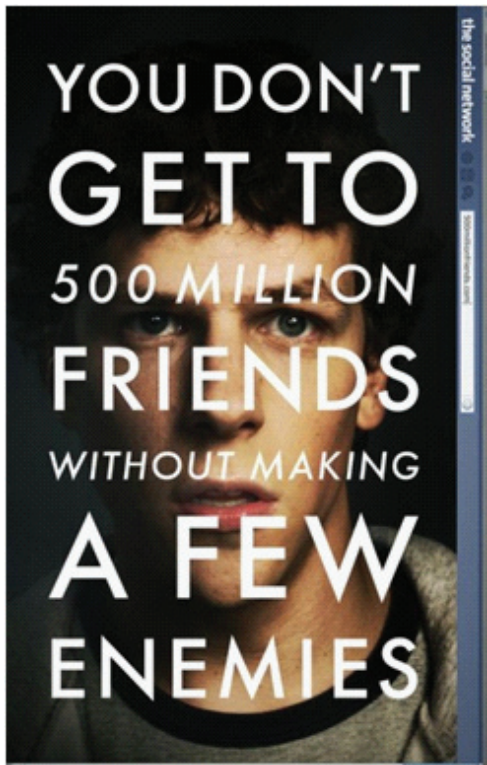




Movies and Culture Report

OSCAR RELEASES BEGIN



The Founding of Facebook: A Tale of Sex, Money, Genius, and Betrayal

Hollywood's coming out of the dead zone between big summer and big fall releases. From October through December, Oscar contenders appear—a string of “important” films to populate spring’s Oscar roster. October also brings a pile of documentaries to hit the indie markets plus horror movies for the Halloween crowd.

October 1

The Social Network (PG-13 for sexual content, drug and alcohol use, and language – Columbia Pictures [Sony]) David Fincher’s (*Fight Club*) adaptation of *The Accidental Billionaires*, the story of Mark Zuckerberg, creator of Facebook. Fincher is one of the better directors of his generation, and the subject matter is surprisingly engaging. Even the mundane world of computer programming gets rough when you toss in an idea worth a billion dollars. Early word: a shoo-in for the Oscars. Jesse Eisenberg, Justin Timberlake, Joe Mazzello.

Freakonomics (PG-13 for violence, sexuality/nudity, drugs, and brief strong language – Magnolia Pictures) Documentary from bestselling book—pop-culturalization of economics promoting the idea that all economic activity is incentive-based. Directed by a who’s-who of Michael Moore Baby documentarians: Alex Gibney (*Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*), Rachel Grady and Heidi Ewing (*Jesus Camp*), Morgan Spurlock (*Super Size Me*), Eugene Jarecki (*Why We Fight*), and Seth Gordon (*The King of Kong*). Expect lauding of leftist policies and all others dismissed.

Case 39 (R for violence and terror – Paramount Vantage) Social worker Emily Jenkins aids an abused 10-year-old girl and uncovers a horrible secret. May seem like a reject from the Lifetime Channel but could actually be an effective horror movie if handled properly. Renee Zellweger, Jodelle Ferland, Ian McShane, Bradley Cooper.

Also:

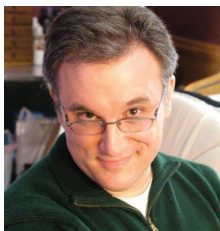
- Cash Crop** (documentary about pot)
- Let Me In** (emotionally damaged kids befriend one another; horror)
- Chain Letter** (cheesy horror)
- Hatchet II** (apparently there were unanswered questions from the original; horror).

October 8

As Good as Dead (R for violence, language, some drug content – First Look Studios) Ethan murders a white supremacist preacher and goes on the lam. He is caught and tortured by the preacher’s widow and two rednecks. Another film that links Christianity with racism, a favorite of the artsy set. Assume Ethan will be morally exonerated and the “Christians” will be the bad guys. Note, the preacher must be a racist because then Ethan isn’t as evil as his victim. Andie Macdowell, Frank Whaley, Brian Cox, Cary Elwes.

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- Oct. Movie Releases, continued
- Movie-Watching Tip: *Be Sure They’re Dead!*
- Culture Links and Comments



You Are What You See:
Watching Movies
Through a Christian Lens
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“[We are] so starved for creativity that we forego quality to satisfy ourselves with quantity, and film producers are happy to oblige.”¹

Life as We Know It (PG-13 for sexuality, language, and drug content – Warner Bros.) Two yuppies who loathe each other must work together to parent their orphaned godchild. A light comedy which, from a social marketing point-of-view, continues trying to convince us that a married, loving couple is not needed for a happy family—even successful singles who hate each other can make it work! Katherine Heigl, Josh Duhamel.

Stone (R for strong sexuality and violence, pervasive language – Overture Films) Parole officer is manipulated by a prisoner. Billed as a taut, psychological thriller, also likely to be a taut display of sex and violence. Directed by John Curran (*The Painted Veil*), so expect it to look beautiful but be far too self-important to be enjoyable. Even if I'm wrong about Curran, neither De Niro nor Norton have made a good movie in ten years. Why should we expect them to pull out one now? Here's to hoping I'm wrong. Robert De Niro, Edward Norton, Milla Jovovich, Frances Conroy.

Also:

Tamara Drewe (Gemma Arterton in shorts)

Rachel (documentary on the life of Rachel Corrie, a pro-Palestinian, leftist protestor crushed by a bulldozer (Let's blame the Jews!))

Secretariat (appears to be *Seabiscuit* with feminist undertones; see [review by Julie Davis](#))

Movie-Watching Tip:

Make Sure They're Dead!

Spoiler Warning: end-of-story features included below.

When an important character dies in a movie, pay attention to whether or not you actually see them die. With no dramatic death scene or corpse, it is likely they only appear to be dead and will reappear in the final act of the movie (James Gordon in [The Dark Knight](#)). Apparently killed, there are no final words, no dramatic exit, so reappearing unscathed should not be a big surprise.

You'll also see this false death of important supporting characters when they do not die but, instead, appear to desert the hero only to return when they are needed most (Han Solo in [Star Wars](#), Theoden in [The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King](#)). This reappearance can signify a change of heart, a turning away from a negative belief, or an embracing of a worldview shared by the hero; it can entice the audience to share that new belief system.

This device is often used to offer the audience a pleasant surprise in the final act, to heighten a character's profile in the film. Absence does make the heart grow fonder, after all.

While each of these may be nice side effects, the main purpose of this device is to fix plot holes or clean up a confused final act. The hero is on the floor, the villain stands over him, gun drawn and ready to shoot. The hero's friend magically emerges at the last moment to shoot the villain because the writer takes a shortcut. The reappearance

of a character spares the writer from devising a logical reason for their hero to survive. Let's face it, Luke would be a smear in the trench if it weren't for ol' Han and his unprompted transformation.

There's a long tradition of this type of narrative cheating. In the next issue of *Movies and Culture Report* we will dig a little deeper and examine use of the *Deus ex machina* (Latin for "God out of the machine").



Culture Links & Comments

Sexy too Soon—American girls are increasingly fed a steady diet of products and images that pressure them to be sexy. See the American Psychological Association's warning and how this affects your daughter, sister, niece: http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/protecting_your_family/combating_cultural_influences/sexy_too_soon.aspx.

Michael Kosmas, a London youth pastor, explains that films can be used to reach the unchurched. *Christianity Today* has more: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/films.can.help.church.reach.the.unchurched.says.young.pastor/26538.htm>.

Man in a Hole: Who Throws the Rope? Pastor James Harleman of Mars Hills Church has a well-written article explaining the similarities of narratives in film. In other words, why are all of these stories the same? <http://cinemagogue.com/2007/04/21/man-in-a-hole-%E2%80%93-who-throws-the-rope/>.

1. *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*. Scott Nehring, 2010. 95.