

### Movie Reviews by Jon Robertus, part-time coach potato

This is a log of movies I have seen, or reseen, beginning in January of 2002, when I got the idea. In general, I don't even bother seeing movies that critics I trust don't care for. Therefore, this is a pre-selected list to some extent. It is heavy on independent and foreign films, which I often like, and light on Hollywood shoot-em-ups, that I don't care much about. Some of my reviews will allude to other movies that I have not reviewed, but have clearly seen. This table is culled from a sequential list I keep on our family web site, and so sometimes I allude to viewing circumstances which appear mysterious! Sorry.

I give the movies a numerical rating, just to help organize them. A rating of 5 = don't miss it, it's either perfectly made or vital to the history of film; 4 = very good and well worth seeing; 3= better than average; 2 = watchable but flawed; 1 = this sucks. Because of the prescreening, I tend to see a lot of movies I like so my scores run higher than random.

**Updated** on: March 6, 2006

MOVIE	Rating	Comments
<b>5 Obstructions</b>	1	We went with friends to see " <b>5 Obstructions</b> ", an artsy film from Denmark. The conceit of this thing is that anyone cares about two unknown film makers playing inconsequential head games with one another. Jørgen Leth made a film in 1967 called "The Perfect Human". His acolyte, Lars von Trier, wants him to remake it five times, in each case with a constraint imposed by von Trier. The boys bicker over this. Von Trier complains to Leth that he won't become human by making a bad film. Really? As near as I could tell they were all pretty bad. The 5 films turn out as boring as the original, which is spliced in for contrast. One constraint was a movie to be a shot as a cartoon; since this was beyond Leth's expertise he brought in Austinite Bob Sabiston, who animated "Waking Life". The cartoon was by far the most interesting of the five versions, although one version of Leth having a sumptuous meal on a street in Calcutta had a redeeming millisecond or so. If this is the best way you can spend two hours of your one and only life, I pity you.
<b>8-Mile</b>	4	I rented " <b>8-Mile</b> " and found it a most interesting and absorbing movie. It stars Eminem as a white rapper, named Rabbit Smith, in a run down Detroit area. Rabbit hangs with a group of blacks who encourage him to become a major rapper. This camaraderie is interesting to view. A big sport in this area is to have rap battles in which each contestant tries to humiliate his opponent with words (like the ancient Eskimo insult songs). Watching this culture, which I assume is fairly accurately portrayed, is astonishing. As Dorothy said, "we're not in Kansas anymore". The rap music is raw, but I was impressed with the rhyming skills of the participants and their obvious facility with their own harsh language. Check this movie out.
<b>13 Conversations about one thing</b>	4	Last weekend we rented " <b>13 Conversations about one thing</b> " and loved it. The film is written and directed by Jill Sprecher (she of the most wonderful " <b>Clock watchers</b> " fame) and stars Matthew McConaughey and Alan Arkin, with good work by Amy Irving, John Turtorro and others. This is a very intelligent look at the "what ifs" of life. There have been several interesting movies, like <b>Sliding Doors</b> , that explore various possible "what if" scenarios. This film doesn't follow those possible trails, but raises the questions in a real-life way. After all, our actions are indeed irreversible. I don't want to give too much away, but I encourage you to see this wonderful and thought-provoking movie. The scene where Arkin wonders aloud what would have happened if he had waved to his wife before leaving on a trip, nicely sums up a lot of the ideas about what might have been.
<b>A Beautiful</b>	4	I was a bit apprehensive about seeing " <b>A Beautiful Mind</b> " Most reviews have been very

Mind		<p>good, but the New Yorker gave it a scathing review. I generally agree with their assessment and so I was confused. Anyway, I saw it and loved it. I think this is one of the finest movies I have ever seen. It deals with the (mostly) true story of John Nash, a brilliant mathematician who won the Nobel Prize for his contributions to network theory in economics. Sadly, Nash suffered from schizophrenia and led a tortured existence. Ron Howard did a super job of direction, and used a wonderful plot device to let us share the feelings that hallucinations seem very real and powerful to the afflicted. (Howard is one of my favorite directors, having done some other fine movies like <b>"Cocoon"</b>, <b>"Parenthood"</b>, <b>"Backdraft"</b>, <b>"Apollo 13"</b>, and <b>"EdTV"</b>. He also did <b>"The Rock"</b> which we should just forget about.) Russell Crowe does a great job as Nash. Crowe (that old Gladiator) is a man of clear physical power and the movie gains strength by showing how this is all useless against the grip of his unstable mind. Crowe steers his physical power carefully through his performance and adds to our feeling of his misfortune. This is a fine and sensitive performance. Jennifer Connelly also does a good job as his loyal wife. Her conflicts are clearly portrayed, although it is not entirely clear why she was so attracted to him in the first place. I say don't miss this one.</p>
A Boy and His Dog	4	<p>I re-watched <b>"A Boy and His Dog"</b>, starring a very young Don Johnson. The movie is set in a post apocalyptic Kansas where the surface is a chaos of looters (what else) and underground is a scary society of religious nuts, led by a cold hearted Jason Robards. Our hero Vic (Johnson) has a brilliant dog who only he can telepathize with. The dialog is very smart, fast, and funny. The story is interesting and the acting is professional. All in all I enjoyed it a good deal.</p>
A Cry in the Dark	4	<p>I watched <b>"A Cry in the Dark"</b> starring Meryl Streep and Sam Neil. Streep got an Oscar nomination for her part, and she did a superb job, as usual. Neil was also very convincing as the husband. This is the story of a family of Seventh Day Adventists whose new baby is allegedly taken and killed by a dingo at Aires Rock in Australia. The available information for the prosecution and our emotions see-saw in this account of a true story. The movie is hard to watch because of the subject, but the issues raised, truth, justice, prejudice and empathy, are all important ones. Not light fare.</p>
A Few good men	5	<p>As we all vegged out we watched <b>"A Few good men"</b> for the umpteenth time. I have not previously reviewed this movie so let me say I like it a great deal. It stars Tom Cruise, Demi Moore, Kevin Bacon, and the mighty Jack Nicholson as the hard-boiled, self-righteous Marine commandant at Guantanamo Bay. The story centers on the death of a Marine under strange circumstances. Cruise and Moore are Navy JAG attorneys sent to defend the admitted killers, who claim they were following an order which had unforeseen consequences. The acting is good. Nicholson is scary as he chews up the scenery. Bacon gives a strong, believable performance as the prosecutor, Cruise does his smart-ass boy genius part well and even Moore, not a good actress, is OK. A very watchable and engaging movie.</p>
A Fistful of Dollars	3	<p>We watched <b>"A Fistful of Dollars"</b>, directed by Sergio Leone. This 1967 movie made Clint Eastwood a big star, although he had been Rowdy Yates on Rawhide. The Man With No Name arrives in a Mexican border town where the Baxterites and Rojoites are battling it out over gold and gun smuggling. A family is trapped in the middle and the hyper competent gunman plays both sides against each other to rid the town of its criminals and to make some dollars. Leone was successfully sued by Kurosawa over infringement of his movie "Yojimbo". This movie has an immense cult following and it inspired film makers like Tarantino. Leone saw the movie as an homage to the Westerns he grew up with Italy, when strong, taciturn Americans were the ideal. I enjoyed the movie for its archetypal images, but it does not bear close logical inspection; Polly quit watching near the end.</p>
A History of Violence	2	<p>As we walked out of <b>"A History of Violence"</b> Polly said, "I have not been so unengaged by a movie in years", and the guy behind me said "that was the best movie I have seen in years". I was in between; I followed the action but I was beset by feelings burbling to the surface that this was not a well made movie. The story is based on a comic book, so right off you can imagine that subtly is not a long suit, and indeed the direction, by David Cronenberg, is ham handed. For example, we spend the first 3 minutes showing why some bad guys are bad – namely they kill a family at a motel for no good reason. Now cut to Tom Stall (soon to be Joey Cusak) and spend 3 minutes showing he is a loving family man, soft spoken, and well liked in the community – "see you in church</p>

		Tom” says a client at his restaurant. Tom and his wife both wear prominent crucifixes. This not so subtle signal tells us they are Christians and under the Lord’s protection; they may suffer a bit, and will need to struggle, but in the end, all will be well. (In fact I think these crosses were blessed by Mel Gibson himself). Anyway, the bad men show up at Tom’s, announce they are going to kill everyone, and so Tom springs into action and kills them. His notoriety gets national attention, and Tom’s mob past is revealed when three Mafiosos come to pay him back for past transgressions. They all are soon killed. Tom’s criminal past precipitates some family strife, and we see an attempt at psychological drama. In addition, Tom is called back to Philly to confront his brother Richie, played tongue in cheek by William Hurt. When Joey left town 20 years before, after wrecking havoc on mobster Carl Fogarty (Fogarty? Mafia? Huh?), he also left brother Richie with a lot of negative mob credit. Richie now wants to kill Joey. He has four other armed killers in his fortress home, and Joey is unarmed, but no matter. Joey makes short work of them all. So there you have it. If you think a movie should be plausible and stick close to a believable story, with real human emotions, then you will find this one lacking. If you are like legendary drive-in reviewer Joe Bob Briggs, where the measure of the movie is body count and boobs, then you are going to like this flick. There is plenty of blood spatter and actual blood pools, after the initial slaughter of innocents the next 10 killings are all of despicable criminals, Tom’s wife, who is pretty good looking, shows us her wares, and there are two very graphic sex scenes. First rate by Joe Bob’s criteria.
<b>A Kiss Before Dying</b>	3	Polly and I watched a 1955 thriller called “ <b>A Kiss Before Dying</b> ” starring Robert Wagner, Joanne Woodward, and Jeffery Hunter. The dialogue seems a little bit stagy by contemporary standards, but it was not too distracting. This is great plot – the movie has been remade numerous times – and this version is well directed and edited. Very enjoyable noir. As I watched I reflected on the fact that the movie was made 50 years ago. It seems very modern in many ways, but the language, and especially the clothes, are fascinating to see.
<b>A Mighty Wind</b>	3	Polly and I went to see “ <b>A Mighty Wind</b> ”. This is a hilarious send up of the folk music movement of the ‘60s. It is written and directed by Christopher Guest, who also did the charming and witty “ <b>Waiting for Guffman</b> ” and the side-splitting “ <b>Best in Show</b> ”. (Guest was Nigel “its got ‘leven” Tutwell in <b>This is Spinal Tap</b> .) The ensemble cast is largely the same as that for Best in Show, and the audience applauded in the movie theater as certain performers appeared. It is clear they are very loyal to Guest’s troop. I enjoyed this movie a great deal. It was not as good as Best in Show (Wind forces things a bit more), but that is setting an extremely high bar. This mockumentary is definitely worth seeing. Guest and his cast have a delightful knack for both understatement and overstatement. They are all clearly having so much fun doing the movie, that you really feel part of the whole enterprise. Like one of the family – two thumbs up.
<b>A Room with A View</b>	5	We watched “ <b>A Room with A View</b> ” for the umpteenth time so its appropriate to review it at last. This is a Merchant/Ivory production of the E.M. Forster novel, and as usual it is very well done. The cast is superb, and includes Helena Bonham Carter as Ms. Honeychurch and Julian Sands as George. Maggie Smith is great, as are Denholm Elliot, Daniel Day Lewis, Judi Densch, Simon Callow (Mr. Bebe), Rupert Grave and other minor characters. This is a love story, but also a social commentary about emerging modernity and mores at the end of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century. It is charming, witty, and elegant. There are no car chases (or even buggy chases) but this is a very engaging movie. No doubt I will watch it many more times and enjoy it on each occasion.
<b>A Series of Unfortunate Events</b>	5	I recently read the first Lemony Snicket book “ <b>A Series of Unfortunate Events</b> ” and just watched the movie of the same name. In fact the movie is a compilation of the first three books, although the first book serves as the beginning and end of the movie (for very good cinematic reasons). We all loved the movie. Jim Carey does a terrific job in several roles, but mostly as the vile Count Olaf. Meryl Streep is excellent, surprise surprise, as the Baudelaire children’s neurotic aunt Josephine, and Emily Browning is superb as Violet. The movie “sets” are amazing and capture the strange, yet familiar, look portrayed in the novels. Very atmospheric indeed. I give this movie two enthusiastic thumbs up.
<b>About a Boy</b>	4	Polly and I went to see a delightful movie “ <b>About a Boy</b> ” starring Hugh Grant. This movie is based on a book by the superb British writer Nick Hornsby, who also wrote

		<p><b>"High Fidelity"</b>. Both books are wonderful and so are both movies made from the books. "High Fidelity" was moved from London to Chicago in the movie starring John Cusack as Rob, the record store owner who cannot commit. His circle of friends is also well played with Jack Black giving a five-star performance. HF was terrific fun, with lots of laughs, and insightful views of contemporary American/British life. (It is interesting how easily the movie moved to the USA because Hornsby's books are not strongly British – they really address any modern society). Anyway, I digress. <b>"About a Boy"</b> was also immensely enjoyable. Very funny, and very poignant too. Hugh Grant, developing a few eye-wrinkles, is very believable as the self-absorbed modern man who finally realizes his isolation is not a virtue but a curse. I loved this movie. Two of my thumbs up and Polly is at least as enthusiastic.</p>
<b>About Schmidt</b>	4	<p>We rented <b>"About Schmidt"</b> starring Jack Nicholson, with supporting roles for Hope Davis and Kathy Bates. He gives a strong and thoughtful performance which received an Oscar nomination. Schmidt is a man facing retirement, and replacement, which opens questions about the meaning of his life. He finds his wife of 40 years annoying until she dies unexpectedly of a stroke and causes him to reflect even further on who he is or was. He tries to become involved with his daughter, Davis, who is marrying a bit of a ne'er-do-well. He discovers she is at best tolerant of him, but has little respect for him, which may be deserved. Eventually he gives in to the forces around him and plays along with the flow of his daughters new family, but you can tell he is unhappy. All the while he has been moved to correspond to a child in Africa, as a result of a TV ad. He uses his letters to reveal himself, and this is a terrific film devise. I thought this movie was just wonderful.</p>
<b>Adaptation</b>	4	<p>We saw <b>"Adaptation"</b> over the weekend and loved it. Nicolas Cage should ONLY play confused dufuses (see also <b>Raising Arizona</b> and <b>Red Rock West</b>) and NEVER action heroes (see <b>Windtalkers</b> and the reprehensible <b>Face Off</b>). To understand this movie you must recall that Charlie Kaufman wrote the screen play for the wonderful movie <b>"Being John Malkovich"</b>, which was also directed by Spike Jonze. In this movie he is given the task of adapting the actual book "The Orchid Thief" for film. However, his task becomes the film and his life, and the books characters get all intertwined in a wonderful, self referential way. It is great fun from start to finish. I loved the part where Kaufman (Cage) meets a writing teacher who tells him to have a bang-up ending and this will save his script. Well there you go. Don't miss it.</p>
<b>After Dark, My Sweet</b>	4	<p>We saw a 1990 movie called <b>"After Dark, My Sweet"</b> starring Jason Patric, Rachel Ward, and Bruce Dern. I never heard of it until we found it in a movie review book, but it looked interesting and was so. Patric plays an ex-boxer who killed a man in the ring and is sucked into a kidnapping scheme by Dern. Patric tells their accomplice, Ward, he should not be taken as a punch-drunk fool, and that turns out to be true. There are some interesting twists in this very interior film. I liked it a lot and think it must be under rated since I never heard of it until now!</p>
<b>Airplane</b>	5	<p>We watched <b>"Airplane"</b> for the umpteenth time, although I have not previously reviewed it. What can I say about this slapstick comedy classic? It is just hysterical. The principles are clearly having a great time racing through a litany of sight and sound gags. Leslie Nielsen, Lloyd Bridges, and Robert Stack are all wonderful, as are scads of others making vignette appearances. Everyone needs to see this movie or your life will be a hollow shell.</p>
<b>Alias Betty</b>	2	<p>The girls and I went to see a French movie <b>"Alias Betty"</b> based on a Ruth Rendell novel. This thriller centers on a writer, separated from her husband, whose four year old son is accidentally killed. Her psychotic mother then snatches another child from what turns out to be a very unstable mother. The movie is a series of vignettes about the various characters that does resolve in a clever fashion. A good piece of work, interesting, but not really enjoyable to watch.</p>
<b>All the Real Girls</b>	2	<p>Polly and I went to see a highly rated indy film called <b>"All the Real Girls"</b>. This is not a great movie, but is O.K. The idea is a good one, a womanizing man meets a nice virgin, and falls in love with her. Is it real? Can he be changed? In fact she has a brief fling and what see is his response to a small dose of his own life style. There is food for thought here. What I don't like is the characters are basically North Carolina goobers, and although these people certainly have the full range of human emotions, I felt that somehow their formulations and analyses of their problems were inconsistent with the</p>

		rest of their lives. Also, not all of the acting was first rate.
<b>American Graffiti</b>	5	" <b>American Graffiti</b> " is a 1973 classic directed by George Lucas. It stars Ron Howard, Richard Dreyfus, Paul LeMat, Cindy Williams, Mackenzie Phillips, Harrison Ford, and many others. It has the greatest sound track of all time. The story centers on the last night of a bunch of high school friends whose lives will diverge. It is hilarious and poignant. This is a must see movie for anyone.
<b>American Splendor</b>	5	We rented " <b>American Splendor</b> ", a movie starring Paul Giamati as underground cartoonist Harvey Pekar. He was a friend and associate of the more famous cartoonist, Robert Krum. The movie is done in an interesting style, using cartoons meshed with the real life acting, and then interspersed with interviews with the actual Harvey Pekar. It shows how powerful the cartoons are at expressing the feelings and chronicling the life of a brilliant, but very eccentric man. It seems to do more than most good novels accomplish. Hope Davis plays his wife and it is good to see this fine actress in a nonglamorous role. Different and very enjoyable.
<b>Amelie</b>	4	Polly and I and friends went to see a delightful French movie (much as it pains me to say that) called " <b>Amelie</b> ". The story is warm and embracing and the characters are wonderful. You really come to know each one in a small way and to value them. The film is VERY funny to boot. My only criticism, and it is mild, is that it needs to be edited a bit. As far as I can tell, no French director has ever learned to edit to aid narrative drive. They seem to think "I am zee great French deerector and every zene I shoot is art. To cut out a zene is to cut out my 'art – sacre bleu". But as I say, the running time is only a small problem and I say make a bee line to this wonderful movie if you can find it.
<b>Anniversary Party, The</b>	4	Polly and I rented " <b>The Anniversary Party</b> " over the weekend. This is a solid, thought-provoking independent film co-directed by, and starring Jennifer Jason Leigh and Alan Cummings. There is a big cast of fine actors and actresses at this anniversary party including Kevin Kline, Gwyneth Paltrow, Parker Posey, Phoebe Cates, Jane Adams, and John C. Reilly. Leigh plays an established actress, just past her prime, and Cummings a novelist who has jus written a screen play based on her, but to star the younger Paltrow. The couple have had their marital troubles but are now reunited and celebrating their sixth anniversary with Hollywood friends and a neighbor couple they despise but need to ameliorate over troubles with their dog. You initially are lost because you need to figure out who these folks are, but their characters develop over the evening. Here are no car chases or explosions; this is a sort of theatrical offering, but very intelligent and engaging. We both liked it a great deal.
<b>Ararat</b>	2	We rented the controversial movie " <b>Ararat</b> " directed by Atom Egoyan. The award-winning movie is centers on the making of a movie about an Armenian artist who witnessed the horrible genocide of Armenians in eastern Anatolia in 1915. Really it is about that fact. This is an event the Turks still fail to recognize but which Hitler used as a model for his extermination of the Jews. Presenting this hidden story is very valuable to our historical perspective, although it is not a fun topic. The movie also has a sub plot about the histories of two of the movie makers and the love affair of their children, but it is really a distraction. The movie is a bit preachy, and the sub plot where Christopher Plummer interrogates one of the protagonists is not all that skillful. Still, this is an interesting and unsettling movie that I recommend, since I feel our current political climate is also full of lies and hidden truths which can only be helped by exposure.
<b>Assault on Precinct 13 (1976)</b>	2	Our movie guide gave the 1976 John Carpenter movie " <b>Assault on Precinct 13</b> " a total of 4 1/2 stars. Online reviewers seem to like it too, but I didn't think it was that great. The story is intriguing, cops and criminals trapped in a derelict jail must fight off an attack by ruthless youth. Some of the dialog is fast and smart, but the overall acting levels is...hmmmm... not that great. Also, aspects of the plot were so far fetched that it detracted from what could have been a good story.
<b>At Close Range</b>	3	In " <b>At Close Range</b> " Christopher Walken plays the head of a mid-atlantic crime ring, truck jackers, and Sean Penn plays his son, flickering in and out of gang life. A potent conflict arises over Penn's girl frined and spirals toward a scary finale. The acting is good, and I personally love to watch both Walken and Penn work. This is not a great movie, but with Walken and Penn emoting, how bad can it be?
<b>Aviator, The</b>	4	I approached " <b>The Aviator</b> " with mixed feelings, mostly centered on my lack of enthusiasm for Leonardo DiCaprio's acting skills. However, I thoroughly enjoyed this big

		budget Martin Scorsese movie. It is clear that Howard Hughes is one of the most fascinating men of our age, a true genius with a hundred doses of good old American get up and go individualism. It is also well known that he suffered greatly from obsessive compulsions and probably other mental illnesses as well. DiCaprio did a very convincing job in the role in spite of his pretty boy looks and wimpy voice. Cate Blanchette did a great job as Katherine Heburn and there were lots of other fine performances as well. But again, it is the nearly unbelievable true story, skillfully directed by Scorsese, that carries this movie along.
<b>Awful Truth, The</b>	4	<b>"The Awful Truth"</b> is a 1937 screw-ball comedy, directed by Leo McCary, and for which he won an Oscar. The comedy stars Cary Grant and Irene Dunne. Like all the screw-balls, it deals with fast talking rich people in search of love. This one has Grant in top form. The patter is hilarious and the story is also a nice love story. Our protagonists are clearly in love and when a series of ill considered actions leads them to the brink of divorce, they execute a series of tactics aimed at healing the breach, without appearing to do so. This is a wonderful and timeless movie.
<b>Bandits</b>	2	Polly and I went with friends to see <b>"Bandits"</b> . Bruce Willis was his usual engaging self, Billie Bob Thornton played an edgy Don Knotts kind-a-guy, and Kate Blanchette's first 5 minutes on screen are almost worth the price of admission; she does a high energy cooking performance that is great. HOWEVER, the whole is less than the sum of its parts. It's a sort of modern dress "Butch Cassidy" in which both Sundance and Butch get the girl. The whole thing is very contrived and you just don't believe in it. It may be worth renting on a rainy day when you are so bored you might otherwise pull your own head off.
<b>Barry Lyndon</b>	3+	I re-watched <b>"Barry Lyndon"</b> a 1975 film by Stanley Kubrick, starring Ryan O'Neal in the title role. The movie is beautifully filmed, using natural light, even indoors; it is the archetypal coffee-table movie of constant beauty. The scenery and the costume are fabulous and give us a wonderful feel for the 18 <sup>th</sup> century setting (the movie is based on a Thackeray novel). This is a very long movie, just over three hours, but it is so entrancing that it is easy to stick with it. You really want to know how this cautionary tale comes out. At first we are very sympathetic to our young hero as he reveals himself to be a man of strength and character, but with time and circumstances he becomes corrupted and quite brutish. The movie is not one that current American audiences would necessarily enjoy, since they tend to have a 30 second attention span before the next car chase or explosion. However cinema freaks should see this film and watch Kubrick unfold a story.
<b>Batman</b>	4	<b>"Batman"</b> (1989) was directed by Tim Burton, and stars Michael Keaton as Batman and Jack Nicholson as the Joker. I don't think Keaton makes a good Batman because he is physically a bit small to be a tough guy. Nicholson is great, as usual, and steals the show. He has dozens of great lines and delivers them with panache. "Where does he get all those wonderful toys? Don't just stand there, go ASK him". This movie has some menace, not like the slap stick TV series, but still keeps a light touch. It is great fun all around.
<b>Batman Begins</b>	3+	<b>"Batman Begins"</b> , directed by Christopher Nolan, describes the childhood traumas that shaped Bruce Wayne into Batman. It stars Christian Bale as Batman, Michael Caine as Alfie...er...Alfred, Liam Neeson as the morally ambiguous Henri Ducard, and Katie Holmes as the love interest Rachel Dawes. I am not a fan of comic book movies which in general set a low bar for cinematic expectations and allow directors to get away with crap, but this one is very well done. It raises moral issues about right and wrong, crime and punishment, and who decides what to do about it. Ducard heads a secret society that judges societies and punishes them when it feels they need it. Some years after Wayne's father is killed he confronts Gotham's criminal king pin but is powerless to act. He travels to the orient and in the depths of his spiral is rescued and trained by Ducard to join his secret society. Wayne's inherent morality rebels and they split company, only to meet again in mortal combat. Now I have to say that the comic book genre allows a lot of logical nonsense to occur but it is best to ignore that and stick with the narrative drive. It did annoy me, as a professional involved in drug design, to see that a second string employee of Wayne enterprises was able to diagnose the nature of a psychotic toxin sprayed on Batman, design, and synthesize an antidote to it in the two days that Batman was unconscious. And don't get me started on the power requirements to boil

		all the water in the Gotham water lines. Even so, this is a most entertaining Batman, almost up to " <b>Dark City</b> " standards.
<b>Batman Returns</b>	2	" <b>Batman Returns</b> " is a Tim Burton sequel to Batman, with Michael Keaton as the Bat, Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman, and Danny DeVito as the Penguin. I didn't much care for this movie. It is more violent, and a lot less funny, than the first one. Perhaps I am just Batted out.
<b>Battlestar Galactica (2003)</b>	3	We watched the three hour pilot of " <b>Battlestar Galactica (2003)</b> ". This is a remake of sorts of the old TV movie, made for the SciFi cable station. It stars Edward Olmos and Mary McDonnell, a couple of almost famous actors. The idea is that mankind made cylon robots but they ran amok and a big war ensued. The cylons ran off for 40 years and then with the aid of a corrupted cybernetic genius, attack the 12 human systems and wipe 'em out. Only the space ship galactic, with equipment too outdated to be sabotaged survives along with a bunch of transport ships. They now need to roam space to start mankind up again from their diminished breeding stock, led by commander Adama (Adam – get it?). The effects are good, and the characters are interesting. I enjoyed this shoot 'em up and may watch more of the SciFi serial which followed the pilot.
<b>Bedazzled</b>	4	We rented the new " <b>Bedazzled</b> " over the holidays, and I was very pleasantly surprised. Brendon Fraser plays a nerd, hopelessly in love with a coworker, who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for seven wishes. His main character is barely believable, but the characters he does in the "wish scenes" are truly inspired. He does a great job and has a fine comedic touch. Elizabeth Hurley plays the devil and SHE does a great job. This was a really good role for her and she plays it with a deft hand. I say check it out, this is a fun time.
<b>Before Sunset</b>	5	" <b>Before Sunset</b> " is a follow-up to "Before Sunrise", set nine years later. Both films were directed by Austinite Richard Linklater and star Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy as Jesse and Celine. This is an unusually intelligent movie; Linklater, Hawke, and Delpy all co-wrote the script and deserve big kudos for it. The dialog is modern but it address BIG eternal questions about everyday life. What is romantic love, and what is duty? Who are we and what can we attain? And biggest of all – what might have been? That reflection always brings a certain bittersweet feelings and a sort of melancholy which may or may not be justified. Jesse is a writer on tour in France and encounters Celine, his one night lover of Before Sunrise. They have only a short time to talk, but it is the best conversation on film. As the time to go to the airport marches on, I kept saying to myself, "no no, keep talking". How many movies can you say that about? This is one of the best films ever.
<b>Behind Enemy Lines</b>	3	Our first night in KC we saw " <b>Behind Enemy Lines</b> " starring Owen Wilson and Gene Hackman. This is loosely based on the true story of the rescue of an American pilot shot down in Bosnia. In this story Wilson plays a hot shot flyer who is disillusioned because he never gets to bomb anything. When he break rules to take a recon picture of something he accidentally photographs a mass grave and the Bosnians shoot him down and the big chase is on. It's pretty exciting and fun to watch. It also points out that the Bosnian war was a terribly sordid affair that we tend to ignore. The secondary story of Hackman as an admiral fighting the military establishment to support his guy is really unbelievable and kind of spoils the movie, since it is unnecessary to the plot and looks cobbled together to provide some pathetic excuse for Hackman to be in the movie and to do something.
<b>Being John Malkovich</b>	5	We re-watched " <b>Being John Malkovich</b> ", starring John Cusack, Katherine Keener, Cameron Diaz and John M himself. This is a truly unusual and creative movie. It centers on a puppeteer, Cusack, who discovers a portal into the mind of John Malkovich. The idea of the puppeteer, skilled at controlling others, is developed, but the story leads to all kinds of interesting personal discoveries about who we are and who we think we are. The acting is good, the characters are interesting, John Malkovich is gracious and charming, and the whole thing is hilarious. It is strange though.
<b>Being Julia</b>	3	We saw " <b>Being Julia</b> " with Annette Bening in the title role and support from Jeremy Irons as her actor/producer hubby, Shaun Evans as her young American lover, and Michael Gambon as her deceased mentor. Bening joins Gwyneth Paltrow and Renee Zellwiger as American actresses who can carry off a British accent. This story centers on a spirited actress for whom life and the stage are a continuous performance.

		Although her character is annoying, it provides a chance for Bening to show her stuff and she succeeds admirably. The story itself is not to all tastes (no car crashes or explosions), but I found it engaging right through. The ending is a treat as well. Although Gambon has limited screen time, being dead and all, he really chews the scenery when he is on.
<b>Being There</b>	3	We watched the 1979 Peter Sellers movie " <b>Being There</b> ". I recently read an hysterical novel called <i>The Bear Went Over the Mountain</i> , by William Kotzwinkle. In that story a bear, Hal Jam, discovers a novel written by a local college prof, and takes it to Manhattan. He becomes an instant celebrity, considered by the book industry to be a rustic genius and the next new thing, although no one actually reads his book. In <i>Being There</i> , Sellers plays a retarded gardener named Chance, who is sheltered by a wealthy protector. When the old man dies, he is cast adrift. By chance (get it), he is involved in a minor accident with Eve Rand (Shirley MacLaine) wife of a mighty king maker played skillfully by Melvyn Douglas. Well dressed and reticent, Chance is taken by the wealthy elite as a profound thinker because they bounce their own ideas off him and like what comes back. Chance becomes a great celebrity and people scurry to find out who he is and what great secrets he possesses. Some consider this demanding role to be Seller's best performance. I am not so sure. Chance is just not a very engaging character, like Hal Jam. The movie is painfully slow to get started. Once the characters are in place the film is intelligently funny, but still rather slow.
<b>Bend it Like Beckham</b>	3	I watched " <b>Bend it Like Beckham</b> " on HBO. It was a very nice movie but not a great movie. The story centers on a high school aged Indian girl living in London. Her family is very centered on Indian culture and tradition and she wants to play soccer, which is a no-no. The girl, Josh, meets an English girl who invites her to play for a first rate girls soccer club. A mini crisis develops between them over the affections of their male coach, and this is entangled with a confusion by the English girls mom that the two soccer buds are lesbians. All told it is predictable, but still interesting, funny, and affirming.
<b>Best in show</b>	5	<b>Best in show.</b> This movie is so funny I nearly wet myself. We saw it with some British friends and we were all cracking up spontaneously hours after the movie was over. You gotta love it.
<b>Better Luck tomorrow</b>	4	We visited Kate at UC Berkeley and she took us to a wonderful indie movie called " <b>Better Luck tomorrow</b> ". It tells the tale of Asian American high school students and their coming of age, although it has a big twist. A group of honor students get involved in petty crimes and an incident makes them notorious – which opens new vistas. Everything comes undone on a last job (how often does THAT happen in movies?), and causes a lot of painful adjustments and regrets. I liked the characters and empathized with them. The acting was good and the plot moved right along. This is a very auspicious beginning for writer/director Justin Lin. I did not see this movie appear in Austin, which is very avant garde, so it may be generally hard to find. If you can find it though, be sure to check it out.
<b>Beyond the Sea</b>	4	" <b>Beyond the Sea</b> " is a pseudo true story of the late singer Bobby Darin, and compared with a documentary I saw, it seems largely correct. Darin is played by Kevin Spacey who does his own singing and dancing. He is fantastic in this role. As Polly said, "it's like he is channeling for Darin". The story itself is an American tale writ large. Darin had a heart condition resulting from rheumatic fever that caused doctors to predict he would not live to 15. This created a strong drive in the lad to succeed and explains some of his brashness and hurry to climb to the top. His drive was augmented by the fact that he was immensely talented. I found this a very enjoyable movie and don't understand its failure at the box office.
<b>Big Red One</b>	5	We finished out the Holiday break with a couple of oldies we had seen before, but which I have not reviewed. The first was the " <b>Big Red One</b> " starring Lee Marvin with Mark Hamill and others. This is based on the experience of the writer and film director Sam Fuller and is a great war movie. Marvin plays the grizzled veteran Sergeant of a squad of infantry from the First Division as it fights from Africa, through Sicily, into Belgium, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. The characters are interesting, and the mixed and the powerful emotions of war are evoked. This movie is not to be missed.
<b>Big Sleep, The</b>	5	I caught " <b>The Big Sleep</b> " for the umpteenth time – I can't resist this wonderful private eye movie, directed by Howard Hawks. It stars Humphrey Bogart as Philip Marlow and

		Lauren Becall as the older Sternwood daughter. The plot is so complex that while filming, Hawkes had to bring in the author, Raymond Chandler, to figure out what the heck was going on. To this day I am not sure who did what to who and it doesn't matter. A mystery is a mystery to the detective so why not to the audience? The acting is good and the dialogue in this sultry thriller is a total hoot. When is it on again?
<b>Big Trouble</b>	1	We saw the comedy called " <b>Big Trouble</b> ". It stars Tim Allen, Rene Russo, Dennis Farina, Janeane Garofalo, Stanley Tucci, and Patrick Warburton (Putty from Seinfeld), so how bad can it be. Well... not as good as it should be. There are some laughs, but the plot is <b>so</b> contrived that you can't accept it for a minute. The story was written by Dave Berry, and I have been told it is funny. My impression is Dave loved " <b>Get Shorty</b> " (as any intelligent person would) and thought he'd write his own version of it. Sadly, Dave is no Elmore Leonard when it comes to dialog and so instead of sounding hip or charming, most of the actors here sound maudlin or just stupid. The romance which ignites for no apparent reason (except perhaps desperation) between Allen and Russo is totally unbelievable and lacks any charm at all. This movie might be worth renting on a boring, rainy weekend, when you've seen all the good movies the world has to offer.
<b>Billy Bathgate</b>	2	Another oldie we rented was " <b>Billy Bathgate</b> ". This movie has some big stars including Dustin Hoffman as Dutch Schultz, Bruce Willis, Nicol Kidman, Steve Buscemi, Steven Hill, and Stanley Tuchi as Lucky Luciano. It is based on a novel by E.L. Doctrow about the psychopathic mobster Schultz, his interactions with a lucky Irish lad (Billy), and his fall from power. I found it watchable and the performances were generally strong. Hoffman was intense and capricious as Schultz, but his physical size belied his reputation for brutality, and Willis seemed to be only half trying. OK but not great.
<b>Bite the Bullet</b>	2	Our movie guide book gave " <b>Bite the Bullet</b> " 4 ½ stars and a good review. It would be cute if I said that it should be called "Bite the Big one" but that would be slightly unfair. The 1975 movie has a big cast, including Gene Hackman, James Coburn, Candice Bergen, and Ben Johnson. It centers on a 700 mile endurance horse race sponsored by a newspaper in about 1905. However, the self conscious exploratory values of the 70's come through too strongly for its own good. Also, did they have such wonderfully snug jeans for women as Bergen wears back in 1905? I don't think so. The scenery in the race also changes at a ridiculous pace. Not really first rate.
<b>Blackhawk Down</b>	5	Kate, Mom, and I went to see " <b>Blackhawk Down</b> ". It was intense. In examining this movie you need to separate movie making from movie message. The film is directed by Ridley Scott so you suspect there will be action and good pacing and boy howdy that is certainly true. This thing moves. Once the story and a few characters are set, the fighting starts and never slackens. The technical aspects of the scenes are terrific and the way they are cut adds to the sense of danger and chaos. I have never been in combat, and never hope to be, and this movie makes it clear why it is not a thing to be undertaken unless all other options fail. What lessons can be learned from this first rate action film? One lesson is don't let politicians set parameters for our soldiers. If a task is important enough to send our boys into combat, than it is important enough to be done correctly. It is clear that the operation in question required heavy armor and more air support. On the other hand, I suspect that army brass has an unrealistic view of how effective "elite" troops can be and they may claim to politicians that they are more capable than they really are. I personally question that the President should be allowed to commit our forces without a full and proper debate by Congress and the public. War is the most serious business and we should know why we are doing it. Well enough of that' you can ask yourself all these questions when you check out this dynamite movie.
<b>Blast from the Past</b>	4	We rented " <b>Blast from the Past</b> " and just loved it. The story begins in 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis. A Cal tech weenie, played wonderfully by Christopher Walken, has built a huge bomb shelter and takes his pregnant wife, played by Sissy Spacek down there to wait things out. As fate would have it, a plane crashes on their house and he takes this as part of a nuclear exchange. They batten down for a siege and live underground for 35 years raising their son Adam, played by Brandon Frazier, to their middle class 1960s standards. When they do emerge, the place has been covered with a slum and Walken assumes these folks are radiation mutants. Anyway, Adam has to go out and get new supplies, and if possible a woman, and there you go. This 60's boy scout dropped in 90's LA is a hoot. Alicia Silverstone is OK as his love interest. This is a fun movie and we both enjoyed it immensely. I say two thumbs up.

<b>Bloodwork</b>	2	Although I am generally suspicious of Clint Eastwood's crime/police movies " <b>Bloodwork</b> " had good reviews and favorable comments from trusted friends, so we checked it out. I found it a very engaging movie right the way through. The story was tight and Eastwood's acting was top notch. He seems to have accommodated to his age and has chosen a character with his own age-dependent problems. His attitude was just right. Confident, but aware of his physical limitations. There is a casting flaw here which can give away a good bit of the plot so I won't dwell on it, but savvy audiences can read things like this as extra-plot information to figure out who dunnit. Anyway, I liked it a lot and say check it out too.
<b>Blue Gardenia, The</b>	2	I watched a 1953 thriller called " <b>The Blue Gardenia</b> ". It starred Anne Baxter, Richard Conte, Raymond Burr and Ann Sothorn. I don't consider this a true film noire, but it might be an honorary member. The archetypal noires have a male hero, generally a war veteran, who has trouble with women and is at odds with established authority. Here, the hero is a woman, but she has been burned by her Korean War fiancé, and she is hunted by the system. The movie is a bit dated, but it is not as hokey as some of the era and I found it quite enjoyable.
<b>Body and Soul</b>	4	I watched a 1947 John Garfield, Lilli Palmer movie called " <b>Body and Soul</b> " on cable. IT was very good, getting 5* in our usual video guide. It was dated, and the production values are not up to modern techniques, but that is to be expected. The acting was good and the plot, though somewhat trite, was realistic. The story centers on a prize fighter who gets caught up with crooked promoters and managers who want to manipulate the fighters for their personal gain (as I said, a bit trite). But the gritty acting makes this story convincing and the fight scenes were shocking brutal by the standards of the time, although now it looks like a girl scout pillow fight.
<b>Bon Voyage</b>	2	We went with friends to see a French movie " <b>Bon Voyage</b> ". It has an interesting setting, France as the Nazis roll in and the government flees before capitulating in the best French fashion, and good costumes too. The story centers on an actress who is sleeping with a government minister and who shoots another suitor and passes the blame onto a former lover, who is our protagonists. She is an obvious user of men and I lost much sympathy for the hero because he was too dumb to deserve any. There is also a Jewish professor and his lovely young assistant who are trying to smuggle heavy water out of France before the Nazis get it, and there is a charming petty criminal accomplice. The whole thing is too hectic, too claustrophobic, and way too long to be completely enjoyable.
<b>Born to Kill</b>	1	We watched a 1947 Robert Wise noir called " <b>Born to Kill</b> ". It starred Claire Trevor, Lawrence Tierney, and Walter Slezak. It started out as quite intriguing, but soon became silly. It embodied an attitude I have noticed before in films of this era - that physical attraction between the sexes is irresistible and leads to bad actions and corny, forced dialogue. As usual in these morality tales, the bad must be punished. Our protagonists, Trevor, begins the movie in a Reno divorce court, and she also smooches the handsome killer, so needless to say, she must die by the movies end. Just like real life.
<b>Bourne Identity, The</b>	3	I rented the thriller " <b>The Bourne Identity</b> ", based on a novel by Robert Ludlum. It starred Matt Damon and Franka Potente (she also starred in the fun German thriller " <b>Run Lola Run</b> "). In the story the Damon is a CIA killer with amnesia. We discovers that others are trying to kill him. Why this is so is not clear to him or to us. Maybe that is good, giving the viewer the prospective of the protagonist. With one or two exceptions, this thriller is based on character and plot rather than just explosions, so that is good. The movie has flaws, but I found it engaging and empty headed fun. I also learned from the dvd extras that Damon actually did scale down the 79 foot face of the bank building in an escape scene. I gotta give him credit where its due!
<b>Bourne Supremacy, The</b>	3	We rented the thriller " <b>The Bourne Supremacy</b> " and enjoyed it a good deal. As in the <b>Bourne Identity</b> , Bourne (played by Matt Damon) is a highly skilled CIA killer who has lost his memory but his instincts about who is not to be trusted remain in tact. Like its predecessor this is a fun action flick. There is less character here than before and more car chases, but it still is a movie I can willing suspend disbelief for and just enjoy the ride. I don't want to discuss the plot because that might spoil the movie – you need to figure it out as you go along.
<b>Bowling for</b>	4	I rented Michael Moore's Academy Award Winning documentary " <b>Bowling for</b>

<b>Columbine</b>		<b>Columbine</b> ” and liked it very much. Moore came to fame with a touching documentary about the auto industry in his home town of Flint Michigan called “ <b>Roger and Me</b> ” which I liked. Then he aggrandized himself in the horrible film “ <b>The Big One</b> ”. This newest effort is much more skillful.. There is still a strong taint of Moore being self congratulatory and overly earnest, but the fact is he raises some interesting points about American culture. In particular “why are we so violent”. There are over 11,000 handgun murders a year in this country as compared to about 150 in Canada. This is a nation 1/8 our size, where about 70% of homes also have guns and yet they have less than 10% of the per capita carnage. You may not agree with his answer, or attempt at an answer because I don’t think Moore feels very confident about his answer either, but it is worth seeing what he has to say. We gotta do something.
<b>Bride and Prejudice</b>	4	We went with friends to see the Bollywood/Hollywood movie “ <b>Bride and Prejudice</b> ”. This is a modern dress, multicultural take on the Jane Austen classic. It stars Aishwarya Rai in the Lizzy Bennet role, and the justifiably unknown Martin Henderson as Mr. Darcy. India is the world's most prolific producer of movies and Rai is their biggest star; she is a ripe beauty indeed. Indian movies are known for their singing and dancing and this one is no exception – it is a musical. There is a lot of energy here and a lot of humor. It is a very different movie experience for Americans, but we all enjoyed it a great deal.
<b>Bridget Jones’s Diary</b>	1	Polly and I rented <b>Bridget Jones’s Diary</b> . I love Renee Zellwiger (another UT graduate), but I can’t say I liked this movie much. I never believed for a minute that her character could be attractive to Mr. Darcy (Collin Firth – yes he also played another Mr. Darcy in Pride and Prejudice). After all, our girl Bridget, although sexy in an earthy sort of way, is slow witted, incompetent, and generally kind of sad. I’ve seen worse movies, but this one is not something I can recommend.
<b>Bring It On</b>	3	We rented “ <b>Bring It On</b> ” starring Kirsten Dunst. This movie preceded Drum Line in time and is similar except that instead of a band contest, there is a cheerleading contest. Again, the cheering choreography is impressive and fun to watch. The movie seems to want to be a send up of cheerleading, the way that the wonderful “ <b>Drop Dead Gorgeous</b> ” sends up beauty pageants (it also starred Kirsten Dunst along with Kirstie Alley and Denise Richards). For example, there is a great scene where Dunst is arguing with other cheerleaders. She proclaims this is not a democracy but a cheerocracy, to which an underling responds, “but you run it like a cheertatorship”. Pretty silly but funny. However, Bring it on also wants to be taken seriously, at least by teens, and so wallows around between satire and earnestness. OK to rent, but I’m glad I didn’t spend real bucks on it.
<b>Brokeback Mountain</b>	4	“ <b>Brokeback Mountain</b> ” is a controversial love story nominated for eight academy awards. It is directed by Ang Lee, screen play by Larry McMurtry, and starring Heath Ledger (Ennis), Jake Gyllenhall (Jack), and Michelle Williams as Ennis’ wife Alma. The actors all do fine work. Ledger has the nominations, but I think Gyllenhall is as good and Williams is terrific in her supporting role. The story, as everyone knows, is about the continuing love between two the two cowboys who met herding sheep on Brokeback Mountain. It must be very difficult for an actor to get into this mind set (unless he is already gay...not that there is anything wrong with that) and these guys do a convincing job. Also, it must be difficult to act out the scenes given the mores of our culture. In the story itself, the deck was stacked against traditonal releationshiops. The cowboys are bisexual, but the man-love is all in the pure outdoors of nature, while the hetero-love is tainted by crying kids, tension and shallow women. Society is strongly against them, we all know the Matthew Shepard case, and the protagonists are forced to live in misery. Ennis in particular has a strong sense of responsibility to his girls though, and he soldiers on in spite of his pain. All in all, this is a well made movie, getting into the minds of men who constitute a fair percentage of our population. The bursts of anger by the protagonists illustrate the tension they are under. Since the viewer is asked to sympathize with the plight, if not the life, of these men, not everyone may find this an acceptable movie.
<b>Broken Flowers</b>	4	We saw the Jim Jarmusch film “ <b>Broken Flowers</b> ”, starring Bill Murray and girl friends Julie Delpi (current) and Frances Conroy, Jessica Lange, Sharon Stone, and Tilda Swinton (past). Murray is a wealthy man (computers) with a long history as a Lothario.

		When we encounter him, he seems emotionally flat and somewhat uninteresting, but his old flames recat in such a way that he must have moved them greatly. Anyway, the story opens with a letter mailed anonymously that arrives suggesting he has a 19 year old son. His neighbor, Winston, writes detective stories and uses his skills to arrange a trip for Murray to visit four old flames who could be the mother. This trip is slow paced, but hypnotically watchable and the different stories of the women are interesting. The story is unresovled and leads to interesting discussions. Who sent the letter? One of the women? His current lady, Delpi? Winston? Does he really have a son or is someone trying to shake him awake? I enjoyed the movie a good deal. I think Murray is a gifted actor and Jarmusch has his moments as an off-beat director.
<b>Caddyshack</b>	3	It was a hot and sleepy afternoon so I re-watched " <b>Caddyshack</b> " for the nth time. This is a very silly movie with a predictable plot starring Rodney Dangerfield, Ted Knight, Chevy Chase, Bill Murray, and others. The story centers on an exclusive golf club run by a wonderfully pompous Knight, crashed by a rich but outrageous developer played by Dangerfield, and menaced by a cunning gopher. In spite of its flaws this movie has a lot of memorable characters and lines. It is fun to watch on a day like this.
<b>Calendar Girls</b>	2	I rented " <b>Calendar Girls</b> " starring Helen Mirren and a lot of other veteran British actors. This is based on the true story of a group of English ladies of a certain age, who raised money for a cancer ward in the local hospital by making a calendar of themselves in the nude (although discreetly hidden). The politics and personalities that emerge as a result are pretty interesting as the ladies ask about themselves and so does the community. Things get hectic when they are all brought to the USA for celebrity treatment. Not a great film, but an engaging and enjoyable movie.
<b>Capote</b>	4	I enjoyed " <b>Capote</b> " way more than I expected. Philip Seymour Hoffman plays Capote and Catherine Keener is Harper Lee in a story about the writing of "In Cold Blood". This book revolutionized non-fiction writing by exploring the characters, getting into their minds really, in a way done in novels; that is journalism as literature. It showed the way for such non-fiction giants as my hero John McPhee. In this movie we see how Capote, the man who wrote "Breakfast at Tiffany's", intuited the significance of this American story, how he came to embrace his brutal topic, and how the undertaking affected him. Hoffman does a great job displaying a complex character with a range of motivations and emotions. The story of the murders, and the murderers, is like a sub plot, but a very strong one in this engaging film.
<b>Capturing the Friedmans</b>	3	We rented " <b>Capturing the Friedmans</b> ", a most interesting documentary. The story is a bit unsettling, about a case in New York where a trusted music/computer teacher is accused of molesting his students. Did he really do it? Was his son guilty? If justice depends on guilt beyond a reasonable doubt you need to wonder. This is a fascinating true story about American justice and well worth a look.
<b>Carlito's Way</b>	3	In " <b>Carlito's Way</b> " Al Pacino plays an ex-drug czar who wants to go straight after a five-year prison stint. Unfortunately, his lawyer, Sean Penn, is totally corrupt and Pacino's loyalty puts him in harms way. The 1993 movie is directed by Brian "buckets-o-blood" De Palma, who is fairly restrained. The plot is action filled and gives room for both Pacino and Penn to show their stuff. However, there is a lot of implausible behavior, and overblown dialogue, mostly by Pacino, that prevents this from being a really first rate thriller.
<b>Casablanca</b>	5	" <b>Casablanca</b> " is another film I have seen a dozen times and never fail to enjoy. Directed by Michael Curtiz in 1942 it stars Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Claude Rains, Paul Henreid, Peter Lorre, and Sidney Greenstreet. The story is set in neutral Casablanca at the start of the war, and ex-pat American Bogart runs a saloon where everyone comes to water. Is he as cynical as he seems? Will he (ie America) help fight the gathering storm? You betcha. This is one of the greatest movies of all time – the plot, the acting, and the wonderful dialog keep it forever young. Round up the usual suspects and see it again.
<b>Cache</b>	1	" <b>Cache</b> " is a French thriller starring Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche. The couple is terrorized by videotapes showing they are being watched; they come wrapped in some childish but gruesome drawings. Sounds good so far. A story concerning a childhood companion of Auteuil's slowly develops. The pace is very slow, and there is no satisfactory resolution. None of liked this movie.
<b>Cat Ballou</b>	4	I re-watched " <b>Cat Ballou</b> ", the 1965 comic western. It stars Jane Fonda as Cat, and

		Lee Marvin in two roles, but mostly as the drunken gun fighter Kid Shelleen. Nat King Cole and Stubby Kaye are minstrels who help carry the narrative in song. This is a light weigh movie but everyone has a good time. Marvin won an Oscar for his role.
<b>Cat's Meow, The</b>	3	Clare and I went to the Alamo Draft house for dinner and a movie, and that movie was " <b>The Cat's Meow</b> ". This Peter Bogdanovich film had some luke-warm reviews, but we both liked it a lot. The costumes and sets were rich and interesting. The acting by Kursten Dunst, as golden age film start Marion Davies, was first rate, and the supporting cast was sound throughout. The plot involves a fictionalized account of a cruise aboard William Randolph Hearst's yacht with 14 celebrities including Hearst, his lover Davies, and her lover Charlie Chaplin. This cruise actually occurred, and film director Tom Ince was killed, but there was never an investigation and no one ever discussed the events, but this account seems plausible. Anyway, it was good fun and worth seeing, even if only as a rental.
<b>Catch Me If You Can</b>	4	As the Holiday wound down we headed for a matinee of a highly regarded new movie by Stephen Spielberg called " <b>Catch Me If You Can</b> ". It, stars the odious Leonardo De Caprio, the wonderful Tom Hanks and the fascinating Christopher Walken. The story is based on a real case where a teenage boy led the FBI in the late '60s on an international hunt as one of the cleverest con artists of all time. The guy stole over four million dollars and lived a fancy life as a pilot, doctor, and lawyer, although he was none of those and in fact was a runaway teenager. I enjoyed this movie a great deal. Although the main character is reprehensible in some ways, you can't help be fascinated by his intelligence, quickness, skill, and daring. I have to admit that DeCaprio did a first rate job in his role. He was very believable and gave us an insight into his feelings and motivation. Hanks was good, as usual, as the FBI agent tracking him down and walken was well cast as the dad. I say check it out.
<b>Cellular</b>	3	" <b>Cellular</b> " is like an action packed ad for Nokia cell phones. There are a lot of minor logical flaws in this thriller, and these were easy to spot as we watched with some friends. Even so, the story is pretty good and it is action packed and suspenseful from start to finish. Kim Basinger plays a menaced housewife, Chris Evans her young rescuer, William Macy as an aging cop, and Jason Statham as a menacing corrupt cop/kidnapper. The good guys don't take the story too seriously, but there is still a lot of tension and fun twists in this flick. If you don't watch too carefully, it is fun.
<b>Charlie's Angels</b>	1	It was a weekend of popular (i.e. not very good) movies for me. What a wonderful source of entertainment is our Hollywood. I saw " <b>Charlie's Angels</b> " on HBO. Someone told me it was "a lot of fun". I guess so. I've seen worse. However, it is clear that the big advantage of not setting your movie-producing sites high, is that it is easy to succeed. I imagine that this is a fun movie for teenage girls or preteens. All the woman are smart, beautiful, DANGROUS, and super competent and all the men are evil, weak, or stupid. The Angels, though, are still gaga over the boys; no matter how clueless and weak they are, they're JUST SO GOL-DARNED CUTE, and some good strong woman has to take care of them. In spite of this ham-handed bunkum, the movie doesn't take itself serious enough to be totally offensive and it tries to be just good fun. I must also state that the old TV angels were better at their jobs – that is being Angels. Let's face it, Farrah Fawcette was the ANGEL. These modern ones are OK, very contemporary I guess. However, Lucy Liu seems dyspeptic throughout, she doesn't seem to have any fun and it kind of spoiled my fun too. If we aren't all going to play hard, the shallowness of this device becomes very apparent.
<b>Chicago</b>	5	Polly and I went to see the movie version of the stage musical " <b>Chicago</b> ". We loved it. It was energetic, well performed, with great sets and choreography and was as fun a movie as I have seen. We saw the musical on Broadway about two years ago, and I feared bringing a Hollywood cast would sacrifice the singing and dancing skills of the theatre. Not so. Renee Zellweger as Roxie, Catherine Zeta Jones as Velma, Richard Gere as Billy Flynn (I'm not kidding) and Queen Latifah as the matron were all terrific. The movie could flash between various dance numbers and their real-life scenarios in a way that was actually richer than the stage play. You MUST see this fun, fun, flick.
<b>Chicken Run</b>	4	" <b>Chicken Run</b> " is a full length claymation movie by the genius Nick Parks. It is the Great Escape for poultry. Mel Gibson voices Rocky, and American rooster held in a Yorkshire poultry prison. His cocky (get it?) Yank grit mobilizes the hens as they learn to believe in themselves and escape their doom as pot-pie ingredients. The animation is

		skillful, as you would expect from the master. The facial expressions are perfect and are loaded with wonderful emotional insights. The story itself is well done – fast paced, suspenseful in its way, and hilarious. I loved every minute of this film.
<b>City by the Sea</b>	3	We rented “ <b>City by the Sea</b> ” starring Robert DeNiro and James Franco. The movie is based on a true story, and although gritty and often depressing was well made and engaging. DeNiro’s acting is believable as always and he has some powerful scenes. The story is that he plays a cop who divorced his wife and abandoned his son. The boy has degenerated and fallen into drug use and kills a dealer in self defense. He is later accused of killing a police officer and DeNiro is torn between his duty as an officer and his rekindled feelings as a father. Although not a great movie it is certainly worth a rental fee.
<b>Clearing, The</b>	3	We went with friends to see “ <b>The Clearing</b> ” starring Robert Redford, Helen Mirren, and Willem Dafoe. Redford directed this film, and like some of his recent work it is very interior, asking about interpersonal relationships. The twist here is that the musing takes place around a kidnapping, in which Dafoe grabs the rich executive and during the captivity they examine one another’s lives and motivations. Back home Mirren and her adult children are going through similar exercises aided by the FBI. I enjoyed the movie. The acting is very good, the issues are thoughtfully approached, and there is some action as well. I also learned that when you go to strangle someone you should finish the job.
<b>Client, The</b>	3	We caught “ <b>The Client</b> ” on HBO. It stars Susan Saradan as a flawed lawyer with a heart of gold, and Tommy Lee Jones as an ambitious FBI agent. The story has a child learning from a mob lawyer where a body is buried. This is key evidence to put some very nasty people away, so guess what? When they learn the boy knows all, they try to kill him! Fortunately, they don’t succeed. The young man has had to scrap his way through life with an inept mom and drucken ex-dad so he is prepared; his self releiance is both annoying and admirable and like McCauly Caulken in Home Alone, he is more than smart enough to deal with any ’ol criminal adult. Even though this is a second rate thriller, it is still watchable and has some tense moments. If you have a cross-word puzzle or some such to make sure that your time is not completely wasted it is even better.
<b>Closer</b>	1	Mike Nichols directed “ <b>Closer</b> ” starring Natalie Portman, Jude Law, Julia Roberts and Clive Owen. It is supposed to be a hard eyed look at the cynical world of modern interpersonal truth and sexual politics. The people are all smart and deliver smart answers when spoken to. However, they are all utterly loathsome and so we don’t care what they do. Their actions, deceit, and disloyalty to one another are disgusting by any standard. They are self absorbed and uninteresting. Sex is weapon not used to cement relationships but to destroy them. There is no good reason to see this dreadful movie.
<b>Coffee and Cigarettes</b>	3	We went with friends to see “ <b>Coffee and Cigarettes</b> ”, directed by Jim Jarmusch and featuring a lot of people including Bill Murray, Kate Blanchette, Steve Buscemi, Iggy Pop, Alfred Molina and lots of other minor celebrities. Jarmusch has directed a lot of strange films including a couple I have seen: <b>Stranger Than Paradise</b> , which I liked, and <b>Down By Law</b> , which I didn’t. I liked this newest movie quite a lot. It centers on tiny interpersonal short stories, set in restaurants, between people who are having trouble communicating. The ones with Murray, with Blanchette, and with Molina are very engaging. There is a lot of humor here and some unsettling insights as well. Laid back but cool.
<b>Cold Mountain</b>	3	We went with friends to see “ <b>Cold Mountain</b> ”, based on the best selling novel by Charles Frazier. The book was a beautifully written, engrossing drama, and unusual love story - all faithfully captured by the movie. You might argue that Nicole Kidman as Ada was a bit too beautiful for the role and the action, but that is hair splitting. Jude Law is good as Inman and Rene Zellwiger nearly steals the show as Ruby. The whole story seems a bit heavier than I recall from the book, I might be in denial. In any case, the movie gives a fair representation of the horror and carnage of war and the utter destruction of lives. In this case, it all seems so pointless although life is redeemed from mans stupidity at the end. Two thumbs up.
<b>Collateral</b>	3	“ <b>Collateral</b> ” is a new thriller starring Tom Cruise as a nihilistic, but very competent, hit man and Jamie Foxx as a taxi driver caught up in, and coerced into, ferrying him around on his night of mayhem. I am not a big fan of Hollywood shoot-em ups but I got fully

		engaged by this one. There are some plot elements that strain credibility, like the coincidence that Foxx picks up the last of Cruise's victims just before meeting him, and the assassination in the night club scene, with police all around, is a bit much. Even so, I was willing to put this aside and go with the flow. The acting by the two stars was first rate, the dialog was smart, and the pacing was good. I also must admit that Hollywood production values and editing are da bomb. This movie looks good and has a lot of energy.
<b>Comedian</b>	2+	" <b>Comedian</b> " is a 2002 documentary which focuses on Jerry Seinfeld, but visits a number of other comedians as well. Seinfeld had retired from his wildly popular TV series, and after a layoff, decided to go back to his comedy club audience. This film explores the motivation of such people, and also reveals how hard it is to stand and deliver "killer material". This is not a great documentary, ala Errol Morris, but it is quite engaging and pretty funny too.
<b>Commitments, The</b>	5	Another oft-watched movie is " <b>The Commitments</b> ". This is the story of a working class Dublin band that strives to bring soul to the people. It is the best. It is hilarious fun, and has the best sound track ever. Our family knows nearly all the movie by heart and recites from it frequently. All the characters are wonderful and you just can't help get engaged by this marvelous movie, unless you can't take foul language – because there is a lot of that here. Just warning you.
<b>Confidence</b>	2	" <b>Confidence</b> " is about a team of criminals who play elaborate con games. When they accidentally take down a money man for a big criminal, played by Dustin Hoffman of all people, they find themselves in a bad spot and convince Hoffman that they can collaborate on an even bigger con. The leader is played by Ben Affleck, and I thought he did a good job, given his reputation as a light-weight actor. At one point he explains that playing a con is like playing chess, and you need to see 20 moves in advance. Well this thing is dependent on way too many unknowables and so the plot is more preposterous than The Sting. Also, I have seen enough of these things to easily guess the ultimate ending, so it was just a case of seeing how that ending was attained. In spite of these short comings, the dialogue was smart enough, and the action quick enough to make it watchable, and even enjoyable if you don't examine it too closely.
<b>Confessions of a Dangerous Mind</b>	3	" <b>Confessions of a Dangerous Mind</b> " was directed by Gerorge Clooney and he plays a supporting role as a CIA master. The movie is based on an autobiography of Chuck Barris, inventor of the Dating Game, the Gong Show, and other schlock. In his memoir, Barris claims he was also a CIA wetboy who killed over 30 people. The movie plays this story out straight, although I personally don't believe a word of it. (In an earlier autobiograhpy Barris forgot to mention this other life, and he now claims the CIA story is ficiton.) The movie itself is well made – Clooney is an impressive talent on both sides of the camera. The acting is also good with Sam Rockwell as Barris, Drew Barrymore as a fictionalized love, Penny, and Julia Roberts as a spy. The movie holds the viewers attention, but should be taken in the spirit of our many comic book adaptations.
<b>Constant Gardiner, The</b>	3	We rented " <b>The Constant Gardiner</b> " starring Ralph Fiennes, Rachel Weisz, and Bill Nighy. It is based on a novel by John LeCarre. Fiennes is a British diplomat, and avocational gardiner, and Weisz is his passionately concerned wife. They go to Kenya and she uncovers a conspiracy among some international pharmaceutical companies who are conducting tests in Africa and fudging the data. It turns out they don't care to be exposed and play hard ball. The acting is first rate and the love story is touching. The action part of the plot is engaging, although a bit depressing. Like several other recent movies, like Lord of War and Hotel Rwanda, this movie confirms that Africa in a living nightmare and the West, in general, has not covered itself in glory.
<b>Corpse Bride, The</b>	2	Director Tim Burton has done some good things, like the wonderful "Edward Scissor hands", or even "Mars Attacks", but he can push too far. Neither Clare nor I liked " <b>The Corpse Bride</b> ". I guess its is nice to think the dead just party party party, but the maggots knocking out the brides eye balls and other things were just unsettling. The main plot was simple and predictable and just not worth the ghoulish side show.
<b>Crash</b>	5	Polly and I paid \$16 to see " <b>Crash</b> " and it was worth it. I was engaged by this drama from start to finish. It is set in contemporary LA and deals with the isolation between people, with race and prejudice and the general human condition. It stars Don Cheadle, Matt Dillon, Ryan Phillipe, Sandra Bullock, Terrence Dashon Howard, and others. All the acting is first rate. There is a lot of coincidence in the movie, but that is a result of

		telling interlocking stories in a dramatic microcosm. There are also a few logical flaws (how could the guy who steals the white van near the movies end not realize what the cargo was when it had been sitting there for at least a day – think about it) and loose ends (does the lock smith press charges are assume redemption has occurred?). However these do not detract from the power and quality of this film. The director, Paul Haggis, was nominated for an Oscar for his screen play of “Million Dollar Baby”; he has another winner in this must see film.
<b>Criss Cross</b>	3	" <b>Criss Cross</b> " is a 1949 noire starring Burt Lancaster, Yvonne DeCarlo, and Dan Duryea. I also saw Tony Curtis waltz by as an extra! This is a pretty good movie in the genre. Lancaster is obsessed with his ex-wife (De Carlo) who has taken up with the criminal Duryea. Lancaster tried to formulate a trap in the form of an armored car heist that goes awry. All the bad end unhappily as was required in 1949, but this is a pretty well executed and generally watchable movie.
<b>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</b>	1	<b>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.</b> I admired the inventiveness of some of the martial arts scenes and the jumping/flying fantasy stuff. However, the plot SUCKED so hard I thought my head would explode. Had to leave about half-way through.
<b>Cruise, The</b>	4	" <b>The Cruise</b> " is a documentary by Bennett Miller focusing on NYC tour guide Timothy Levitch. Levitch is very eccentric, but totally lovable and quite fascinating. He views life as a wonderful cruise and his job as a joy, albeit a poorly paying one and that can lead to stress. Like the best documentaries, the director brings you into a world you may know little about, but one you find is rich and engaging when properly presented. I love this little movie and recommend it highly.
<b>Curse of the Were-rabbit</b>	4	" <b>Curse of the Were-rabbit</b> " is a full length animated film by Nick Parks. Parks is the soft spoken genius of claymation. He started by making short films like "Creature Comforts" and worked his way up as his fan base and financial success grew; he made the wonderful " <b>Chicken Run</b> " story for example. However, Park's major creatures are Wallace and Gromet, a cheese eating inventor and his long suffering dog. They appeared in three short films, "A Grand Day out", "A Close Shave", and the utterly brilliant " <b>The Wrong Trousers</b> ". In Curse, our heroes run a humane rabbit capturing company, Anti-pesto, and are trying to save the local gardeners from a rabbit infestation. Wallace's tactics go a wry and a terrible were-rabbit emerges. The story is gentle and witty as always. What is such a treat is seeing the way these clay people express their words and emotions. Each frame is a separate modeling job! I love this man's work.
<b>Cutter's Way</b>	4	We re-watched " <b>Cutter's Way</b> ", a 1981 thriller starring Jeff Bridges, John Heard., and Lisa Eichorn. Cutter (Heard) is a disabled Vietnam vet with a lot of pent-up anger and cynicism. Bridges plays his long time friend, a notorious womanizer aptly named Bone. Bone sees a man dispose of a body, and evidence accumulated by Cutter points to a local (Santa Barbara) big wig named Cord. When Cord knows they are on to him things get rough. This is a first-rate thriller with good acting, interesting, albeit unusual characters, and a strong plot. Very under-rated.
<b>Dark Blue</b>	3	We rented a DVD of " <b>Dark Blue</b> " and LA set police thriller starring Kurt Russell. Now this movie has pretensions of being either " <b>Training Day</b> " or " <b>LA Confidential</b> " and it is neither. The story appears to be based on the finding of police corruption in the Ramparts section of LA, and so to some extent is inspired by fact. However, Russell's character is way too in your face to be believed. The movie comes off as preachy and ham handed. Also, it lacks the tension of TD or LAC. It is just not as skillful a movie. On the other hand, it is acceptable summertime watching if you're not put off by broadly drawn characters.
<b>Dark City</b>	4	" <b>Dark City</b> " is a super stylish sci-fi thriller starring William Hurt, with Jennifer Connelly and Keifer Sutherland. Hurt awakes in a crime scene but cannot piece together what has happened. He inhabits a sunless world where nothing seems stable, and he is pursued by powerful menacing strangers. He is haunted by colorful flashback images of a life he once new but cannot find, and he cannot even find a way out of the city. This is a most engaging movie, almost hypnotic, as we struggle along with our hero to make sense of a chaotic world.
<b>Day of the Jackal</b>	5	I rewatched " <b>Day of the Jackal</b> " for the umpteenth time. The story centers on an assassin, played by Robert Fox, who is hired by unhappy French Algerians to kill De Gaulle. Although he is a bad man, his skills and resourcefulness are hypnotic, and we find ourselves rooting for this one man pitted against the police and intelligence

		agencies of several nations. This is one of the best thrillers I have ever seen; I consider it a must see movie.
<b>De Lovely</b>	4	Mom and I went to see " <b>De Lovely</b> " starring Kevin Kline and Ashley Judd. This is the story of song writing genius Cole Porter and his amazing life and loves. Porter was bi-sexual, but it seems his deepest affections were ultimately for his wife Linda. The acting here is fabulous with both Kline and Judd doing impressive turns. The plot is clever, setting the real story within a play rehearsal where a dying Porter is hashing out the fine points of his life with the archangel Gabriel. This allows the songs to flow out naturally from the circumstances instead of just having folks on the street spontaneously burst into song as was common in the 50s musical. The music is superb, and a lot of stars like Natalie Cole, Elvis Costello, Sheryl Crow, Alanis Morsette and others doing individual numbers. What is astonishing is how many great Porter songs were not in evidence, but how could they get them all in? This is a wonderful movie.
<b>Deep End, The</b>	1	During our recent visit to Minneapolis we saw " <b>The Deep End</b> ". The New Yorker, and other reviewers, called this the best American movie of the year. If that is so, we are in for a most boring time. Although Tilda Swinton gives a strong performance as a desparate mom, the movie cannot be saved. The plot is stupid and the pacing is GLACIAL. There is no suspense except wondering if anyone in the audience is going to pull his own head off. If you want a real thriller, go see Momento.
<b>Devil in a Blue Dress</b>	5	In our continuing veg mode we rewatched a wonderful movie " <b>Devil in a Blue Dress</b> " which the kids had not seen. I think they liked it as much as we. It stars Denzel Washington with a great supporting job done by Don Cheadle. Washington plays an unemployed machinist in 1948 LA, who gets hired on to do a bit of detecting and soon finds himself in a labyrinth of mystery. This movie is great to watch, atmospheric, good sound track, tight story, and great characters. A must see.
<b>Diamond Men</b>	5	On the advise of friends we rented " <b>Diamond Men</b> ", starring Robert Forster and Donnie Wahlberg. It was excellent. Forster played the bail bondsman in the wonderful " <b>Jackie Brown</b> " and I thought he should have had an Oscar for best supporting actor. He is equally good in this starring role, and Wahlberg is also very convincing as a brash young man who grows under the tutelage of Forster. The story is that Forster is a middle aged diamond salesman who is being phased out of his company following a heart attack. They want him to train Wahlberg, which seems very unlikely at first. The characters really grow on you and this is a film that just engages you and sucks into the lives of these guys. It also has some humor, suspense, and a nice twist ending. I say two thumbs up.
<b>Die Another Day</b>	1	Polly was visiting Clare, and I was sick with a cold and rented " <b>Die Another Day</b> " as stupid-time entertainment. Boy howdy. It stuck to the usual James Bond formula, except that it lacked the little opening adventure. I guess they don't want to get stuck in a rut. So guess what? It turns out that some evil-doers, North Koreans this time, build a big space machine that can destroy the earth, or large parts thereof. Fortunately James is on the case, ably assisted by Halle Berry as a CIA assassin. (This is no Monster's Ball performance for her I can tell you; Halle is just walking through.) There are lots of exciting and preposterously stupid chases in what is basically a remake of Dr. No. There is a big fight up in Iceland which is hilarious to anyone, like me, who used to drive in Minnesota. One evil doer has a supped up roadster with so many rockets on it there can't be a motor behind the grill and he drives around on the ice with the top down – yeah right. Also my experience is not that a hard acceleration on glare ice sends your car rocketing off like it was on a drag strip. But since Bond's car can be made INVISIBLE, I guess its pretty special. I don't know why I give in to these Bond movies, even if I'm now down to one every five years. It's been all down hill since Sean Connery hung up his tux.
<b>Dinner Rush</b>	3	We went with friends, Ginger and Bill, to see an indy film called " <b>Dinner Rush</b> " starring Danny Aiello as the owner of a Tribeca restaurant. In the movie we meet him and lots of characters, with interesting, quirky, flaws. The kitchen scences are hectic and fun. I never thought of being a chef as such a high pressure job. In addition, the mere pictures of scrumptious Italian food is a sensual delight. Now it turns out Danny's character is mob connected, and some upstart punks from Queens want to move in on the lucrative establishment. This is a parallel plot that drives the story. Overall, the film is a little light weight , but I enjoyed the movie while watching it. If you see it on video it

		is worth a watch. Tony Soprano would agree.
<b>Dirty Pretty Things</b>	3	Clare is staying with us so we rented some flicks. We saw " <b>Dirty Pretty Things</b> ", a gritty English film with solid reviews. It was directed by Stephen Frears, who has done many other movies including "Dangerous Liaisons", "My beautiful Launderette", "The Snapper", and "High Fidelity". This movie is centered on immigrants who work the underbelly of London – in fact there are essentially no native Englishmen in it. A mafia-style East European is running an illegal organ-donating operation out of a hotel where the action is centered. It is a gritty and unsettling movie, but interesting and one with a sort of redemption. Not for every one though.
<b>Dish, The</b>	5	<b>The Dish.</b> This is a wonderful movie about an Australian radio dish that transmitted all of the first moon-walk video. It is charming, warm, and inspiring. My daughters saw it with us and were moved to tears -- they had no idea of the impact the first moon landing had on the whole world.
<b>Do You Believe in Miracles?</b>	5	" <b>Do You Believe in Miracles?</b> " is a documentary about the 1980 U.S. hockey team and its gold medal victory in the winter Olympics. This is a marvelous piece of film making, following the coach and the team members as the legendary rink rats coalesce from rag tag scrappers to the pinnacle of their sport. And it's all true! It has the come from behind heroism of fiction, but it actually happened. The grit, courage, and determination of these guys will bring tears to your eyes – I guarantee it. This is not chest beating jingoism it is a terrific film about people rising to be great. It is really inspiring.
<b>Doctor Strangelove</b>	5	We watched " <b>Doctor Strangelove</b> " again for the umpteenth time and realized I had never reviewed what may be my favorite movie. This dark comedy was directed by Stanley Kubrick and stars Peter Sellers in three roles, and great performances by George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden, Keenan Wynn, and Slim Pickens. Based on a story by Terry Southern, this scrip is a masterpiece. The directing and editing are superb so that all together it is just about as perfect as any movie can be. It is a bit frightening that the humor is largely at the expense of our deepest human nature.
<b>Dogtown and Z-Boys</b>	5	" <b>Dogtown and Z-Boys</b> " is a fascinating documentary about the Venice Beach folk who invented modern skate boarding. The story was written by two skaters, Stacy Peralta and Craig Stecyk, and directed by Peralta – still it does not seem to be self promoting. The Z-boys were working class surfers in a tough part of LA. When the waves were down they carried their skills into skate boarding. They invented "vertical boarding" when they sneaked into abandoned swimming pools and rode them. This film works on every level. It is pretty well made and cut, although you are aware these guys are not Errol Morris. The individual stories are fascinating and moving, and the action is wonderful to watch. The skaters talk frequently about style and view their sport as art. I agree. No ballerina has anything on the grace, or the personal interpretation, of these guys. Don't miss this film.
<b>Drum Line</b>	2	First off we went to see " <b>Drum Line</b> ". The story involves the battle of marching bands at some black colleges in Georgia. As you might expect, the plot is trite, hokey, and predictable in the most primitive cycle of drama; the story is just a matrix in which to set the band performances. However, the characters are very likeable and the bands are terrific fun to watch. (It could just as well have been a documentary as far as that goes, but we would have missed some charming actors). Overall I liked the movie. I will say in passing that I have attended several live performances of the Japanese Kodo Drummers. As good as the college bands were in drum line, they don't evoke the hair-standing-on-end emotional reaction of the Kodos. That is drumming of an even higher order.
<b>Duel</b>	5	I caught a bit of " <b>Duel</b> ", one of my favorite movies ever. This is Steven Spielberg's first major movie, and I believe was based on a student film project. It stars Dennis Weaver as a modern everyman, frustrated with his job, and unhappy in his marriage. On a business trip out of LA he gets into a road incident with a brutish looking gas tanker; its muddied, wiped, windows are like its evil eyes. It is clear the driver is toying with Weaver and actually wants to kill him with his powerful rig. Weaver encounters the driver in a roadside restaurant, since the truck is there, but he cannot identify the man, which leads to further off-road incidents and humiliations. The plot is simple, but it focuses on key human issues of dignity, power, integrity, and loneliness as well as the emotions that surround them like love and rage. This is a very skillful movie and an exciting story to boot.

Emma	4	I rented " <b>Emma</b> ", the Jane Austen story starring Kate Beckinsale, and watched it with my girls. Now there were two Emmas released in 1996, one starring Gwyneth Paltrow and one starring Kate Beckinsale. I saw the Paltrow version in the theatre some years ago and liked it well enough. The rap on it was that Mr. Knightly, as portrayed by Jeremy Northam, was too young and handsome to fit the book. This version is considered better by the Austen purists, and it certainly was well done and great fun. It tells the story of a young gentlewoman who tries to make matches that suit her version of the world, but which is generally off base. Mr. Knightly, watches her and tries to guide her while all the while being in love with her. Although all the Austen stories are good, I still think that <b>Pride and Prejudice</b> is the gold standard.
<b>Endurance, The: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition</b>	5	Sunday, Nov 18, Polly and Kate and I went to see " <b>The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition</b> ". This is a superb documentary about the 1914 expedition to cross Antarctica. The story itself is so amazing that if it were written as a novel it would be dismissed as preposterous -- "why not write something at least somewhat believable"? But it's all true and this movie has film footage, still pictures, and drawings made by the crew. They were trapped in the ice pack and drifted for months while their ship, the Endurance, was crushed. The story of their amazing escape has to be seen to be believed. It is not only extraordinarily interesting, but will give you a new sense of human courage and strength. There is modern footage of the area to accompany the narrative. It includes spectacular views of glaciers, icebergs and the rugged mountains of South Georgia. If you can find this movie in your town -- don't miss it.
<b>Englishman who went up a hill and came down a mountain, The</b>	3	I watched " <b>The Englishman who went up a hill and came down a mountain</b> " at David's and enjoyed it a great deal. It is based on a true story of a Welch communities that cannot accept that its beloved hill is too short, under 1000 feet, to make the mountain definition in 1917 Britain, and endeavors to build it up. Very heart warming, mildly funny, and human.
<b>Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind, The</b>	4	Polly and I went with friends to see " <b>The eternal sunshine of the spotless mind</b> ". This movie is directed by Charlie Kaufman who also directed " <b>Adaptation</b> " and " <b>Being John Malkovich</b> ", so you expect some creativity. And you get it. This is a very engaging film with a strong cast. Jim Carrey gives an excellent dramatic performance, Kate Winslett is the bitch he is in love with, Tom Wilkinson does his costmary professional performance as the doctor, and Kursten Duncie is good as a secretary in love with her boss. The story centers on a the idea of a procedure that can wipe out memories and when Winslett wipes Carrey we wipes her back, but fights the procedure when he realizes how precious memories, and relations, are. This is a gritty movie, with unglamorous characters – even the doctor and his technicians are down at the heels – and so we need to identify with everyman as it were. There is redemption here, in a most thoughtful movie. Two thumbs up here.
<b>Fahrenheit 911</b>	4	During a visit to Mpls I took my Mom to see " <b>Fahrenheit 911</b> ". This documentary has raised a lot of fuss, but I loved it – sort of preaching to the choir. Writer/director Michael Moore uses film clips, interviews, and documents to build a case that W Bush had less than honorable intentions for going to war in Iraq. It may be that Moore has picked his film clips carefully, and some say unfairly, but they are very cleverly interwoven to make his case. Even Moore opponents agree this is a well made project. I also think Moore raises some important questions that need to be publicly discussed. It is my opinion that a true democracy requires honest attention and a fair OPEN discussion of key issues, which is just not the case any longer. The big issue Moore raises is how should the Great Republic make the most important decision it can make – when to send its young people to war, and who will make this tremendous sacrifice? Let's talk about it.
<b>Far from Heaven</b>	1	Polly and I went to see " <b>Far from Heaven</b> ", starring Julianne Moore, Dennis Quaid, and Dennis Haysbert. The film has gotten rave reviews for its recreation of the 1950's style and for its intelligent handling of tricky social issues, like race and homosexuality in an Eisenhower perfect world. The movie is set in Connecticut and so gives a window onto northern values about race at a time when the south was aflame. The movie succeeds in recreating the era, although it occasionally seemed a bit too self conscious of its language. Exploring these other tricky issues is always good, too, I suppose. The acting was mostly good. However, I did not enjoy watching this movie. Movies were often bad back then and recreating a bad movie isn't that enjoyable. As common for

		that time the movie is a bit ham-handed and unbelievable. I feel like I did when the very horrible <b>English Patient</b> was out - everyone loved it but me. I think now, though, that many people know I was right. Clare has written to say she thinks this movie is a no-star bomb.
<b>Fargo</b>	5	I watched " <b>Fargo</b> " for the umpteenth time and found it marvelous as always. This is my second favorite Coen Brothers film (only after <b>Raising Arizona</b> ). It has wonderful acting by William H. Macy, Francis McDormund, and Steve Buscemi and strong support from Harve Pressnel. The Coens are Minneapolis boys and they have caught a lot of the flavor of the area, although they trowel on the accent a bit thick. The story centers on a plot by a car salesman, played brilliantly by Macy, who is really a loser and is striving to find some dignity for himself but it all fails. You can watch him come unglued in a truly amazing performance. Buscemi, and the scary Peter Stormare, are small time thugs he locates in Fargo to kidnap his wife and get some ransom from her rich but overbearing dad (Presnell). Matters all misfire and a lot of violence ensues. McDormund plays the sheriff of Brainard, where the first crimes are committed. She is like the calm center of a mad world – a competent yet humane person that does what has to be done (as Garrison Keillor tells us from Lake Wobegon). This is a must see movie.
<b>Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control</b>	4	" <b>Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control</b> " is a wonderful documentary by Errol Morris, the genius of the genre. This fascinating film focuses on four men, a lion tamer, topiary gardener, mole-rat habit designer, and an MIT robot designer. What do they have in common? What can we learn about ourselves and the nature of life from them? Check it out and see. Morris uses his cutting and a hilarious old background movie about lion tamer Clyde Beatty. I love this movie
<b>Fast Runner, The</b>	2	We rented " <b>The Fast Runner</b> ", the first movie filmed in Inuit and a 2001 Cannes Film Festival winner for a first picture. It was quite interesting in many ways, but very slow. The story involves a small hunting group of Eskimos who have an evil encounter with a shaman and it impacts the group into the next generation. The landscape is beautiful, but raw and you wonder how anyone can live there. We don't know when the movie is set, which gives us a timeless feel for this simple life. There is no metal anywhere, so it could be set from, say, 1000 BC to 1900. The details of the lives presented here reminding me of the marvelous and powerful book <b>Kabloona</b> , by Gontran de Poncins. These are truly primitive folk, with basic emotions and no real nuance. The pacing of the movie is slow, I guess like Eskimo life, and the acting, by native people, is not really very good. Even so, I enjoyed watching the movie and would certainly recommend it to scholarly types. My daughter, however, has it in for Eskimos and thinks the movie should not even be discussed.
<b>Finding Nemo</b>	3	Clare and I went to see " <b>Finding Nemo</b> ", the latest Pixar presentation. The graphics were spectacular, the sea environment offering a wonderful subject for the Pixar skill and imagination. I liked the movie a lot. The plot and the characters were a definite step down from the marvelous <b>Toy Story I</b> and <b>Toy Story II</b> , but were about on a par with <b>Monsters Inc.</b> Definitely worth seeing, especially on the big screen.
<b>Finding Neverland</b>	4	Polly, Kate, and I went to see the newly released " <b>Finding Neverland</b> " and really loved it. It stars Johnny Depp as James Barrie, author of Peter Pan, and Kate Winslett as his muse, the widowed Mrs. Llewellyn-Davies. Dustin Hoffman plays a sympathetic impresario and Julie Christie is the harsh grandmother. The strongest impression I have is that Johnny Depp may be the most talented actor in Hollywood. He is simply fantastic in the role of the dream-driven author, and his Scottish accent is rock solid. All of the acting is good, and the sets are scrumptious. The Edwardian costumes help carry us to an era where wealth and power merged with taste and civility, which is like a fantasy in itself. I loved the way the story moved from narration to fantasy as Barrie creates the world of make believe. Meantime, the crocodile keeps following us with his ticking clock, a reminder that in real life we will all grow up and worse. This movie is marvelous.
<b>Flight of the Phoenix - 1965</b>	5	I need to say a few words about " <b>Flight of the Phoenix</b> " – the 1965 original starring James Stewart, Richard Attenborough, Peter Finch, Hardy Krüger, Ernest Borgnine and some others. This is a must see A number one movie. An oil company work crew, lost and off course, crashes during a sand storm in the Libyan desert. This crash site now becomes a self-contained microcosm where a variety of dramatic tensions can work themselves out. The goal is to build a small plane from the wreckage and fly to safety. But how to do it with the resources at hand? It is a brilliant plot idea and very well used

		here. The cast is fine but it is the story that stars. The role of technology, intuition, heroism, loyalty, individualism and personalities all interact in a delicious stew. I don't know what the 2004 remake will be like, but I am suspicious that it can match the original.
<b>Final</b>	3	<b>"Final"</b> is an interesting little movie directed by Cambell Scott and starring Dennis Leary and Hope Davis. Leary awakes in a mental hospital with flashes of his past and the bizarre notion that he is to be killed by injection. Davis is helping him work through his problems – or is she? The acting is good and like a stage play, essentially everything occurs in one room. Not a great movie, in fact it is quite obscure, but we all were engaged by it.
<b>Flirting with Disaster</b>	3	<b>"Flirting with Disaster"</b> stars Ben Stiller, Tea Leoni, Alan Alda, and Lilly Tomlin. Stiller commences a search for his birth parents, aided by Tea Leoni. There are numerous hilarious episodes as various candidates are accepted and rejected. Ultimately the real folks turn up as Arizona hippies played with a hilariously deft touch by Alda and Tomlin. This movie is a lot of laughs.
<b>Fog of War, The</b>	5	I rented <b>"The Fog of War"</b> . This is a documentary interview with Robert McNamara, directed by the brilliant Errol Morris (who also did "Thin Blue Line", and "Fast Cheap and Out of Control"). It is evident that McNamara is a brilliant man, even though I despised him during the Vietnam war era. When he is on camera he is riveting. He is concerned about big issues and is clearly a mind to be reckoned with. Morris does his usual artistic job inter-weaving interviews with supporting footage to create a non-linear narrative that tells the story in a fascinating way. I think this film is a masterpiece, a true work of art and should be required viewing for any voter in the Great Republic.
<b>Following</b>	4	My daughter Kate is in town and we saw several movies. We rented <b>"Following"</b> , a most interesting little film. It was written, directed, and shot by Chris Nolan, the guy who wrote and directed <b>"Memento"</b> . It is clear he was developing that idea in this, his first movie. The thing was shot over a year, just on weekends, with his friends. It is a spooky film noire with stark photography, a sense of brooding, as is essential to the genre, the protagonist never is sure what is going on. Nolan does some time jumping here. It helps raise questions about the plot but it is not as integral to the story as in Memento. I really liked this movie, for itself, but also as an example of what a genius with a mission can accomplish outside the system.
<b>Freaky Friday</b>	3	Clare wanted us to see one of her favorites <b>"Freaky Friday"</b> , starring Jamie Lee Curtis and . This Disney movie is a remake of a 1977 movie starring Barbara Harris and Jodie Foster. The story is that a mom and teen aged daughter, at each other in the usual way, trade consciousness so that each inhabits the others body until they come to some understanding. This spell occurs under the hand of a kindly Chinese lady with interesting powers. No matter how we get there, the story works well and Curtis does a terrific job acting the teenage role. This story could have dropped like a bomb but it is deftly handled and thoroughly enjoyable. Well done.
<b>French Detective, The</b>	3	We rented the 1975 movie <b>"The French Detective"</b> . I enjoyed it a good deal. It was an interesting plot, the characters were engaging, if a bit broadly drawn, and it had some humor. The story centers on the investigation of a political group whose henchman kills a Roen policeman when he interferes with their beating of a political opponent. It is fun to see the way the French justice is perceived to work by a tough, honest, but very cheesed off chief inspector.
<b>Friday Night Lights</b>	4	We rented <b>"Friday Night Lights"</b> and found it very engaging on several levels. The movie is based on a book by H. G. Bissinger where he followed the actual fortunes of the Odessa Texas football team. In the first instance this is a sports movie, where the team must struggle to achieve greatness. There is football action, long runs, slick pass plays, hard hits, and bad breaks. More importantly, this is a movie about the psychology and sociology of football in a smallish town. It is clear that football is the center of this towns identity. Everyone obsesses about it. Their sense of self worth is tied up in the team. Now for modern urban dwellers, this narrow obsession seems limiting and rather crude. Even so, you get the sense watching the movie that the group identity, solidarity, and emotional bonding is a very powerful thing. Those who live with it and through it may experience something that soldiers do, but that urban sophisticates do not. Whether that is good or bad is open to debate. In any case I recommend this movie whole heartedly. It stars Billy Bob Thornton as the coach, and my orthopedic surgeon,

		Carry Windler, has a part, but in fact there are no real stars here, only the story.
<b>Galaxy Quest</b>	5	We also rented " <b>Galaxy Quest</b> " for the umpteenth time. I saw this movie in the theater many years ago, but it remains a favorite. It finds the cast of a now defunct Star Trek-like TV show doing personal appearances. They are picked up by real aliens who have monitored the show for years and built their civilization around its acted heroism and moral values. The aliens are wonderful, their villainous enemy is nasty, and the Star Trek satire is well done. The cast of Tim Allen, Sigourney Weaver, Alan Rickman, and others does a good job. They are tired and cynical early on, awed and frightened when they realize what is happening, but not too serious at any time to spoil the fun. This is a don't miss it movie.
<b>Garden State</b>	2	We went with friends to see " <b>Garden State</b> ", written, directed by, and starring Zach Braff and Natalie Portman. I was intrigued by the trailers and a 4 star review in our local paper. In fact, this is not a 4 star movie – maybe two. The acting is very workman like and convincing, no complaints there. I just felt the plot was real tired; it is about an upper class family which is, guess what ---- dysfunctional! Recently we had the <b>Royal Tannenbaums</b> , and <b>Iggy Goes Down</b> as other examples. This movie has some interesting moments, but if you see the trailers, you see it all.
<b>Georgie Girl</b>	5	We saw " <b>Georgie Girl</b> " on HBO while Clare and Ibbey were visiting; it stars Lynne Redgrave, James Mason, Alan Bates, and Charlotte Rampling. This 60's hip comedy is still first rate. Georgia is the dowdy daughter of a serving family, working for Mason who has a long interest in the girl. Rambling is her room mate at their flat, and Bates is one of Rampling's men. We see the beautiful folk as pretty shallow, and even cruel, but Georgie's humor and humanity shine through in this humorous drama with a practical twist ending.
<b>Get Carter</b>	3	We rented " <b>Get Carter</b> ", a 1971 Michael Caine thriller. Carter is a London criminal who goes to New Castle to investigate the death of his brother. He is a stoic and very hard man, but these English criminals seem meek because they hardly ever have guns. You keep thinking, "Tony Soprano would clean this up in a minute". The plot has some holes, I think, because it is a bit confusing so maybe I missed something. Our movie book gave it 4 of 5 stars, but I think it is only so-so.
<b>Get Shorty</b>	5	At Clare's we rewatched " <b>Get Shorty</b> ". The movie is based on the Elmore Leonard book and is one of my favorite movies of all time. The cast is great with John Travolta doing a super job as Chili Palmer. Dennis Farina, Gene Hackman, Danny DeVito, and Rene Russo are all good and that fast, sharp, Leonard banter just carries you away. You must see this movie at least once, and that is not going to be enough. It always brings you up.
<b>Ghost World</b>	4	I just saw <b>Ghost World</b> , starring Thora Birch and Steve Buscemi, and it was wonderful. The story centers on a somewhat precocious high school senior trying to find herself. Old news you may say, but this is no ordinary coming of age flick. The acting is first rate and there are more questions than answers. The ending is surreal and will elicit a lot of conversation. Be sure to catch this one.
<b>Gift, The</b>	3	Clare and Russ own a copy of " <b>The Gift</b> " starring Cate Blanchette, Keanu Reeves, and Greg Kinear. The movie was directed by Billie Bob Thornton and is set in the Louisiana swamp lands. Everyone here is crazy and so Blanchette's job a psychic reader is in demand. The plot is somewhat predictable, but it has its moments. Not really first rate despite its strong cast.
<b>Girl With A Pearl Earring</b>	3	" <b>Girl With A Pearl Earring</b> " is based on the wonderful novel by Tracy Chevalier. It stars Scarlett Johansson as Griet and Colin Firth as Vermeer. The movie is a good representation of the novel and captures what scholars consider to be a pretty accurate portrayal of the physical and moral landscape of the time. The movie is beautifully filmed and is meant to show the viewer the kind of light and scenes which inspired the genius of Delft. This is not an action flick and may not appeal to all tastes, but I enjoyed it thoroughly and remained engaged throughout. I love that painting and admire the way Chevalier took this object and invented such a fascinating story around it – you want it to be true.
<b>Gladiator</b>	1	While I'm thinking about it, I should say a word about " <b>Gladiator</b> ", an academy award winner for best picture. In a word, it sucks. I suppose the scope, scale, blood, dust, and action are impressive enough. The plot, though, is so ham-handedly stupid it defies description. What a set up. This thing was as goofy as any old Arnold movie, and was

		even worse because IT TOOK ITSELF SERIOUSLY. Bah, hum-bug.
<b>Golden Bowl, The</b>	2	<b>The Golden Bowl.</b> OK Mechant/Ivory costume drama of the Henry James novel. Not really first rate though; we're not talking <b>Room With a View</b> to be sure.
<b>Gone With the Wind</b>	5	When the family gathered for Thanksgiving we all watched " <b>Gone With the Wind</b> " for the umpteenth time (at least for some of us). Needless to say, this is a must-see classic for any film fan. It is a terrific story with compelling characters, famous actors and actresses and towering spectacle (mostly the burning of Atlanta). The movie is a part of American popular culture and you need to know it just to keep up with everyday references. On this occasion I must confess, we got a bit silly and started bad-mouthing the movie to our own hilarity. It was a new take on an old favorite but also worked well.
<b>Good Girl, The</b>	3+	We rented the newly released " <b>The Good Girl</b> " starring Jennifer Anniston, with John C. Riley and others. Anniston plays a 30 year old high school grad working in a Wall-mart type store. Her husband is a nice guy, a house painter , but he is not ambitious, is boring, and smokes way to much dope with his partner. She sees her life going nowhere. When a poetic young man arrives at work, she is drawn to him, although he is obviously a loser and mental rat-bag in his own way. Her life takes on some interest although their affair leads to some interesting consequences. At first I thought Anniston couldn't pull off her role with its west Texas twang, but I soon became engaged and came to enjoy this movie a good deal. It was a different story and way different from the fluff that most of the "Friends" have gotten mired in. I give it thumbs up.
<b>Goodfellas</b>	4	" <b>Goodfellas</b> " is a Marin Scorsese film starring Robert De Niro, Ray Liotta, Joe Pesci, Lorraine Bracco, and Paul Sorvino (plus others minor roles Sopranos fans will recognize). This is based on the true story of the mafia gang that carred out the famous Lufthansa heist, plus many other outrages. The movie is very interesting, showing the life style of these criminals in its many facets. The Liotta character always wanted to be a mobster, attracted by the money, power, celebrity, freedom, and respect of these sociopaths. He attains these but at the end is forced to sell them out to keep them from killing him – the downside of the life not evident to the younger man. The film is chocked full of bad language and there is some nasty vilence. Howver, it is a terrific movie both informatve and entertaining.
<b>Good Night and Good Luck</b>	5	" <b>Good Night and Good Luck</b> " is the story of Edward R. Murrow's efforts to expose and depose Joseph McCarthy. It stars David Strathairn as Murrow, and he does a fabulous job, capturing Murrow's look, sound, reflective intelligence, and even his mannerisms (I remember watching Murrow as a child). Writer/Director George Clooney plays Fred Friendly, Murrow's producer. The movie is filmed is sharp black and white which not only facilitates real McCarthy footage, but gives a feel of the early 1950's. I gained a new respect, as I'm sure Clooney desired, for Murrow. His intelligence, integrity, and courage has long set the standard for journalist excellence. Murrow believed that a functioning democracy requires the truth to work with, and the personal interest of the citizen to reflect on this. It is a timely subject for an America in which Fox "news" (which to them means bullying propaganda and out right lies) is perhaps the main source of information for millions. I wish all Americans would see this important and well crafted movie.
<b>Gosford Park</b>	3	Polly and I went with some friends to see <b>Gosford Park</b> . I was amazed that it was full on a Saturday afternoon, and when my secretary had tried to see it Friday night it was sold out. You have to love Austin. This is the latest Robert Altman film (some of my other Altman favorites are <b>Cookies Fortune, The Player, Nashville, McCabe and Mrs. Miller, and MASH</b> ). As usual, he tells a good story with interesting characters and interactions. The setting is a shooting-weekend at an estate in 1934 England. The story is all upstairs-downstairs, and the characters are fascinating in a variety of ways. Everyone in the world is in the movie, so that is fun. There is a crime at the end, and the movie is nearly spoiled by the presence of a too broadly drawn inspector, but even this gaff can't prevent this from being a fun movie.
<b>Grande Illusion, La</b>	4	I watched <b>La Grande Illusion</b> again. This 1937 film by Jean Renoir is rightly considered a masterpiece and one of the must sees for a true movie aficionado. The story centers on a group of French POWs who want to escape from a series of German camps in WWI. It has a strongly anti-war , pro-life, message released just as Germany was gearing up for WWII. The story also shows the modern breakdown of some ancient ideas as we watch the interactions of a French nobleman, Capt. de Boeldieu, and a

		German military aristocrat played by Eric von Stroheim.
<b>Grizzly Man</b>	2	" <b>Grizzly Man</b> " is a documentary directed by Werner Herzog about Timothy Treadwell; it has won a number of awards and a lot of critical acclaim. Yet I think it compares pretty unfavorably with some great recent documentaries like "Fog of War", "Spellbound", Hands on a Hard body, or "Murderball". I think there are two reasons for this lower tier rating. First, I don't think Herzog is a good documentary film maker, although he did have some interesting insights about Treadwell as the latter went from film maker himself to film actor. It just was not a tightly edited story. Secondly, and more importantly, the viewer has little sympathy for Treadwell. Treadwell is clearly disturbed and runs away from society to become a bear. He lives for 13 summers with the bears, treating them like friends, although he constantly alludes to their dangerous nature. He films EVERYTHING, and comes to star in his own production; in fact Herzog just splices his stuff and tosses in some interviews with friends and associates. Treadwell has such an inflated view of his importance to the bears and society in general, that it is hard to cut him any slack, even though it is clear he is a nutter. In the end, we are secretly glad the bear ate him, but it is a shame his girlfriend had to suffer the same fate.
<b>Guns of Navarone, The</b>	2	I watched " <b>The Guns of Navarone</b> " again after many years. I read the Alistair McClain novel when I was a teen and thought it was very exciting indeed. The movie stars Gregory Peck as the leader of a team of dare-devil misfits (what a novel idea) who must scale the cliffs of a Mediterranean isle to spike two massive guns preventing the British navy from rescuing trapped forces in WW2. There is a big cast including David Niven, Anthony Quinn, Anthony Quayle, Irene Papas, and Gia Scala. In retrospect this is a pretty far fetched story. Our heroes shoot and never miss, why those fumble-fingered Nazis can't hit the broad side of a barn, and are really stupid to boot. This movie was nominated for best picture but lost to West Side Story. Times change, because they are both pretty mediocre movies by contemporary standards.
<b>Guys and Dolls</b>	2	Polly and I watched the 1955 Joseph Mankiewicz musical " <b>Guys and Dolls</b> ", starring Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra, and Jean Simmons. The criminal underclass of NYC is given a fairly sympathetic treatment and some of the lines are funny and insightful. I also now understand why the Simpson's Fat Tony speaks in the distinct and elevated way he does - 'cause that is the joke in this old movie. The songs are not great and Brando is not a singer. Also the movie is way long at over 150 minutes running time, so I can't recommend it except as a history lesson on movies.
<b>Hamlet</b>	4	The 1990 " <b>Hamlet</b> " has a formidable cast, Mel Gibson, Glenn Close, Alan Bates, Helena Bonham Carter, Ian Holm, and Paul Scofield. The movie was directed by Franco Zeffirelli, who also did "the taming of the Shrew" and "Romeo and Juliet" (incidentally the first date Polly and I ever had). Not only that, but the direction, photography, and action are first rate and make for a most watchable film. The archaic English of the Bard's plays make it hard for modern ears to comprehend, and this requires an energy input many people won't make. This is regrettable because there is a reason these plays have endured. Hamlet is considered by many to be the finest Shakespeare play. Although it is not my personal favorite (I am a big fan of both Richards) there can be no doubt Hamlet is a big one, where about half the lines are part of our shared speech heritage ; a few examples include "To be, or not to be ..", "the play's the thing..", "alas poor Yorkick", "What a piece of work is man!" etc etc etc.
<b>Hands on a Hard Body</b>	5	" <b>Hands on a Hard Body</b> " is one of the greatest films EVER. It is a 1998 documentary directed by S.R. Bindler, about people competing to win a Nissan hard body pickup at a dealership in Longview Texas. They do this by standing there, keeping a hand on the truck, until the last one standing wins it. Sound interesting? Well it REALLY is. The film focuses on the contest itself, but delves with great sympathy into the stories of the contestants. These are funny, toughing, and immensely human. You as viewer will become emotionally engaged and will pick a favorite to root for. No Hollywood epic you have ever seen will hold your attention like this indy masterpiece. Everyone I have told about this movie, who actually sees it, loves it. You will be a better person if you see this wonderful movie.

<b>Hard Word, The</b>	1	We rented an Aussie thriller called " <b>The Hard Word</b> ", starring Guy Pierce (he of the fabulous films " <b>Memento</b> " and " <b>LA Confidential</b> "). An NPR review said this was a string of thriller clichés, but done with unusual gusto that made it a must see. I beg to differ. This thing is worthless. The plot is unbelievable when you can half-way figure out what is going on. This is like a bad soap opera outing.
<b>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</b>	4	I have read only the first two Harry Potters, but the movie " <b>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</b> " did a good job of creating Harry's world about like I expected. The acting was good all around, and the special effects were, well, special. They helped create an intriguing and engrossing world that allows the viewer to lose him, or her, self. Some episodes of the book were missing, in particular only one quitache match was shown, but I can see where the director simply couldn't include everything and do a good job of developing key scenes. The Rawling's book is a modern classic that skillfully touches on the dreams, fears, and imagination of children of all ages, so by staying true to the book, even a half-baked director like Chris Columbus could do a good job. In short, I liked the movie a great deal and recommend it to anyone.
<b>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</b>	4	We went to see " <b>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</b> ". It was great fun for all. I didn't like it quite as much as the first one, but many family members preferred the new one. The heroes were brave, the villains were sinister, and the special effects were great. The adventure plot of this movie was more interesting than in the first Potter, but there the novelty of the parallel wizard-world was most intriguing. In spite of our hero's brave deeds in episode 2, I must say that if I were a student at Hogwarts School, I would be a little annoyed at the special attention the faculty pays to them. They seem like real teachers pets, but I guess that's just me.
<b>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Ashkaban</b>	3	We rented " <b>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Ashkaban</b> " and watched it on Clare and Russ's mighty big TV. This is the third Potter movie, and it was pretty good. I read this third book and mostly enjoyed it. However, the big scene where Potter, Snape, Black, Pettigrew and whoever all serially pull wands on each other was right out of a B western. I don't know if I will read, or watch any more of them. The production values were good, but I didn't care much for this story and am growing a bit tired of the whole deal.
<b>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</b>	4	" <b>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</b> " is the fourth Potter movie and the first one for which I have not read the book. The computer graphics are spectacular and do allow the viewer to go places, and see things, he would never see otherwise. More and more these cyber animators are the whole deal in movies. In this story our continuing heroes and heroines are adolescents. The boys look bulkier and Hermione has some curves. The scene of the ball explores this new aspect of their lives and works well. It feels like a real human drama. The rest of the story has the usual dangers, excitement, and magic although a real death occurs to tell us this is weighty matter. The central story is a competition, held for school children, where death is a real concern. What are the authorities thinking, and why don't the students protest? Are they like Romans at the gladiator games? The stories close connection with English school culture makes it easy to except this as a day dream I guess, while heroic magic creates a great escapism for children of all ages (as they say). I mostly bought into it and enjoyed the movie, especially the effect. However, I think writing about magic is not as demanding as staying within the constraints of reality. It is easy to create a menace, or solve a problem, by just pulling a magic trick out of your...out of your ear, rather than to carefully construct a realistic event.
<b>Heist</b>	1	I took our extended family to see the new David Mamet movie called " <b>Heist</b> ", starring Gene Hackman, Danny DeVito, and Rebecca Pigeon. I was very optimistic because the reviews were generally favorable and I loved " <b>The Spanish Prisoner</b> ". Mamet has written a lot for the live theatre and his dialog is often stagy, but it worked great in the Prisoner, and gave the movie a distinctive air. In Heist, no one does it put Pigeon (Mamet's wife) and it makes her sound weird, stiff, and unbelievable. This is not the only problem either. In general, we don't care about the people in the story, and the plot is unsatisfying. Mamet just arbitrarily pulls out one trick after another, like baggies from a big roll, but there is no reason to believe in them. The audience is never given a clue what is afoot, so the whole plot is as contrived as some ridiculous Sylvester Stallone shoot-em-up. Heist was a real disappointment.
<b>Hellboy</b>	2	I rented " <b>Hellboy</b> " starring Ron Perlman as the purveyor of the fist of doom. This is a comic book movie and has the gaudy colors and adolescent humor of the genre.

		<p>Perlman does not take himself seriously so that gives it a light touch. The story is comic book stuff, Rasputin, back from the dead, works with Nazis to release demons from their crystal prison yada yada yada. Hellboy is a baby demon who comes through the portal and works for the government to keep these villains at bay. OK stupid time viewing; I made popcorn, sat back, and let it happen.</p>
<b>High Crimes</b>	3	<p>We also rented a thriller called "<b>High Crimes</b>", starring Ashley Judd and Morgan Freeman. Many action/thriller movies are just over the top preposterous, but this one was quite plausible. The acting was good, the dialog believable and Ashley Judd is just plain gorgeous. The story involves a military trial of Ashley's hubby, who is accused of being a Lieutenant Calley style mass murder. We guessed the plot twist pretty early in the movie, but in spite of that it was still very watchable. Many viewers, though, may not be as analytical as our neurotic band and may have gotten a thrilling surprise at the end.</p>
<b>High Plains Drifter</b>	1	<p>"<b>High Plains Drifter</b>" was directed by and starred Clint Eastwood, trying to recreate the character from the Sergio Leone Spaghetti westerns. He is the same inscrutable, tough, but just man of those cult favorites. This movie is as surreal and confusing as they are, and is rather nasty as well. The town of Lago, beside a lake in the desert, perpetrated a terrible crime against its late sheriff and Eastwood has apparently come to dispense his own form of justice. (I don't know why it is called high plains anything when the set looks pretty much like Arizona). These town people are all the more despicable because they are under threat from some other bad men, whom they sold out, but will not defend themselves. I mean what kind of people will not shoot their enemies? Instead they hire him to save them. He kills and rapes various bad members of society and separates the few sheep from the goats before riding off into the sunset.</p>
<b>Himalaya</b>	4	<p>I went to see <b>Himalaya</b> a couple weeks ago. The photography was spectacular, the scenery was exotic, and the story, although elementary, was profound and well told. It also has yaks. This film may not be easy to find, especially in the twigs, but it is well worth seeing if it is available.</p>
<b>Holes</b>	4	<p>We went to see the movie "<b>Holes</b>" and liked it a great deal. We also read the young adult novel of the same name written by Austinite Louis Sachar, who also adapted it for the screen play. The movie gives top billing to Sigourney Weaver and Jon Voight, but unknown kids are the real stars. (Although Voight really does a terrific job showing the youngsters how to act a role). This is a good story with a strong narrative drive. It was very faithful to the book which was a real page turner. Although it is a plot driven story the characterization is also pretty well done. The story centers on Stanley Yelnats, the hapless victim of an old family curse, who is sent to a boys rehabilitation camp in west Texas and where character is built by digging holes. The warden, Weaver, has an ulterior motive, which is to search for the lost loot of the notorious criminal Kissin' Kate Barlow. The way all these stories interweave is very clever and this is a genuinely enjoyable movie.</p>

<b>Holy Smoke</b>	2	I also rented " <b>Holy Smoke</b> ", co-written and directed by Jane Campion (she of <b>An Angel At My Table, The Piano</b> , and two Palm D'Or awards). This story has some potential. An Australian girl, played by Kate Winslett, falls under the spell of a Hindu mystic while traveling in India. Her distressed family calls in a deprogrammer, Harvey Keitel, to reclaim her. She appears to play ball with a three day project but in fact uses her sexual allure to undermine the deprogrammer. What could be a good plot doesn't work because Keitel is unbelievable in his role. The deprogrammer has done 189 of these cases, why does he lose his grip now? Hasn't he seen this all before? Also his descent is precipitous and humiliating as he assumes a sort of Emil Jennings role from "The Blue Angel". As in all contemporary films, her family is dysfunctional, and this includes the totally unbelievable scene where her sister-in-law gets it on with the not all that appealing Keitel after "knowing" him for about 10 minutes. Not a good movie, although Kate Winslett gets naked as usual.
<b>Home Movie</b>	3	We rented a documentary called " <b>Home Movie</b> " by director Chris Smith (who also did the very enjoyable "American Movie"). It grew from an advertising project he did for a home improvement store, examining five unusual homes. One thing that seems apparent, unusual homes are generally occupied by unusual people. This includes a good 'ol boy alligator farmer on his house boat, an inventor (and his bizarre lady friend) in a mechanized home of the future in Chicago, a couple in a converted Atlas missile silo in Kansas, a couple of cat-fanciers in a cat maze, and an ex-actress in a Hawaiian tree house. Although not up to the best of Errol Morris documentaries, this is still a fascinating work. The people are interesting as are their homes, although the cat people kind of grossed me out. I also liked an extra on the DVD about a Monsanto plastic house from the '50s.
<b>Hotel Rwanda</b>	4	" <b>Hotel Rwanda</b> " tells the true story of a Hutu hotel manager who cleverly managed to save over a thousand Tutsis refugees in the 1994 genocide. The manger is played brilliantly be Don Cheadle, who must be one of the most talented people in Hollywood. His emotions seem genuine and he uses a very convincing accent. The story is a moving one; the plight of these people is as sad as the Jews in the Holocaust, and although on a somewhat smaller scale, nearly a million were slaughtered. As usual, the West stood by and watched it happen. The same thing is happening even now in Darfur and we are still doing nothing. This movie should be watched by all Americans, not only because it is a masterful piece of film but in the hope that we can become more aware and empathetic to people who live in misery and terror no matter how far away.
<b>Hours, The</b>	3	We rented " <b>The Hours</b> ", a film with wide critical acclaim. It stars Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, Meryl Streep, and Ed Harris. The movie has three meshing stories, one in 1924 England centers on Virginia Woolf, played by Kidman, as she is writing Mrs Dalloway, one in 1951 LA, centers on a housewife, Moore, who is reading the novel and is also depressed and contemplating suicide, and one in 2001 NYC, centering on Streep and Harris, ex-lovers now both homosexuals and planning a Dallowayesque party. The acting is professional, but all very heavy. The recurring theme is whether life is just too much – which can be a downer. The value, I suppose, is to give an airing to the difficulty faced by suicidally depressed people who clearly do exist and whose one and only life must be tragically unhappy. I can't say I enjoyed the movie, but it has some artistic merit I suppose.
<b>House of Sand and Fog</b>	4	We rented " <b>House of Sand and Fog</b> " starring Ben Kingsley and Jennifer Connelly. Kingsley plays an exiled colonel from the Shah's army. He works two jobs and maintains a sense of self worth and dignity as he tries to advance his wife, son, and self within American society. Connelly is a weak woman of few resources except her beauty. Her lethargy causes her to have her house unjustly sold at auction for back taxes. Kingsley buys it for a song and won't sell it back except at an increased price. Connelly has a lawyer working to get it back, but this is slow. A deputy sheriff takes her under his wing, tossing off his own wife and family to be with her and get her house back. None of this goes well for anyone and the film, like the book, has a tragic ending. The pace is slow and the film is a downer but it does raise some very basic notions of home and a sense of belonging. I could recommend it more highly if I were more sympathetic to the Connelly figure.
<b>Hustle and Flow</b>	2+	" <b>Hustle and Flow</b> " is a gritty undertaking by director John Singleton. DJ is a pimp and small time drug pusher living in a chaotic underworld. He has a dream to make a top

		selling rap record, like his Memphis idol Skinny Black. He enlists his hard working but disenchanted friend Key and a young white musician into the enterprise. The experience allows all concerned to grow, and DJ to find a measure of redemption. This is an interesting, but often uncomfortable, film to watch and in the end is worth seeing as what I assume is a realistic insight into the world of rap.
<b>I capture the Castle</b>	2	We went with friends to see the English movie " <b>I capture the Castle</b> " based on a novel by Dodie Smith, who also wrote, "101 Dalmatians". My impression that Ms. Smith was trying to put a Jane Austen story into a more contemporary setting, the 1920s. Like a good Austen novel, it has two loving sisters worried about marrying well, a brilliant but eccentric and impoverished family, and competing handsome young men. We see the story through the eyes of Lizzy..I mean Cassandra, who has all the intelligent but confused thoughts and emotions of a teenage girl on the edge of womanhood. The dialog is not up to Austen standards, and the acting is only adequate. All in all, though it is still an enjoyable movie, especially for the ladies.
<b>I Heart Huckabees</b>	2+	Polly and I went to see " <b>I Heart Huckabees</b> ", starring Dustin Hoffman, Lilly Tomlin, Isabelle Huppert, Jude Law, Jason Schwartzman, Mark Wahlberg and Naomi Watts. This is a very unusual movie, but an engaging one. Hoffman and Tomlin are "existential detectives" solving the mysteries of our individual hopes and dreams. Huckabees is a giant store that stands for modern consumer America, which has both its good and bad points. The movie has some funny moments and raises a lot of questions that you and your friends can discuss. You will need to do that because nothing is resolved and the audience is not sure what it all means –like life its own self. I need to think more about it. On the surface it is not a great movie, but still it is interesting.
<b>I Walk the Line</b>	3+	" <b>I Walk the Line</b> " is a biopic about Johnny Cash. It stars Joaquin Phoenix as Cash and Reese Witherspoon as June Carter. They both do their own singing and are quite impressive. The movie follows Cash's impoverished upbringing and his conflict with his father, on through his attempts to form a band and make gospel music. An encounter with the legendary Sam Phillips changes his fortunes and his fortunes change his life. He suffers through a terrible bout with drugs, divorces his first wife, but eventually finds strength in Carter. I thought the performances were good, and the story engaging. Very enjoyable entertainment; be warned – you may find yourself humming Ring of Fire, or I Walk the line for some time afterward.
<b>Ice Age</b>	2	We rented the DVD of " <b>Ice Age</b> ". The DVD format is much sharper than VHS and it served this animated film very well. The plot is silly and predictable but again, there are some likeable characters. The mammoth, voiced by Ray Romano, is very long suffering, noble and engaging. The animation, by Blue Sky Studios, is superb. Their use of "natural" lighting is wonderful and gives the film a clean but realistic look. Another nice thing about the DVDs is they send along extra stuff, including a marvelous short called "Bunny", which won an Academy Award, as best short film, for the studio in 1998. Although the graphics are as good as they get, I rate this film a step below Monsters Inc and two long steps below the two Toy Story films, because of a thinner story line, weaker plotting and shallower character development.
<b>Igby Goes Down</b>	2	Polly and I rented " <b>Igby Goes Down</b> " starring Kieran Culkin (as Igby), Claire Danes, Jeff Goldblum, Bill Pullman, and Susan Sarandon as the mom. This is a dark comedy about a dysfunctional (what else) family of rich WASPs. The mom is very controlling, the dad (Pullam) has a nervous breakdown etc. Everyone is very smart, self aware and cynical. Much of the dialog is quick and clever, but not to a good purpose. The whole thing is a sort of unredeemed Royal Tannenbaums. I can't say I liked it very much, although it was interesting in a way.
<b>I'll Sleep When I'm Dead</b>	1	We rented " <b>I'll Sleep When I'm Dead</b> " starring Clive Owen (of Croupier fame) with minor appearances by Charlotte Rampling and Malcolm McDowell. I can summerize the movie in one word – 'nagood. Owen's brother is a petty grifter who meets with a bad end and Owen needs to come back from the woods (for some uncelar reason) to deal some justice. The movie is dark, ugly, and confusing. I never did figure out who the Rampling figure is and what her role is.
<b>Importance of Being Ernest, The - 1952</b>	5	We also rewatched the 1952 version of " <b>The Importance of Being Ernest</b> " starring Michael Redgrave as Ernest Worthing, Michael Denison as Algernon Moncrieff, Edith Evans as Lady Augusta Bracknel. This Oscar Wilde play is justifiably considered the funniest play ever wrtten and this wonderful London cast is fabulous. We watch this

		every now and then to be sure we can remember all the lines. A BBC presentation from the 1970s is probably my favorite version, but it is really hard to find.
<b>Importance of Being Ernest, The</b>	4	Next we went to see " <b>The Importance of Being Ernest</b> ", a movie version of Oscar Wilde's hilarious play. Now our family is somewhat obsessed with this play, often called the funniest play in history. I have seen it on stage two or three times, we all enjoyed the filmed version from 1952 starring Michael Redgrave, Edith Evans and cast, but far better were two subsequent BBC productions with relative unknowns. This new movie version stars Colin Firth as Ernest, Rupert Evert as Algie, Francis O'Connor as Gwendolyn, Reese Witherspoon as Cecily, and Judi Densch as Lady Bracknel. They are all extremely good, except for Dame Densch. Her character missed the mark by being too natural and not the arch caricature that Wilde intended; she seemed out of place a lot of the time. The sets in this production were spectacular, way beyond anything that one sees on the stage. Unfortunately, the director cut many, many hilarious lines from the script and for no good reason any of us could see. In particular, the marvelous garden scene between Gwendolyn and Cecily was cut badly. Everything that remained was good and very funny, but there is so much more that was lost! In spite of this, the movie audience was convulsed and clearly enjoyed what they saw and heard. This play is so funny one can clearly throw out 25% of the laughs and still have a better script than anything coming out of Hollywood today. In any case, you just can't miss with "Ernest" - see it by all means.
<b>In Good Company</b>	3	We rented " <b>In Good Company</b> " starring Topher Grace, Dennis Quaid, and Scarlett Johansson. The idea is that Quaid is a hard working, genuinely nice sales manager with a good family life. He is demoted behind Grace when the company is bought out and suffers the slings and arrows of aggressive market force hard ball assholes. Grace's wife leaves him and he takes up with Quaid's daughter (Johansson). There are some interesting ideas here, and some archetypal personalities. In the end, the good are rewarded and the bad are done in - just like real life. I guess it is a sweet enough story, and rewards our values, but it is not a great movie and not really very funny.
<b>In the Bedroom</b>	5	Polly, Kate, and I went to see " <b>In the Bedroom</b> ". The headline is that this is a powerful and well made movie. People are no doubt aware that Sissy Spacek won the Golden Globe Award as best actress for her role, but I thought Tom Wilkinson as the Dad was even better. I felt he gave a more layered and thoughtful performance. Spacek was very good, but she was mostly just angry, whereas Wilkinson's character ran convincingly over a range of emotions and actions. He was clearly a man wrestling with weighty issues. Marissa Tomei was well cast, and did a great job, as the soon-to-be divorced woman that is the focus of family problems because of her relations with the only son of the family. This is Todd Field's first film direction, and that is good news for the future. A number of personal and moral dilemmas present themselves here, and you will find yourself discussing them at length.
<b>In America</b>	4	Polly and I went to see " <b>In America</b> ", an Anglo/Irish production that has won a great deal of critical acclaim. The story involves an Irish family that loses a young son to cancer and moves, illegally, to America so the father (Paddy Considine) can pursue his dream of being an actor. He is accompanied by his gorgeous, earthy wife (Samantha Morton) and his beautiful daughters (Emma and Sarah Bolger). They are forced into a Harlem apartment which scares the daylights out of me. I have not been so scared in any thriller I have seen, and in fact they are not really menaced. There just seems so much at stake. The acting is excellent, and the film has great redemptive values as the family engages a dying black artist. Strong stuff, but not necessarily a fun movie.
<b>Incredible Shrinking Man, The</b>	4	Polly and I watched the 1957 classic movie " <b>The Incredible Shrinking Man</b> " and found it most engaging. This movie can be viewed on several levels. On one it is a sci-fi thriller starring a B grade actor Grant Williams. He plays a man who is exposed to a radioactive mist, coupled with insecticides, and begins to shrink. He is clearly angry and tormented by his fate and as he gets really small he has a battle with a house cat and a tarantula. As a thriller it works well with decent effects for the time and believable acting. The movie also is a fascinating social commentary about the fears America faced about radiation (very common in those times) but also about man becoming smaller in the face of impersonal scientific and social forces. The last monolog in the movie is quite effecting about the place of man in a huge and unknown universe. This movie rocks.

<b>Incredibles, The</b>	4	We went to see " <b>The Incredibles</b> " on the big screen and really enjoyed. This is another masterpiece from the Pixar group, the same geniuses that made Toy Story and Toy Story-2 and the lesser Finding Nemo and Monsters Inc. The story is that the super heroes, common at the time, are retired under public pressure. Muscular Mr. Incredible has married Elasto-girl and they now have a passel of mini-heroes. Day to day life is a bit boring and Mr. I chafes under the meanness of his office boss. For excitement he sneaks out for the excitement of dangerous rescues, and gets led into a trap that engages the whole family. What is really cool here is the quality of the animation and the naturalness of the characters. These digital folk have real personalities and, at least with the Pixar folk, we care about them. Great fun.
<b>Insomnia</b>	3	I watched the new version of " <b>Insomnia</b> " starring Al Pacino and Robin Williams, and found it quite enjoyable. I had seen the original Swedish version, and thought it was only OK. Perhaps the limitation of subtitles dulls some of the nuances. In neither version did I get a sharp sense of what the insomnia metaphor was actually dealing with, but I may just be slow. In any case, at the surface level, this is a reasonably good police procedural with a tight little conundrum that keeps the cop and killer in a plausible spin. I also just like to watch Pacino work.
<b>Interpreter, The</b>	2	We saw " <b>The Interpreter</b> " on the big screen. Great views of NYC. This thriller stars Nicole Kidman and Sean Penn. She is a white African with a troubled past who currently works as a UN interpreter. When she overhears a conversation threatening to kill a visiting African dictator, Penn arrives to maintain order. It is an OK movie but with the star power it has, it could have been better. Penn's mushiness got to be hard to swallow and there were certain plot implausibilities. Kidman is SO gorgeous though, it is worth seeing the movie to just drink her in; the way the camera clings to her, you know that the director, Sydney Pollack, know this too.
<b>Into the Night</b>	3	" <b>Into the Night</b> (1985)" is a strange mix of thriller and comedy, starring Jeff Goldblum and Michelle Pfeiffer. It is directed by John Landis, who appears as an Iranian thug, and there are many cameos by other directors, all having a hoot. Goldblum plays an engineer with insomnia, his wife cheats on him, and his life is a mess. On a late night ramble, he encounters Pfeiffer running for her life from Iranian hit men and the story unfolds as she begs his help and leads him on a long chase. Pfeiffer has been involved with jewel smuggling from Iran and both the Savak and underworld figures are after her. The bad men are bad, but also silly, so it is hard to say what Landis wants. For whatever reason, I bought into it, and enjoyed Goldblum's cynical and resigned wit. Polly didn't care for the movie.
<b>Intolerable Cruelty</b>	2	Polly and I went to see the new Coen brothers movie, " <b>Intolerable Cruelty</b> " starring George Clooney and Catherine-Zeta-Jones, with a bit for Jeffery Rush and others. As you know, I am a big Cohen Brothers fan and I liked this movie too. It is not great, like " <b>Raising Arizona</b> ", " <b>Millers Crossing</b> ", " <b>Fargo</b> ", or " <b>Blood Simple</b> ", but it is not stinky like " <b>The Big Labowski</b> " or " <b>The Man who wasn't there</b> ". What the Minneapolis boys are up to here is re-creating a sophisticated '30s comedy where a tough man and a tough woman find love. The Coens have set themselves quite a task since the protagonists are just unlikable. Clooney plays an unscrupulous divorce attorney and Jones is a man-eating gold digger who marries for money. As predicted, love eventually conquers but not until there are a few laughs and fun plot twists. I wouldn't pay top dollar for this light weight diversion, but it would be great on video.
<b>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</b>	4	I had never seen the 1956 sci-fi/thriller " <b>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</b> ", but I have now and I loved it. The production values were pretty decent and the acting and dialog were up to contemporary standards. Some was even a bit racy in a tame sort of way. The plot is a good one. Alien life forms land in a fields near a small California town and their pods can mature into emotionless replicates of locals who fall asleep near them. A contemporary Hollywood movie of this genre would depend on graphics and explosions and ridiculous pacing to carry the story. This old classic is far more subtle and much more disturbing. Our hero, a doctor played very well by Kevin McCarthy, ultimately confronts the pod-clones and they claim that their new life, although emotionless, is superior to the old turmoil. Why resist it? Even his lover, Dana Wynter, tries to convince him. This is a tough question and makes this a very thought provoking as well as suspenseful movie.
<b>Iris</b>	3	Polly, Kate, and I went to see " <b>Iris</b> ". This may be the last movie we see at the Arbor,

		since they are converting this wonderful independent film theater into a chain-store restaurant. Just what we needed, less culture and more bad food. Anyway, this is a fine film, starring Judi Dench as the aged Iris Murdoch and Kate Winslett as the younger version. Both women do fine and convincing jobs. Hugh Bonneville plays her husband, John Bayley, as a young man while Jim Broadbent plays the writer and critic as an old man. They also do fine jobs. Both pairs are convincing as the same person at two stages in life. The cutting between the two time periods is very well executed, and fills the viewer with a sense of a life in all its depth, and adds to the tragedy of Murdoch's increasing dementia due to Alzheimer's. This is a worthwhile movie for any person of a literate bent. No car chases or explosions though.
<b>Italian for Beginners</b>	1	Saturday (4/27/02) we went to see a Danish comedy called " <b>Italian for Beginners</b> ". The story is set in a boring Danish town, where anyone with a spark of life attends weekly Italian language class in the local school. Apparently the Danes, like the English, equate Italy with the warmth of life itself. There are a number of characters with human interest and flaws: a local minister/tyrant, a widowed replacement minister, a colorful soccer nut and several lonely ladies. The movie is very sweet and has some charms, but it is a bit slow. I think it may be an adequate reflection of Scandinavian life. Not much happens.
<b>Italian Job, The</b>	2	We went with friends and paid actual money to see the new thriller " <b>The Italian Job</b> " with Mark Wahlberg, Charlize Theron, Ed Norton, Donald Sutherland and some lesser lights. The best that can be said about this remake of the 1969 Michael Caine thriller is that it is a "summer movie". This means we can have mindless fun while not holding our entertainment to any kind of professional standard. The stunts were great, fast cars, bold heists and so on, and the cast had engaging moments. However, this thing is so shot full of logical holes it is appalling. I also dislike the idea of lionizing criminals. We are supposed to admire our little crew for their skills as thieves, and love them because they don't kill people, unlike their criminal adversaries. I guess the producers want to remind us that in our society crime does pay and people with real jobs are ugly chumps.
<b>Jackie Brown</b>	5	We rented " <b>Jackie Brown</b> " and watched again after a long hiatus. This is a terrific movie, based on an Elmore Leonard novel (he also did the screen script) and directed by Quentin Tarantino. It stars Pam Grier as Jackie, Samuel Jackson, Robert Forster, Robert DeNiro, Bridget Fonda and Michael Keaton. They all do superb jobs. Forster gives a terrific performance as the bail bondsman. Jackson and DeNiro also give spirited and nuanced performances. The dialog is first rate Leonard and the plot is interesting with nice twists. The language is rough and there is considerable violence (though not like Pulp Fiction, let alone The Usual Suspects). I personally love this movie.
<b>Jennifer-8</b>	3	" <b>Jennifer-8</b> " is a thriller starring Andy Garcia, Uma Thurman, and with a nice appearance by John Malkovich. Garcia plays an LAPD detective lured to Eureka by an old colleague. Once there he becomes embroiled in an unsolved murder which becomes part of a serial killing spree. Thurman plays a blind girl who is a potential witness to one of the murders and is menaced herself. The plot requires some suspension of disbelief, but the dialog is mostly good and Malkovich is a hoot during his brief appearance.
<b>Junebug</b>	3+	We attended the Austin premier of " <b>Junebug</b> " starring, among other, local boy Ben McKenzie. We have been friends of Ben's parent's for years and were pleased to see him do well in this fine independent film. The story centers on a Chicago couple who go to North Carolina to recruit a primitive artist for a gallery they own, and to visit his (Alessandro Nivola ) family. Ben plays the younger brother, who has a pregnant wife, played wonderfully by Amy Adams. We see an interesting interplay of values and life styles here. The movie is well directed and tells us as much from what is left unsaid, as it is by what is articulated. The pacing is slow, but that tells us about life in North Carolina I guess. This is Phil Morrison's first movie, and that bodes well.
<b>Junior Bonner</b>	4	We watched an old (1972) Steve McQueen movie called " <b>Junior Bonner</b> " and were very engaged by it. The movie was directed by Sam Peckinpah who is famous for his violent take on life, but this is a much gentler story with interesting characters who illuminate the life of rural western folks. Junior is a rodeo cowboy centered in Prescott Arizona, surrounded by his enterprising brother Curley (Joe Don Baker), mom (Ida Lupino), and his larger than life father Ace (Robert Preston doing a great job). Not a lot

		happens, except the family interacting against a relatively (by suburban standards) colorful backdrop of rodeo folk. Even so, I was fascinated by it and thoroughly pleased by the fine performances all around.
<b>Josephine Baker Story, The</b>	3	We watched " <b>The Josephine Baker Story</b> " and found it very engaging. There are two main reasons for this. First, the true story of Ms. Baker is so amazing as to seem fictional, and second the powerful acting performance of Lynn Whitfield in the title role. Baker grew up in East St. Louis and witness a massacre of blacks in 1917. She had a brief career as a dancer and comedian before going to France where she was a huge star with her erotic, primitive dances. (This is strongly presented in the movie) She returned to Broadway but was forced to eat dinner in her room and to use the back stairs. She later served in the French resistance, entertained US troops, was vilified in America as a communist and then founded a sort of orphanage.
<b>Keep the river on your right</b>	2	We rented a strange and somewhat unsettling documentary called " <b>Keep the river on your right</b> ". It concerns the exploits of an artist/anthropologist named Tobias Schneebaum who fell in with a tribe in the jungles of Peru, joined them on a raid, and participated in a cannibalistic ritual. Later he went to New Guinea and had a homosexual relationship with a native there. It was certainly not like life in Kansas. If homosexual cannibals are of interest to you, check it out.
<b>Kid Stays in the Picture, The</b>	5	Polly and I went to see " <b>The Kid Stays in the Picture</b> " with our friends Ginger and Bill. This is essentially the documentary autobiography of Robert Evans, based on his book. It is possible that this is a smug and self-serving piece of work. I don't care – I loved it. I did not know this guy existed but he clearly has had one of the most amazing lives ever. He began as a successful executive for Evan Piccone slacks, was discovered by Norma Shearer at a Hollywood swimming pool, had a brief film career as an actor, and then became a major producer for Paramount Pictures and as an indie producer. His films include <b>Rosemary's Baby, The Odd Couple, Chinatown,</b> and the <b>Godfather</b> . He was married to Allie McGraw, before she ran off with Steve McQueen (see those Mc people all stick together), and nearly ruined his career getting caught in a cocaine bust. It is an amazing story and even if told from the other side I bet it would still be amazing. Check it out.
<b>Killing Time, The</b>	2	Our movie guide gave strong reviews to " <b>The Killing Time</b> ", a 1981 thriller starring Beau Bridges, Kiefer Sutherland, Joe Don Baker and other minor actors. The plot is totally unbelievable. Sutherland kills a man on his way to a deputy job in a small California town and assumes his identity. No one on the other end seems to notice. Then Bridges' (another deputy) ex-girl friend decides this would be a good time to kill her overbearing hubby, and he supports her.....the acting is not good either. If you can buy into the setup then the rest of the movie has some minor interest as the cat and mouse game is executed, but this is not a good movie.
<b>King Kong (1933)</b>	4	I re-watched " <b>King Kong (1933)</b> ", starring Fay Wray and Robert Armstrong. By today's production standards the movie is fakey looking and the dialog is a bit silly and forced. Even so, this is a must see movie. It has a great plot that any viewer can slip into for some high adventure. It must be put into its time, where it set new standards for animation. I also saw a documentary on the writer/director Marion C. Cooper, and it is more amazing than fiction. This man was a soldier, adventurer, entrepreneur, and artist of the first rank. He invented the Kong story from his own travel experiences and imagination. The movie is also interesting in the way it flirts with some exotic themes of beauty with strong sexual undertones. I checked it out in preparation for the homage, directed by Peter Jackson, being released soon.

<b>Kinsey</b>	3	<b>"Kinsey"</b> is the story of the Indiana University prof who shocked the 50s with his famous study of human sexuality. The story itself is interesting as Kinsey moves from a compulsive documentation of flies to a compulsive documentation of sex. The movie also captures the political and social strictures of that time which contrasts with those today. I was also unaware that his research team became a pack of libertines (assuming this biography is mostly correct). The acting by Liam Neeson and Laura Linney is professional in tough roles. Even so, this is not a great movie; it is like a documentary but not a very engaging one in spite of the ever fascinating sub theme.
<b>Kiss of Death</b>	3	Polly and I watched a little known 1947 film noire called <b>"Kiss of Death"</b> starring Victor Mature, Richard Widmark, Colleen Gray, Brian Donlevy, and Karl Maldin. The characters were well developed and the story was surprisingly tight. It is not like the Maltese Falcon, but was well executed by today's standards, which most movies of that era are not.
<b>Kitchen Story</b>	3	We saw an amusing Swedish movie called <b>"Kitchen Story"</b> . It is based on some actual experiments done by the Swedes right after WW2 to improve human efficiency, especially in the kitchen. After they had dealt with Swedish housewives they sent teams to study Norwegian bachelor farmers (I'm not kidding) and this story deals with an observer and his study. It is rather slow, but also funny, humane and charming. Not a must see, but enjoyable in a whimsical way.
<b>Lantanta</b>	4	Recently we rented an Australian thriller/character study called <b>"Lantanta"</b> . The cast, except for Geoffrey Rush and Barbara Hershey, will be unknown to most Americans, but they all do a good job. In fact the three couples whose lives we follow are all believably attractive. That is they don't look like super models but like people you know. In the story a police detective is having marital troubles, although he is devoted to his two sons. He meets a woman, Jane, in a dance class, who is separated from her hubby, and has an affair with her. This woman lives next door to a working class couple with an out-of-work husband. He later is involved in the death of Jane's therapist (Hershey) and this has an interesting effect on his marriage as you might imagine. All this seems very coincidental until in the credits I saw that the film script was based on a stage play, so there you go – built in microcosm. We found the film intelligent and interesting to watch and it works as a low voltage thriller too. Check it out.
<b>Last Orders</b>	4	Polly and I saw <b>"Last Orders"</b> on the weekend. The term refers to the last round of drinks in a British pub, but in this case it refers to the last salute and remembrances of Jack Dodds, a character played by Michael Caine. The case includes Tom Courtenay, David Hemmings, Bob Hoskins, Ray Winstone ("Gal" in <b>Sexy Beast</b> ) and Helen Mirren. The story begins as Jack's ashes are delivered to his favorite pub. As our heroes journey to the sea to scatter the ashes, the story of Jack's ordinary life unfolds, with its joys and sorrows, dignity and failings. This is a tried and true cinematic device, but it works very well here. The acting, not surprisingly given the strong cast, is excellent. The clever editing and reminiscences make the story unfold in an interesting, non-linear way. I say check it out. There is no particular need to see it on the big screen, and it would be a very nice rainy day rental.
<b>Layer Cake</b>	4	<b>"Layer Cake"</b> is a British crime thriller by American director Matthew Vaughn, who also produced the Guy Richie thrillers "Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels" and "Snatch". This movie has that feel, with plenty of violence, quick action, complex relationships among criminal groups and the intense feeling that no one can trust anyone. The dialog is not quite as snappy but is still smart. Although not a box office hit, this film has a huge DVD following. I liked the ending.
<b>Legally Blond</b>	1	While my folks were here I rented <b>"Legally Blond"</b> starring Reese Witherspoon. I had been given the impression that this was a high quality teen movie, like the splendid "Clueless" (a modern dress remake of Emma). I was misinformed, as Mr. Rick says in Casablanca. Legally Blond sucks. The story is SO contrived and ham-handed I am at a loss for adequate words with which to berate it. Just give it a miss - viewing it might atrophy your brain.
<b>Last Innocent Man, The</b>	2+	We watched <b>"The Last Innocent Man"</b> on HBO. It got 4 out of 5 stars in our movie review book, but that is too many. The movie stars Ed Harris as a cracker-jack criminal attorney in Portland Oregon. He is having twinges about creating the "reasonable doubt" that gets any number of scum bags acquitted. He meets a woman, separated from her hubby, who leads him into an interesting labyrinth of murder and mystery.

		Although there are some flaws in the setup, the plot is pretty engaging. We found the ending unsatisfying though, and spent some time discussing how this basically nifty plot could have been salvaged at the end.
<b>Last of the Mohicans, The</b>	5	The 1992 version of " <b>The Last of the Mohicans</b> " is a five-star film. The first thing it has going is plot; it is based on the classic novel by James Fenimore Cooper and has all the big elements of great story telling. We have action, romance, heroism, and a panoply of human emotions that make this story timeless. The movie stars Daniel Day Lewis as Hawkeye, the white adopted son of the noble Mohican warrior Chingachgook. Lewis is terrific in this action role; it is hard to imagine he is the same man who played the effete Cecil in Room With A View. Madeleine Stowe plays Cora Munro and presents one of the most beautiful visages in movie history; you can see why Hawkeye is willing to run through hell for her. The other actors are all believable, the filming and editing are first rate, and boy howdy does this thing have action. A must see movie.
<b>Late Show, The</b>	4	We re-watched " <b>The Late Show</b> " starring Art Carney and Lilly Tomlin. This is perhaps the most under-rated film noir ever. The story, set in 1977, is great, with Carney as a retired detective and Tomlin as his unlikely associate. There is humor, suspense, tension, and mystery in this terrific film. The criminals are mean, and as trivial as I imagine they really are.
<b>Laughing Policeman, The</b>	2	We watched " <b>The Laughing Policeman</b> ", a 1973 crime drama starring Walter Matthau, Bruce Dern, and Lew Gossett. The movie is based on a Swedish novel by Per Wahlöö. A serial killer mows down a bunch of people on a San Francisco bus, including Matthauss' detective partner. He gets a new partner, Dern, and go looking in the underbelly of the city for the criminal. The police are shown with their strengths and foibles. However, I found the overall plot unsatisfying and somewhat arbitrary. The ending was forced and unbelievable.
<b>Laurel Canyon</b>	1	We rented " <b>Laurel Canyon</b> " with some friends. The cast looked good, Francis McDormand, Kate Beckinsale, and Christian Bale. The story has some promise, about the choices people make and about family; relations, but ultimately this things flops like a fish. We were all pretty bored by the predictable actions which was aggravated by the fact that you don't really care about the characters. The Beckinsale character's actions were not entirely believable and that made matters worse.
<b>Life of Brian</b>	4	I watched Monty Pythons " <b>Life of Brian</b> " again. This is not as funny nor as well done a movie as "The Holy Grail". But it is still very good. In particular the scene where John Cleese is a Roman Centurion who corrects Brian's conjugation as he graffities a wall, the lisping Pontius Pilate, and the "haggling" scenes are hysterical. The Pythons are happy to skewer anyone pet and they really see into the human condition for all their madcap antics. Remember..."always look on the bright side of life".
<b>Lilo and Stitch</b>	2	During our recent visit to Minneapolis, Clare and I took my young nephew and niece to see the new Disney movie " <b>Lilo and Stitch</b> ". The little kids seemed to enjoy it, but I was very disappointed. This movie used hand drawings throughout, which is in contrast to the digital wonders like Toy Story. However, we are not talking Cinderella or Fantasia here. The drawings are adequate, but not lush. The story is OK, but not great either. It involves some space alien "gremlin" that is sentenced to earth and causes all kinds of whacky things. Unfortunately, none of them are funny. A great deal has been made of the fact that the heroine, Lilo, is not a pasty white cute girl like so many Disney films feature, and I guess that is cultural progress of some sort. Too bad she had to star in such a weak vehicle. The movie has some violence and the pacing is like a Saturday morning cheap cartoon. It is just not very carefully done.
<b>Little Murders</b>	3	We watched a strange movie from 1971 called " <b>Little Murders</b> ". It was based on a play by Jules Feiffer, directed by Alan Arkin and starring Elliott Gould, Donald Sutherland, Vincent Gardenia, Lou Jacobi, Alan Arkin, and others. The acting is all first rate. The story centers on Gould, a gentle man who becomes a nihilist in the face of rough and tumble life in NYC but Sutherland nearly steals the show as a faithless minister. Modern society comes in for a thrashing in this little known flick. It is dated, but I liked it a good deal.
<b>Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels</b>	3	We rewatched " <b>Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels</b> ". This Guy Ritchie movie is clearly derivative of Quentin Tarantino, but it is very well done. The action occurs in the London underworld where four groups of various levels of criminals and marginal types get hard with one another. None of these folks are likeable, but as in Tarantino's "Pulp

		Fiction” and “The Sopranos”, you can’t help having favorites and cheering for the best of a bad lot. This movie is larded with foul language and violence, but also with smart-ass humor and excitement. If you liked Pulp Fiction, who will enjoy this movie at least as much.
<b>Longest Yard, The</b>	3	“ <b>The Longest Yard</b> ” stars Burt Reynolds, Eddy Albert, and other recognizable characters. Reynolds is an ex-pro football QB who is imprisoned for stealing his girl friends car. The warden want him to form a prisoner team to tune yup his semi-pro team composed of prison guards. This is a good ole boy fun movie with interesting ramifiactions. We wind up rooting for the murders, rapists, and arsonists against the forces of law and order. Early in the game when the prisoners take cheap shots at the bullying guards, it is funny. Later when the guards take the shots we are outraged. Ah, the power of narrative. Good fun any way.
<b>Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring</b>	5	I’m glad I saw Harry before I saw <b>Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring</b> , because otherwise Harry might have seemed less than it was. There is nothing wrong with Harry, it’s just that the Lord of the Rings was more spectacular and so well done that it could make most any film seem small. In the first place, Lord of the Rings is an epic story. It deals with many of the themes developed in Harry Potter, like good and evil, honor and courage, but does so a bigger scale. Both stories use special effects to bring us into their magical worlds, but those in Lord of the Rings were truly special in a Herculean sense – the best I have seen to date. Some film critics said the Matrix was worth watching just for the effects. Poobah -- there is no reason to watch the Matrix, but even giving it all the benefits of doubt possible, it was not a special effects patch on Lord of the Rings’ butt. This thing has to be seen to be believed, and you need to see it on the BIG SCREEN. It’s nearly three hours long, but the time goes fast because the story is so engaging. I liked it so much I might even PAY to see it again, and that is saying a lot.
<b>Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers</b>	5	The day after Christmas the whole family went to see “ <b>Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers</b> ” – this is the second part of the ring trilogy. What can I say except that I was TOTALLY blown away. The Tolkien saga is tremendous, with its skillful interweaving of many Western myths, and this epic novel translates into a tremendous plot that just dwarfs most other movies. The acting is fine, or at least never gets in the way of the story, and the animation just defies description. You have to see it to believe it. The scale of the work, its sweep and grandeur, yet its attention to detail, puts it in a class by itself. You could string together a hundred Harry Potters, fun as they are, and still not come up to this movies knees. In addition to the titanic story lines of nations and races there are interesting and poignant personal stories that engage us utterly. This movie cannot be missed.
<b>Lord of the Rings – Return of the King</b>	5	The day after Christmas we all went to see “ <b>Lord of the Rings – Return of the King</b> ”. We all loved it as much, or more, than the previous two installments. The grandeur of the battle scenes was staggering on the wide screen and Golem’s tortured behavior in close was equally impressive. Clearly this is the best animation to date and shows how effectively it can be used. This is just a wonderful presentation of the Tolkein saga and will take its place among the all time movie greats. Just tremendous.
<b>Lord of War</b>	3	“ <b>Lord of War</b> ” stars Nicholas Cage as a Ukrainian/American arms dealer. The movie is allegedly based on facts, and is all the more depressing if that is true. Cage does a reasonable job portraying the dealer; he loves the excitement of his work and has the natural personal skills to navigate even this dark, dark place. He is also a strong family man which seems odd, and has an interesting ongoing conflict with another arms dealer played by Ian Holm. He is also pursued by and idealistic American Interpol agent, played by Ethan Hawke, whose sense of fair play spares Cage’s life in darkest Africa. In the end, we see the whole game is more complex than one imagines, and we see that the U.S. government, the universes largest arms dealer, finds these independent death merchants useful on occasion.
<b>Lost in Translation</b>	4	We went with friends to see the new Bill Murray file “ <b>Lost in Translation</b> ”. The story is a bittersweet one about a has-been American actor, Murray, who is making big bucks in Japan promoting whiskey. He meets the young wife (played by the strangely attractive Scarlett Johansson) of an American photographer and they have an interesting relationship. I love to watch Bill Murray work; I think he is one of the best actors around. He was a lovable wacko in “ <b>Caddy Shack</b> ” and in “ <b>What about Bob</b> ”. He was a

		convincing figure of menace in " <b>Mad Dog and Glory</b> " and gave nuanced, first rate performances in " <b>Groundhogs Day</b> ", in the greatly underrated " <b>Quick change</b> " and in this latest film. The movie is very funny as well as thoughtful and I recommend it without reservation.
<b>Love Actually</b>	3	We watched " <b>Love Actually</b> " on HBO and found it surprisingly enjoyable. The idea of this little flick is that love is all around us – just go to an airport and watch. Love here falls into many areas, love of siblings, of wives and husbands, children, friends, and country. It has a huge cast, with Colin Firth, Hugh Grant Emma Thompson, Laura Linney, Liam Neeson and Bill Nighly in key roles and Rowan Atkinson, Billy Bob Thornton, Denise Richards, Claudia Schiffer and others. The plot is thin and pretty unbelievable, but there is a lot of humor and affirming human emotions so that we all agree to play along. This is not a great film, but I really enjoyed it anyway.
<b>Love and a .45</b>	2	" <b>Love and a .45</b> " is derivative from "Bonnie and Clyde", "Pulp Fiction", and "Raising Arizona" and maybe others as well. It stars Gil Bellows and Renee Zellweger as two lovers from the underside of society. He is a skilled, and even charming, convenience store robber who never uses a loaded gun. She is trying to make him go straight, but later shows herself to be a dab gun hand. He gets into a bad scrape due to the psychotic behavior of an old prison buddy which leads to a murder. Two mean and unprofessional local cops show up at the couple's trailer and both are killed by our heroes. A mad chase ensues. The chase concept is like Bonnie and Clyde, the violence and smart mouthing is like Pulp Fiction, and the inner narrative of our mis-understood hero is like Raising Arizona. This movie is not up to any of its models, but it is actually pretty watchable.
<b>Love and Death</b>	5	I watched Woody Allen's " <b>Love and Death</b> " again recently. This movie is hilarious, one of his best in my opinion. Woody plays a Russian of semi-noble status at the time of the Napoleonic wars. He uses this vehicle to satirize Tolstoy's War and Peace, and epic Russian literature in general. Verbose existential philosophies and even Allen's film idol, Ingmar Bergman, also get hilarious jabs. He raises some very serious questions in this movie, but he shoots in one line jokes before matters get too dark. This is a must see movie.
<b>Lovely and Amazing</b>	5	This weekend we went to see the chick-flick " <b>Lovely and Amazing</b> " starring Katherine Keener, Brenda Blethyn, and Emily Mortimer. All these ladies are somewhat insecure and self absorbed and this raises the question of their genetics and their environment. Blethyn plays the mom who is undergoing liposuction to make herself look better for no obvious reason; she has adopted a needy black girl, who has lots of identity issues herself, and creates interesting situation while her adopted mom is hospitalized. Keener is her older daughter who is gorgeous but feckless. She is absorbed in her "art" which is clearly not of any merit, but she can't accept that fact. Mortimer is the younger sister, a budding actress who is fixated on how she looks to others, and on tending stray pets. The men in their lives reflect their personalities and problems. I found this a very interesting and totally engaging film. The acting was very good, with each character portrayed in a complex and totally believable fashion. The issues are not explosive, but reflect real life concerns for many modern folk, and it is interesting to see the scale of these problems when you have the built-in standard of the young black girls plight. Many guys won't care for this film, although they will definitely remember one scene with Mortimer and her new actor boyfriend.
<b>Lumumba</b>	2	Kate and I went to see a French made movie, " <b>Lumumba</b> ", dealing with the rise and fall of the firebrand independence leader of the Congo. It was an interesting view of the conflicts of colonialism. We had all read, and loved, the book The Poisonwood Bible, set at that time and this fleshed out some of the political details. Not a great film, but worth the price.
<b>Mad Hot Ballroom</b>	2	" <b>Mad Hot Ballroom</b> " is a documentary about compulsory ball room dance classes, and a dance competition, in inner city New York. The classes, for 10-12 year olds, provide an outlet for the kids energies, and gives them a useful focus for at least a part of their lives. Some of these youngsters are really sharp and very perceptive. You also see some serious personality problems forming up. This movie is not as engaging as, say, Spell Bound, but it is still worth a look.
<b>Magnificent Seven, The</b>	4	I rewatched " <b>The Magnificent Seven</b> ". This movie is a western remake of the Kurosowa 1954 classic " <b>The Seven Samurai</b> ", which must rank as one of the classic

		<p>movies of all time. The Western is very good too, and has a better sound track. The wonderful plot makes these films ageless. A village of farmers (peons) is threatened by brigands (banditos). In desperation, and naiveté, they seek the aid of warriors from a dying class of fighters (samurai/gun slingers). The warriors see a chance for one last noble deed to give merit to lives that are exciting, but meaningless. For individual reasons each acts with heroism and honor to save the innocent. In each case a leader, here Yul Brynner, assembles his band of skilled misfits for the task. Each has an interesting story and character that the audience can sympathize with, despite their sordid pasts. Their brave and selfless actions inspire the farmers and give them the courage to fight for their own rights and to be better men. What a great story. The western version is weaker than the samurai movie because it gets a bit preachy, and because there is an added scene in which the cowboys are disarmed by the bandits, escorted from town, and given their guns back! Yeah right. Well they pay for that stupidity. Both movies are must see.</p>
<b>Malcolm X</b>	3	<p><b>"Malcolm X"</b> is Spike Lee's tribute to one of the most interesting and dynamic personalities in recent American history. With a running time of over 3 1/2 hours, you practically get to relive his life, at the cost of a big slab of your own. I was familiar with Malcolm X's story from various documentaries and so there was not much new factual information here, but Denzel Washington did a fabulous job portraying Malcolm. His story, from his father's murder by white supremacists, his separation from his white mother, his job as a Pullman porter, his drift into crime, prison, and finally black nationalism is captivating. I think all Americans need to see this story to more fully understand who we are as a people – if not as this movie, then try the PBS documentaries.</p>
<b>Maltese Falcon, The</b>	5	<p>I must have seen <b>"The Maltese Falcon"</b> a dozen times and I enjoy every time. Once it starts, I am hooked. The story, by Dashiell Hammet, is a masterpiece, directing by John Huston is excellent, and the acting by Humphrey Bogart, Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, and even Mary Astor, is marvelous; Bogart is great in this tough guy role and Greenstreet won an Oscar for his urbane performance. Even though the movie is over sixty years old it stays fresh. Everything works. This is a must see movie, one of the ten best ever.</p>
<b>Man on Fire</b>	2	<p>Visiting Mom we watched <b>"Man on Fire"</b> starring Denzel Washington as an ex-CIA body guard down on his luck. He is recruited to guard the daughter of an American mother in Mexico City, but he is shot and she is snatched. After a miraculous high speed recovery, he sets out on a ruthless and efficient march of revenge and vigilante justice. An OK action flick, but not a great work of art.</p>
<b>Man who wasn't there, The</b>	1	<p>Dec 1. Polly, David, and I went to see <b>"The man who wasn't there"</b>. First off, I should say that I am a big fan of the Coen Brothers, who hail from my home town of Minneapolis. I think they are unusually intelligent and interesting film makers who have tried their hands at a wide range of genres, and have been generally very successful. I liked their first movie, <b>Blood Simple</b> (filmed in Austin, incidentally). It was true to the noir style and was totally engaging. <b>Raising Arizona</b> is my favorite. I loved its off beat humor and surreal atmosphere; our whole family uses key dialog lines from the movie in our everyday lives. The Coen boys did a superb gangster film, <b>Miller's Crossing</b>, that had me as far on the edge of my seat as any movie I have seen. What can I say about <b>Fargo</b>? I was totally engaged by the story, was fascinated by the characters and admired the performances. It was very funny to boot. I also liked <b>Oh Brother Where Art Thou?</b>, although not as much as the first four I listed. Now the Coen boys have done some clinkers, too. <b>The Big Lebowski</b> tried to capture the surreal aura of Raising Arizona, but it failed miserably. The characters were not believable or even likeable. This is getting us closer to the problems with <b>The man who wasn't there</b>. The thing is shot as a kind of film noir, with some very interesting camera shots and nifty black and white lighting tricks, but it all seems posed and mannered. The protagonist, if he can be called that, is a taciturn barber played by Billie Bob Thornton. The problem is, he doesn't care to live his life, enjoy his life, or even save his life. If he doesn't care, why the heck should we? And we don't. The whole enterprise is a big disappointment. Very flat and glacially paced. You might want to see the film if you are collecting the Coen set-o-movies, or if you are nuts about lighting tricks, but otherwise I must sadly say, give it a miss.</p>

<b>March of the Penguins</b>	4	We went to see the wonderful new documentary " <b>March of the Penguins</b> ". This is filmed by the same crew who did "Winged Migration" and it shows the same skill and charm. This documentary focuses on the mating, nesting, and chick care of emperor penguins. The struggles of these birds in the harshest environment on earth is interesting and up lifting as it affirms life's indomitable spirit.
<b>Maria Full of Grace</b>	4	Polly, Clare and I watched " <b>Maria Full of Grace</b> ", an HBO produced drama in Spanish with subtitles. This is a terrific story of a struggling Columbian girl who, lured by the promise of money to escape her plight, allows herself to be recruited as a cocaine "mule". I have no real knowledge of the cocaine trade, but this film had the ring of truth to it. The acting is excellent and the story is strong and moving. Given America's role as the demand for drugs, this is a film we should all see. Something has to change.
<b>Master and Commander The Far Side of the World</b>	4	We went to see " <b>Master and Commander The Far Side of the World</b> " on the big screen and loved it. I have read a couple of the books in this series and enjoyed them; they center on a British naval captain, Jack Aubrey as he leads his warships against the French and Spanish during the Napoleonic wars. He is accompanied by the ships surgeon, Stephen Maturin who makes a scholarly counterpoint to the man of action. This movie concatenates two of the novels as Aubrey (Russell Crowe), Maturin (Paul Bettany) and a cast of hardies track the larger French frigate Acheron through the Atlantic, around the Horn and catch her in the Galapagos Islands. The sets are great, the action is intense and realistic (says PBS experts) and the interpersonal relationships are well developed and subtle in what is basically an action flick. I say don't miss this one.
<b>Matador, The</b>	3	" <b>The Matador</b> " stars Pierce Brosnan, Greg Kinnear, and Hope Davis. The story is that Brosnan plays a professional hit man who is starting to develop a conscience, which interferes with his work. He meets a nice guy business man, Kinnear, and after a rocky start develop a strange friendship. The Matador connection is that Brosnan sees himself in this way, as a courageous slayer of a strong and competent foes; no one else is buying this. I have never cared much for Brosnan as an actor, and disliked his Bond performances, but I really liked his portrayal of this amoral character. He is pretty scary and definitely holds the stage when he is on camera. There are some interesting plot twists which took me in, and that is fun. This is a most enjoyable thriller/character study.
<b>Matchstick Men</b>	3	" <b>Matchstick Men</b> " is a con-game movie starring Nicolas Cage, Sam Rockwell, and Alison Lohman, and directed by Ridley Scott. Cage does a solid job portraying a con man with OCD. When his long lost daughter shows up, it changes his life. As usual in this genre, the director tries to fool or surprise the audience, and I got fooled by this one. The characters, criminals, are not really likeable, but this is still an enjoyable movie with redemption at the end.
<b>Mean Girls</b>	2	The last night of Clare's visit we watched " <b>Mean Girls</b> " starring Lindsey Lohan. Guess what? High school is full of cliques and sometimes pretty, popular girls are not nice to everyone. Fortunately they get a come-uppance of sorts in this bubble gum movie. The first part was pretty funny, giving some new jokes and insights into a trite theme, but the ending was totally lame dude.
<b>Merchant of Venice, The</b>	4	" <b>The Merchant of Venice</b> " is a lushly filmed version of the Shakespeare play, starring Al Pacino as Shylock, Jeremy Irons as Antonio, Joseph Fiennes as Bassanio and Lynn Collins as Portia. The acting is very good and it is relatively easy to follow along with the language of the Bard. This is a thought provoking play about prejudice, power, justice and compassion. It seems particularly relevant to our times despite its antiquity.
<b>Merci pour la chocolate</b>	1	We rented a French "thriller" called " <b>Merci pour la chocolate</b> ". It was slow, ham handed and pretentious. The plot centers on a young woman who feels, for no reason, that she might be the offspring of a famous pianist. He takes her in and helps her prepare for a big recital. Meanwhile, his wife, a chocolate heiress, is giving everyone rhyponol to have them kill themselves while driving. That's what I said. It is really stupid. When the hubby learns she has contaminated the girl and his son, he keeps playing the piano and asking philosophical questions instead of calling the police or throttling the wife. This movie sucks.
<b>Metropolis</b>	5	We rented Fritz Lang's 1926 classic " <b>Metropolis</b> " recently. It was truly wonderful to see. The exaggerated facial responses and makeup of the silent era always look silly and it is easy to belittle these productions on a technical level, but that is to miss the real genius of this film. The sets are spectacular and very interesting, like many German

		<p>expressionist films (Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Nosferatu etc). They convey an amazing vision of the future as seen from a time when factory worker existence was very mean indeed. Lang is clearly sympathetic to the plight of these soulless toilers, but he presents them in a way that smacks of a certain elitism. In addition to the social issues, Lang develops a number of advanced ideas that were taking shape, about psychology and religion. I saw in the New Yorker that a new version has just been release including 40 minutes that were filmed but cut out. In this new material the relation between the ruling boss and the robot-inventing genius is clarified, centering on a love triangle with the boss's wife. Wow. Lang had all the major plot lines dealt with in 1926. If you love movies, and their history, this is a must-see master piece.</p>
<b>Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil</b>	3	<p>"<b>Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil</b>" is a thriller, directed by Clint Eastwood and starring John Cusack and Kevin Spacey. The story is loosely based on a real incident. Cusack is a writer summoned by a wealthy Savannah socialite, played by Spacey, to review one of his very select and very famous Christmas parties. The Spacey character is a not entirely closet homosexual and after the party kills a young man. The plot unfolds as his attorney, abetted by Cusack, tries to convince a local jury that he acted in self defense. It is not a great story, or very suspenseful, but I like Cusack and Spacey does a great job. There are many colorful minor players and Savannah itself becomes a character. A subtropical, decadent throw back with surface grace and deep down flaws. I enjoyed the movie.</p>
<b>Million Dollar Baby</b>	4	<p>We went with an old college friend to see Clint Eastwood's newest movie "<b>Million Dollar Baby</b>". It stars Eastwood as a boxing trainer, Hillary Swank as Ozark trailer trash with an indomitable drive for success, and Morgan Freeman as an ex-boxer, crony of infinite humanity and wisdom. The movie is up for all kinds of awards, and I can understand the buzz. The acting is sound, with Swank giving a real star performance; she could get a second Academy Award for this. Eastwood and Freeman are also sound professionals, skillfully playing somewhat familiar characters. The movie is not like many sports movies though in that it takes a nasty turn which raises some novel questions for the genre. We know from his sparring with a local priest that Eastwood is a man seeking answers to hard questions and this adds gravity to the ending. He also has a broken relationship with his own daughter (common for his heroes). This meshes with his relationship with the Swank character, and adds to the tragic weight. Eastwood, a known conservative Republican, portrays her welfare family in a completely unsympathetic way, but this fits with the story and does not seem gratuitous.</p>
<b>Millions</b>	2	<p>"<b>Millions</b>" is a British film about two boys who have recently lost their mum. Dad moves them to a new town where they try to fit in. The younger boy has some problems, since he hallucinates about saints. He later discovers a bag of money tossed by criminals from a train. He and his brother us the money for their ends, but eventually he crooks come looking for it. This is a well meaning movie, and harmless enough. I can't say I was wild about it though.</p>
<b>Minority Report</b>	3	<p>Clare, Russ, Polly, and I went to see "<b>Minority Report</b>" while we were in Kansas City. Now I am suspicious of any action movie with Tom Cruise, but even the New Yorker raved about this film, so I gave it a go. I am very glad I did – it was excellent. The story is set in the future Washington DC where the police use three psychic "seerers" to predict when a murder will be committed and then act to stop it. Needless to say, as a professional scientist and overall skeptic, I find this premise extremely unlikely. However, the director, Stephen Spielberg, handles this very deftly and it is easy, and plausible to buy into the idea and go along for a great ride. The acting is good, the pacing sharp, and the special effects well executed. We all had fun and found this movie not only entertaining, but also thought provoking. I say check it out.</p>
<b>Miss Congeniality</b>	1	<p>I saw "<b>Miss Congeniality</b>" on HBO. I sure am glad I didn't buy a ticket! I admit, it did have a couple of funny moments, particularly scowering beauty pagents. Overall, though, this is a worthless movie. I understand that Sandra Bullock has a lot of say about her movies, and if so, this is a self-serving pile of syrupy goop. "See how cute I am? I may not be drop-dead gorgeous, but don't you think I'm cute anyway?" The plot was stupid beyond words and the sycophantic acting of Benjamin Bratt and Candice Bergen was a disgrace. I know why investors put money into movies like this - because they know people will go see them. It's the last thing - the going to see them - that I don't understand.</p>

<b>Miller's Crossing</b>	4	I re-watched " <b>Miller's Crossing</b> " a 1920 era gangster film directed by the Coen brothers. It stars Gabriel Byrne, Albert Finney, John Turturro, Steve Buscemi and others. Byrne plays Tom Regan, an Irish mob figure with a gambling problem. He lacks the killer instinct and muscle of many of his playmates, but he is smart and sees the battle between rival gangs like a chess master. Only the stakes of this game are your life. The plot is complex but engaging, and the characters are what we imagine prohibition era gangsters were like, with appropriate period jargon. Very tense and fun to watch.
<b>Memento</b>	5	<b>Memento</b> . I could not not take my eyes off this thriller. Guy Pearce plays an insurance investigator looking for his wife's killer. He was also injured in the attack and has lost his ability to incorporate short-term memory into permanent memory (this is a real syndrome). The story unfolds in temporal reverse but it works great.
<b>Mondays in the Sun</b>	2	We also went to see a new Spanish movie called " <b>Mondays in the Sun</b> ". IT is a gritty story about a group of unemployed ship builders in northern Spain. The characters are interesting and their stories evoke human sympathy. A lot of contemporary political arguments are brought up in a natural way, with out taking sides or being preachy. You can see the plight of the displaced workers, but you also see the irritation of one of the group who has a new job and whose taxes are paying the dole for his buddies to hand out at the bar all week. Like most European films, it is too long since no one there seems to know how to edit film, but overall it was interesting.
<b>Monsieur Ibrahim</b>	2	We rented a subtitled French movie " <b>Monsieur Ibrahim</b> ", starring Omar Sharif as Ibrahim. It is a warm, humane, and affirming story about a young Jewish boy, abandoned by his Mom, ignored and scorned by his dad, who finds understanding and parental love in the form of a Turkish shop keeper, Ibrahim, and various local B girls. The message is we are all people and all need each other. Ibrahim is a Sufi mystic with a liberal view of the human condition – a sort of understated Zorba the Turk. I can't say this is a great movie, but it has some humor, some great scenery as the pair travels in Turkey, and lots of human warmth.
<b>Monsoon Wedding</b>	3	Polly and I took in " <b>Monsoon Wedding</b> ". This nominally Indian film was directed by Mira Nair who also directed "Mississippi Masala", a movie that I liked very much. I also enjoyed her latest. It focuses on an upper class family, preparing for an arranged marriage between their daughter and a young man currently living in the USA. The daughter has been having an affair with a married celebrity, and there is a subplot about a "funny uncle" who arrives for the wedding a precipitates an emotional outburst. I'm sure such goings on are rare, especially in one family, but that is what is required to tell a story. It is loud, chaotic, and generally a lot of fun to watch. There is a very sweet parallel story involving an enterprising young man, who decorates upper-class wedding, and the servant girl of the central family. I say check it out if you can find it.
<b>Monster's Ball</b>	3	To end our weekend we rented " <b>Monster's Ball</b> " starring Billie Bob Thornton, Peter Boyle as his odious, racist father, and Halle Berry in her Oscar-winning performance. This is a grim tale of two dysfunctional families, one white and one black, trying to find redemption. It is probably realistic, but these folks are, happily, not familiar to me. The performances were good but I can't say I really liked this movie – it is just such a downer. There was also one nagging problem for me - Berry is SO gorgeous it is hard to believe that men wouldn't be line up for blocks to take care of her once her bad-boy hubby got himself jolted into the here-after. Maybe not though. I'm still sorting this one out.
<b>Monsters Inc</b>	3	We went to the cheap movies to see " <b>Monsters Inc.</b> " and we all enjoyed it a great deal. It is a PIXAR production so you know the animation and graphics in general are excellent. The plot of the story was also original and very clever. It had humor, danger, friendship, warmth, villains and good guys – everything movie staple except romance. Clare and I felt that good as it was, it was not quite up to the Toy Story/TS2 gold standard; principally because the humor was not as plentiful nor as sophisticated as in those pictures. However, Polly liked Monsters as much as those superb films. In any case it is definitely worth seeing.
<b>Mostly Martha</b>	3	We rented a German movie " <b>Mostly Martha</b> " and enjoyed it. Like " <b>Big Night</b> " and " <b>Dinner Rush</b> " this flick centers on the hectic life style of professional chefs. The cooking and the prepared dishes were interesting and tempting to look at. He story is sedate, but engaging. Martha is an uberchef whose life had centered on her profession

		until her sister is killed in a car crash and she inherits her niece. At the same time an Italian chef arrives to work in the kitchen, and there you are. Not fast paced, but very enjoyable.
<b>Moulin Rouge</b>	1	I recently saw <b>Moulin Rouge</b> , and walked out of it. Polly and some friends toughed it out, but I was ANNOYED by the jump-cutting, noise and general caos. I was told that Nicole Kidman got naked, but I'm still glad I left early. I was REALLY glad when I learned that the naked bit was not even true -- they were just pulling my chain.
<b>Mrs. Dalloway</b>	4	Seeing the Hours reminded me that I had not reviewed " <b>Mrs. Dalloway</b> ", starring Vanessa Redgrave and based on the novel by Virginia Woolf. The novel is about a big party given in 1923 England, but occasions a lot of questioning about life's choices. In particular, Mrs. Dalloway's old boy friend, an adventurer of sorts, is there and represents a strong counterpoint to the conservative, quiet life of privilege that she ultimately chose. This is a pretty intellectual movie, with little action (save some WWI scenes) but I found it very engaging. In fact I have seen it twice and enjoyed it immensely both times - I actually find it very affirming.
<b>Mumford</b>	3	We rented " <b>Mumford</b> " the other evening. This is a small, but engaging, Lawrence Kazden movie about a therapist in a small town. Not a lot happens, and it is very predictable, but it still held my attention. The hook is the that the therapist is an imposter, but he is such a natural at his "job" he accomplishes a great deal. He also marries Hope Davis so clearly it is worth the scam.
<b>Mummy, The</b>	3	We also were the proud owners of a DVD player for about 24 hours. To try it out we rented " <b>The Mummy</b> ", with Brandon Fraser (whom I've take a modest liking too). Again, this is a case of "don't try too hard, and no one can say you failed". It is actually better than Charlie's Angel's, though. It's lots more fun, and even though it has animated mummies, is no more far fetched. Sadly, our DVD player had a glitch and we missed the end of the Mummy. As a consequence, I don't know HOW our heroes dealt with this evil force. (Maybe Tom Ridge was called in to hunt "bandage boy" down). There is a movie called "Return of the Mummy", so I can only assume the Mummy made good his escape. That may be OK, because my daughter Kate declared the restored Mummy to be a "hoty". I guess they just don't make 'em like that any more.
<b>Muriel's Wedding</b>	4	Seeing the hours reminded me I had not reviewed " <b>Muriel's Wedding</b> " which starred Toni Collette (she had a minor role in the hours). I likes Muriel's Wedding quite a lot. Muriel is an ugly duckling, and a bit of a dufus, who lives in Porpoise Spit Australia. She initially hangs around with a bunch of shallow party girls. They give her the boot, but she finds comfort with another, tougher, smarter outcast played energetically by Rachel Griffiths who now stars on Six-feet Under. This team has some fun at the shallow tarts' expense, so that is good. This is not a totally convincing movie, but it hits home a lot, has some humor, some pathos, and lots of energy. Worth a rent on a raining weekend.
<b>My Architect</b>	3	" <b>My Architect</b> " is a documentray by Nathaniel Kahn. He is the bastard (sorry about that) son of Louis Kahn. His father died, deep in debt, in the men's room of a NYC when Nathaniel was only 11. As a young adult he realized he needed to start a search for his inigmatic daddy while people who remembered him were still alive. This is a very interesting story on two levels. Louis Kahn's story is one of those, and the striving for identity and understanding by his son is the other. I am familiar with several of Khan's projects, such as the Salk Institute in La Jolla, and the Kimball museum in Ft. Worth, and I have always been impressed by the Bangladeshi parliament building. I did not realize how few works Kahn actually completed (he was not always very practical in his art). I was also unaware of what a jerk he was to two other families he had besides the one he admitted to. In any case I can see why this film was nominated for an academy award – it is well made and very engaging in a gentle way.
<b>Mystic River</b>	5	Belatededly I saw " <b>Mystic River</b> " on DVD, but since it was on Clare's "mighty-big-TV" it was like being at the movies. Sean Penn got best actor and Tim Robbins best supporting actor for this film and boy howdy, I can see why. It is very powerful plot and well acted. Penn made a beleiver out of me. Clint Eastwood directed superbly and even composed some of the original music. I may have to rethink my opinion of him as an artist. This is a taunt movie - really first rate.
<b>Naked in Ashes</b>	2	" <b>Naked in Ashes</b> " is a 2005 documentary about Yogis in India. It centers on a 14 year old novitiate who follows his guru to Hindu enlightenment. The movie subject is clearly exotic and therefore inherently interesting. However, the story is told by the Yogis

		<p>themselves; it is slow and becomes repetitive. I think it could have profited by some objective input from outside observers; the director, Paula Fouce, is not up to Errol Morris standards. Now I will make a statement about the subject matter. I think organized religion has a large role in all societies and clearly is important to people for the comfort and security it seems to bring them. However, I have a rather jaundiced view of the dogma that underlies each and every one of them; they all have absolute beliefs which are irrational and intellectually indefensible. My feeling about the Hindu Yogis is that they seem to have carried their beliefs right over the edge of sanity. That is, the BEHAVIOR of such a person is essentially indistinguishable from that of a homeless ambulatory schizophrenic shouting at me on a street corner from under his aluminum foil hat. One yogi has kept his arm raised for 13 years, and another's legs are spurting blood from the ulcers arising from never sitting or lying down. For some reason this is thought to make the world a better place. Hmm. I think I'll just keep struggling along in this world trying to be a decent scholar, father, and grandfather.</p>
<b>Napoleon Dynamite</b>	2	<p>Kate and I watched "<b>Napoleon Dynamite</b>", a movie that got good reviews. We were both a bit uncomfortable watching it. The protagonist, and his relatives, are somewhat autistic. They have some technical knowledge, but are socially clueless. Their behavior is often amusing, but it is laughing at victims. Fortunately, there is some redemption at the end and the movie does make a valid, albeit trite, comment about high school mores. The movie was interesting but not as good as I had hoped.</p>
<b>Narrow Margin, The</b>	3	<p>"<b>The Narrow Margin</b>" is a 1952 thriller in which a tough cop, played by Charles McGraw, is assigned to take a witness from Chicago to LA on a train. The witness is the exwife of a mobster and there are several killers after her on the train. The movie is well done with some interesting twists and surprises. It wears a lot better than many movies from that time.</p>
<b>New Jack City</b>	2	<p>Our movie book, and friends, had told us "<b>New Jack City</b>" was a good movie. It stars Wesley Snipes, Judd Nelson, Ice-T, Vanessa Williams and the director, Mario Van Peebles. In fact, this is not a well made movie. It is gritty, and has a message about the inner city and drugs, but it is preachy AND the directing sucks. A lot of the plot is so unrealistic (I am thinking here of the court scenes) it is laughable. We actually could not watch all the way to the end.</p>
<b>No Mans Land</b>	3	<p>We rented the film "<b>No Mans Land</b>" and found it very interesting. It is set in Bosnia during the recent war. A patrol of Bosnian irregulars is cut down by Serbs, but one makes it to a trench in no mans land. Two Serbs are sent in to check it out, and they plant a mine under what they take to be a dead Bosnian. The first Bosnian kills one Serb and wounds the other. They are trapped between the lines and the story revolves around their actions and that of the mined soldier, who comes to in a very bad spot. A U.N. team of French and Germans arrives, and proves to be totally ineffectual. The story is ripe with symbolism for our times, but it is quite skillfully done and not ham handed. A lot of it is subtitled, but the only language the various parties can communicate in is broken English, and that, too, is significant. The movie won many international awards, and is well worth watching.</p>
<b>No way out</b>	3	<p>"<b>No way out</b>" is a 1987 thriller starring Kevin Costner, Gene Hackman, Sean Young and others. It was pretty good, or at least held our interest. The story is based on a novel called <b>The Big Clock</b>, which was also made into a thriller starring Ray Milland, in 1948. The story is updated to contemporary sensibilities but the big theme is the same. Our hero is in love with the big bosses paramour, the big boss knows she is seeing someone, but he doesn't know who. The big boss kills her in a rage and then sets up the unknown man, our hero in reality, to take the fall. The hero has to avoid a closing net of evidence while revealing the true killer. This is an excellent plot type and it works well in both movies. The later film throws in a twist at the ending which requires some rather unconvincing action early in the film, but this is not a serious drawback.</p>
<b>Normal Life</b>	2	<p>I rented a flick called "<b>Normal Life</b>" starring Ashley Judd and Luke Perry. Both gave surprisingly professional performances. I have had a thing for Ashley since I saw her marvelous first movie "<b>Ruby in Paradise</b>". In this story she plays a bright but very disturbed young woman. Perry is a rookie cop who is smitten with her beauty and apparent vulnerability. It gets to be very rough sledding though as Pam's socio pathology makes his life difficult. He turns to robbery to pay his debts and is quite good at it. When Pam finds out, she wants in on it since this thrill a minute life is the only one</p>

		she craves. These are not happy folks, but it is a pretty good story. Judd takes her shirt off every other scene, but since she is also crying miserably it is not really a bonus.
<b>Not Only But Always</b>	4	<b>"Not Only But Always"</b> is a drama based on the relationship of british comics Peter Cook and Dudley Moore. Cook was a brilliant wit, from an upper class background, and Moore was a short club-foot from Dagenham. At first Cook dominated the pairing in a cruel way, but his depression and alcoholism took its toll while Moore rose to stardom in the USA. The acting is good and the humor biting. Very interesting movie indeed.
<b>Office Space</b>	4	I rewatched <b>"Office Space"</b> starring Ron Livingston and Jennifer Anniston as disaffected employees, he in a software factory, she in a restaurant. This is a greatly underestimated movie. It is brilliantly funny and although it had virtually no box office it is now a cult classic, which is entirely deserved. I also like that it was filmed in Austin, which makes it fun on the outside shots. The boss figure, played by Gary Cole, has become a family favorite and we mimic his lines a great deal.
<b>Once upon a time in Mexico</b>	2	We watched <b>"Once upon a time in Mexico"</b> recently. This is a violent comedy/fantasy directed by Austinite Robert Rodriguez (he also did <b>"Spy Kids"</b> ). This is part of the El Mariachi series and is quite fun if you take it in the right spirit. It stars Antonio Banderas as the super tough and unflappable mariachi, Johnny Depp as an American agent, Salma Hayek, Mickey Rourke and Willem Dafoe as an evil dude (surprise). I gather this is a send up of the old Clint Eastwood, Man with no name, westerns. That is, the plot makes little sense, you can't be sure who to trust, and there is lots of shooting. This movie is very tongue in cheek, though, with jokes amid the mayhem. Not great art, but could be a diversion on a very boring day.
<b>Only Yesterday</b>	4	<b>"Only Yesterday"</b> is a sweet and evocative animated film directed by Isao Takahata. The drawings are soft and lush, like water colors, which give the film a novel look. The protagonist is a 27 year old Japanese office worker who reflects on her childhood, particularly as a fifth grader, and sees how it shaped who she is. She visits relatives in the country and finds a different life. The use of animation allows some wonderful scenes where her past "selves" prompt her contemporary actions. The artists draw the main characters as Japanese-Caucasian hybrids with big round eyes; I guess it increases the market for the movie, and is not too distracting. In any case, I found this a wonderful and even moving film.
<b>Open Range</b>	4	Friends advised we rent <b>"Open Range"</b> starring Robert Duval, Kevin Costner, and Annette Bening. Although a bit flawed, this is a most enjoyable oater. Duval has much of the attitude and mannerisms of Gus from the marvelous <b>"Lonesome Dove"</b> series, and Costner does a creditable job as his hired hand and friend, but a man with a dark past. These free range grazers come afoul of a wealthy cattle baron who pretty much runs a nearby town (seem familiar? I think the actual Johnson County wars are the inspiration). The cowboys have a few townies on their side, including the doctor and his sister plus a resourceful livery man. The evil rancher and his men must be dealt with, and they are in a most satisfying way. Very watchable and engaging movie on several levels.
<b>Open Water</b>	3	We rented a recent thriller called <b>"Open Water"</b> . This is a really independent film where a group of friends used modern digital technology to more or less create their movie and it is darn good, with a sizable box office. The story is inspired by an actual event in Australia. A couple on an open ocean scuba dive gets left behind due to a miscalculation in retrieving divers. The couple then faces likely death from dehydration, exposure, and worst of all – sharks. A lot of primitive fears and human emotions are aroused. This is not a masterpiece, but it is pretty good viewing.
<b>Onion Field, The</b>	4	<b>"The Onion Field"</b> is a dramatization of a true story about the murder of a police officer in Bakersfield. The star of the drama is James Woods playing the bright, but crazy killer Greg Powell. The movie does a good job showing the effect of the crime on Powell and on all those around him, a petty criminal accomplice, his girl friend, a surviving police officer and so on. Much of the film deals with the criminal justice system as we see the psychopathic Powell turn the system inside out.
<b>Orange County</b>	2	What about <b>"Orange County"</b> . It stars Tom Hanks's son Colin as a brilliant high school student who is ham-strung in his efforts to get into Stanford by his wealthy but dysfunctional family. Now there is an original plot. Jack Black is his over-the-top drugged out brother and Chevy Chase, Lilly Tomlin, and Kevin Kline make guests appearances (no doubt they are close friends of Tom's). I rented this video because it

		had lots of good reviews as a solid coming of age film, and compared it to <b>"Risky Business"</b> in quality. I think it was watchable and sweet but not great. It was pretty predictable in spite of the out of control behavior of his parents and Black's character.
<b>Osama</b>	3	We went with friends to see "Osama". This is a story about the plight of women in Taliban controlled Afghanistan and it delivers a strong message. Clearly the Taliban, like all radical religious nuts, are a menace to civilization. By the best standards, this is not a technically great movie. The acting is sincere but not always professional but it was good enough for the purpose. The young girl who is the focus of the story was very believable by any standards and you really
<b>Panic</b>	3	I watched <b>"Panic"</b> on HBO. Our movie book gave this little known movie 4 1/2 stars, and I am inclined to also rate it highly. It stars William H. Macy as a hired assassin working for his domineering daddy, Donald Sutherland. He is bored with his wife, Tracey Ulman, and captivated by a young woman, Neve Campbell, whom he meets at his therapist, John Ritter, office. I found it hard to believe in this type of family "business" but putting that aside, the rest of the story was engaging. The extreme business led naturally to strong relationships within the family. The acting was nuanced and professional all around. Macy clearly is a man who seems tormented and befuddled. The ending was predictable, but appropriate and even satisfying in a sad way.
<b>Panic Room</b>	3	We saw the HBO TV premier of <b>"Panic Room"</b> starring Jodi Foster. There are some flaws, but I enjoyed the flick. It was pretty suspenseful so it must have worked at some level; that is I bought into the story and found myself engaged by it. This is a fairly novel twist on the usual trapped woman thriller and I do love to watch Ms. Foster work. This is not great art but is a very watchable stupid-time movie.
<b>Patton</b>	4	Kate had never seen <b>"Patton"</b> starring George C. Scott as the brilliant, but controversial, WW II general. I have seen this movie many times, but it is always watchable, like the truly great ones are. The acting by Scott is in a class by itself and the spectacle of the army in action is first rate too. A must see movie and perhaps the best war movie ever.
<b>Perfect Crime, The (2005)</b>		<b>The Perfect Crime (El Crimen Perfecto)</b> is a hilarious comedy from Spain. It centers on a department store Lothario who is competing with another word-a-day manager to for promotion. His life becomes muy complicated when he accidentally kills the guy, but falls under the control of a rather plain, but very tough, saleswoman. This subtitled movie is very off beat, but it is truly hilarious and insightful about contemporary social values.
<b>Phone Booth</b>	2	I watched <b>"Phone Booth"</b> starring Colin Farrell on HBO. It was a pretty entertaining thriller, and so short you could hardly bet bored. Keifer Sutherland played an evil genius, a little TOO much of a genius to be believable, He is disembodied for most of the movie, but seems to be some kind of avenging angel - one who is willing to work with you even if it means killing some other innocent people to take a point about personal improvement. Farrell does a good acting job as a hard driving publicity man who has not lost the last shred of his humanity. Not great but OK.
<b>Pieces of April</b>	3	We also saw <b>"Pieces of April"</b> directed by Peter Hedges ("What's eating Gilbert Grape" and "About a Boy"). It stars Katie Holmes as April and Patricia Clarkson as her mom (she was nominated for an Oscar for this role). April is a problem child who spent her youth and adolescence acting out. Her mom has cancer and is dealing angrily with the realization of her end. April tries to prepare one last Thanksgiving meal for her family with the aid of her tenement neighbors. The movie has some humor through the grimness and shows the good, bad and mundane in people of all colors and walks of life. The movie is about relations, which marks it as a chick flick, but it is still pretty good.
<b>Pink Panther Strikes Again, The</b>	5	I re-watched <b>"The Pink Panther Strikes Again"</b> after many years. This is the fourth and the funniest of the series. In the early Panthers Peter Seller's Clouseau was a clueless ditz playing against a sophisticated background. Here, everything is played for laughs – all the stops are pulled out. Now if this strategy fails you have an adolescent mess, but it all works here. Let's list some hysterical scenes: the opening fight with Cato, the Quasimodo humpback disguise, the country house interrogation, the Oktoberfest assassinations, and the dentist disguise in the castle. I had tears in my eyes I laughed so hard. Sellers was a genius, Herbert Lom is convincing as the "Lunatic Dreyfus" driven mad by Clouseau, and Lesley-Anne Down does a convincing turn as the

		worlds most beautiful woman.
<b>Pirates of the Caribbean</b>	4	We went to see " <b>Pirates of the Caribbean</b> " on the big screen. The movie is based on the Disney theme park ride, so I guess all sources of inspiration have now been tapped. In fact the movie was lots of fun although it was too long – at least one scene should have been whacked for better pacing. The animation of the doomed pirates was great and Johnny Depp as Captain Sparrow was terrific. He was really into the part and was clearly having as much fun as the audience.
<b>Pitch Black</b>	2	On Clare's advise we rented a sci-fi thriller called " <b>Pitch Black</b> ", starring Vin Diesel as Riddick. It was actually pretty fun. You just need to suspend disbelief and go with it. There are numerous logical plot flaws, and both the action and the dialogue are predictable, but it is OK. Everyone is having fun and not taking this too seriously.
<b>Possession</b>	3	We rented " <b>Possession</b> ", the movie version of A.S. Byatt's Booker Prize winning novel. It stars Aaron Eckhart and Gwyneth Paltrow as modern literary scholars who uncover secret letters from Queen Victoria's poet laureate, a married man, to a minor lady poet. The film cuts between the modern search, and love story, to the love story of long ago where the poet is played by Jeremy Northam and the poetess by Jennifer Ehle (she was Lizzie in the 5 star BBC production of " <b>Pride and Prejudice</b> "). All the acting was fine and the story was engaging. It had a good deal to say, without actually saying it, about comparative mores and universals of the human heart. Needless to say there are no car chases or explosions so if that is your criterion for an enjoyable movie, you better look elsewhere. Polly and Clare and I all liked it a great deal.
<b>Predator</b>	4	It was too hot to go outside so I rewatched " <b>Predator</b> " starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and others, including Jesse Ventura who utters his immortal line "I ain't got time to bleed". This is a terrific sci-fi/action flick. The production values for the big stars are fantastic, the characters are bullet hard and engaging, and most importantly, this is a first rate story idea. Arnie leads a crack team of commando mercenaries, hunters really, into the jungle lair of narco-terrorist-rebel bad guys. They do their job with ruthless efficiency only to find themselves hunted by a hyper tough alien who uses earth as a game reserve (don't ask why he doesn't go to NYC or Tokyo where there is more game. I think this space guy likes a challenge). Once you buy into the plot just sit back and enjoy the ride. A very fun movie.
<b>Prime of Miss Jean Brody, The</b>	5	We rewatched " <b>The Prime of Miss Jean Brody</b> " for the umpteenth time. This is a wonderful film, starring Maggie Smith in the title role. The movie is based on a novel by Muriel Spark; it deals with a hyper romantic teacher at a girls school in 1930s Edinburgh. She tends to ignore the usual roles of pedagogy in favor of developing Brody girls with the flair for life that she sees as of paramount importance. The acting is first rate and the story develops interesting ideas of universal significance. A must see movie for serious film aficionados.
<b>Prince of the City</b>	3	Since I am catching up on film reviews I may as well do two oldies that I recently rented. I had not seen " <b>Prince of the City</b> " before. This is a Sidney Lumet movie starring Treat Williams, Jerry Orbach and others. It deals with a true story of a NYC narcotics detective who rats out other corrupt officers. It is a real long movie, but well worth watching. Williams gives a very strong performance of a man torn by his conscience and his love for his partners, who he views as basically good men doing a dirty job that society needs but won't reward.
<b>Proof</b>	3	On the advice of our friends Ginger and Bill we rented an Aussie movie called " <b>Proof</b> ". It featured a very young Russell Crowe in a major supporting role. The story centers on a young man, blind from birth, who takes photographs and has them narrated by friends and acquaintances, as a way of understanding the world and proving what has occurred or what he has experienced. His housekeeper is in love with him, but his insecurities keep her at arms length. This is a very thoughtful, intelligent, movie exploring relationships and reality. First rate.
<b>Proof of Life</b>	3	I saw " <b>Proof of Life</b> " with Russell Crow and Meg Ryan on HBO. It was better than I thought it would be. I figured all the hype about their off-screen romance was all there would be to the movie. Mind you, we're not talking great art here, but I found the movie engaged me throughout. It was good, diverting entertainment, with a believable-enough plot and decent acting. I say check it out on a rainy weekend or boring evening.
<b>Pulp Fiction</b>	5	I should review Quentin Tarantino's trailblazing movie " <b>Pulp Fiction</b> ", which starred Lordy Lordy EVERYBODY. Big roles though were John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson,

		and Bruce Willis, with strong work by Ving Rhames, Tim Roth, Uma Thurmon, Harvey Keitel, Amanda Plummer and others too numerous to mention. The story centers on vile criminals and their everyday “work” and concerns. The language is rough and the violence is graphic. The dialogue though is fast and hilarious and the intersecting stories have tremendous narrative drive. This first time I saw the movie I felt I should bathe in alcohol, but on a second viewing I relaxed for the ride. This movie is not for everyone but it has an immense following. It paved the way for a whole genre which includes several good Guy Richie films and several others as well.
<b>Quick Change</b>	4	We watched “ <b>Quick Change</b> ” for the umpteenth time. This is one of the most enjoyable and underrated movies I know of. It stars Bill Murray, Gina Davis, Jason Robards, Randy Quaid, and has appearances by many actors who would later achieve some fame. The story involves a disgruntled city worker, Murray, who carries out a brilliant bank robbery. His meticulous planning is literally blown away by a car horn, but that adds to the tension. The dialogue is very fast and witty and you find yourself drawn into rooting for these criminals. Don’t miss this movie – it can be rented and makes the circuit on HBO.
<b>Quiet American, The</b>	3	We went to see “ <b>The Quiet American</b> ” starring Michael Caine and Brendan Fraser and based on the Graham Green novel. The story is set in Vietnam in 1952, just as the French were getting whipped and the U.S. was nosing around. It is an interesting story, although it now seems predictable. Caine is a British journalist, married to a Catholic (what else from Green?) back home who won’t divorce him, although he is in love with a gorgeous local beauty. Fraser plays a CIA operative under cover of being a medical aid officer. He wants to protect her since he knows Caine is old, and will soon be recalled. In fact he too is in love with her. Why this should be is unclear. She is a beauty, but doesn’t say much. She may be a metaphor for Vietnam itself, over which different groups are competing for different reasons. Since the movie begins with the discovery of Fraser’s body, I guess it’s no secret that he is killed, but Caine’s role in the death is complex. Pretty good and worth at least a rental.
<b>Rabbit-Proof Fence</b>	4	We went with friends to see the Australian film “ <b>Rabbit-Proof Fence</b> ”. It is based on a true story set in western Australia in 1931. Mr. Neville, played by Kenneth Branagh, is in charge of all aborigines and it is the law to separate half-cast children from their families and raise them as poor whites. The goal is to eventually breed them out of existence. In this story three girls are arrested and taken to an internment camp 1200 miles from home. They escape and make their way back along the 1500 mile rabbit-proof fence set up to keep rabbits out of farm land to the west. The movie is well made, the scenery is impressive and the story is terribly moving. Although it may sound a bit depressing the heroism and scale of the human emotion makes this a must see movie, if you can find it.
<b>Rainmaker, The</b>	3	We saw “ <b>The Rainmaker</b> ” on HBO and enjoyed it thoroughly. This is a lawyer story, based on a novel by John Grisham. It stars Matt Damon as a newly minted attorney with principles, Danny DeVito as a street smart wannabe, and Jon Voight as a smooth corporate lawyer. Danny Glover, Claire Danes, Mary Kay Place, and Mickey Rourke also have good roles. This story may have some flaws, but it is very watchable. Our young upstarts battle corporate villains and a good time is had by all. The movie is directed by Francis Ford Coppola so it is not surprising that with a good cast and an engaging story you get an enjoyable movie. Damon did a very convincing Tennessee accent and I must say that I have come to think he is one of the better real actors in the business. He even held up well against the highly skilled Voight.
<b>Raising Arizona</b>	5	We watched “ <b>Raising Arizona</b> ” for the umpteenth time, and loved it as always. This is my favorite Coen brothers movie, and they have made some good ones. It stars Nicholas Cage, Holly Hunter, Tex Cobb, John Goodman and others. They all do a great job. This is a surreal comedy about the nature of good and evil, fate and fortune. It is hilarious and also thought provoking if you want to bother. But no matter what level you tune in for, it is terrific.
<b>Ragtime</b>	3	We rented “ <b>Ragtime</b> ”, a sprawling turn of the century story based on the novel by E. L. Doctorow and directed by Milos Forman. It stars Howard Rollins, James Cagney, Mary Steenburgen, Elizabeth McGovern, James Olson and others. I read the book many years ago and was astonished that none of the story seemed familiar! What good does all this reading do us anyway? The movie was long, a 2-reeler, but I stayed

		engaged throughout. Polly was a bit underwhelmed so there is a modest split here. I was captivated by the costumes and manners of the people and by the way Doctorow brought in famous people and stories of the time. The main plot of this story, that of Coalhouse Walker, was interesting and emotionally powerful. It was a great vehicle to explore American race relations.
<b>Raising Victor Vargus</b>	3	We went with friends to see " <b>Raising Victor Vargus</b> ". This is an indy film, dealing with the life and romances of poor Dominicans on the lower east side of Manhattan. The movie has its charms, as we follow the hopes, aspirations and insecurities of these impoverished youth. There is humor and reflection and a sense of human universals. The folks are sure poorer, more ignorant, and way less attractive than any Hollywood coming of age story. It shows we are all alike in basic ways though, and love will prevail even in the mean streets of little Dominica. We feel that soon a poor boy and poor girl will find each other and give rise to a dozen poor babies to start the great cycle all over again.
<b>Ray</b>	4	" <b>Ray</b> " is the biographical story of Ray Charles. The story itself is fascinating as a talented and determined blind man rises to the peak of celebrity and finding solace in a long time heroin addiction. However, the big draw in this movie is the acting of Jamie Foxx as Ray. He worked his butt off to master the mannerisms of the blind genius and even performed several of the movie songs. He is up for an academy award for two movies, Ray and Collateral, although Ray is clearly the superior performance. The only minor flaw in this movie is some of the early, and late, scenes are rushed to build his character in a somewhat heavy handed way, but this does not detract from a first rate film.
<b>Read my lips</b>	4	Polly and I went with friends to see a French (sub titled) thriller called " <b>Read my lips</b> ". We all loved it – this thing is masterfully executed. The story works on many levels. It is a great straight up thriller with an interesting plot. It is a quirky kind of romance, and it is a thoughtful exploration of individual isolation. The heroine of the story, played brilliantly by Emmanuelle Devos, is nearly deaf and needs hearing aids. This affliction is a fine vehicle to naturally explore her loneliness in the context of this action movie. She sees her chances for a happy, full, or even interesting life as rather limited; when the chance comes along, in the form of an ex-con office assistant, she grabs on hard and won't let go. I loved it and recommend it strongly, if you can find it.
<b>Real Women Have Curves</b>	2	We saw a low budget indy film, " <b>Real Women Have Curves</b> " on HBO. I had seen trailers for it in the local art house cinema, but didn't think it looked worth paying for, and that was right. The movie is well meaning, dealing with personal issues of a rather overweight and plain, but smart, Hispanic girl in east LA. We deal with a variety of clichés and the acting is mediocre at best. Not offensive, but not worth going out of your way for either.
<b>Red Eye</b>	3+	" <b>Red Eye</b> " is a Wes Craven thriller starring Rachel McAdam and Cillian Murphy. Normally I would not see such a flick, but we had friends who wanted to see it so there you are. In fact, I thought it was pretty good. Short, tight, and engaging. We are not talking great art here, but decent entertainment. McAdams is held captive on a red eye flight by a ruthless assassin who controls the fate of her father; this is part of a scheme to assassinate a hard nosed politician. She must match wits and strength with him and it is fun to watch.
<b>Red Lights</b>	2	We went to see the French drama, " <b>Red Lights</b> "; found it engaging but not terrific. The story centers on a man of modest capacities, except for drink, who is resentful of his successful wife. A road trip to collect their children from summer camp leads to a quarrel and an unlikely series of events that reshapes their lives. It is not really a thriller, but more of a drama.
<b>Remains of the Day</b>	5	I watched, again, " <b>Remains of the Day</b> ", a Merchant-Ivory drama starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson. I had forgotten how moving and thought provoking this drama is. It unfolds at an estate in 1935 Oxfordshire where various nobles are trying to understand the Nazis. The main story is about the relationship of a tightly wound butler and his house maid. A great many issues are raised here, about governance, class, duty, loyalty, interpersonal relationships, and lost opportunities. I think this is a masterpiece.
<b>Return, The</b>	4	We went with friends to see a Russian movie called " <b>The Return</b> " directed by Andrei Zvyagintsev. The story is that a father, missing for 12 years suddenly returns to a

		shabby household run by a mother, her mother, and two sons, aged about 15 and 12. It is unclear where he has been, although prison is likely, and he immediately takes them on a car and boat trip to an island where some treasure is buried. Mostly the film concerns itself with father/son relationships. It is dark but very intriguing. Although its pacing is slow I found it very watchable. Many questions are left unanswered so you need to discuss it with others. That's a good idea anyway.
<b>Restoration</b>	3	Polly and I rented " <b>Restoration</b> " starring Robert Downey, Sam Neill, Meg Ryan, and Polly Walker. This is a costume drama dealing with the restoration of Charles II and all that that mini-enlightenment entailed. It also dealt with the personal restoration of the Downey figure, a talented physician initially lured by the fleshy pleasures of the court. It was actually pretty interesting historically and the set were certainly amazing.
<b>Ride the Pink Horse</b>	3	We watched a 1947 film noir called " <b>Ride the Pink Horse</b> ", directed by and starring Robert Montgomery. This is not a really professional looking movie in some ways but it is strangely engaging. It employs all the archetypes of the genre: a tough war hero mistreated by society, a cheating dame, an uncertainty as to what is actually going on, and a sympathetic black and white darkness. Montgomery comes into a New Mexico town looking to settle a score with a war profiteer who done in his pal. He is admired and aided, for now obvious reason, by an attractive local girl to whom he is initially cruel (until she proves she is worthy I guess). Montgomery seems a bit stiff in his tough guy role, but I must admit I was sucked right into this strange story. It is not on video, so you need to watch for it on classic movie stations.
<b>Ripley's Game</b>	3	Polly rented us " <b>Ripley's Game</b> " starring John Malkovich as Tom Ripley. Matt Damon played a younger Ripley in "The Talented Mr. Ripley" and Dennis Hopper played a cowboy Ripley in "The American Friend", but Malkovich I think is the real Ripley. As usual Ripley is smart, competent, and amoral, or at least on a different track from everyone else. I am not sympathetic to this Patricia Highsmith character, but I find the stories fascinating and quite engaging. One problem with this particular Ripley is the production values. The sound amplitude varies all over the place, and when you turn it up for indoor conversations, the switch to an outdoor scene nearly blows your eardrums out. No wonder it had no theatre run.
<b>Road Home, The</b>	3	About a week ago I saw <b>The Road Home</b> , a Chinese movie about a school teacher sent to a primitive village during the "great leap backward". It was a bit slow in places, but the photography was beautiful and interesting, and the simple love story was very moving. It starred the same girl who appeared in <b>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</b> .
<b>Roger Dodger</b>	3	Polly, Clare, Kate and I went to see the indy film " <b>Roger Dodger</b> " starring Campbell Scott (who I learned is George C. Scott's son), with interesting supporting roles by Jennifer Beales and Elizabeth Berkley. The story involves a Manhattan advertising executive who fancies himself a real ladies man, and he tries to pass his worldly knowledge on to his visiting nephew. The dialogue is smart, fast, and cuttingly funny, but there is a palpable edge of desperation and unhappiness. Roger is a smart guy with what seems a lot of potential, but he is strangely out of synch with reality. The film raises many interesting questions, mostly about men and women, and answers none of them, so there is a lot to discuss afterward. I really liked the movie and so did we all. There are no car chases or explosions though.
<b>Room With A View</b>	5	" <b>Room With A View</b> " is a Merchant Ivory production of an E.M. Forster novel. As you might expect, it is beautifully filmed and skillfully edited. It stars Helena Bonham Carter, Julian Sands, Maggie Smith, Denholm Elliott, Daniel Day Lewis, Judi Dench, Simon Callow, Rupert Graves and others. The acting is splendid and the Edwardian love story is wonderfully engaging. This intelligent tale begins with a tour of Florence and carries back to upper crust England where the characters are reunited by fate or by their love of all things Italian, depending on which character is talking. In any case this is a must see movie of taste, elegance, charm and wit.
<b>Rounders, The</b>	3	My sister Pat is in town and we rented a taunt drama called " <b>The Rounders</b> ". It has a great cast, Matt Damon, Edward Norton, John Malkovich, and John Turturro. Damon plays a compulsive gambler of considerable skill and the story takes us into the world of professional gamblers. It becomes clear that winning poker players are intuitive psychologists who also know a lot about odds. It is the ability to read the other players that makes the difference. The ambient life style of these high stakes gamblers is often very tawdry and frightening. I found this a really absorbing movie with fine acting and an

		engaging plot. I am not sure I understand the message of the movie though. It seems as if it is saying, "if you are a compulsive gambler, be true to yourself". Well maybe.
<b>Royal Tennenbaums, The</b>	2	Polly and I rented " <b>The Royal Tennenbaums</b> " last week. It was very strange, but I was engaged all the way through. For one thing I love to watch Gene Hackman work, and he is splendid in his role as a wayward Dad to a family of remote, but gifted children. His estranged wife is played by Angelica Huston and she is great too. I don't care for Ben Stiller for some reason I can't put my finger on, but he does a good job here, as does the ubiquitous Gwyneth Paltrow. The hyper intellectual relationships within the family were fun to see and quite funny in an unsettling way. The ending was a little to pat, but overall I liked the movie. Only one car crash, so its not an action flick. Clare wrote to say that she hates this movie. I noticed that Clare often low-balls my ratings, but never raises them; she is clearly a harsher critic than I.
<b>Runaway Jury</b>	2	" <b>Runaway Jury</b> " is a 2003 thriller starring John Cusack, Gene Hackman, Dustin Hoffman, and Rachel Weisz. It is based on a John Grisham novel where a gun manufacturer is being sued for contributing to the death of Hoffman's clients husband. Cusack and Weisz are plants in the jury trying to manipulate it for sale. Or are they? Well you'll find out. This is not a great movie, but its watchable.
<b>Rush Hour 2</b>	2	David and I went to see Jackie Chan's " <b>Rush Hour 2</b> " at the dollar (now 2\$) movie. Why would anyone go to see a Jackie Chan movie? Because it is great fun to see Jackie's amazingly choreographed fight scenes, of course. He always comes up with something new and outrageous. The scene where he slides under the tellers window, slick as a greased weasel, is truly amazing. As usual, the plot is stupid beyond words, the dialogue is laughable, and the romance is cornball. This is all irrelevant because its just a matrix in which Jackie does his martial arts dance. The only thing I really objected to is the very presence of Chris Tucker. I found him even more annoying than in Rush Hour, and that was very annoying indeed. Also, Jackie is getting longer in the tooth and is more conscious of his status than in his earlier movies. This one is not as fresh as <b>Rumble in the Bronx</b> , the wonderful <b>supercop</b> , or the Chinese language <b>Operation Condor</b> , and its nowhere near as imaginative or funny as <b>Shangri Noon</b> . For a buck or two though, its like going to the Jackie circus.
<b>Russian Ark</b>	3	Polly and I went to see an unusual Russian movie called " <b>Russian Ark</b> ". It is a real spectacle and worth seeing if you are a bookish type of person. An unseen narrator awakes amid wealthy people and military officers in 18 <sup>th</sup> century attire. He is unsure if he is dreaming or is part of a performance. He meets a man in black who is a European diplomat of the era and together they go through 33 rooms of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. It is spectacular. There are over 2000 costumed actors and it is amazing to sense what life must have been like as the courts of Peter and Catherine aped their European betters. Certain rooms take us to other episodes of Russian history, like the siege of the city by the Nazis, the Russian revolution and court of Nicholas etc. The Hermitage tour is wonderful and the discussion of art and history is engaging. There are no car chases or explosions though.
<b>Saints and Soldiers</b>	4	My in-laws brought us a first rate 2003 indie film called " <b>Saints and Soldiers</b> ", directed by Ryan Little and produced on a shoe string budget. The story is supposed to be based on an actual WW II occurrences, but I must say some details of the story strained credulity. Even so, the acting was first rate and the basic story is tight and suspenseful. The characters are interesting, reflecting a range of attitudes and values, (as is common in "fox hole" war movies). A rag tag bunch survives the caos of the Malmedy Massacre and must make their way through German lines to relative saftety. I had not heard of this movie, and I was most pleasantly surprised by it. I wonder how many more jewels have missed my detector?
<b>Salt men of Tibet, The</b>	3	I watched a German documentary called " <b>The Salt men of Tibet</b> ". It was beautifully photographed, but VERY slow. Not much happens in rural Tibet. In spite of the pacing, I found the film interesting because is gives an insight into what is likely to have been the way of life our primitive ancestors. These folks live in small family sized groups, and their lives center on survival, really. I was interested in the superstition, the demands for ritual in all their tasks, by the exclusion of woman from key tasks, and by the singing. They have songs, long boring songs, for all tasks. The men annually drive their yaks to a salt lake, and collect salt for trade with agricultural people. The practitioners of this art have a secret salt language which must never be revealed to others, especially to

		women. Women cannot even go to the lake since they can apparently effect the deposition of salt in magical ways.
<b>Seabiscuit</b>	4	While in Minneapolis for a family reunion we all went to see " <b>Seabiscuit</b> " starring Tobey Maguire, Jeff Bridges, Chris Cooper, Elizabeth Banks, William H. Macy, and Gary Stevens. The movie is based on the true exploits of the depression era race horse that became a national obsession. As told here, it is a wonderful story of heroism and courage for the horse and the people around him - and I loved it. (I am a sucker for this kind of thing, <b>Black Stallion</b> brought tears to my eyes). The directing and editing was well done and wove the horse story into the national mood which made it more relevant. The acting was solid and not saccharine. I thought Jeff Bridges and Chris Cooper were particularly strong and Tobey Maguire was believable as a depression era scrapper. I have learned that some experts now believe that Seabiscuit's rise from obscure also ran to legendary speedster may have been powered by exogenous adrenaline, but if so I don't want to think about it just now.
<b>Serenity</b>	3	" <b>Serenity</b> " is a B grade space western with strong Star Wars influences. It has a no-name cast, but has good effects, lots of action, and some amusing, albeit frequently hokey, dialogue. I liked it way better than StarWars-1 (Phantom Menace) which I quit watching after 15 minutes because the plot and the acting sucked so bad. The idea of Serenity is that a Hans Solo type veteran of the space colony wars has a beat up space ship, Serenity, with a rag tag, but tough and reliable crew. These petty crooks take passengers, a psychic girl named River and her brother, as they flee from the empire forces, chased by a Darth Vader like hunter. Sound familiar? You betcha. Anyway, there are interesting ideas about the dangers of social engineering and lots of action. If you sit back, don't think too hard, and just let it happen, it is a fun movie.
<b>Seven Samurai, The</b>	5	" <b>The Seven Samurai</b> ". This 1954 Kurasowa movie, featuring Toshiru Mifuni, is a classic, often described as the best Western ever made. It is an absolute must see. Check out my review of "The Magnificent Seven" for more details.
<b>Sexy Beast</b>	4	We saw <b>Sexy Beast</b> , starring Ben Kingsley, Ray Winstone, and Ian McShane along with some unknown, but capable actors. Kingsley is so scary you can hardly believe he played Ghandi! Anyway, the story involves Gal (Winstone) as a retired thug, living in Spain on his ill-gotten gains along with some old crony and their respective ladies. Kingsley shows up to "encourage" him to participate in one last heist. When he encourages you, you damn well stay encouraged too. It is real tense and quite a ride. This is one fun movie. I say check it out for sure – if you're not some girly-man.
<b>Shadow of the Vampire</b>	4	" <b>Shadow of the Vampire</b> " is a very interesting movie for film buffs. It is a fictionalized story of the 1921 filming of the silent classic "Nosferatu", based on the Dracula story (but for which German film makers could not get permission to film). John Malkovich plays the director, Friedrich Murnau, whose film research leads him to discover a most realistic Dracula who agrees to play the role for "concessions". This actor, Max Schreck, is played convincingly by Willem Dafoe. Other more minor characters also do good jobs. Murnau's plan hits some snags, though, as Schreck has troubles keeping his true nature in check. The film is very atmospheric and gives us tantalizing glimpses of the decadence of Wimar Germany. It also deals with absorbing intellectual topics line the perversion of art and the human ego. The movie is also very funny in a tongue in cheek way.
<b>Shadow Magic</b>	1	We rented a film called " <b>Shadow Magic</b> ". It describes a fictionalized account of the genesis of the actual first Chinese made silent movie in 1905. In this account an Englishman brings moving pictures to Peking in 1902 and after he is expelled his enthusiastic Chinese apprentice takes over the cause of filming the actual life of China at the turn of the century. In principle this is an interesting subject, but the movie is too slow and flaccid to be really good. Too bad.
<b>Shanghai Knights</b>	1	Clare and I went to see " <b>Shanghai Knights</b> " starring Jackie Chan and Owen Wilson. Sad to say we were both disappointed in this latest offering from the usually charming martial artist (you can read my previous review of <b>Shanghai Noon</b> for example). Jackie did his usual martial arts routines, but it is clear that at 50 he is slowing down; some of the villians were more impressive. Many of his routines were more like comic dance numbers than his usual high-flying fare. We were also uncomfortable with the constant stream of sexual jokes and innuendos. Neither of us is a prude, but this was about the only sense of humor displayed and it was crude. Also, there were a lot of children in the

		<p>theatre, conme to see the Jackie show, and we felt this was inappropriate for them and quite unlike his earlier sweet self.</p>
<b>Sherman's March</b>	2	<p>Polly and I rented a documentary from 1981 called "<b>Sherman's March</b>", directed by and more or less starring Ross McElwee. The idea for this Boston based Southerner was to examine the effect of Sherman on the South and its attitudes. IN fact when he gets there, family and friends spend all their time trying to hitch him up with various ladies. This is not a terribly successful effort as our hero seems a bit reclusive, but the people he meets and the events that occur are interesting, and often hilarious. There is also some pathos here and some of the cracker folk are down right scary. It is a very long film on DVD, over three hours, but it is still interesting, especially if you are doing a cross word while attending to the proceedings.</p>
<b>Shreck</b>	2	<p>I also rented "<b>Shreck</b>", which won an Oscar for the brand new best animated film category. It was watchable. The animation was excellent, and it had some laughs, although of a generally adolescent nature. The Eddy Murphy donkey was enjoyable, and the scene where a tough little Gingerbread man gives lip to the evil Prince was hysterical. However, this movie is not a patch on either <b>Toy Story</b> or <b>Toy Story-2</b>. Both were FAR more clever and engaging. They got their humor from a real human recognition of interpersonal relations and not so much from farts and ear wax. The scene in TS2, where Mrs. Potato head backs Mr. P's "angry eyes" for their adventure may be the funniest in movie history. In my opinion either TS or TS2 should have won an Oscar, not just for animation, but as the best picture of any genre. This is particularly true for TS, which was infinitely superior to the horrid "English Patient" which won best picture in 1996. TS2 did win a Golden Globe for best comedy of 2000, so that is some consolation.</p>
<b>Shreck-2</b>	4	<p>We also watched "<b>Shreck-2</b>" on the mighty big TV and enjoyed it a great deal. The animation was simply spectacular as these people make their modeled world more and more realistic. In addition, I liked the plot and loved the tender relations of the ogres. Although still a bit more adolescent in its humor than the Toy Story movies, this new Shreck is more subtle and skillful than the first. The Eddy Murphy voiced donkey was funny and he played off well with the Antonio Banderras voiced Puss-in-Boots - who darn near stole the show. All told this is a fun, fun movie.</p>
<b>Sideways</b>	4	<p>Polly and I went to see "<b>Sideways</b>", rated by Newsweek as the best movie of the year. I may well agree because it is very fine indeed. It stars Paul Giamatti (he played Harvey Pekar in "<b>American Splendor</b>") as a failed writer with a deep knowledge of wine. He takes his old college roomy, Jack, a second rate actor and womanizer, played brilliantly by Thomas Hayden Church. The boys go on a wine tasting trip just before Jack's marriage to a gorgeous and prosperous Armenian girl, but Jack's lust for adventure causes problems as well as many opportunities for comradeship and self discovery. The movie has great acting, a thought-provoking plot, lush scenery, and lots of humor. This is a must see movie for reflective adults.</p>
<b>Singing Detective, The</b>	2	<p>We rented "<b>The Singing Detective</b>" and watched it with friends. This is a very unusual movie, and was not at all what I expected (that is it is NOT a noir film). The story centers on a man (Dan Dark played by Robert Downey Jr) who is hospitalized by a severe skin affliction. He has written a cheap detective novel and in his pain or his drug induced state, he hallucinates himself into that story which is itself based on his childhood recollections of his trampy mother etc. Robin Wright Penn plays his current, long suffering wife. I don't know what to say. Bill was confused by the plot, which is complex, but we enjoyed the cheap detective patter, the revisited clichés and the way the novel characters revolted, but mostly we loved the oldies sound track. The real life story of the author of this story, Dennis Potter, is as bizarre as this movie.</p>
<b>Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow</b>	3	<p>We rented "<b>Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow</b>", starring Jude Law, Gwenth Paltrow, and Angelina Jolie. This is an imaginative yarn set in 1939, but not the one we know. The sets are very art deco, in NYC, and heroic in the wild. The earth is being ravished by giant robots that steal machinery and resources. A German scientist seems to know what is going on, but he is killed. Paltrow plays plucky big city reporter Polly Perkins and Law is her ex and future lover, Joe the Sky Captain. He has a mercenary force that is called on as the military has been drawn off. They later encounter Jolie who is the British commander of a flying airfield that is part of the effort to save the earth. Quite a story. The whole things was filmed in front of a blue screen and virtually</p>

		everything else was digitally created. The stories that can now be told and the scenes that can be created are truly astonishing. Whatever you can imagine can come true on the screen. This is not a great movie, but I enjoyed seeing it, and some of the patter was pretty sharp. A nice tribute to the 30's.
<b>Snatch</b>	3	<b>Snatch.</b> Interesting name for a movie. This is another Guy Richie (he of " <b>Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels</b> " fame) shoot-em up. It is also a LOT of fun. Both of these flicks are derivative of Quentin Tarantino's " <b>Pulp Fiction</b> ", but they are both well done. There is a lot of violence, but the dialogue is fast and funny and the story is tight and has a satisfying surprise ending. I say check it out.
<b>Some Came Running</b>	3	" <b>Some Came Running</b> " is a 1958 movie starring Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Shirley McClain, and Martha Hyer. It is based on the James Jones novel and was nominated for 5 academy awards. This movie is a bit dated, but I still enjoyed it. The acting was not bad, albeit somewhat overly enthusiastic at times, but Martin was most charming. The plot raised some interesting social questions. Sinatra is a soldier returning to an Indiana town in 1948. He has issues with his now wealthy brother and sister-in-law. He falls for the daughter of a college prof (Hyer), the two are suited in many ways, but her reluctance to get involved with a man with a past drives him to a good natured tart played by McClain. It could happen.
<b>Something's Gotta Give</b>	2	We went to see the comedy " <b>Something's Gotta Give</b> ", starring Jack Nicholson, Dianne Keaton, and Keanu Reeves. I love to watch Nicholson perform and he is in rare form here. I have never thought much of Keaton's acting skills but she is OK. Some of her emotional scenes are very good, but some of her fun scenes seem forced to me. Perhaps this is the way an older woman acts trying to make things happen with someone like the Nicholson character. Keaton is a successful divorced playwright and Nicholson is a successful 63 year old playboy who is courting her daughter. A heart attack forces him to stay at her sea-side home and the proximity leads to a change in relations. This is a light weigh, but very funny movie.
<b>Song Catcher, The</b>	3	Recently I went to see <b>The Song Catcher</b> . This is the story of a woman college professor who goes to the mountains of North Carolina around 1910 to record the local music. It was Scottish and English folk music of the purest form. The movie was watchable, and the music was moving. Still, it was not as good as I had hoped.
<b>Spanish Prisoner, The</b>	4	I watched " <b>The Spanish Prisoner</b> " again, and still enjoyed it. The movie is written and directed by playwright David Mamet. It has the feel of a play in that the language seems elevated and a bit stagy, and yet this works well for this particular thriller. The story is very Kafkaesque in that we are never sure who we can trust and because our hero is being toyed with by unseen powers. The movie stars Campbell Scott (George C.'s son), Rebecca Pidgeon (Mamet's wife), Steve Martin as a villain, and Ben Gazzarra. They all do fine jobs in this distinctly Mamet vehicle. Now I have to tell you that the complicated plot has some logical flaws, but the pacing and interesting plot are such that you don't notice it as the story unfolds. After the fact you might start to question things, like "how did they know Joe (Scott) would buy the Pidgeon character a first class ticket home from a business trip"? Yet this is important for the story. Or, near the end it was clear the bad guys wanted Joe to fall into the hands of the police, based on their actions at Logan airport, but why did they work to avoid his falling into their hands in NYC? Never mind. Just go along with the ride for this smart and fun thriller and enjoy the delicious surprise ending.
<b>Spartans</b>	2	We went to see the new David Mamet thriller " <b>Spartans</b> " starring Val Kilmer. The script has less of the obvious stage-driven dialogue of earlier Mamet films, like the marvelous " <b>Spanish Prisoner</b> ", and I sort of miss it. This story involves the actions and morals of military operatives with absolute, Spartan-like, obedience to the King, in this case the president. This can cause problems if the King's motives are ignoble. Not a great movie, but engaging. Kilmer is an under rated actor, in my opinion, who does a good job in a script that seems timely, although it no doubt reflects the dilemmas of all political systems.
<b>Spell Bound</b>	5	Polly and I went to see " <b>Spell Bound</b> ", a truly marvelous documentary film about the National Spelling Bee. Now you are possibly thinking "why would you want to see that?" I heard a laudatory review of it on NPR and it has been much discussed, and I can tell you the theater was pretty full, so word traveled fast. The film crew focused in on eight people, roughly 10-12 years old, from all over the country – by good fortune, of

		the 246 participants the crew happened to focus on the eventual winner. There were two astonishingly hard working Indian-American kids and their families who really displayed the American dream. There were a couple of white kids from rural areas and several from cities, and a most engaging black girl from Washington. These marvelous kids, their parents and teachers, represented a wonderful slice of America, its hopes, dreams, aspirations, work ethic, and courage. It was funny, interesting, exciting and touching. The movie made you proud to be a human and an American at that; I loved it and cannot recommend it highly enough.
<b>Spiderman</b>	3	Since it was too darn hot to go outside, I watched " <b>Spiderman</b> " on HBO. I found it very watchable and quite entertaining. There have been a lot of comic-book movies of late and I often feel this format is just an excuse to hold the director to a lower standard of film making. I bought into this one though, it really did seem very comic book like. I saw Peter Parker (Tobey Macquire) as every nerd who has a dream of secret powers, which would make him a cool hero. You can either view this movie as an elaborate fantasy or as the nerds dream come true. Kirsten Dunst was good as MJ, and Willem Defoe was a convincing Green Goblin. Clare wrote to say she hated this movie and feels it has no redeeming values.
<b>Spiderman 2</b>	3	Polly and I went to see " <b>Spiderman 2</b> " and enjoyed it. I had seen " <b>Spiderman</b> " some time ago and enjoyed it too. A lot of contemporary movies try to capture the old comic-book look and feel. I often think these directors use this notion as an excuse to make implausible, badly acted movies but this one works well. The action is spectacular if totally unbelievable, as in the old comic books. Spidy has some conflicting emotions, which gives the character some depth, but it came dangerously close to being whinny. Tobey Macquire is a good choice for Spidy, since the story is basically the adolescent fantasy of a sub-alpha male with "secret" powers. Kirsten Dunce is good for related reasons – she is desirable, but not unattainable. I loved J.K Simmons as editor J. Jonah Jameson. I like his work as the city's head shrinker on "Law and Order" and he really puts out here as well. All in all pretty good fun.
<b>Spirited Away</b>	1	Polly and I went to see the animated Japanese film " <b>Spirited Away</b> " written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki, and released by Disney pictures. This movie had excellent reviews and many critics call it a sort of Alice in Wonderland for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century. Neither Polly nor I was convinced, however. The movie is visually interesting, with lots of colors and intriguing scenes. Many people in the theatre with us laughed at "funny" scenes and seemed to enjoy it. We found it boring, chaotic, and vaguely unsettling. Perhaps if one were more familiar with Japanese folk tales it would be better. It appeared to us, though, as just random action - like a mindless Saturday morning cartoon. Magic things happened for no reason you could possibly expect, the director just pulled them out of his .....ear. The Japanese love for blood was also evident here, and was pointless to what plot there seemed to be. I was also interested to observe that the Japanese post WWII fascination with atomic monsters has now given way to a concern for the environment, as when the river spirits show up at the bathhouse full of filth. Also, what gives with the witches HUGE baby? That was a stumper. I guess I just don't get it, but I thought this movie sucked.
<b>Spy Kids</b>	3	" <b>Spy Kids</b> " is directed by Austinite Robert Rodriguez, and lots of it is filmed in Austin, which is fun for me. The story involves parental spies played by Antonio Banderas and Carla Gugino. These Bond-style agents get themselves into a pickle and need to be rescued by their resourceful off spring. The whole thing is good family fun with good graphics, humor and warmth. It is not a serious thriller, but that is not its intention. The movie is a success because it does a great job of doing what it set out to do!
<b>Squid and the Whale, The</b>	1	" <b>The Squid and the Whale</b> " is a contemporary drama dealing with, guess what?, a dysfunctional modern family. Jeff Daniels is an arrogant writer/English professor, and Laura Linney is his writer wife. They conflict largely over his ego and her non-stop hoing. They have two boys pulled apart as the parents battle (like the squid and whale seen in the natural history museum). The protagonists are very unappealing and our lack of concern means that this movie fails. There is one interesting subplot, about the oldest son and his relations with a potential girl friend. His ego and lack of empathy ruin the match and like many people, he comes to regret his actions. It is well done, but cannot save this highly acclaimed, yet worthless movie.
<b>Supersize Me</b>	4	We went with friends to see the new documentary film " <b>Supersize Me</b> ". We really loved

		it. The protagonist, and writer/direct Morgan Spurlock, ate nothing but McDonald's meals for 30 days. He began in super shape, and was monitored by three physicians. The effect was devastating as he gained 25 lbs, and his medical signs went ballistic. His doctors advised him to quit at 2 weeks the effect on his liver was so bad. In addition to the interesting and timely message, the film was very well executed. Spurlock intercuts his personal story with interviews of people, health officials, food spokesmen etc to provide a great narrative. The movie has a serious message but is delivered with good humor and such a personal touch that it did not seem preachy. I think this is a must see for all Americans.
<b>Suspicion</b>	2	I watched an old (1941) Alfred Hitchcock movie " <b>Suspicion</b> " starring Cary Grant and Joan Fontaine. Grant plays a handsome opportunist that we are not quite sure of, although even giving him the benefit of the doubt he seems unlikable. I guess the Fontaine character was only interested in the physical aspect of this relationship. The film shows lots of the Hitchcock style, blonde heroine, ambiguous clues, psychological tension, increasing menace, wonderful lighting tricks and so on. I found the ending most unsatisfactory, however. It is a Hollywood rule that Grant always has to be a good guy.
<b>Star Trek: First Encounter</b>	1	Some of my kids told me that " <b>Star Trek: First Encounter</b> " was the best of the Star-Trek movies. This may be so, but it was still a stink bomb in my opinion. I saw a few of the older ones, like " <b>Wrath of Khan</b> " which I thought was pretty clever. First Encounter, though, had nothing good to offer. The plot was poorly developed and I was not entirely sure what was supposed to be happening. The acting was sad, sad, sad. The characterization of the scientist who invented the WARP drive in 2063 as a drunken, rock and rolling outcast old geezer was preposterous beyond words. Maybe it was meant to gratify the army of rustic movie goers who think that they too have the secret potential to be great. And what about Lilly? Why did Captain Picard take her advice about bombing the Enterprise when trusted friends were blown off? And it only took her a minute too. How believable is that? I also hated the way other TREMENDOUS problems popped with no forewarning that such a thing might be a concern, and then they were instantly solved by the captain tapping on any computer screen that happened to be nearby. It's just rush, rush, rush from one unbelievable thing to the next. High school kids with a video camera couldn't be less professional. I haven't seen anything this bad since Sylvester Stallone was the " <b>Cliffhanger</b> ".
<b>Step Into Liquid</b>	4	Polly and I went to see the surfing documentary " <b>Step Into Liquid</b> " and we loved it. It was directed by Dana Brown, son of Bruce Brown who did the 1975 surf movie " <b>Endless Summer</b> ". Clearly surfing been very very good to the Browns. The photography is terrific, better than in Endless Summer. For example, there are shots from inside a big pipeline wave, shot through the water, at a surfer riding the barrel, and his hand is trailing into the wall of water, that is poking into your viewing space. Amazing. The surf culture is still a cult of slacker true believers, but its great that our society can support this interesting colony of fun seekers. As Jesus said, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless you become like a child. What do children do? They play. These people are clearly in heaven on earth
<b>Station Agent, The</b>	3+	We went to see an Indy film called " <b>The Station Agent</b> " starring Peter Dinklage, Patricia Clarkson, and Bobby Cannavale. Dinklage plays (and is) a dwarf with a passion for trains. When his sympathetic boss dies, he inherits a run down station in rural New Jersey. There he meets a cheerful junk food purveyor (Cannavale) and a befuddled artist (Clarkson). Needless to say the film explores the nature of prejudice and tolerance and courage. Funny, if somewhat forced, and uplifting. Cannavale is terrific as Joe and Dinklage is very effective as the struggling agent.
<b>Stranger, The</b>	2	We watched a 1946 Orson Wells movie " <b>The Stranger</b> ". It starred Wells, Edward G. Robinson, and Loretta Young. Wells is a Nazi hiding in a Connecticut town with Robinson on his trail. Wells is considered a film genius, and may have been, but his work seems very dated and even silly today. Compare it with the timelessness of say, the Maltese Falcon or Casablanca. Anyway, he does have style, as seen in the final scene and I love to watch Robinson.
<b>Sum of all fears, The</b>	2	Russ, David, and I rented the action movie " <b>The sum of all fears</b> " based on a Tom Clancy novel. Why the villains, who were written as middle eastern terrorists, were converted to Nazis in the movie is unclear to me, but it was a sucky modification. It seemed to move the plot from a believable contemporary scenario to fantasy land, but I

		was still able to buy into it. In general, I am leery of Hollywood action movies which tend to be stupid explosion-fests, but this one was pretty fun. Perhaps I just enjoyed the familial company. Also Russ and Clare's TV is bigger than many screens at the Dobie theatre, so it was kind of like being in an Art house! In the story Baltimore gets nuked - so that is bad, especially for my friends at Johns Hopkins. I never saw a movie before where we actually get it.
<b>Swimming Pool</b>	4	We went with friends to see a new French/English movie called " <b>Swimming Pool</b> ". It is a mystery starring Charlotte Rampling and Ludivine Sagnier. Rampling plays a mystery writer in love with her publisher, who works her like a horse. She is frustrated that he only wants her formulaic inspector books and won't let her branch out. To calm her down he lets her use his vacation home in the south of France. Initially happy, her stay becomes complicated when the editor's daughter (Sagnier) by a Frenchwoman appears. This Julie is a seductress who spends a lot of time naked (not that that is a BAD thing) and has a parade of men through, and a murder occurs. I don't want to say more about the mystery, so as to spoil it, but it is very well done. It had us all talking about what occurred, or didn't occur, for some time.
<b>Syriana</b>	3	" <b>Syriana</b> " is a complicated and somewhat baffling story. Perhaps this is what the director, Stephen Gaghan, wanted to achieve, a feeling that where politics, oil, and religion meet, we don't have a clue what the hell is going on. In the mix we have George Clooney as a dedicated, but ill used, spy, Matt Damon as an idealistic economic adviser, Christopher Plummer and Chris Cooper as bidness types, and a plethora of middle easterners of various sympathies. There is not much suspense and just a grim resignation that this is the way the world works. The movie was over long, and I fail to see the significance of the subplot where Damon's boy meets an ill fate. Also, why would the CIA assassinate a potentate with a predator missile? All fingers would immediately point to who done it, so that is just bad writing and directing.
<b>Tape</b>	4	I rented " <b>Tape</b> ", starring Ethan Hawke, Robert Sean Leonard, and Uma Thurman. This was originally a play, and has the theatrical look about it – shot in a single room, and all dialogue. It is directed by Austinite Richard Linklater, who has directed a few other movies I like. These include " <b>Slacker</b> ", " <b>Dazed and Confused</b> ", and the wonderfully charming " <b>Before Sunrise</b> ". The story centers on a sort of competition between two friends, Hawke and Leonard, over their life styles and values, but mostly focused on a high-school "romantic" interlude (or was it an assault?) with Thurman. Although I was impatient with some of the pacing, I generally enjoyed the film.
<b>Team America</b>	2	" <b>Team America</b> " is the second full length feature from the South Park crew. In this version, the animation is presented as puppets; it works great and makes the characters even sillier than cartoons. I must admit the movie has some hysterically funny scenes, but as is becoming increasingly evident, the boys go just a step too far. They tend to roll around in their own vulgarity and violence, nullifying a lot of their creativity. In between outrages though, their characters are generally on the mark. Everyone gets skewered by these guys, but their right-wing shooting seems sharper than their left, which I am beginning to find not just unfair, but annoying.
<b>The Thin Blue Line, The</b>	4	" <b>The Thin Blue Line</b> " is a 1988 documentary by the master Errol Morris. He goes back and investigates the murder charges, and conviction, against a drifter in Dallas county Texas. The documentary evidence eventually got the falsely accused Randall Adams exonerated. The film itself is hypnotic in its surreal use of reconstructed scenes, although it is often a bit too slow. This is an early work and Morris was still perfecting his craft, as can be seen in the brilliant <b>Fog of War</b> .
<b>To Be and To Have</b>	4	We went to see a French movie " <b>To Be and To Have (Être et avoir)</b> ". The story centers on a teacher in a contemporary one-room school in rural France, and his diverse students. The scenery is beautiful, the children are adorable and often hilarious. The teacher plays many roles, teaching all elementary grades to rather bucolic children. He is also another father figure and sophisticated mentor. This is no Hollywood movie – nothing explodes, no one is killed, nothing heisted, no bad language. It is just a gently view into the real lives of ordinary people and it is very affirming. I really loved it.
<b>Together</b>	2	Over the weekend we went to see a Swedish film, called " <b>Together</b> ". It is about a variety of folks living in a hippie-style commune in 1975 Sweden. It is quite interesting, with some humor and some poignancy. If you are of a certain age, which I am, and

		were a young adult in the late 60s and early 70s, you will get more out of it. It's subtitled - I know some people hate that.
<b>Touching the Void</b>	5	Polly and I rented " <b>Touching the Void</b> ". This is a dramatization of the astounding true story of Joe Simpson and Simon Yates. These two young Brits, together with a non-climber named Richard Hawking tried to climb Siula Grande in the Peruvian Andes in 1985. No one had succeeded in this endeavor before them, and no one has done it since either. A cynic might say this film shows the cost of youthful hubris and poor planning, but it is really a LOT more. Joe falls during the arduous climb and fractures his right knee and leg. Simon tries to save him, but when Joe sleds over a crevasse, in the dark, in a storm there is nothing for it but to cut him loose. Joe survives the new fall and by dint of incomprehensible strength, courage, and determination manages to get himself out of the crevasse and back to camp before Simon and Richard leave. Both characters narrate in the film. This thing has to be seen to be believed. The only thing that rivals it is the incredible Shakleton rescue, told in the story <b>Endurance</b> . Both of these true stories, about Brits, reveal the strength of human character, their heroism, and their will to survive. These guys are all a lot tougher than I would be – not that I'd ever climb up anything higher than a chair, and I don't like cold either. Renting the DVD is an extra treat because there are three additional segments about the film making and about the protagonists that are definitely worth watching.
<b>Training Day</b>	4	I rented " <b>Training Day</b> " once Denzel Washington had won the best actor award for it. I must confess I was pleasantly surprised. He did an excellent acting job, convincingly portraying a complicated narcotics officer in LA. The movie seemed a bit improbable in places, but that may reflect my own ignorance of street crime. In any case it was WAY more believable than most police shoot-'em ups, say anything with Mel Gibson in it. Overall, it was interesting, tense, and real entertaining.
<b>Triplets of Belleville, The</b>	3	Polly and I went to see the animated fairy tale, " <b>The Triplets of Belleville</b> ". This France/Canada co production has an unusual look. It is animated but not in the Pixar mode. The drawings are caricatures but they are ripe with emotions. There is essentially no dialogue, just a few mutterings, but the story is crystal clear. The movie is very funny and so unusual it is definitely worth a look. We also saw with it a fascinating animation just released – a Salvador Dali/Walt Disney co-production.
<b>Troy</b>	3	We watched " <b>Troy</b> " starring Brad Pitt, Orlando Bloom, and everyone else in the world. It was enjoyable as an action film. I believe the language was too modern but who knows. The Iliad and Odyssey are full of action by the gods, and in this Hollywood version, the gods are alluded to, but they don't DO anything. In Homer they take sides and effect the action. In fact the humans are like instruments of the gods but here they are more or less mocked by Greek realists. There are also some liberties with the actual epic plot as well, so the movie says it was "inspired" by Homer. Some obvious discrepancies, besides the silence of the gods include these. The Trojan war lasted 10 years, not 2 weeks. Menelaus was not killed by Hector, and in fact goes home with Helen! Ajax was not killed by Hector either, and Agamemnon makes it home and was offed there by his wife. The super hero Diomedes was not even mentioned in the movie, even though he was a major force in the Iliad, especially when Achilles was sulking. Still in all, I found the movie a good attempt for modern sensibilities and quite watchable.
<b>Truth or Consequences</b>	3	We saw " <b>Truth or Consequences, New Mexico</b> " on HBO. This is a violent movie, but a well crafted and suspenseful one. It stars Kiefer Sutherland (who also directed), Vincent Gallo, and some lesser knowns with small parts for Rod Steiger and Martin Sheen. Gallo gets out of jail and tries to get back at a drug dealer who shafted him. He recruits some folks, including Sutherland for the job, but Sutherland goes ape and kills a load of folks. The FBI is after them as is the mob, because the drugs they ripped off belonged to even bigger boys. Along the way the gang kidnaps a couple and their roles are well played.
<b>True Confessions</b>	2	We rented " <b>True Confessions</b> " a story set in post WWII LA. Robert DeNiro plays a money raising monsignor for the archdiocese, and Robert Duvall is his older brother, a slightly tainted detective. Charles Durning is a political wheel who is a big donor and big embarrassment to the Church and Duvall is trying to hang a gruesome murder on him. The characters are interesting and thoughtful but the pacing is glacial.
<b>U.S. Marshals</b>	2	The last movie we saw was " <b>U.S. Marshals</b> " starring Tommy Lee Jones, Wesley

		Snipes, and Robert Downey Jr. This is a follow-up to the very wonderful “ <b>Fugitive</b> ” starring Jones with Harrison Ford. The Marshals however, is not as good. It wasn’t fun and took itself too seriously. The plot is preposterous with Snipes playing the role of a US agent that is being framed by bad guys in the agency. His acting is poor to begin with, mouthing a bunch of unconvincing platitudes about doing the right thing. He has, or knows how to get, the evidence to acquit himself, but instead of turning them into his lawyer he has to escape from a plane, run over hill and dale, swim through swamps, ‘rassel alligators, and whip every man in the joint to do it himself. It is the silliest excess since the laughable role of Sylvester Stallone in Cliffhanger. This kind of perpetual, ludicrous “action” is exactly the reason I hate this genre. The directors figure if a little is good then a vast excess must be better – right? Wrong.
<b>Unfaithful</b>	2	We saw “ <b>Unfaithful</b> ” starring Diane Laine and Richard Gere. Laine is a housewife and mom with more time and energy then she knows what to do with so she has an affair with dark, European artist type. What else can you do really. Needless to say this kind of infidelity will have bad consequences, which it does when hubby Gere puts two and two together. The end game redeems the movie by addressing some interesting questions about treading off the right thing to do against practical family matters. Not a great movie, but not without its moments either. Laine gets naked a few times but there is always some swarthy mitt there to ruin the view.
<b>Vanity Fair</b>	3	“ <b>Vanity Fair</b> ” is based on the Thackery novel of the same name. Becky Sharp, played with a convincingly by American Reese Witherspoon, is the daughter of a starving artist but is determined to use her intellect, looks, and artistic accomplishments to rise through the social ranks along with her friend Amelia. The setting is England and continental Europe around the time of the Napoleonic wars. The story has some wit, but not like Jane Austen, and some moral values to display of that sort. The costumes, sets, and scenery are excellent. The end of the story tries to tie up too many loose ends at once, and felt rushed and unnatural, but the rest is quite enjoyable.
<b>Verdict, The</b>	3	Polly and I watched “ <b>The Verdict</b> ” starring Paul Newman, James Mason, Jack Warden, and Charlotte Rampling. Newman is a lawyer with skills and a past that left him a drunk. He is given a slam dunk settlement case in which a Catholic hospital will pay damages to avoid a public controversy. Newman screws up and loses the settlement and has to go to trial, which is really stacked against him. He is in a deep deep hole, but struggles against overwhelming odds – and WINS! Hurray! Although the story is very predictable, it was still enjoyable entertainment, with good acting from a strong cast.
<b>Waiting for Guffman</b>	4	We rewatched “ <b>Waiting for Guffman</b> ” and found it as hilarious as in the past. The movie was directed by Christopher Guest. It stars Guest along with his usual company: Larry Miller, Fred Willard, Catherine O’Hara, Parker Posey, Eugene Levy, and Bob Balaban. This is the same group that made <b>Best in Show</b> and <b>A Mighty Wind</b> , all hilarious sendups of small segments of American life. In this story Guest is asked to direct a centennial program commemorating Blaine Missouri (played by Lockhart Texas and produced in Austin). The local talent is mustered, with all their foibles, to sing and dance the glory of Blaine. The movie is very funny, but also basically warm hearted; I highly recommended it.
<b>Waking Life</b>	2	Last night we rented the Richard Linklater film “ <b>Waking Life</b> ”; he also did some nice movies like “ <b>Slacker</b> ”, “ <b>Dazed and Confused</b> ”, “ <b>Before Sunrise</b> ”, and “ <b>Tape</b> ”. This is an animated movie although I think it is based on filmed actions with over-painting. The look is novel, and I found it fascinating to watch. This is a very intellectual film, dealing with reality and dreams, morality and the meaning of life. Some critics think it is one of the most brilliant films ever made. Linklater lives in Austin and as the dreaming narrator, he interviews, that is chats with, some UT profs and denizens as well as other NY and Hollywood celebrities drawn as friends of the dreamer; these include the Before Sunrise stars, Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy and Timothy “Speed” Levitch, the wonderful tour-bus guide from “The Tour”. It was fun to see Austin landmarks sliding casually past in the movie. All the scenes were rocking, though, like being in a boat and this was unpleasant for me, although I guess it helped carry the message about the uncertainties of our waking life. This film is not for everyone, but if you are an inveterate book reader, that type of person, I think you will find this a very worthwhile experience. It is visually fascinating and very thought provoking. It also has some high-brow humor.
<b>Walking and</b>	4	“ <b>Walking and Talking</b> ” is a chick-flick written and directed by Nicole Holofcener who

Talking		also created the marvelous <b>“Lovely and Amazing”</b> . This is also a movie about how women relate to each other and to men. It is intelligent, witty, and engaging. Katherine Keener and Anne Hecht are the two main roles, with various men moving around while they sort out how to adjust themselves to the progress of time and events. I liked it as much as <b>Lovely and Amazing</b> . There are no car crashes or shoot outs though.
Weeping camel, The	2	We went with friends to see the German produced film <b>“The weeping camel”</b> . Let’s review what we learned. 1. There is a lot of sand in Mongolia. 2. The purpose of camels is to make more camels. 3. If you live in Mongolia, there is ample parking. 4. You can convert a “bad” camel into a “good” or at least “tolerable” camel by forcing it to listen to horrible, aggravating music. 5. Mongolians smoke a lot (Camels I assume). Although very slow, I actually found this an interesting movie, and beautifully filmed against a harsh landscape. The movie really is like looking into the past. The action was somewhat staged for the cameras but it was still valuable to see. You get a sense of timelessness as these people live close to the earth and their animals - very little intellectual life here. This is not a movie for action freaks though. There should have been some spectacular camel crashes accompanied by fiery roll-overs.
Wet Hot American Summer	2	Polly and I just saw a send-up of teenage camp movies, called <b>“Wet Hot American Summer”</b> with Jeannie Garaffolo. It certainly hit every cliché in the genre and had a few laughs. I wouldn't spend a lot of money on it though.
Whale Rider	3	Polly and I went to see the Indy film <b>“Whale Rider”</b> and liked it very much. The story is set in contemporary New Zealand among a village of Maoris. The center of the story is the relationship between and old line grandpa figure, descendent of a long line of chiefs, and his grand daughter. Her fraternal twin brother died at child birth and this upset the lineage. Her father becomes an artist and moves to Europe and the action takes place between the girl, representing a hopeful new and all inclusive future, and the tradition of the old. The photography is excellent, and the scenery interesting (this thing could work as a travelogue) and the story works at many levels. No car chases or explosions, though.
What About Bob	4	Now that we have renewed our HBO contract we have been making the best of a stream of mediocre movies. We saw <b>“What About Bob”</b> with Bill Murray and Richard Dreyfus. This is not a great movie, but is good for more than a few laughs. I love to watch Murray work – he often cracks me up, although he can have a nasty edge if he needs one. It is Dreyfus, though, who steals this show. He begins as a confident, even arrogant intellectual, and is convincingly ground to emotional dust under Murray’s relentless and mindless advance. If this were a stronger vehicle, Dreyfus could have won an award.
Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill, The	4	<b>“The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill”</b> is a short but engaging documentary by Judy Irving. It focuses on a gentle spirit named Mark Bittner who found himself by watching parrots living near his home in san Francisco. His revelations about the birds are interesting and his interactions with them and people around him are uplifting. I recommend this film without reservation. Watching it is like taking a much needed rest in the midst of a trying day.
Wild Strawberries	4	We watched <b>“Wild Strawberries”</b> , a subtitled Ingmar Bergman film from 1957. It centers on an aging physician, a professor, who is approaching the end of his life, as his dreams make him aware. He reflects on his accomplishments, his family, and his disappointments. His daughter-in-law accompanies him on a trip to receive an accolade, and they have important conversations about his relationship with his son (her estranged husband). They encounter a group of jovial youths, as well as an unhappily married couple, who also focus his thoughts on life issues. Finally, the film uses reveries, flash backs, to key incidents of his youth to help paint the picture of a life. This is a classic film and I found it totally engaging, although it is as unHollywood as a movie can be.
Wild Things	3	I caught most of <b>“Wild Things”</b> , one of my movie guilty secrets. This is a “Florida noire” movie, like <b>“Body Heat”</b> and <b>“Palmetto”</b> ; the place just reeks of corruption. The movie has a big cast, Neve Campbell, Kevin Bacon, Matt Dillon, Denise Richards, and bit for Bill Murray. The Dillon character plays a school teacher of accused of rape, but this is just the beginning of a wonderfully convoluted plot of who dunnit and what are they doing? This film is not for everyone, because it is sleazy, but it is a fun, fun thriller that will entertain adults.

<b>White Heat</b>	4	I watched " <b>White Heat</b> ", starring James Cagney, for the umpteenth time. Director Raoul Walsh claimed Cagney was the finest actor he ever worked with, and I can see why. This is a five-star performance (to see other sides of the actor see Yankee Doodle Dandy where he sings and dances or the fast paced comedy 1-2-3). Outside Cagney the acting seems stagy and dated, and there are aspects of the story that beggar creditability, but overall this is a must see movie in the history of film and an enjoy; able one to watch. "Top of the world Ma".
<b>Wind Will Carry Us, The</b>	1	We rented an Iranian film, directed by Abbas Kiarostami, called " <b>The Wind Will Carry Us</b> " (but it won't carry us very far or fast!). A group of engineers travels to the remote Kurdish village of Siah Darih, which looks like a dental white pueblo. They apparently are there to see the ceremonies the locals will put on when an ancient village lady shuffles off this mortal coil. The local landscape is desolate but beautiful and the big vista shots should have been seen on a bigger screen, but there you are. Nothing happens in this glacially paced film, but we do see the concerns of daily life. This is an apolitical movie which deals with the concerns and mentality of ordinary folks. There is a good natured division between the locals, who are really rural, and the engineer with his cell phone so I guess that is interesting. This movie could have been edited into a gorgeous travelogue, but it was not a terribly captivating story.
<b>Windtalkers</b>	1	Polly was out with friends so I rented " <b>Windtalkers</b> ", a movie about WWII Navaho code talkers, starring Nicolas Cage. It had lots of shooting, lots of explosions, and tried hard to take on the horrors of war, the dignity of Indians, and various prejudices. It failed at most of these. For one thing the Marines claim that the premise was false, the code talkers were NOT accompanied by men meant to kill them rather than have them captured. The human aspects of the drama were a bit wooden and unconvincing. The action, however, was ridiculous. Every Jap "knee mortar" shot hit right smack dab in the middle of clustered Americans, even though it is not an accurate weapon. Every explosion was repleat with oily flames of a preposterous volume. Artillery never had to find the range, it just hit trucks, jeeps or whatever like a guided missile. All except for Cage. He had "inner turmoil" over a previous incident on Guadalcanal and so his dark focus made him invisible to bullets. He ran through the jungle with his never-ending Tommy gun mowing down Japs like wheat, while all those around him were being shot or blown up and EVERYONE was yelling and screaming. This movie had more yelling and screaming than any other. This is no " <b>Patton</b> ", " <b>Big Red One</b> ", or " <b>A Bridge Too Far</b> " I can tell you. It reminds me of a silly WWII propoganda film.
<b>Winged Migration</b>	4	We went with friends to see " <b>Winged Migration</b> ". This is a documentary film, four years in the making, directed by Jacques Perrin, who also led the French team that made the marvelous " <b>Microcosmos</b> " film about insects. The photography is spectacular, using ultramodern video and audio techniques, and the whole enterprise has a life-affirming nobility following dozens of species on their migrations around the world. Polly said she could have continued to watch these graceful creatures for hours. We both noticed some subtle anti-Americanism though. The first time any birds encounter human trash is in America, and they dwelt on American duck hunters. Later in the film "eastern Europe" also got some bad press for pollution and hunting, but not a bad word about western Europe, which more or less invented both industrial trash and duck hunting. Even so, this minor editorial note did not detract from the majesty of this wonderful film.
<b>Withnail and I</b>	5	" <b>Withnail and I</b> " is a dark comedy set in London in 1969, the end of an era. It stars Richard E. Grant and Paul McGann ("I") as two down and unemployed actors. In desperation the two go to a cabin owned by Withnail's strange uncle, and a series of hilarious misfortunes befall them. The dialog in this movie is fast, smart and hysterical. The movie is a family favorite and we have memorized many lines from it. To give an idea of its importance, one of my daughters will not allow her husband to watch the movie, because if he doesn't like it, she would have to leave him. Why take risks? I love this film.
<b>Women, The</b>	3	Polly and I rented " <b>The Women</b> ", a 1930's black and white drama based on a play by Clare Booth Luce. It was quite shocking at the time, giving the inside dope on the behavior and machinations of the fair sex, and starring an all female cast. Not one man is visible in the entire movie. Anyway, the story, involving a failed marriage that is eventually reunited, when the evil woman is exposed, is tame by current standards. The acting seems a bit overdrawn, but this is a landmark film for movie buffs.

<b>World According to Garp, The</b>	2	John Irving wrote " <b>The World According to Garp</b> " and it was made into an interesting movie starring Robin Williams, Glenn Close, John Lithgow and Mary Beth Hurt. The movie has its merits, convincing us that life is a privilege to have and savor each moment. However, the various sub plots were not all satisfying. The mom (Close) thinks men are dirty and violent, and yet it is a fanatic woman who shoots her son. Is Garp a dedicated writer or not? Why does he give up on his craft so easily? I am of at least two minds about the movie, but Polly didn't care for it.
<b>World's Fastest Indian, The</b>	5	" <b>The World's Fastest Indian</b> " is one of the most enjoyable movies I have seen in a long time. It is based on the true story of Burt Munro, an eccentric New Zealander with a life-long dream to convert his 1920's Indian motorcycle into the fastest bike and to run it at Bonneville Flats, even at 68 years of age and with a bad heart. Anthony Hopkins does a terrific job (what a surprise) playing the high speed Kiwi. What is so wonderful about the movie is you feel good about being a human and seeing how people all over the world respond with sympathy to this dedicated, noble, and courageous man. He seems to make everyone around him feel better about themselves, and you will feel the same as you watch the movie. It has humor, humanity, tenderness, and real excitement. I was totally engaged from start to finish.
<b>Wrong Trousers, The</b>	5	I will let " <b>The Wrong Trousers</b> " be the title for three short (about 30 minutes each) claymation films. The other two are " <b>A Grand Day Out</b> " and " <b>A Close Shave</b> ". These films are created by Nick Parks, the quiet English genius of this genre. They feature Wallace, and eccentric, cheese fancying, inventor with marginal social skills (Nick Parks?) and Gromet, his silent, but brilliant, courageous, and long suffering dog. A movie has 24 frames per second, and when the action is intense, as it often is in these films, that means 24 separate models for each second of film. I saw a documentary about the making of these things, and a complex speech segment may require a days work to generate a few seconds of film. The facial expressions are terrific and really present the inner man, dog or other. The stories are silly, but you get swept right up in them. The Wrong Trousers is my favorite, as our heroes confront a diabolically clever penguin, Feathers McGraw – you just have to see it. A Close Shave is also very skillful and most enjoyable. A Grand Day Out was the first Wallace and Gromet and I don't think they had quite hit stride yet, although it is still worth watching. Don't miss the Trousers though, or your life will be a hollow shell.
<b>y tu mama tambien</b>	3	Next we went to see a Mexican movie " <b>y tu mama tambien</b> (and your mama too)". What can I say about this? Hmmm? Well first off, don't take your church choir group to see it. It has a lot of nudity and more graphic sex than any commercial film I have ever seen (although I admit to having missed some Mickey Rourke movies). In fact this rather blatant display detracts from the story, which would be quite good if the viewer didn't feel quite so embarrassed. Again, this film centers on two friends who become competitive in the sexual sphere. They take a road trip with a GORGEOUS shirt-tail relative (played by Maribel Verdu), who has her own issues. Her actions become more clear by the end of the movie, but at first I thought she simply represented an art-movie stereotype and a shallow excuse to get naked. The director, Alphonso Cuaron, is very conscious of being arty which I don't like, but he ultimately makes an oddly touching movie. I think in the future, he should try to tell a story on its merits, but I guess as Pedro Almodovar showed, a hot film will get you noticed.
<b>You Got Served</b>	3	We rented " <b>You Got Served</b> ". The plot was trite and ham handed. The dialogue was silly and poorly presented – I did a cross word puzzle through most of it. Still, I am giving the movie two thumbs up. Why? The hip-hop dancing is amazing to behold – I put my pencil down when the dancing started. These kids are fantastic. They are all in great shape and move like gymnasts crossed with ice skaters. The moves are crisp, clean, and boundlessly energetic. As with jazz, blues, rap, and other art forms, American blacks have created another fantastic form of expression that is a joy to see.
<b>Zoolander</b>	2	I rented a fairly recent comedy called " <b>Zoolander</b> " last night. It was co-written, directed by and starred Ben Stiller. It also had his real-life dad Jerry Stiller and Owen Wilson. Derek Zoolander is a celebrity male model with certain "looks", like "Blue Steel". He is really stupid, shallow, and self centered, like everyone around him. This movie goes after modeling the way the very wonderful " <b>Drop-dead Gorgeous</b> " went after beauty pageants. Zoolander is even more outrageous though, going beyond parody to a sort of "comic book". It has plenty of dumb-fun laughs though, I must admit. The scene where

		<p>Zoolander and Hansel (Wilson) have a competitive “walk-off” is hilarious. On the down side the movie had some huge flaws. For one, the Time-reporter love interest, played by Christine Taylor, was way too smart and too attractive to be having a hard time meeting guys. Secondly, that such a woman would fall for such a shallow and stupid man as Zoolander is too unbelievable even for a send up comedy, and finally, the scene in which she has a sexual encounter with multiple men and beasts is in such bad taste it is unfit even for me. Just poor directing in my opinion.</p>
<p><b>Zorro the gay blade</b></p>	<p>4</p>	<p>While David was here (just after our jaunt to Europe) we watched “<b>Zorro the gay blade</b>”. I have seen this thing many times, and it is one of my guilty pleasures. I think this is one of the funniest movies ever made and George Hamilton deserves all the coco-butter tanning oil he can wear for having done such a fabulous job as twin brothers who fulfill the Vega destiny in their own ways. The only bad part of the movie is the role, and the acting, of Lauren Hutton as an American agitator. This just doesn’t work, even in a farce.</p>