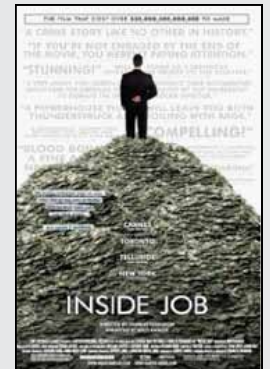




Movies and Culture Report

The Post-Oscar Push





THEATRICAL RELEASES

March 4



The Adjustment Bureau (PG-13 for language, violence, some sexuality – Universal) Matt Damon stars as a man confronted by the forces of fate—literal forces, as in men in suits—who work to keep him on the journey planned for him and, therefore, away from the unexpected love of his life. Matt Damon, Emily Blunt, Lisa Thoreson, Anthony Mackie, Jon Stewart.

“Do we control our own fate?” Watered down, this is a film that asks that question. Expect the answer to be “Yes!” since Hollywood, and therefore our culture, is dominated by the existential concept that man creates his own journey, his own universe and meaning. This will probably not be a favorite flick for Calvinists.

Interesting question: Why didn't the men in suits foresee his jumping off their pre-ordained path?



Rango (PG for low-brow and sexual humor, mild language – Paramount Pictures) A chameleon takes up the role as Sheriff in the run-down, lawless Western town of Dirt. ([Watch the movie trailer.](#)) Johnny Depp, Isla Fisher, Ned Beatty, Bill Nighy, Stephen Root, Harry Dean Stanton, Timothy Olyphant.

Remember back in the old days when a cartoon meant it was made for kids? Many parents probably are looking forward to taking their small children to this movie. You may want to hold off and see the film yourself before taking the young'uns.

The film is about Rango, a chameleon, who takes on the role of Sheriff of Dirt (Get it? chameleon—takes on). This seems harmless enough. The problem lies in the dark content filled with discussions and jokes about death and

continued pg 3





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

murder, with mild cursing and sexual humor. There's also a plot thread about a dwindling water supply, so the topic of resources depletion is covered. If that isn't an issue for you, also consider the intense marketing campaign this picture has had *and* how strongly they've emphasized the involvement of Johnny Depp—a great actor, but not a role model I want for my children.

Also

Take Me Home Tonight aimless college grad, wild weekend, sex, drugs, set in the 1980s—need more?

Beastly adaptation of “Beauty and the Beast” set in New York

Abel a fantasy-minded little boy feels he must fill the role of his absent father—then, after two years, Dad returns home; Mexican production

I Saw the Devil crime thriller/horror; a man seeks to avenge the death of his wife; South Korean production

March 11



Battle: Los Angeles (PG-13 for intense violence, war sequences and language – Sony Pictures) Aliens invade Los Angeles ([Watch the movie trailer.](#)) Aaron Eckhart, Michelle Rodriguez, Michael Peña, Bridget Moynahan.

Notice the invasion must happen in L. A. If aliens landed in Berkley or San Francisco, it's possible no one would notice. If people did know, I don't think most would be overly motivated to stop them. “Let me know when they get down to Santa Cruz or up to Chino.”

Plenty of early buzz over this production, and it certainly looks like a potential big hit. If you see it, watch for the Death of God Image at the beginning of the invasion. Don't know what the Death of God Image is? Read my book [You Are What You See](#), page 49. Okay, commercial over.

Interesting that as our society slides into difficult times economically and socially, there's a rise in alien invasion and other end-of-the-world plotlines. Sometimes art may reflect society's thinking.





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued



Mars Needs Moms (PG for action sequences – Walt Disney Pictures) A boy learns to appreciate his mother more after she is kidnapped by Martians who need Earth women to raise the Martians brood. ([Watch the movie trailer.](#)) Seth Green, Dan Fogler, Joan Cusack, Tom Everett Scott.

Apparently dads aren't needed.

This could have some good, pro-family elements to it. The trailer, however, doesn't inspire much confidence that this will be a must-see production.

Also

Kill the Irishman docudrama; true story of 1970s Irish thug, Danny Greene, who worked for Cleveland mobsters; Ray Stevenson, Christopher Walken, Vincent D'Onofrio

Red Riding Hood fantasy/horror; medieval village haunted by a werewolf; Gary Oldham plays werewolf hunter Father Solomon; Canadian production





DVD RELEASES

March 1



127 Hours (R for language and disturbing violent content - Fox Searchlight) Danny Boyle's Oscar-nominated film about mountaineer Aron Ralston's torturous ordeal. Ralston is stranded and struggles for life. James Franco also received an Oscar nomination for his performance as Ralston.

One of the things I found interesting about this production was the marketing. Ralston's is a grizzly tale—one most people don't want to experience even on screen. That in mind, trailers avoided the more gruesome aspects of the story and focused on the whimsical, adventurous flirtation between Ralston and the girls before his accident. As news reports told during Ralston's real-life ordeal, he was forced to amputate his own arm with a dull knife. In the trailers, that tiny detail is intentionally minimized.

When you see a film you think looks good, note the rating. If it's R, it's wise to do a little research and find out why.



What If... (PG—Jenkins Entertainment) Ben Walker abandons his ministry and girlfriend to pursue a business opportunity. Mike the Angel shows Walker how his life *could* have been if he had stayed. Kevin Sorbo, Kristy Swanson, John Ratzenberger, Debby Ryan.

Seems to be a Christian rework of *It's a Wonderful Life* and many others like it. At first blush, I'm hesitant to consider this given the apparently derivative plot, but it's directed by Dallas Jenkins and I know he "gets it"—he's a Christian filmmaker who understands that we do not improve our standing in the arts by making schlock.

For Jenkins' thoughts on Christian film, check out his article at [Big Hollywood](#).





DVD RELEASES, continued

Also

Burlesque Cher and Christina Aguilera's chance to strut

Faster Dwayne Johnson shoot-'em-up

Love & Other Drugs Jake Gyllenhaal, Anne Hathaway, and "free" sex—based on the book *Hard Sell: The Evolution of a Viagra Salesman*

March 8



Exit Through the Gift Shop (R for language – Paranoid Pictures, Banksy) Documentary on Banksy, perhaps the best known American artist of his generation. Well, kind of. He is an anonymous artist who is best known for his visually arresting graffiti. He has gained a great deal of attention, notably for his humorous, culturally referential works. He also is a sharp self-marketer. The film was nominated for the Oscar for Best Documentary.

Graffiti, even outstanding and beautiful graffiti, is still an act of defacement and theft. It is theft because it forces someone, either private or public, to expend money and resources to remove the unwanted artistic expression. It steals resources from one person to supply the desires of others.

Banksy and the other street artists are talented and produce some interesting works, but the side-effects of their efforts are important to keep in mind.





DVD RELEASES, continued



Inside Job (PG-13 for some drug and sexual content - Representational Pictures) The 2011 winner of the Oscar for Best Documentary. An exploration of the cause of the economic meltdown of 2008. Narrated by Matt Damon.

This film is directed by Charles Ferguson who also made the anti-Iraq War documentary *No End in Sight: Iraq's Descent Into Chaos*, and the narrator,

Matt Damon, is very active in his leftist political beliefs. Not exactly the kind of folks from whom an audience should expect to receive a reasoned, fair hearing on such a politically charged topic.

The fact Hollywood cherishes this film is also quite telling.

Also

The Next Three Days Russel Crowe crime drama

Morning Glory star-filled cast playing at TV news; styled a romantic comedy

Jackass 3 docu-comedy; yep, they made a third one

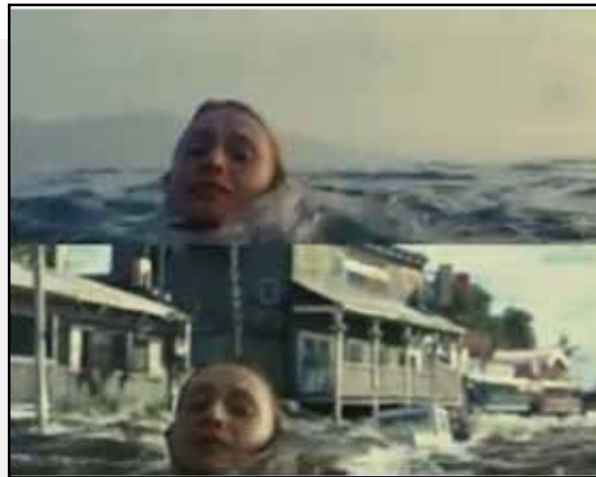




Culture Links

SLASHFILM.COM HAS POSTED AN INTERESTING LOOK AT THE VISUAL EFFECTS IN CLINT EASTWOOD'S FILM, *HEREAFTER*.

It's important for consumers of movies to see and understand the extent to which modern filmmakers can manipulate reality. Just because you see something, doesn't mean it actually happened—even tears.



RELEVANT MAGAZINE HAS AN ARTICLE FROM ALEX WILGUS questioning if and when Christian artists should use violence in their projects.

The question isn't whether or not these films use violence responsibly. It is: How do you wake someone up to the madness of the human condition after sitting through *Kill Bill* and *Bruno*? One could argue any of these films use violence "well," but it's impossible to get away from the fact that everybody is doing it. Extreme content is a drop in the bucket these days,

and it must escalate in order to break through the audience's toughening skin. Once salt has lost its flavor, how can it become salty again?

[Editor's Note: for further discussion on the appropriate use of questionable content in film, read [You Are What You See](#), Ch 26: Purpose, Truth, and Content.]

CHARLES HAMBRICK-STOWE HAS A QUICK BUT worthy article about a brewing genre he calls The Washed-Up Geezer Redemption Film, showing how Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino* (2008), Mickey Rourke's *The Wrestler* (2008), Jeff Bridges' *Crazy Heart* (2009), and *Red* (2010), showcasing "a wrinkled-but-buff Bruce Willis along with Morgan Freeman, John Malkovich, and Helen Mirren, looking hot at 63 as she hefts outsize automatic weapons."

And, of course, there was *The Expendables* with Stallone. Stowe shows how each of these films exhibit predictable similarities as well as interesting variations on his theme.

Can the last hurrahs of Baby Boomers hold a lesson for film audiences?





Culture Quote

This excerpt from the movie *Fight Club* sums up very well the result of buying into the entertainment industry's Disposable Paradise.¹ Once people learn they have been lured into wasting their lives on nonsense and empty dreams, they are left with only anger, bitterness, and, too often, hopelessness.

Tyler Durden: Man, I see in fight club the strongest and smartest men who've ever lived. I see all this potential, and I see squandering.

*&!% it, an entire generation pumping gas, waiting tables—slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy *&!% we don't need.

We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War, no Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war; our Great Depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars. But we won't—and we're slowly learning that fact—and we're very, very pissed off.²

1. See [You Are What You See](#), Chapter 7: The Disposable Paradise.

2. Screenplay by Jim Uhls, adapted from the novel *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk. 1999, 20th Century Fox.





The Oscars Are Tarnished

by Scott Nehring

Last week the 83rd Annual Academy Awards program was condemned by *The Hollywood Reporter's* Tim Goodman as “one of the worst Oscar telecasts in history.”¹

Anyone who struggled to sit through the stumbling bore of a show certainly understands how he reached that conclusion.

Hosts were a pair of young actors, Anne Hathaway and James Franco, who seemed clearly overwhelmed by the challenge of their gig. The nominees—other than possibly Jennifer Lawrence for Best Actress (*Winter's Bone*) or Hailee Steinfeld for Best Supporting Actress (*True Grit*)—offered no one to root for. The winners certainly offered no surprises, and the whole presentation, when it wasn't an awkward yawn-fest, was perfunctory and ultimately needless.

Each year it seems the Oscars, indeed all entertainment awards ceremonies, becomes more blatantly frivolous. For the past few years, I assumed it was simply my cranky, aging self becoming

more and more curmudgeonly. While that is certainly at play, this season's Oscars show revealed it wasn't just me who could not care less; the industry could not care less either.

The Hollywood of today is a tired and rundown replica of what was once a bounty of cinematic icons, glamorous starlets, and classy leading men. While even the historic Oscars emphasized a drastic decline of the industry, with each passing year that descent becomes more obvious.

Throughout the 2011 show, images appeared and references were made to the true greats of the cinema. The obligatory obituary sequence, likewise, reminisced about the performers, directors, writers, and creators who built the industry our generation of filmmakers has allowed to fall into disrepair.

True, the most recent generations in Hollywood often create works more sophisticated than their forbearers. The Coen Brothers' remake of the John Wayne classic *True Grit* clearly displays this advancement. The Coen's version has a more dramatic, intellectual approach. The film's lead, Jeff Bridges as Rooster Cogburn, provides a more detailed, layered performance than Wayne delivered. At issue, though, is that no matter how intelligent and well-crafted the film may be, it is still the revision of a classic piece of cinema and cannot replace the original. Bridges may have given new life to Cogburn, but it was the iconic Wayne who brought him to life in the first place. The Coen's version is a well-made film, but it is still a copy.

The problem revealed in this season's Oscar presentations was the lack of star power—that sense of grandeur has

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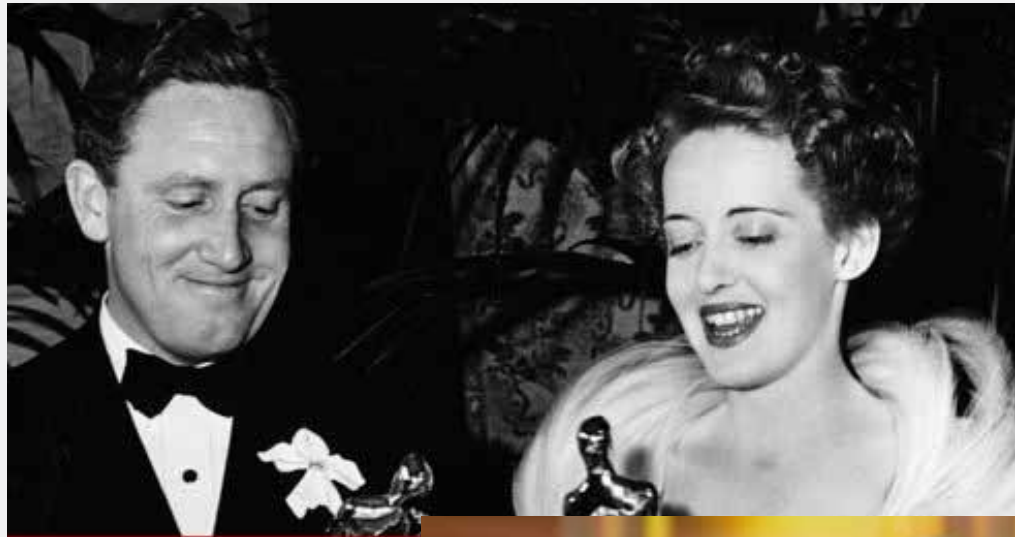


continued from The Oscars are Tarnished, pg 10

been lost, the thrill that was the glittering world of Hollywood has soiled its glisten. Natalie Portman is attractive, but is she truly talented? Others, such as Mark Ruffalo, are talented, but they offer little inspiration and gain little respect. The industry functions for those who use it, but the shine is gone.

So as we read about how lousy this season's awards exhibition was, we must ask ourselves why it matters. The first fifty or sixty Oscar events did not rely on the hosts to make them interesting; it was the flash of the classy stars, the witty, charming remarks from the podium, and the glitz of an evening which held audiences enrapt.

That was generations ago. Like the shiftless, spoiled trust fund heirs who squander the family fortune, most of today's entertainment elite laze through the accolades, soak in the spotlight, and give little back to the audiences who support them. 📺



Photos:

Above - Spencer Tracy, Best Actor Oscar for *Boys Town*, and Bette Davis, Best Actress Oscar for *Jezebel*. 1938.

Right - 2011 Academy Awards hosts, Anne Hathaway and James Franco.





Movie Watching Tip

Forks in the Road

When a character is presented with contrasting moral choices, it is a best practice for movie-watchers to pay close attention.

Screenwriters, producers, and directors deliver myriad moral statements through the actions of their hero. We learn the lessons they put in front of us as we watch their hero perform those acts then witness the results of those choices.

When Detective Mills mulls over whether he should execute the serial killer, John Doe (*Se7en*), or Batman ponders whether he should kill The Joker (*The Dark Knight*), we are, by extension, also faced with that dilemma. When the hero punches a bad guy, steals a car, or lies and is rewarded for his effort, it alters our perceptions of social mores.

If the hero makes a choice which is starkly different from established morality, be careful; the filmmaker may be attempting to persuade you to reconsider your own moral standards and beliefs.





At Rest [Daniel 12:13](#)

Jane Russell (1921–2011)

Actress, activist



One of the classic sex symbols of Hollywood, Jane Russell was introduced to audiences in Howard Hugh's *The Outlaw*. Her acting career peaked when she co-starred opposite Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Privately, Ms Russell was a Christian and became a pro-life advocate after an abortion nearly killed her and left her unable to bear children. Her struggle led her to adopt three

children and to found the World Adoption International Fund in 1955. She also started the Hollywood Christian Group, a weekly Bible study for Christians in the film industry which she hosted in her home.³

Ms Russell died of respiratory failure at the age of 89.

3. Silver screen star Jane Russell, abortion sufferer and pro-life advocate, dies at 89. Kathleen Gilbert. www.LifeSiteNews.com.

Perry Moore (1971–2011)

Producer

The openly homosexual executive producer of the recent *Chronicles of Narnia* film series, Moore was also in charge of producing the powerful film *I am David* and the 2010 documentary on the life of children's book author and illustrator Maurice Sendak. Perry was also the author of *Hero*, a novel about a homosexual teenage superhero for which he won a Lambda Literary Award.



Moore was said to be a Christian who spoke publicly about his faith. He died at the age of 39 from an alleged drug overdose. The night prior to his death, it is reported, he called his family with the news he had just secured financing for the fourth Narnia movie, *The Magician's Nephew*.⁴

4. Virginia Beach native and 'Narnia' producer, Perry Moore, found dead at 39. WTKR-TV3.





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, USA Today.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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