

Dr. Ed's Movie Reviews 2005

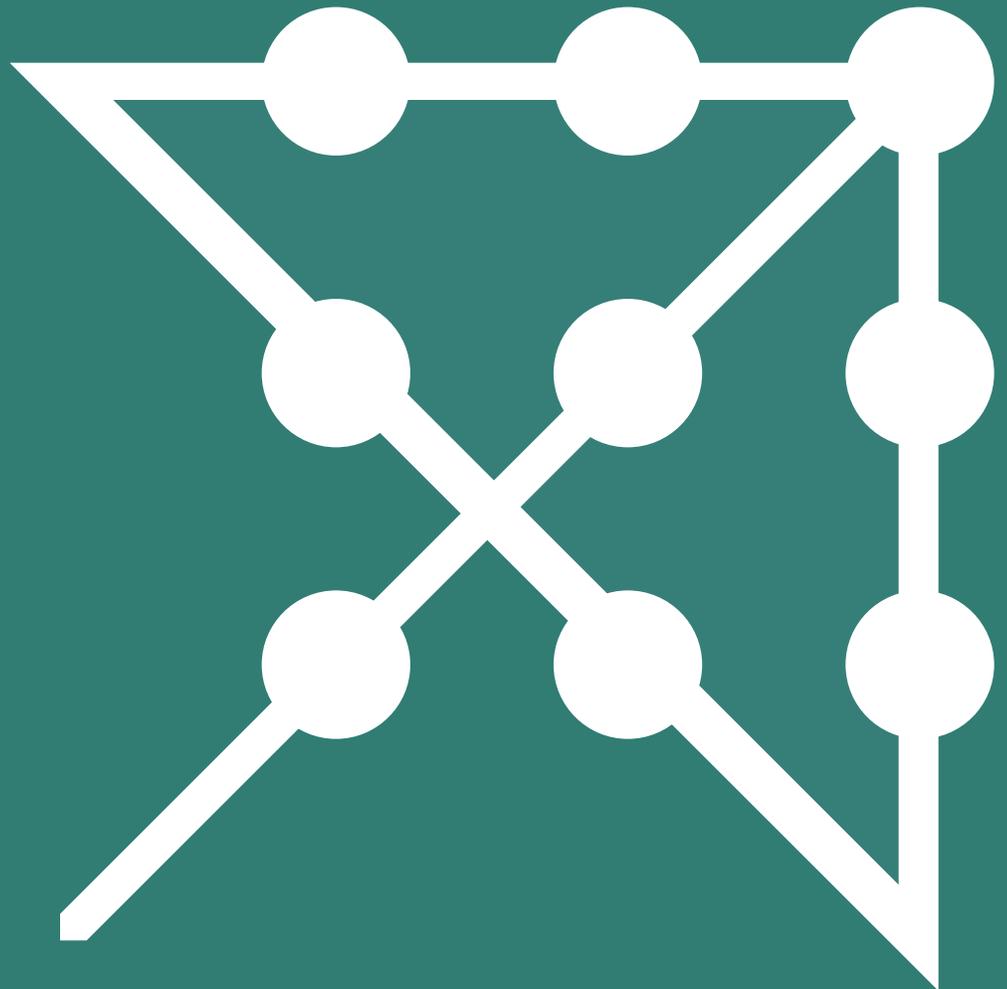
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thinking outside the box

Aliens of the Deep (-) is a 3-D movie playing at IMAX theaters. My 6-year-old son really enjoyed this under-the-deep-blue-sea documentary by Titanic director James Cameron. My wife wasn't impressed given the hype about all the amazing sea creatures that were no-shows, with the exception of one truly ethereal aquatic life form. I was bored, too. Squids, octopi, and shrimps are all in aquariums and Red Lobster restaurants. After the Sunday matinee, the Yardeni bunch took a stroll in Central Park, along with everyone else in Manhattan, to see Christo's magnificent and majestic orange gates.

Batman Begins (++) has a great cast, a great script, and is great fun. It is a super-hero flick for grownups. The weakest performance was by Tom Cruise's fiancé. Why are movies about super heroes so popular? Could it be we are all disappointed by the weakness of most of our political, business, academic, and religious leaders?

Brokeback Mountain (+) is about how tough life is for a couple of cowboys. The acting is fine, and the mountain is majestic. The dialogue is often annoyingly mumbled.

Broken Flowers (-) is artificial. The directing and cinematography are in your face. The constant message is "Gee, isn't this a great artistic flick?" It is a contrived flick about a middle-aged bachelor searching for a son that he may or may not have fathered. Bill Murray, once again, does a good job of playing a middle-aged man who is emotionally detached, as he did in "Lost in Translation," which is a much better movie.

Capote (++) is about how Truman Capote became a key character in his famous chronicle of the murder of a farm family in Kansas by a couple of homicidal maniacs. He seems torn between sympathizing with the killers and wanting to see them executed so he can finish his book, "In Cold Blood." The acting is superb. According to the movie, Capote cold bloodedly manipulated both the sheriff's office and the killers, driven by his passion to write the book.

Cinderella Man (++) is based on a really good true story about a real life Rocky. Russell Crowe does a good job in the title role, though he has to constantly fight the syrupy-sweet acting of Renée Zellweger, who seems to put in every role she plays.

Crash (+++) is a really intense movie about stressed out Californians of assorted ethnic groups. They crash into each others' lives with often devastating force. Los Angeles is a melting pot that is melting down. (They can all use a week in the wine country.) The action, dialogue, casting, and acting are all superb. If you enjoyed Pulp Fiction and 2 Days in the Valley, you should see this one.

Good Night, and Good Luck. (++) is a well-focused docudrama about CBS journalist Edward R. Murrow's brave attack on Senator Joseph McCarthy's craven attacks on American citizens and their right to due process.

Just Like Heaven (+) is a good date movie, similar to "Sleepless in Seattle." This one is about spiritual pursuit in San Francisco. Boy meets girl's spirit.

King Kong (+) is very disappointing and too long. It is a colorful, action-packed caricature of the original. The brontosaurus stampede was bizarre. The ice-skating scene really killed the remake for me. Directed by Peter Jackson, the movie is a mishmash of his "Lord of the Rings," Spielberg's "Jurassic Park," and Lucas's "Indiana Jones." The ape was great and should receive an Oscar for best leading gorilla. Unlike the original, the girl really goes ape for the ape, but doesn't have much to say. The movie is too scary for kids.

Lord Of War (+) is another movie about how Africa has been destroyed by the collusion of evil global entrepreneurs and corrupt, blood-thirsty local strongmen. The "Constant Gardener" (++) and "Sahara" (-) are two other recent movies with this theme. Nicholas Cage delivers one of his better performances (everything is relative) as a gun runner. The best and most disturbing flick about the chaos in Africa was "Hotel Rwanda" (+++) last year. The United Nations just agreed for the first time that it had a responsibility to intervene to protect civilians against genocide, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. What took them so long?

March of the Penguins (+++) is a truly unique film about a truly unique animal. It demonstrates that survival of the fittest requires a great deal of team work. In this species, staying close to the consensus is essential to staying alive. Investors, on the other hand, can get killed staying with the consensus. Contrarians are rarely chickens.

Memoirs of a Geisha (++) is a pleasure to watch if you like to watch geishas do their thing, which is mostly serving tea, making light conversation, and playing intense office politics.

Mr. & Mrs. Smith (+) was entertaining for about an hour. The last 55 minutes were OK if you like video-game-style shoot-em-ups. Brad and Angelina are certainly beautiful people and a hot pair. It is obvious that Jennifer never stood a chance. This movie's celebrity couple overcomes suburban boredom by shooting several rounds of ammo at each other as foreplay. I believe the producers made a huge mistake not ending the movie in a way that would have set the stage for a number of sequels that could have been billed as Mr. & Mrs. Bond.

In **Pride & Prejudice** (+), love conquers pride and prejudice. Nothing can conquer the lack of chemistry between Keira Knightley, who is certainly beautiful and vibrant, and Matthew MacFadyen, who is sullen and stiff, especially when compared to the original 1940 version with Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier.

{Proof} (-) is as interesting and entertaining as a mathematical proof is to non-mathematicians. It's a movie for quants. Prime numbers just don't do it for me. Neither does Gwyneth Paltrow, but she is a good actress. One of the big insights is that if you think you might be nuts, you probably aren't. Does it, therefore, follow that if you don't think you are nuts, you might be?

Shoppgirl (+) is Steve Martin's slow-paced, self-absorbed flick about the relationship of one young woman with two different men, i.e., a very rich older man in his 50s who has nothing to give and a nice young penniless man who is very giving, but is as weird as Kramer (not Cramer). Why is Hollywood so obsessed with emotionally dead middle-aged men, as in this movie and in "Lost in Translation" and "Broken Flowers"?

Star Wars: Episode III--Revenge of the Sith (+), the latest and (perhaps) last Star Wars movie, is an epic morality play. When the Jedi say, "May the force be with you," they mean the force of light. The transformation of Anakin Skywalker into Darth Vader reminds us that there is a dark side to the force as well. On the dark side you get really lame dialogue, wooden acting, and trite political intrigue of Roman vintage. Yoda is still my favorite character, though grammar lessons he badly needs.

Syriana (+) is a very unthrilling action thriller. Round up the usual suspects. They are all guilty of conspiracy. Of course, from Hollywood's perspective, no one is guiltier than the US government and the US oil companies. Together, they will do whatever it takes to provide the oil necessary to fuel the private jets of our Hollywood stars and their producers.

The Constant Gardener (++) is based on the John le Carré novel about evil drug companies testing a new, and sometimes deadly, drug on unsuspecting Africans. It's a good story and well-paced, though the hand-held cameras are annoying. In "It's A Wonderful Life" (1946), the bad guy owned the local savings & loan. Now the bad guys are running drug companies. Maybe the pharmaceutical companies need to spend less money on advertising similar blockbuster drugs and work harder on improving their image with the public.

The Family Stone (+) is a heartwarming film that is likely to be televised every year just before Christmas along with "It's A Wonderful Life." In both films, life isn't easy, but it does go on and it beats the alternative.

The Interpreter (+) sometimes gets lost in translation. It isn't among the most thrilling thrillers I have ever seen. But it is entertaining. Nicole Kidman is as beautiful as ever. She should have pulled the trigger so that the end of the movie wouldn't have been so predictable. Sean Penn always seems too intense in the intense roles he plays.

Walk the Line (++) is worthwhile just to see Joaquin Phoenix's superb acting as Johnny Cash. Furthermore, he does a good job of actually singing the songs. Reese Witherspoon also excels in her role as June Carter, his wife, and singing the songs. There are lots of similarities between this flick and last year's movie about Ray Charles. If you enjoyed "Ray," you'll enjoy this one, too.

War of the Worlds (- -) is truly awful. Tom Cruise is truly awful. The little girl who plays his daughter says near the start of the movie, "Is it over?" That's the question I kept asking until the movie was finally over. I heard it was bad, but I had to see it for myself. The cinematography is so dark you need a flashlight to see the action. The soundtrack is extremely loud, with the little girl shrieking almost the entire time. If you thought Spielberg's "Artificial Intelligence" was bad, this one is much worse. Could it be that some celebrities living in Hollywood and vacationing in the Hamptons have so completely lost touch with reality that they can no longer make a good science-fiction flick like "ET" or "Close Encounters of the Third Kind"?

Wedding Crashers (+) is fun and funny. If you enjoyed "There's Something About Mary," you'll probably like this one, too. Vince Vaughn steals the show, showing off his hilarious comedic talents. Next time you have a wedding (or a funeral), check that all the guests were actually invited. But let the crashers stay: They might be the life of the party.