

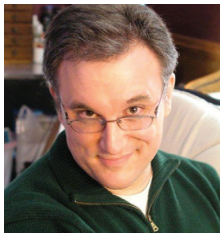


Movies and Culture Report

2010 COMES TO AN END



“Irish” Micky Ward’s unlikely road to the world light welterweight title



You Are What You See:
Watching Movies
Through a Christian Lens
— BUY IT TODAY

Christmas is coming and so is the end of another year. Studios have some final, big ticket movies they hope will capitalize on holiday dollars. Some Oscar-contenders will release (*The Fighter*, *True Grit*, and *Casino Jack*) and popcorn flicks that should be delivered in Styrofoam boxes with a plastic toy (*Tron: Legacy*, *Little Fockers*, *Gulliver’s Travels*).

Thank you for your support this year. I hope we are able to give you more movie-watching advice and culture news throughout 2011!

December 17

The Fighter (R for language throughout, drug content, violence, sexuality – Paramount) Wahlberg portrays “Irish” Micky Ward prior to his career as a professional junior welterweight fighter. Ward, known for tenacity and strength, is a great subject for a biography. Christian Bale’s performance as Ward’s supportive but drug-addled brother, Dickey, seems a shoo-in for the next Supporting Actor Oscars. Keep an eye out for this film. Mark Wahlberg, Christian Bale, Amy Adams, Melissa Leo.

Tron: Legacy (PG for sci-fi action violence, brief mild language – Walt Disney Pictures) With available technological advancements, this sequel to the 1980’s sci-fi cult classic is a no-brainer. Expect fantastic imagery *unsupported* by any meaningful storyline. If this has any depth, no one will be more shocked than me. Jeff Bridges, Olivia Wilde, Garrett Hedlund, Bruce Boxleitner.

Also:

Yogi Bear 3D - Dan Akroyd and Justin Timberlake voice the cartoon buddies

Casino Jack - left-coaster Kevin Spacey plays a hotshot DC lobbyist

Rabbit Hole - Nicole Kidman plays a mother whose son dies in a car accident

How Do You Know? - Reese Witherspoon grieves growing older and finds herself in a love triangle

December 22

Little Fockers (PG-13 for mature sexual humor throughout, language, some drug content – Universal) Fockers—get it? Ha! It’s the joke that keeps on giving ‘cuz Fockers sounds like...well, if you don’t get it, ask your teenager. This sit-com put to film gets another installment of the old, rehashed material as they try to squeeze the last drops out of the franchise. Robert De Niro, Ben Stiller, Jessica Alba, Owen Wilson, Dustin Hoffman, Barbra Streisand.

Gulliver’s Travels (PG for brief rude humor, mild language, action – 20th Century Fox) Jack Black reworks the old tale. Let’s see if Black, who has worked to make himself a presence in children’s entertainment, also worms in some of [his political activism which he comfortably fuses with his family](#)

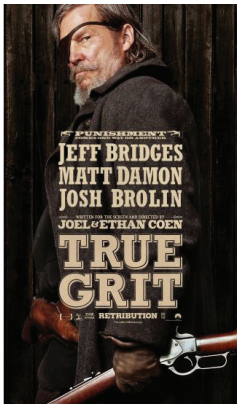


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“The portrayal of sin to teach a moral lesson is not necessarily sinful ... sometimes it is necessary.”¹

[entertainment](#) persona when he’s not [mocking Christ in a pro-gay political ad](#).

ONE CANNOT SEPARATE A PERFORMER FROM THEIR BELIEFS. Their beliefs inform their decisions on which projects to attach themselves to. Their beliefs bleed into their works, both intentionally and unintentionally.



True Grit (PG-13 for intense sequences of western violence and disturbing images – Paramount Pictures) If someone is going to remake a John Wayne classic, I can’t think of a better pick than the Coen Brothers. Early reviews are mixed, however. Bridges may have turned out to be one of the more reliable and impressive film actors of his generation, but Wayne’s boots are hard to fill. Jeff Bridges, Hailee Steinfeld, Josh Brolin, Matt Damon, Barry Pepper.

Also:

Country Strong - Gwyneth Paltrow and Garrett Hedlund climb the ladder of country music and disrupt her marriage

Somewhere - debauched actor must clean up his lifestyle when his daughter gets dumped on his doorstep

DVD RELEASES

Looks like you won’t have to worry about running out to the video store right before Christmas.

December 21

Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps (PG-13 for brief strong language, thematic elements – 20th Century Fox) Oliver

Stone revives his glory days with this throw-back to the original Wall Street. Sometimes throw-backs should just be thrown out. Michael Douglas, Shia LeBeouf, Josh Brolin, Carey Mulligan, Eli Wallach.

Devil (PG-13 for violence and disturbing images, thematic material, some language including sexual references – Universal Pictures) A small film about a group of people trapped in an elevator. The elevator is the least of their issues, however, when they realize the devil is stuck with them. If the devil is on your elevator, doesn’t he simply have to make the music play louder to reproduce the effects of hell? Chris Messina, Geoffrey Arend, Logan Marshall-Green, Jenny O’Hara.

Also:

Easy A - teen romantic comedy; “good” girl capitalizes on a rumor she lost her virginity

Angel - young woman creates her own imaginary reality

December 28

The American (R for violence, sexual content, nudity - Focus Features) Aging actor George Clooney plays an aging assassin. Clooney as an assassin. Clooney.



Here’s a bright idea—let’s train a man to kill people for a living but let’s pick a guy who is commonly the best looking man in the room. He won’t stick out or nothing after his murders. This production received mixed but relatively positive reviews. George Clooney, Irina Björklund.

Resident Evil: Afterlife (R for sequences of strong violence, language – Screen Gems) If you want to see this film, I have no idea why you’re subscribing to this newsletter. Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter, Wentworth Miller, Shawn Roberts.

Also:

Legendary - sports drama; teen tries to reunite his family

Legendary Assassin - Oriental action thriller

And Soon the Darkness - horror; two American girls lost in Argentina



10 Favorite Christmas Videos, Old and New

by Christine Hunt

The Star of Bethlehem (2007, MPower Pictures) Documentary produced by Stephen McEveety (*The Passion of the Christ*). Attorney Rick Larson “walks you through Biblical and historical clues” using Scripture and astronomical computer software to “reveal the incredible significance of the celestial event.” Stunning and thought-provoking glimpse into the magnificent complexity of God’s grace. Don’t miss the Extras.

Patrick Stewart’s 1999 version of **A Christmas Carol** (TNT and Hallmark Entertainment). The depth of understanding Stewart has for this character places him far above all other actor interpretations I have ever seen—likely due to his having played *Christmas Carol* as a one-man show off and on from 1991-2005. Stewart’s is also the film version closest to Dicken’s original story. A must-see on my Christmas viewing list every year. Watch, especially, for his choking laughter as he makes the transition from miser to merry-maker.

[Interesting explanation of humbug](#) and Scrooge’s motivation for hating Christmas.

It’s probably NOT what you’ve thought.]



Since You Went Away (1944, Vanguard Films, Selznick International Pictures) All-star cast (Claudette Colbert, Shirley Temple, Hattie McDaniel, Joseph Cotton, Lionel Barrymore) in an Oscar-winning, WWII-era film about a family coping with hardships on the home front—issues of life and death. Fidelia, the housekeeper, states the Central Question of the film: “The Lord, Hissself, is just gonna have to take care of these calamities somehow.” And the answer by movie’s end: He does.

Not a Christmas film, per se, but ends with a stirring Christmas Eve scene that kick-starts my holiday feelings. Especially poignant to me since my son was a Marine in Iraq the last few years.

White Christmas (1954, Paramount) I love the story behind this story. Writers were tasked with incorporating Irving Berlin’s hits into a musical showcase. They not only accomplished that, they created characters and a storyline that refused to play second fiddle to the music. Danny Kaye—third choice for the part—is perfectly cast and great fun to watch. My attachment to this film is (aside from the humor) because the snow at film’s end is a gift that follows the honoring of Major General Waverly.

Joyeux Noel (2005, Nord-Quest, Senator Film - French production with subtitles) Centered around WW-I and the Christmas truce of 1914, this film quickly joined my list of favorites. Based on multiple accounts of the event and artistic license by the writer/director, Christian

Carion, *Joyeux Noel* shows human misery in the trenches from perspectives of French, Scottish, and German soldiers, but it also shows the longing of the human soul for peace—and Carion’s story inadvertently acknowledges peace can only be found in Christ Jesus. [WARNING: Is an adult movie with scenes of violence, emotional distress, one scene of sexuality (married couple) which is easily skipped, and difficult questions about life and war.]

THE REMAKE of *Miracle on 34th Street* (1994, 20th Century Fox) shows honest struggles with love and faith. I appreciate that Mother and Bryan are wed prior to developing an intimate relationship. About the six-year-old actress: “Ironically, Mara [Wilson] is Jewish so was not raised to believe in Santa Claus, but this was a bonus ... she was able to empathize with her character’s stance that there was no Santa.”² Richard Attenborough is marvelous as Kris Kringle.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (2005, Disney and 20th Century Fox) — Return of Christmas is the first sign of liberation in this C. S. Lewis classic.

Ernest Saves Christmas (1988, Touchstone) Before Jim Carrey’s Ace Ventura there was Jim Varney and his Ernest P. Worrell, a far more innocent, lovable bumbler. In *Saves Christmas* Varney plays a taxi driver with a “Keep Christ in Christmas” bumper sticker who whistles

old hymn tunes. Full of slapstick, clichéd lines and situations, but more than Christmas is saved in this comedy that’s safe for even young children to enjoy.

You’ll notice *It’s a Wonderful Life* is not on my list. Sacrilege, I know. My in-laws will probably not forgive me. Please don’t misunderstand—I think *Wonderful Life* is a good film and I love to watch Jimmy Stewart act, but it has never once spoken ‘Christmas’ to me and does nothing to put me in the holiday mood. Sorry.

Two other videos that do, however, both inspire and capture a unique perspective on the season are from Focus on the Family:

The True Christmas Story: Herod the Great, Jesus the King (2002) In this short documentary, historian Ray Vander Laan takes us on-site to the ruins of Herod’s palaces and to the caves around Bethlehem where shepherds actually watched their flocks. Vander Laan illustrates clear distinctions between the two kings of the Jews 2000 years ago and lessons in faith we can learn from them. Bonus material includes a three-minute explanation of Hebrew thought and culture and how they differ from our Western, Greek-based ways of thinking.

McGee and Me!: ’Twas The Fight Before Christmas (1990) Hard to find but worth the hunt. Nicholas and McGee learn that God’s love is for everyone—even those who are hardest to love. And that, to me, is what Christmas is all about. ❄️



Movie-Watching Tip *Editing Your Reality*

[Good News Film Reviews](#) has posted [an interesting, short video](#) on the ability of an editor to alter reality. While this video focuses on



reality TV, not feature film, it reveals how editing tricks modify both what you see and what you think about what the filmmaker puts on screen.

A projected image is malleable, whether in film or on the news. Never, **NEVER** believe your eyes when watching a screen because you are always, **ALWAYS** watching what someone else wants you to see.*

Culture Quote

“THE INVASION OF THE FAMILY by industry, mass media, and the agencies of socialized parenthood has subtly altered the quality of the parent-child connection. It has created an ideal of perfect parenthood while destroying parents’ confidence in their ability to perform the most elementary functions of childrearing.”³

Christopher Lasch. *The Culture of Narcissism*

Culture Links & Comments

Technology Review has an [interesting article on Transmedia Storytelling](#) and [the future of how we will enjoy and deliver our stories to one another](#).

[FamilyValues Cinema](#) offers a [Netflix-like service](#) for parents who want to keep their entertainment wholesome.

[Hollywood acknowledges the impact of their intentional social agenda](#). “[Jill Clayburgh] remained one of the most important actresses of the ’70s, alongside

Jane Fonda, Glenda Jackson, Diane Keaton, and the young Meryl Streep (with whom she was friends)—women whose films were marked by their portrayals of strong, independent women who didn’t need a man to complete their lives and [who] were prepared to take a stand by doing so.”⁴ The role that would make her a superstar of the decade was Erica in Paul Mazursky’s *An Unmarried Woman*, a single woman in a feminist world. The film was a lightning rod for many issues of the late ’70s, from divorce to sexual liberation and its message it was okay not to be married.

At Rest

Jill Clayburgh, Oscar-nominated actress whose portrayal of single women in the 1970s helped define feminism in movies and reshape the role of leading lady, died November 5 at her home in Lakeville, Connecticut. She was 66.



1. *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*. Scott Nehring, 2010, p. 37.

2. imdb.com/name/nm0933798/bio. Accessed 11/29/10.

3. Christopher Lasch. *The Culture of Narcissism*. pp. 169-170. <http://home.comcast.net/~plutarch/Narcissism.html>.

4. imdb.com/news/ni5341276. Accessed 12/17/10.