

# Dr. Ed's Movie Reviews 2016

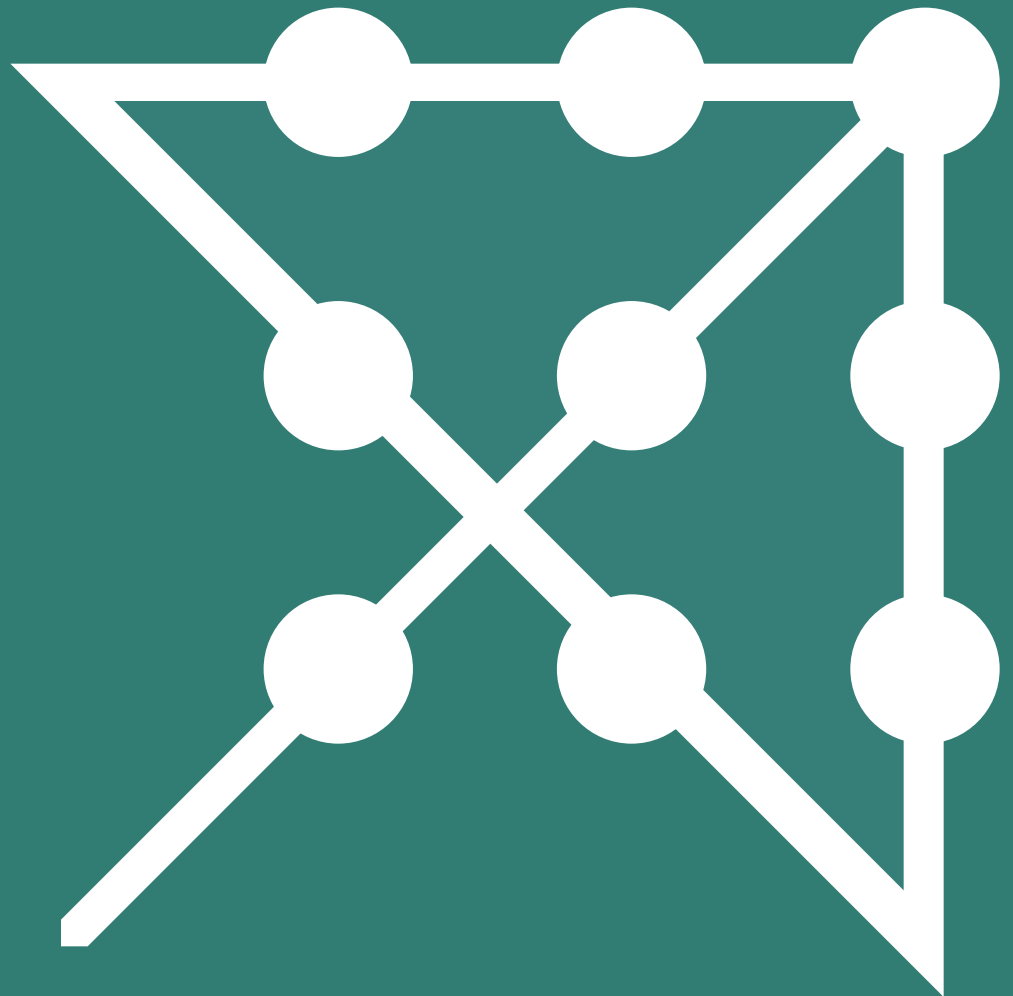
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*thinking outside the box*

**The Accountant (+)** stars Ben Affleck as a wiz accountant whose autism gives him an extraordinary ability to remember reams of numbers. So he has a great knack for forensic accounting. He also has a compulsive need to finish the complex accounting puzzles he faces, and occasionally does so with lethal force. He is the good guy. The bad guys are aiming to take their company public. Hollywood loves to take out crooked business people. How about a movie about the crooks in Washington?

**Arrival (+)** is a sci-fi flick starring Amy Adams. She plays a language expert recruited by the army to try to communicate with tall octopus-like aliens that have mysteriously landed their spaceships in 12 countries on Earth. It's a slow-paced movie, but raises interesting philosophical questions about our relationship to the future. It is also timely since there are many people in America and around the world who view Donald Trump's arrival in the White House as similar to an alien invasion. The movie suggests that we should give him a chance. He might be coming in peace and make the world a better place.

**Anthropoid (+ + +)** is an excellent movie based on the true story of "Operation Anthropoid." That was the code name for the mission impossible that two Czech soldiers were assigned by their government-in-exile in London. They were to assassinate SS officer Reinhard Heydrich, who was the main architect behind the Final Solution. He was also the Reich's third in command behind Hitler and Himmler and the leader of Nazi forces in Czechoslovakia and headquartered in Prague.

**Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk (+)** is a movie about the difficulties that soldiers face when they come back from their tours of duty in the Middle East. Lynn becomes a hero after a harrowing battle in Iraq and is brought back home temporarily for a victory tour with his squad. After they are honored during a halftime football show in Texas, Lynn has the choice of staying home or going back to finish his tour of duty. He decides to go back "home" to the war zone. The reality that soldiers confront on the battlefield is so completely different from the reality at home that it alters a person's entire perspective.

**Born To Be Blue (+ +)** is a finely crafted semi-fictional movie about jazz trumpeter Chet Baker's life in the 1960s. Ethan Hawke provides an intense performance of the musician, who had a self-destructive streak that got him addicted to heroine. Next, I want to see Don Cheadle in "Miles Ahead" about Miles Davis, another great jazz trumpeter who also had some personal issues. It seems that many creative people have lots of problems. I'm glad I gave up playing the saxophone after I graduated from high school. There's been less jazz in my life, which might explain why I am inclined to be a rosy optimist rather than a blue pessimist.

**Café Society (+ +)** is good fun, but only if you really like Woody Allen's films, which one way or another always seem to be about Woody Allen. He is too old to star in his own films, so the lead actors all act like Woody Allen, reflecting his easily recognizable quirky mannerisms. They all tell Woody Allen jokes, which are very funny in this movie. There is an older man having an affair with a younger woman, a frequent theme in Woody's movies and personal life. He is a very funny, but flawed individual.

**Deepwater Horizon (+)** stars Mark Wahlberg as a rigger on the rig that blew up in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico. The explosion resulted in 11 deaths. An estimated 4.9 million barrels of oil gushed out of the out-of-control wellhead for 87 days, badly polluting the Gulf. The film provides a very realistic "you-were-there" perspective on the disaster. According to the movie, it was all about corporate greed as BP attempted to cut costs. According to the government's investigation, managers and workers on the rig and shore-side engineers made a series of very bad decisions. In the movie, Transocean employee Andrea Fleytas is shown fighting her boss to sound a critical alarm when gas starts rushing into the area where the drilling crew was working. In fact, Fleytas testified before the Marine Board that she was overwhelmed by more than 10 warning lights going off at once and failed to sound the general alarm when she had the authority to do so. That's the difference between entertainment and reality.

**Eye in the Sky (+ +)** is a morally complex movie about the rules of engagement in the war on terrorism. It stars Helen Mirren and Alan Rickman as British military commanders aiming to wipe out a terrorist cell in Kenya with a hellfire missile that is mounted on a drone. They both are stymied by legal and political government officials who debate whether to approve the attack. The problem is that a young girl selling bread near the terrorists' unsafe home will almost certainly be seriously injured if not killed. Meanwhile, the evil doers are strapping on suicide vests.

**Elvis & Nixon (+ + +)** is a very funny film about Elvis Presley's decision to volunteer to be a deep undercover agent for the US Bureau of Narcotics. He was very upset about all the drugs that kids were taking and believed that Communist-inspired rock bands were promoting drug addiction in the US. So he flew out to Washington, DC and showed up at the White House unannounced to offer his services to President Richard M. Nixon. At first, the President declined to meet with Elvis, but then relented after his daughter pressed him to meet with "The King" and get his autograph. The dialogue of the meeting is straight out of Nixon's secret tape recordings, and is hilarious.

**Girl on the Train (-)** follows the script of the best-selling novel about a nanny, a shrink, infidelity, booze, and murder in the burbs. The book is set outside London. In the movie, the main action takes place in Ardsley-on-Hudson. The girl on the train is able to snoop on her ex-husband's home with his new wife and baby, as well as on their nanny's home, while commuting on the Metro North line to NYC. The movie feels like a long train ride, with a sense of relief when it is over.

**Hacksaw Ridge (+ + +)** is a true story about a true American hero, a World War II medic. He enlisted in the army, but refused to carry a rifle because his religious beliefs forbade him from killing. He saved the lives of a number of soldiers injured during the bloody battle to capture Okinawa from the Japanese. He did so in a most extraordinary way under enemy fire. The battle scenes are very graphic, but appropriate to highlight the bravery of Private Desmond T. Doss. Mel Gibson did a very good job directing this film.

**Hail, Caesar! (- - -)** I honestly can review only the first hour of this comic film because my wife and I walked out after we turned to each other and agreed that it was really boring. It's too bad because we usually enjoy movies by the Coen Brothers. This one is about Eddie Mannix, a Hollywood studio fixer, whose job it was to keep the actors in line and to cover up any scandals during the 1920s through the 1940s. The movie would have been more interesting if it more seriously portrayed Eddie's exploits, which included arranging a rumored mafia hit on George Reeves, the star of the *Adventures of Superman* television series. The legend is that Eddie wasn't upset that George was having an affair with his wife, but mad when Superman hurt her by dumping her for another woman.

**Hell or High Water (+ +)** is about two bank-robbing brothers. One has been in prison before and is just a bad guy. But his good-guy brother needs his help to rob branches of the bank that is set to foreclose on a ranch left to his two boys by his recently departed mother. The game plan is to rob the bank to pay the bank back with its own money, and then to set up a trust at the bank for the boys. The movie will convince you that we all either should or should not be carrying a gun and keeping an assault rifle in our trunks. It's your basic "Live free or die" movie. Jeff Bridges is great as the beer-swilling, soon-to-retire sheriff.

**In the Heart of the Sea (+ +)** is a whale of a tale directed and produced by Ron Howard. According to the movie, which is based on a 2000 non-fiction book of the same name, the sinking of the American whaling ship *Essex* in 1820 inspired Herman Melville to write his novel *Moby Dick*. Early industrial societies used whale oil widely in oil lamps and to make soap and margarine. It's easy to sympathize with a whale intent on killing those who are killing his mates for their blubber. Fortunately, the killing stopped with the commercial development of substitutes such as kerosene and vegetable oils.

**The Infiltrator (+ + +)** stars Bryan Cranston as a US Customs agent who infiltrates the money-laundering operation of Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar. It is based on a true story. The agent winds up running the biggest such operation in the US, though one of Escobar's lieutenants claims that the Federal Reserve actually laundered more by accepting dollars deposited by Columbia's central bank without asking any questions. At the end, the sting led to the arrest of about 100 bankers at BCCI, the world's seventh-largest bank, which facilitated the money laundering. In addition, several of Escobar's associates in Florida were arrested.

**Jason Bourne (-)** is the fifth in a series of movies based on the Robert Ludlum spy novels. Matt Damon stars as Bourne, who is out in the cold from the CIA, where the chief has covertly funded a Silicon Valley social media company to spy on all of us. Each of the Bourne movies seems to have an improbable car chase scene longer than the previous one through the gridlocked downtown streets of a major city. The swat truck chasing Bourne in Las Vegas in this film destroyed 170 cars. The seconds-per-scene editing is fast-paced and almost nauseating. Take motion sickness pills before seeing this movie. Damon was better as a Martian than as a spy.

**Joy (+)** stars Jennifer Lawrence as the title character, who established a very profitable business by inventing better household products (like the self-wringing mop). She did so despite a very chaotic situation in her own household. It is all based on an inspirational true story showing that entrepreneurs can overcome lots of both personal and professional challenges to become wildly successful.

**The Light Between Oceans (+ +)** is a beautifully filmed movie with a great cast and a heart-wrenching story line about a baby lost at sea and found by a couple who had just experienced the heartache of two miscarriages. The only loose end is why the dead man in the row boat didn't have any identification. But you have to think with your heart, not your mind to fully enjoy this movie. I can sympathize with the child (whose mother wants her back) since I am similarly torn between the love of Hillary and the Donald for my vote. In this case, both my heart and my mind are repelled by both.

**The Magnificent Seven (- - -)** is a remake of the original. It isn't as magnificent as the original starring Yul Brynner. This one stars Denzel Washington as the group leader of the seven gun fighters. In the original, the vigilantes were hired by a Mexican village to stop the bad guys from pillaging their farms. Anticipating a Trump presidency perhaps, this version has the vigilantes working on this side of the border to make America great again. The fight scenes are quite good, but just about everything else about this movie was bad.

**A Man Called Ove (+ +)** is a Swedish movie about the trials and tribulations of life. Ove seems to have more than his fair share of them. Though he has turned into a grumpy old man, somehow he manages to maintain his humanity despite his life's setbacks. The comedy is bittersweet, as it often is in life.

**The Man Who Knew Infinity (+ +)** is an excellent biopic about brilliant East Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (Dev Patel), who traveled in 1913 to Trinity College in England to work with professor G.H. Hardy (Jeremy Irons). The math wiz isn't accepted by most of the other math professors partly because he is a foreigner and mostly because he presents his remarkable conclusions without providing the theorem proofs, because they come to him directly from God. Eventually, he does provide them and is proven right after all. Too bad that so many economists pretend that their theories and forecasts are divinely derived.

**Manchester by the Sea (+)** is a very good movie about love, family, life, loss, and death. In other words, it's mostly depressing, with some comic relief along the way. Casey Affleck plays the afflicted main character, who has been numbed by his Job-like bad luck. However, he doesn't glean much insight from his pain. Instead, he finds solace in being a janitor. On second thought, maybe the movie wasn't as good as it could have been, unless you think getting through each day is a major accomplishment. The movie's got buzz thanks to the National Board of Review,

which rates it as the Best Film--and Affleck as the Best Actor--of 2016.

**Money Monster (+)** is entertaining. However, it is mostly a familiar caricature of Wall Street and lots of other movies that caricature and disparage Wall Street. It's another one of Hollywood's odes to the common (mostly uneducated) man who has been shafted by the capitalist system's flimflam artists. The latter are greedy manipulators who take advantage of innocent people, many of whom are just as greedy, betting that they'll strike it rich by putting all their eggs in one basket. George Clooney does a bad imitation of Jim Cramer.

**Nocturnal Animals (+)** is a film that is beautifully shot with great acting performances by Amy Adams and Jake Gyllenhaal. However, the screenplay, written by the film's director Tom Ford, is jerky and quirky. It forces you to commit lots of emotional energy at the start, and then fizzles. The basic message is don't drive late at night with your wife and teenage daughter on a rural highway in Texas that doesn't have cell phone service.

**Papa Hemingway in Cuba (+ +)** is a remarkable movie about a remarkable man near the end of his life, when he focused more on his regrets than on his accomplishments. Hemingway lived in Cuba at the time when Castro and his comrades were beginning to foment their revolution. By then, writing no longer came easily for the great author. However, he could still down 16 martinis in an evening. He began to contemplate suicide as he had a harder time controlling his demons. There must have been some geniuses in the past who didn't suffer as much as those who become the subjects of movies like this. By the way, the movie was actually filmed in Cuba and at Hemingway's home there, which is now a museum.

**Race (+ +)** is a well-executed biopic about Jessie Owens, who won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Owens, who was black, faced plenty of discrimination at home. His victory in Germany countered the Nazi propaganda promoting concepts of "Aryan racial superiority" and depicting others as inferior. Owens was a great American sports hero. While the movie reviews have been mixed, I found it to be a very balanced retelling of a truly extraordinary story.

**Remember (+ +)** is about remembering the atrocity committed by a Nazi commander in Auschwitz and seeking to avenge his crime many years later by finding and killing him. With help from a fellow Holocaust survivor played by Martin Landau, a widower, played by Christopher Plummer, who struggles with dementia, embarks on a cross-country odyssey to find the former Nazi responsible for the deaths of their family members. There are quite a few plot twists along the way. Don't read any other reviews that might give them away.

**The Revenant (+ +)** features an Oscar-worthy performance by Leo DiCaprio as Hugh Glass, a scout for a group of fur trappers during the 1820s. The film is grizzly and a bit tedious, as the protagonist hunts down one of the other trappers who abandoned him for dead while he was still breathing in a shallow grave after he was mauled by a grizzly bear. His nearly fatal encounter with the mother bear was intensely graphic. It brought back painful memories for me of this past week in the stock market, when the bear took big bites out of the bull.

**Room (+ +)** is a very intense movie with outstanding performances by Brie Larson and Jacob Tremblay, who play a young mother and her five-year-old son. She was kidnapped as a teenager and kept locked up in the tool shed of a neighborhood predator. They escape about halfway through the movie and then must adapt to the world, which the young boy never knew existed. Larson deserves to win the Academy Award for Best Actress. The kid wasn't nominated, but he certainly deserves an Oscar for his performance.

**Snowden (+)** is a docudrama about Edward Snowden, the spy/traitor/patriot who blew the whistle on the NSA's intelligence-gathering methods. They amounted to a search engine that was set loose to collect information on everyone on the planet, including any American with any digital information. I expected to dislike the movie because it was directed and written by Oliver Stone, who is a leftwinger obsessed with rightwing conspiracy theories. However, while the movie didn't

address the damage done by Snowden, it did convincingly make the case that the government went too far, threatening the right to privacy of innocent citizens. That was confirmed by subsequent legislation passed by Congress to rein in the NSA's fact-gathering operations. My hunch is that despite Snowden's efforts, official and unofficial hackers continue to create ever-growing dossiers on all of us.

**Star Trek Beyond (+)** is a great movie for Trekkies. My wife is one of them, so we had to go see it. The Enterprise crash-lands on a mysterious planet as a result of a surprise attack in outer space. The attack is led by Krall, a lizard-like dictator who derives his energy by sucking the life out of his victims. I sure hope that isn't where the US is heading after January 20, 2017. Donald Trump has certainly taken the Republican party where no one has gone before.

**Sully (+ + +)** is a great true story about a truly great American hero. Its release during the 9/11 weekend is a wonderful reminder of the strength of the American character. America is among the few countries in the world that have always extolled and still extol the freedom of individuals to pursue their happiness, i.e., their personal goals. Yet at the same time, American individualism has always been mostly community-minded, not self-centered and selfish. Sully landed his jet on the Hudson, saving the lives of 155 people. He made it very clear that his heroism had to be shared with all the passengers and emergency responders who facilitated the rescue that lasted only 24 minutes. It is truly an uplifting American story expertly directed by Clint Eastwood with a great performance by Tom Hanks.