



# Movies and Culture Report

## SOMETHING TO BE THANKFUL FOR



The race against time and evil

Thanksgiving week sparks the end-of-the-year release schedule—one of the richest times of year for the film industry. Big ticket sequels (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, *Tron Legacy*, and *Little Focker*) plus notable originals (*The Tourist*, *The Next Three Days*, *The Fighter*, and *I Love You, Phillip Morris*) hit in the next six weeks.

The holiday season brings time for family, spending money, and time off, so note how many family-friendly movies come out in the next month-and-a-half. The industry expects to make up for summer losses with family-oriented films like *Yogi Bear 3D*, *The Nutcracker 3D*, *Tangled*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

### November 19

**Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1** (PG-13 for sequences of intense action violence, frightening images, brief sensuality – Warner Bros.) The wildly successful and influential *Harry Potter* franchise comes to a close—good thing since the kids aren’t kids any longer. Interesting they’ve split the film across two separate releases. They’ve done great work so far reducing the books to motion picture length; delivering a two-part bang at the end will prove satisfying to fans and lucrative for the studio. Let’s see if they can maintain a functional narrative over two films. Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint, Alan Rickman, Ralph Finnes.

**The Next Three Days** (PG-13 for violence, drug material, language, sexuality – Lionsgate) Penned and directed by Paul

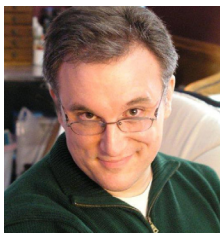
Haggis (*Crash*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *Flags of Our Fathers*), this film tells of a husband who works to free his wife after she is imprisoned for murder. Since it’s a Haggis film, assume it will be heavy. Since it’s fronted by Russell Crowe, assume someone gets their head bashed in. Russell Crowe, Elizabeth Banks, Liam Neeson.

Also:

- Made in Dagenham** - anachronistic dramatization of 1968 car plant strike against sexual discrimination
- White Material** - dramatization of civil and racial strife in Africa
- Nothing Personal** - dramatization of open marriage leading to eating disorders and promiscuity

### November 24

**Tangled** (PG for brief mild violence – Disney) Disney updates Rapunzel. A princess who spends her life in an isolated tower falls in love with a passing bandit. She leaves the tower to be with the handsome young man. Early word is pretty strong. It’s been a long time since Disney released a classic and this production likely won’t break that trend, but will still probably be an enjoyable time out. Mandy Moore, Ron Perlman, Jeffrey Tambor, Zachary Levi.



You Are What You See:  
Watching Movies  
Through a Christian Lens  
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**“We live in this world. Part of our job is to help clean things up. Film can and will help accomplish that task.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Faster** (R for strong violence, drug use, language – CBS Films) “The Rock” and his waxed eyebrows treat audiences to a whole new series of public beatings of bad guys. Johnson as “Driver” (his character doesn’t even get a name) attempts to avenge his brother killed during a heist. Interesting—this straight-forward guy flick, seemingly made to populate Walmart’s DVD bins, includes an Oscar winner and nominees (Thornton and Berenger). On Oscar night, I bet they weren’t thinking it would lead them to be supporting actors to a guy who made his mark rolling around with oiled guys in spandex. Dwayne Johnson, Tom Berenger, Billy Bob Thornton, Carla Gugino.

*Also:*

**Love and Other Drugs** - sex romp includes Viagra

**The Legend of Pale Male** - docudrama of a boy and a redtail hawk

**Burlesque** - Cher and Christina Aguilera strutt their stuff

## DVD RELEASES

Summer releases are coming; too bad most aren’t worth paying for.

November 23

**The Expendables** (R for strong action, bloody violence, language – Nu Image Films) Dim-eyed guy flick featuring Sylvester Stallone, cameo of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis, Jason Statham, Jet Li, Eric Roberts, Mickey Rourke, Steve Austin, Dolph Lundgren, Randy Couture and Terry Crews. Why not just pass out testosterone and steroid shots and be done with it?

*Also:*

**The Disappearance of Alice Creed** - crime thriller (kidnap, rape)

**I’m Still Here** - documentary of Joaquin Phoenix

**Eat, Pray, Love** - Julia Roberts shucks her marriage to find herself

**The Pillars of the Earth** - drama; 12th Century England

November 30

**The Twilight Saga: Eclipse** (PG-13 for intense violence, sexuality – Summit) More Bella, Edward, Jacob, and whatnot. If you know someone who likes the trials and tribulations of an ancient vampire who, despite his age, pines for a high school girl, then you already know this is coming. If you don’t, you’re a luckier person than you realize. Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, Taylor Lautner, Xavier Samuel, Bryce Dallas Howard.

*Also:*

**The Sorcerer’s Apprentice** - Nicholas Cage fantasy adventure

**Knight and Day** - Tom Cruise action adventure

## Movie-Watching Tip: **The Establishing Shot**

This often ignored but critical tool of filmmaking is used at the opening of a scene to establish place and time. We’ve all seen these quick images of a building’s exterior, cityscape, or other identifiable scener that sets the stage for what’s next.

In *Ghostbusters*, we leave Peter Venkman attempting to woo Dana Barrett and are taken to the Ghostbusters office. To help

the transition between the two unrelated scenes, director Ivan Reitman inserts the following image:



This cues the audience there’s a change—as if John Cleese dropped in and said, “and now for something completely different.”

Also, a director can manipulate the audience’s need for an establishing shot. In the horror film *Saw*, director James Wan avoided establishing shots between scenes and locations. Since most of his film took place in dark, frightening interiors, the absence of establishing shots increased the film’s sense of dislocation.

Remember: every shot in a film has a purpose—or should.

## Culture Links & Comments

The new film [Works in Progress is a great example](#) of how Christian filmmakers can make a film that displays Biblical ideas without being preachy.

[Storytelling brings hope and the Gospel to Mongolia](#). Flannelgraphs are a powerful ministry tool in Mongolia, but it’s the message not the method that makes The Greatest Story Ever Told.

[Relevant Magazine excerpt](#) from my book *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens* titled “Why Are Christian Movies So Bad?”

<sup>1</sup>. *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*. Scott Nehring, 2010. 191.