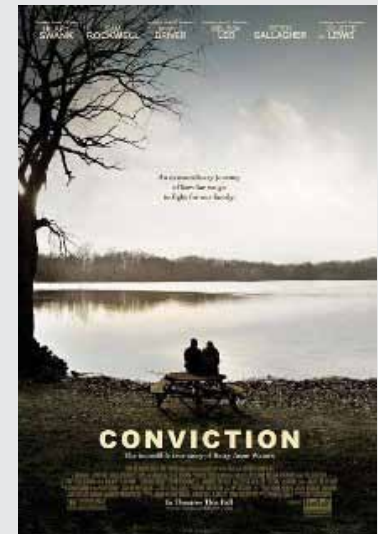




Movies and Culture Report

Slim Pickings





THEATRICAL RELEASES

February 4



Sanctum (R for language, violence, disturbing images – Universal) Based—**based**—on a true story (which usually translates into, “Something sorta happened like this but we removed the real parts, fictionalized the whole tale, and still say *based* because it makes us seem credible”). A dive team is trapped when the cave they’re exploring collapses. Sounds like *The Cave* or *The Descent* sans the monsters.

Seems little is special about this production other than its executive producer is James Cameron and it’s marketed as being in 3D. Why should this be of interest when everything is getting the 3D treatment? Truth is, there probably isn’t anything special here, which is why they need to focus marketing on Cameron and, by inference, connect to his success with *Avatar*. If we remember how impressed we were with *Avatar* and *Titanic*, we’ll imagine this film holds more of the same. ([Watch the movie trailer.](#)) Ioan Gruffudd, Richard Roxburgh, Alice Parkinson, Rhys Wakefield.



The Roommate (PG-13 for violence, language, sexual content – Sony) Sara’s life is turned upside down when she is assigned a new dorm roommate, Rebecca. As it so happens, Rebecca is a violent nutcase—’cause, like, y’know, crazy chicks who ’re quick to go psycho are like sooo okay to get into college and, like, live with other people. Sounds like *Single White Female* in a dorm.

The film caused controversy when original marketing placed the psycho chick in front of a building at Southwestern College—a private school affiliated with the United Methodist Church. Hmmm. Was the religious implication intentional? ([Watch the movie trailer.](#)) Leighton Meester, Cam Gigandet, Alyson Michalka, Billy Zane.

Also

Waiting for Forever romance set in Hollywood

Cold Weather forensics-type mystery drama

American Grindhouse documentary on the American Exploitation film genre





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

February 11



The Eagle (PG-13 for battle sequences and some disturbing images – Focus Features) The Roman Ninth Legion goes missing in the mountains of Scotland. Marcus Aquila, a centurion and the son of the Ninth Legion’s commander, heads past Hadrian’s Wall into uncharted Caledonia, a mysterious place filled with savages and peril. Marcus Aquila’s quest is to solve the mystery of his father’s

disappearance and to retrieve his emblem, the Eagle of the Ninth.

If well paced, this has the makings of a great adventure. Casting of Channing Tatum and, in particular, Donald Sutherland hint it may not be as good as it looks. ([Watch the movie trailer.](#)) Channing Tatum, Mark Strong, Jamie Bell, Donald Sutherland.

This is another in a string of Roman films made since *Gladiator*. Are these popular because we Americans see something of our Roman forbearers in ourselves?



Gnomeo and Juliet (G but contains cartoon nudity and violence – Walt Disney) *Romeo and Juliet* get animated as garden gnomes. Expect tons of puns and goofiness.

Something of note is the script has nine names connected to it. Nine people to write it. It took fewer people to fly to the moon. Like cooks in a kitchen, too many screenwriters *can* be a bad sign.

Also

Justin Bieber: Never Say Never documentary from his 2010 concert tour

Just Go With It crude Adam Sandler, Jennifer Aniston romantic comedy

Cedar Rapids comedy about an insurance salesman
No, really.





DVD RELEASES

February 1



Monsters (R for language – Vertigo Films) Some believe this film to be an unbelievable bore. To others it’s a haunting allegory of racial and national discord. One thing’s for sure, it leaves the audience with definite opinions. Made for \$800,000, it has done quite well for director Gareth Edwards.

After an alien invasion, a journalist tags along with a man traveling through the danger zone—tones of Andrei

Tarkovsky’s brilliant sci-fi classic, *Stalker*, and the recent films *District 9* and *The Road* come to mind. ([Watch the movie trailer.](#)) Whitney Able, Scoot McNairy.

I don’t think it’s accidental that as our civilization heads into certain but unknowable changes, our entertainment (be it television shows, movies, or books) becomes more and more apocalyptic. Zombie attacks, alien invasions, and plagues wipe out our country and force survivors to struggle to stay alive. These stories have always been with us, but there has been an obvious increase in the number of them produced since the 9/11 attacks.



Conviction (R for language, some violent images - Pantheon Entertainment) High school dropout Betty Anne works her way through law school so she can represent her brother, Kenny, who she believes has been wrongfully convicted of murder. This is the feature film directorial debut of Tony Goldwyn, grandson of Samuel Goldwyn—part of film industry royalty. Goldwyn is best known to Christian film audiences from his lead in the film [Joshua](#) (2002).

The premise of this film is a strong underdog story and the power of family. Given the cast, this just may be the film to look for this month. Hilary Swank, Sam Rockwell, Melissa Leo.

Also

Never Let Me Go coming-of-age romance

Let Me In vampire fantasy, horror

Welcome the Rileys much older man/younger woman drama





DVD RELEASES, continued

February 8



Life as We Know It (PG-13 for sexual material, language, some drug content – Village Roadshow) A situation comedy in which two single goofballs are named guardians of a little girl by the married couple who originally set the singles up on a blind date. The unlikely pair move in together to raise the child. Hilarity is supposed to ensue.

What does occur is more of entertainment’s deconstruction of the family unit. Given the state of the entertainment industry, though, should we be happy the two singles are opposite genders? Katherine Heigl, Josh Duhamel, Josh Lucas, Christina Hendricks.

You Again (PG for brief mild language - Touchstone) Heard the joke: Why were the 12 disciples all men? Because Jesus couldn’t find twelve women who could work together. Think that’s sexist? Then how about a chick flick where



all the women are jealous, vindictive, grudge-holding, and hyper-sensitive? Oh, that’s not sexist—it’s whimsical. Kristen Bell, Sigourney Weaver, Jamie Lee Curtis, Betty White.

And what’s with all the hoopla over Betty White? She’s just a dirty-minded old woman. Instead of modeling how to age with grace and wisdom, she seems hell-bent on raising lasciviousness to a virtue.

Also

For Colored Girls dramatic depictions of poems which explore women’s issues

It’s Kind of a Funny Story coming-of-age story about a clinically depressed teen

The Romantics romance/sex comedy

Paranormal Activity 2 horror





Culture Quote

“...in America, instead of making the audience come to the film, the idea seems to be for you to go to the audience. They come up with the demographics for the film and then the film is made and sold strictly to that audience. Not to say that it’s all bad, but it leaves a lot of the rest of us out of it. To me cinema can be a much more friendly world if there’s a lot of things to choose from.”¹

– Clint Eastwood
in the industry since 1955

actor - *The Bridges of Madison County, Space Cowboys, Million Dollar Baby, Gran Torino*

director - *The Bridges of Madison County, Mystic River, Million Dollar Baby, Flags of Our Fathers, Letters from Iwo Jima, Invictus, Gran Torino,*
and the upcoming **J. Edgar**,
scheduled for release in 2012

Scott’s Response

Eastwood is discussing how the current marketing culture, the disposable paradise (see page 7), stifles artistic expression and advancement.

Narrowly focused target markets force cultural tastes to change through a lack of options. What is interesting is that Eastwood is currently working on a biopic of J. Edgar Hoover,² and reports indicate that Eastwood’s film buys wholesale into unsubstantiated rumors of homosexuality and cross-dressing, even though these alleged elements of Hoover’s life are significantly out of character and far from proven—indeed, these accusations seem to have been propagated by the mobsters and Communists who swore themselves to be his enemy and were actively attempting to mock, discredit, and vilify Hoover.

Now Clint thinks it would be a “more friendly world if there’s a lot of things to choose from.” Does this friendly world include utilizing rumor and innuendo to smear a dead man? Is it a “friendly world” with lots

continued pg 7





Culture Quote, continued

continued from Scott's Response, pg 6

of options where salacious rumors are propagated by political enemies?

I sincerely doubt Hoover and I would see eye-to-eye on many things, but it irks me when someone complains about artistic restriction and, at the same time, uses so-called artistic license to perpetuate falsehoods and discredit or devalue another human being. ☹

Excerpt from *You Are What You See* on *The Disposable Paradise*³

The entertainment industry is just that, an industry. Warner Brothers, MGM, and Universal are companies no different than McDonalds, Burger King, or Coca-Cola—which indicates that those who own the studios are no longer in the business of making movies.

The marketing campaign for one product line bleeds into the campaign for another. Cross-marketing, corporate partnerships, and mergers combine to influence movie

release schedules and production lineups. This conflation of interests results in film products that look more like advertisements than stories.

Production studios and their ruling corporations are not some sly Big Brother that calculates its continued influence over our populace. They can make us neither stupid nor immoral. They can, however, tempt us with sexual imagery and show stupid heroes rewarded for imbecilic behavior. The issue for us little folk is that production studios create our modern myths, our folktales which explain to us our world.

Decisions over which films to release, what types of stories to tell, and what messages to impart are decisions generally not made by either artists or the people concerned with society as a whole. Those decisions too often reside with individuals whose only responsibility is to turn a profit. That fact, alone, reveals one of the major reasons why today's films cater less to Main Street and more to boosting ledger sheets—trumped, of course, by agenda-drivers, then the ledger sheets can take a close second place.

What happens when those corporations decide a society mired in conflict or populated with under-educated lemmings will provide them with a more docile consumer base? ☹





Christians are Insulted Enough No Need to Make Up Reasons to be Offended

by Scott Nehring

Speak to Christians about cinema for more than five minutes and you'll likely hear moaning over treatment by the secular media. With films such as *The Golden Compass* and *The Da Vinci Code*, complaints about theological bigotry seem to ring true.

Facing the Giants was a small-budget, Christian-focused film about a troubled football coach who turned to God for help. The film gained quick notoriety when it was nationally reported that the MPAA had given the family-friendly film a PG rating.

According to the film's producers, Alex and Stephen Kendrick,⁴ the MPAA told them the PG rating was warranted due to the film's frank religious content. The

MPAA admits to citing the film's religious message as being one of the original factors in their decision of a PG rather than a G rating, but the MPAA had other reasons, viable reasons for the rating, including the main character's open discussion of his infertility.

When this story of perceived bigotry hit *The Drudge Report* in June of 2006, Christian media went nuts. Across the Internet, columnists and bloggers, myself included, decried the horrible threat to our faith. U. S. Representative Roy Blunt (R-MO) stated,

This incident raises the disquieting possibility that MPAA considers exposure to Christian themes more dangerous for children than exposure to gratuitous sex and mindless violence.⁵

The commotion, however, stemmed from miscommunication between the film's producers and the MPAA. The MPAA was initially wrong to even broach the subject of theology; then, when the controversy blew up, the MPAA was forced to restate their decision and remove any references to the religious message of the film.

There is a basic lack of logic in the film's producers' expectations of a G-Rating. The main character

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continued from Christians are Insulted Enough, pg 8

talks about the usefulness of his genitalia, which alone should make the film a target for parental guidance.

The concern which surrounds the religious elements appears to be a simple case of an insensitive and clueless MPAA board member not being mindful of his words. But instead of handling this for what it was, a misunderstanding, the Christian media went wild with claims of bigotry and censorship where none existed.

The hoopla served the Kendrick brothers and provided priceless marketing that was certainly a factor in their film grossing millions at the box office. But let us move beyond the Kendrick Brothers, who were after all just releasing a movie, and examine the Christian subculture's reaction.

This situation reminds us we have to confront actual bigotry when it rears its head. Censorship should never be permitted. However, we must be careful not to become hypersensitive and carry on with perceived insults when none were intended. We are then merely being defensive—and we propagate a lie. ☹

Editor's Notes

February 1, [Chandler Birch and Christian Book Previews published their review](#) of Scott's book, *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*. Birch's review concludes with:

The cure, he proposes, is to know the two basic truths about film: that there can be God-honoring beauty in film, and that it is possible to watch a movie and learn something.

Despite the fact that his premise has huge potential to lead to a diatribe, Nehring steers clear of hypocritical finger-pointing, and his informal tone and vast knowledge of film history make this book into a fascinating and enlightening study.

He promises that, by the end of the book, his reader will be unable to watch movies in the same way ever again, and he keeps his word. By the end of this intelligent, entertaining book, cinema will never be the same; rather, it will be yet one more tool to learn about and glorify our God.





Culture Links

PAUL VERHOEVEN DISCUSSES HIS USE OF THE CHRIST IMAGE and the Christ figure to underscore the sacrificial nature of his hero in the hyper-violent, cynical, sci-fi flick *Robocop*.

[I've posted a video of Verhoeven discussing the issue.](#) Notice how he casually mentions the perversion of the Christ figure into a revenge-seeking killing machine as his “American Christ.” He uses the model of Jesus Christ as a means to deliver a political message.

Just because a character is modeled on Christ doesn't mean they are acting on His behalf. The Christ Pose is not Christ, Himself—it hijacks His image to tap into our collective understanding of his sacrifice. Christ, Himself, cannot be altered or torn down. but our perceptions of Him can be swayed, manipulated. Whether in film, books, or in discussion, simply referencing Christ does not equate to Christian faith or thinking.

PRODUCERS OF THE UPCOMING SUPERHERO MOVIE CAPTAIN America: The First Avenger will get a name change [for international audiences; it will simply be titled The First Avenger.](#) Even when it doesn't make sense, the industry will avoid showing anything positive about America to foreign markets.

[This sort of corporate cowardice has happened before.](#) If you recall, back in 2006 *Superman Returns* changed the famous line to “Truth, justice, and all that stuff.” We can't have those precious foreign markets hearing the scary “A” word, now can we?

Has anyone thought that one of the reasons why marketers are forced to be so wimpy about displaying anything American is because of the forty years of America-bashing done by Hollywood producers? Nah, must be coincidence.

IN THE WAKE OF THE TUCSON MEMORIAL, FRANKLIN GRAHAM (son of Rev. Billy Graham) states in a NewsMax article entitled [Franklin Graham: Spirit of Anti-Christ Is Everywhere](#), that not only was God mostly avoided in the memorail service but the name of Jesus Christ is actively being pulled out of all public discourse.

[J]ust mentioning the name Jesus Christ in the public square is increasingly frowned upon and [Graham] warns: “The spirit of anti-Christ is everywhere.”

In film, this is seen in the consistent reference to a general “god” while Jesus Christ is never mentioned, even by clergy. The sole exception is the recent exorcism film [The Rite](#).





Movie Watching Tip

Stealing Movies

Pirating movies may seem like a lark, a kick, a good idea—but it's not. Think it doesn't hurt anyone? Think again.

Copying movies or downloading them without paying for them is no different than walking out of a store with a DVD in your pocket. Even though the pirating is done electronically, it's still theft. You're still taking something without paying for it. And you're impacting someone's livelihood—the way they feed their family. Big stars make big dollars, but most people in filmmaking aren't 'big guys'; they're doing a job, trying to make it day-to-day just like you and me.

The bigger thing to remember is that theft is a sin. Know how to walk in God's love? *Want* to know? John 14:21 says that as we are obedient to God's commandments, we experience His love. In Exodus 20:6, God promises to build blessings into the lives of the people who love and obey Him. Then there's what we read in Romans 13:9:

For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

If we're going to reach people in the film industry for Christ, we must love them.

Is getting the latest movie a few days or weeks earlier than the guy next door really worth breaking the commandments of God?





At Rest

[Daniel 12:13](#)

Susannah York (1939–2011)

Actress



A British film, stage, and television actress who was appointed an Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. The award winning actress is best known for her prolific work in the 1960s in such films as *They Shoot Horses Don't They?* (1969), *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), and *Tom Jones* (1963). She continued to work for the rest of her life in numerous stage and film productions such as *Jane Eyre* (1970), *Superman* (1978), and *Franklyn* (2008).

She died of bone marrow cancer at the age of 72.

Bernd Eichinger (1949–2011)

Producer/Screenwriter



Bernd Eichinger was German-born and the Executive Director of Constantin Film. His varied career was responsible for some brilliant cinema, most notably *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*) which revealed the final day of Adolf Hitler in his bunker – later made famous by the popular [“Hitler Finds Out” Internet meme](#). Eichinger was also responsible for some corrosive productions (*Resident Evil*) and cheesy productions (*The Fantastic 4*).

Eichinger died of a heart attack at the age of 61.





ENDNOTES

1. [Internet Movie Database. Biographical page on Clint Eastwood. "Quotes"](#)
2. Eastwood is currently working on *J. Edgar*, scheduled for a 2012 release. Designated a "[b]iopic [i.e., biography] on FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, focusing on his scandalous career and controversial private life as a homosexual and rumored cross dresser;" it stars Leonardo DiCaprio as Hoover and Armie Hammer (*The Social Network*) as Hoover's lover ("It's not a kissing scene—it's a ton of kissing scenes,' [Armie, all smiles, told us](#) last night."). ([Internet Movie Database. J. Edgar.](#))
3. Excerpted from *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*. Chapter 7: The Disposable Paradise. Scott Nehring. RightLine Publishing. 2010. p 65-66.
4. I conducted the interview with Stephen Kendrick on February 3, 2009. My thoughts on the conversation were published as "[Fireproof's Stephen Kendrick Has Me Reconsidering Christian Film.](#)" February 4, 2009. GoodNewsFilmReviews.com.
5. Family unfriendly. [The Washington Times](#). Wednesday, June 28, 2006. Most recently accessed 2/1/2011.
6. Scott Nehring. *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*. RightLine Publishing. 2010. p 62.





Information

Learn more about Story. Buy the book: YouAreWhatYouSee.com.

Find Scott Nehring's latest film reviews: GoodNewsFilmReviews.com.

Scott is a film critic whose reviews have been published on a number of websites across the United States, Australia, and India including Reuters.com, USAToday.com, *The Chicago Times*, FoxNews.com, and a variety of local news stations across America.



As a former screenwriter, Scott is focused on balancing his love of story structure and cinema with his Christian faith. He loves to teach film studies to Christians, showing them how to read films and how to deal with the sometimes thorny subject of engaging modern culture.

Scott was a co-founder of the [Catholic Media Review](http://CatholicMediaReview.com). His current reviews can be found at [Good News Film Reviews](http://GoodNewsFilmReviews.com) and at ChristianCinema.com.

Good News Film Reviews (GNFR) was established in June 2007 to discuss film and culture from a Christian perspective. From the first post onward, Scott has called for Christians to change both the way they view film and how they engage in culture. GNFR fell quiet following a short sabbatical, was re-launched in January 2008, and has been going strong since. GNFR is also home site for the Carnival of Cinema, a bi-weekly collection of film-related posts submitted from around the world. The Carnival of Cinema has been in operation since September 2006.

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