singer. All these people are very very strange--some verge on psychotic. The movie is amusing, though, and Brody brings a sweetness to his role that we found quite enjoyable. We think that rather odd movie is worth renting. **Thumbs Up**

**DUNKIRK:** (2017) It is, at its roots, just another WWII war movie. However, the historical significance of *Dunkirk* definitely raises the movie's level. Christopher Nolan told the famous story from three perspectives: the land (soldiers on the beach), the sea (boats assisting in the evacuation), and the air (fighter planes). The director then invented fictional characters to tell the stories, although he went to great pains to faithfully recreate the operation which took place between May 26 and June 4, 1940. Operation Dynamo, as it was called, saw over 700 private boats rescue a total of 338,226 soldiers marooned on the Dunkirk Beach. The boats, which included everything from small boats to large pleasure yachts, were often manned by the members of the Royal Navy. However, due to a shortage of naval personnel, the owners of the boats took them to Dunkirk themselves. Sir Mark Rylance portrays the owner of a boat who answered the call from the British Admiralty. Tom Hardy portrays a Spitfire pilot, but he has to act mostly with his eyes because he wears an authentic RAF flight mask. You might also recognize Sir Kenneth Branagh who stands on the Dunkirk Mole—a long stone and wooden jetty—looking mostly concerned, sometimes very worried, and only happy at the end of the movie. The fictional characters who bring to life the plight of soldiers on the beach, falls to three talented newcomers. Gary and I have had our fill of war movies, and we had to wait through a lot of soldiers dying before the final shot of those small boats coming to rescue them. That final shot was almost worth the wait. **GRADE B-**

**DUPLICITY:** The best part this movie is the interplay between Julia Roberts and Clive Owen who, according to Roger Ebert, are both trying to play Cary Grant. Their scenes together are lots of fun. Our local reviewer didn't think they had any chemistry. We don't agree: They make a great pair! Director Tony Gilroy keeps you guessing as to who is manipulating whom all the way to the end. The only thing you're certain of is that mendacity is alive and well in corporate espionage. Tom Wilkinson and Paul Giamatti play the CEO's of huge manufacturing conglomerates. Each is constantly trying to outdo the other and, in the opening scene, we see that their rivalry has descended into fisticuffs. As A.O. Scott said in his New York Times review, that scene contains the only violence in the film. Scott liked the chemistry between Robert & Owen enough to give the film a grade of "A." Claire (Roberts) is a former CIA agent and Ray (Owen) is a former M16 agent. Both are now working in corporate security. Or is that corporate espionage? They met several years ago in Dubai under suspicious circumstances, and we are kept guessing as to the nature of their relationship. Is it romantic? Or is it duplicitous? The fun is in finding out. Wilkinson and Giamatti are terrific, and the supporting cast is equally good. We liked this one and didn't find the jumping back and forth in time at all distracting. Yahoo critics gave it an average grade of B. Yahoo viewers gave it only a C. Perhaps that's because it doesn't have any chases, gun battles, or explosions. We're with the critics. **GRADE B**