



Movies and Culture Report

OFF TO A LAME START



Two knights, an accused witch, a remote abbey, and a monks' ritual to end the Black Plague. Christian-bashing anyone?

The cadre of Oscar-worthy films has come and gone. Holiday blockbusters peaked and now linger in multiplexes. So, what's next? It's time for substandard gunk to be dumped into the market to pick up leftover holiday dollars.

January 7

Season of the Witch (PG-13 for thematic elements, violence, disturbing content – Relativity) This is the big production for this film cycle. Cast includes Ron Perlman (love him), Robert Sheehan (Keep an eye on him—he'll likely be well-known soon), and Christopher Lee (Check out this guy's bio on [IMDb](#), [Wikipedia](#), or [Amazon](#). We're all boring louts by comparison). The handicap? Nicolas Cage—the man with serious debt issues. Cage is like a Mr. Yuck-sticker on any movie. His presence is a warning that the production is lousy. If you question that, [check out his resume since 2005](#).

a comeback. Unavoidably reminiscent of the excellent film *Crazy Heart* in which Jeff Bridges played a down-and-out country music star who self-destructed personally and professionally. This movie has some serious boots to fill and Paltrow is no Bridges, so chances are this won't be a stunner. Note that the storyline includes relationships that threaten a marriage. ([Watch the trailer](#).) Gwyneth Paltrow, Tim McGraw, Garrett Hedlund.

Also

The Absent slasher/horror film

The Time That Remains Released in France (2009), this examination of the creation of the state of Israel has slowly made its way around the world. Supposedly coming to the U.S. this month, that may be pushed back. Save it to your Netflix queue if interested.

January 14

The Green Hornet (PG-13 for language, violence, sensuality, drug use – Sony) Rich kid's dad dies; young man takes over the company and has a helpful minority who create cool gadgets. No, this isn't *Batman* or *Iron Man*, though you may be left wishing it had been. ([Watch the trailer](#).) Seth Rogen, Cameron Diaz, Tom Wilkinson, Christoph Waltz, Jay Chou. ⇨



This film is about 14th century crusaders who transport a woman suspected of witchcraft to a monastery. Unfortunately, we can assume that residents of the monastery **won't** be the good guys, so keep an eye on this film. The presence of a medieval monastery offers plenty of opportunity for overt or covert Christian bashing. ([Watch the trailer](#).) Nicolas Cage, Ron Perlman, Robert Sheehan, Christopher Lee, Stephen Campbell Moore.

Country Strong (PG-13 for thematic elements involving alcohol abuse, some sexual content – Legacy) Comfy drama about a down-and-out country music star who hooks up with a songwriter to mount



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

“[W]e insist our heroes be more than just normal people. They are extraordinary.

Seth Rogen? We have fallen to a place in this culture where Seth Rogen (*The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Knocked Up*, *Superbad*) plays a superhero? Think about it: **leading men are intended to represent a culture's view of ideal manhood.** Seth Rogen? What happened to our culture's Clark Gables, Raymond Maseys, Gary Coopers, Jimmy Stewarts, and John Waynes?

The Dilemma (PG-13 for mature themes, sexuality – Universal) This film [received early criticism](#) for the inclusion of a joke in which electric cars are called “gay” (see the [trailer here](#)). While I'm willing to support the movie just for being anti-PC, they lose me with the “dilemma”: A man discovers his best friend's wife is cheating on him. Should he tell his friend about the infidelity? What? Why is that a dilemma?

This is a Ron Howard movie ([The Da Vinci Code](#)), so expect it to be well constructed and quite chummy—but watch for underlying social-marketing messages. Vince Vaughn, Kevin James, Jennifer Connelly, Winona Ryder.

Also

The Cabin in the Woods intense horror

Hong Kong Phooey action comedy

En Ganske snill mann Norwegian comedy crime drama

Ong Bak 3 Thai action film



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your
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DVD RELEASES

This year's opening week holds nothing to be thrilled about. Beginning the 11th, however, last Fall's quality films will begin to trickle into the new release section.

January 4



Machete (R for strong, bloody violence, language, sexuality, nudity – Troublemaker Studios) Machete is hired to assassinate a U. S. Senator but his American bosses turn on him. Machete retaliates against those who would have him killed.

This film feeds, and feeds on, escalating tensions over illegal immigration, anchor babies, and border city struggles. It deals in racism, nationalism, and violence. There is little reason to watch this irresponsible trash. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Danny Trejo, Robert De Niro, Jessica Alba, Steven Seagal, Michelle Rodriguez.

Case 39 (R for violence, terror, and disturbing images – Paramount Vantage) A social worker wants to protect a girl only to discover the child is downright evil. Critics panned this violent horror flick for a reason. Audiences were mixed however—all depends on how discerning you are. Renée Zellweger, Ian McShane, Bradle Cooper, Jodelle Ferland.

Also

Dinner for Schmucks crude, sexual comedy

Howl social-marketing docudrama on Alan Ginsberg and the obscenity trial

The Yellow Handkerchief sexualized coming-of-age road trip

Catfish docudrama on finding love (i.e., sex) on the Internet

January 11

The Social Network (PG-13 for sexual content, drug and alcohol use, language). All but certain to take home an armful of Oscars, this fictionalized telling of the creation of Facebook is everything a movie should be: gripping, thoughtful, and structured. A must see, though with content warning for sex and language. Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield, Justin Timberlake. [Read the review.](#)

[Watch the trailer.](#)



Alpha and Omega (PG for rude humor, mild action - Lions Gate) Formulaic animated tale about two dogs—a weak male and a strong-willed female—who struggle against the elements when they are separated from their pack. Is quite forgettable. How do I know? Everyone's already forgotten about it. Maybe because of its social agenda? ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Justin Long, Hayden Panettiere, Dennis Hopper, Danny Glover, Larry Miller.

Also

The Switch romantic comedy based on switching sperm donations

Piranha 3D comedy horror

The Freebie “One Night Experiment in Infidelity”

They are super-human, more like God than like us, and they tell us how to live.”¹

Godzilla is Dead: The New Brand of Japanese Horror Films

by Scott Nehring

TROUBLING PRODUCTIONS IN MODERN cinema are known as *torture porn*. Films such as the *Saw* series, *Hostel*, *Wolf Creek*, and *The Human Centipede* are designed to display, even celebrate human torment. Today’s trend away from moral-based horror and toward amoral pain for pleasure is something that should concern everyone, but the devolution of horror isn’t just a trait of Western cinema.

Japan has an incredible cinematic history with a vibrant list of brilliant actors, writers, and directors that stands up to the American and European masters. In truth, though, directors like Akira Kurosawa (*Rashomon*), Hiroshi Inagaki (*Miyamoto Musashi*), and Masaki Kobayashi (*Kaidan*) may thrill pathetic, doughy-gutted film geeks, but most Americans wouldn’t know them from Adam. When most Westerners think of Japanese film, they think of *Godzilla* and, if they’re really astute, they may toss in *Mothra* for good measure, but the influx of Ishirō Honda’s *Gojira* (*Godzilla*) and other classic monster movies had definite impact on American culture and cinema.

The last decade, however, witnessed a seriously degenerating wave of Japanese influence. Now, instead of screeching giant lizards who knock down models of cities, a young girl climbs out of a television.

Today, Japanese horror is represented by two names: Hideo Nakata and Takashi Shimizu (film geeks may also include Takashi Miike). Nakata and Shimizu are probably most recognizable to American audiences not

by their own work but by derivative American works. Nakata’s movies (*Ringu* and *Honogurai mizu no soko kara*) and Shimizu’s *Ju-on* and *Ju-on 2* inspired a generation of Western horror-film makers. Haven’t heard of these films? Sure you have. *The Ring* (*Ringu*), *Dark Water* (*Honogurai mizu no soko kara* [you know, the one with Jennifer Connelly that you didn’t see because it looked stupid and was]), and *The Grudge* (*Ju-on*). These films in either their Japanese or American versions have something in common: **nihilism**.

Nihilism is, in essence, the logical by-product of existential thought. Watered down, it’s defined as “everything means nothing, therefore nothing has any worth—including you and the petty thoughts in your meaningless head.”

This is the stuff of loser, white, suburban kids with dyed-black hair who lurk in mall food courts.

Ringu, *Ju-on*, *Honogurai mizu no soko kara*, and their American derivatives offer the new look in horror film. These films follow the same predator concept of *Friday the 13th* or *Halloween* but with something new. In these films there is a complete—and I mean absolute and total **lack of moral structure**. These stories exhibit a world devoid of God, and **that** is the reason these films are so effective.

HEROINES ARE THREATENED BY THE CURSED GHOST OF A CHILD. As with traditional aspects of Japanese ghost stories these movies bring the dead into life, but rather than follow standard Japanese ancestral beliefs that the dead protect the living, these ghosts do the opposite. Each of these films have characters who enter a world where they are infected by a curse

and are unable to detach themselves from its grip. The curse supersedes God and, therefore, eliminates all hope. Once caught in the web, characters hopelessly fall to the brutal death awaiting them.

In *Ringu*, the simple act of watching a videotape condemns the viewer to a horrifying death. In *Ju-on*, mere entrance of any character into a cursed home insures their death. There is no way out, no escape—you are going to die, it is going to hurt, and there is nothing you can do about it. To be fair,

in *The Ring* the heroine does escape that fate, but at a very high cost and only to encounter it again in the future.

Fun stuff, eh? Why is this important? American and European filmmakers busy themselves puking the bile of violence into mainstream culture and making torture palatable to the masses. These new Japanese originals and their remakes inject hopelessness into their young audiences.

In films like *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *American Werewolf in London*, or *The Exorcist* there is a strand of godliness in the narratives—no really, it’s there; it’s buried under gore and ugliness, but it is, indeed, present. Hope and structure exist and, although evil is having its day, good still offers shreds of

hope and balance.

In *The Ring* and *The Grudge*, neither good nor evil exist. Only the dark pit of nothingness looms before the characters. At film’s end where the moral of the story resides, and it’s called the **moral** of the story for a reason, we find the film’s resolution does nothing to provide any

⇒



photo from Ringu



photo from The Ring



photo from The Grudge

YOU ARE WHAT YOU SEE

Godzilla, continued from p 3 ~

moral structure to the universe of the film story. The characters discover they may have salvaged their lives but there was no triumph of good over evil (or vice-versa) because neither good nor evil exist. Ultimately, the lives saved did not deserve the effort; the proof provided by the narrative is that everything is worthless.

The projection of nihilism onto the human heart has the same coarsening results as the visual impact of extreme violence. Films are modern myths, stories that teach us about our lives and our universe. When our stories teach that our universe is without design, without

purpose, that life itself is a meaningless effort, the lesson harms the audience.

Projecting a world without God presents the audience with the lowest of human inventions. Without God, without purpose, why should anyone not indulge in torture porn and all else that ignites their fancy? In a nihilistic universe there's no capability for morality—and no logical reason for anyone to take offense.

The human mind that denies God is the same mind that accepts anything else in exchange.
Remove Almighty God
and you remove hope.

Horror movies are fun. I don't deny that. And I argue that they have their place in society—they show the evil that resides in the human heart and our desperate need both for God and for a savior. Since all films, all stories are, in effect, instructional manuals on how to live within this world, horror films must not operate by a different set of rules. When films give bad life-lessons, they should be called out for what they are: just plain wrong.

Have nothing to do with
godless myths and old wives' tales;
rather, train yourself to be godly.

I Timothy 4:7 (NIV)

At Rest (Daniel 12:13)

Grant McCune (1943-2010)

One of the ground-breaking artists who created many aspects of the original *Star Wars* films



including
R2-D2.

McCune was an influential designer and model maker and was part of the team who won the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects in 1978.

Blake Edwards (1922-2010)

Best known for work with Peter Sellers in creating *The Pink Panther* series, Edwards was also a prolific writer and producer up to the mid-1990s. He directed over 40 films, mostly light comedies (*Victor/Victoria*, *10*, *Operation Petticoat*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*), many of which included his



wife of nearly 40 years, Julie Andrews, in the cast.

One critic stated, "Edwards' movies are slick and glossy, but their shiny surfaces reflect all too accurately the disposable values of contemporary life."³

Culture Quote

"I CAN ONLY ADDRESS MYSELF TO THE ALL-POWERFUL AUTHOR AND MASTER OF NATURE AND OF MY HEART. TO WHOM SHALL I CRY, O LORD, TO WHOM SHALL I HAVE RECOURSE, IF NOT TO THEE? NOTHING THAT IS LESS THAN GOD CAN FULFIL MY EXPECTATION."²

- Blaise Pascal, mathematician, physicist, philosopher

Culture Links & Comments

Here's further proof much of modern cinema is propaganda, particularly documentaries—there's a very good chance it was made *not* to document life on earth but to promote a political point of view. Case in point:

[Wikileaks released documents showing Cuba banned Michael Moore's pro-Cuban healthcare "documentary." Sicko. Why? The Cuban government was concerned that if their people saw the outright falsehoods in the movie, they would expect actual healthcare on the communist island.](#)

Just because you see it doesn't make what you're seeing real—you can no longer believe your eyes. [This display of celebrity images reveals how Photoshop and other technologies make the stars appear perfect.](#) (**Warning:** includes many sensual images and nudity.)

Vox Populi has a brilliant takedown of a pro-atheist, op-ed piece from Ricky Gervais (**Language Warning**, but worth it). [This is how you take apart an atheist.](#)



1. Scott Nehring. *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*. 2010. p160. Available [here](#).
2. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662). Prayer, to Ask of God the Proper

Use of Sickness. 1. from *Minor Works*. The Harvard Classics. 1909–14. Available [here](#).

3. John Wakeman, ed. *World Film Directors*. Vol 2. H.W.Wilson Co. 1988. pp. 302–10. Quoted on [Wikipedia](#).

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