



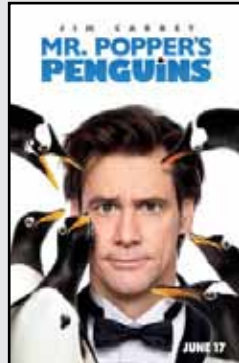
Movies and Culture Report

NEW:

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Can We Put Aside



Childish Things?

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THEATRICAL RELEASES

June 17



Green Lantern (PG-13 for violence and action) A test pilot is granted a mystical, green ring that gives him otherworldly powers and membership in a universal peace-keeping force. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Ryan Reynolds, Mark Strong, Blake Lively, Peter Sarsgaard, Temuera Morrison.

Good news, Ryan Reynolds—you get to star in a big budget superhero movie.

Bad news—you're playing Green Lantern.

I think we all know this signals, hopefully, the studios are coming to the end of the superhero movie genre. Well, this production plus the fact they're re-launching the X-Men and Spider-Man franchises.

Superhero movies are the cinematic equivalent of riding a Tilt-a-Whirl: it's fun, but ultimately it's for the kiddies. It is unfortunate that great numbers of full-grown adults will go out of their way to see this kind of film on opening night.

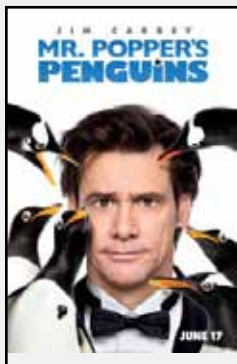
Adults, predominately men even into their mid-thirties, aren't ashamed to play with cinematic toys. That says something about our culture.

And then there's the whole "universal peace-keeping force" thing. Shades of "Sure, we'd love to become just another cog in the United Nations blue-beret world"? I don't see that going over any time soon, either, but that doesn't keep the powers-that-be from trying.





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued



Mr. Popper's Penguins (Not Yet Rated)
A businessman inherits six penguins and transforms his NYC apartment into a winter wonderland. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Jim Carrey, Carla Gugino, Angela Lansbury, Philip Baker Hall.

Thinking that it may be nice to bring the kiddies to an adaptation of a classic children's book? You may want to look elsewhere.

Beyond actor Jim—"I made my career by literally talking out of my anus"—Carrey, note that the screenplay is written by the same team who wrote *Hot Tub Time Machine* and *Sex Drive*. Then there's also the pushing of the Global Warming hoax and plenty of scatological humor—one of the penguins is named Stinky and someone gets penguin excrement squirted in the face. Flatulence and poop jokes all around!

The aware audience member won't be shocked that the studios can't adapt an innocent children's book without soiling it with filth and agendas.

At some point we need to take a serious look at what we're doing to our children. What are we teaching them? What is it about us, as a culture, which refuses to allow them to have their own things? To maintain their innocence?

[One on-line review](#) states:

Adults might have to stretch their patience to accommodate the level of absurdity inherent with the improbability and impracticality of a New York businessman raising six penguins in his apartment, but **Mr. Popper's Penguins isn't really meant for the discerning viewer.** ... and the parallel of a familial bond with the unity of a waddle of penguins isn't the **worst** moral message one could offer young kids.

Well, maybe not the **worst**, but wouldn't it be refreshing to see such creativity and financial backing produce something both entertaining and artfully unsullied?





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

Also

Kidnapped horror thriller; Spanish production; family taken hostage in their own home turn the tables on their kidnapers

The Art of Getting By teenage romance; “The purpose of birth is to die so why bother putting in any effort in life?” Three guess whether or not this production will actually provide any profound or realistic answers to the question.

Buck documentary of a cowboy who more than gentles horses, he reconciles people; “There’s no wisdom worth having that isn’t hard won.” ([Facebook page with trailer.](#))





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

June 24



Cars 2 (Not Rated) Star race car Lightning McQueen and his pal Mater head overseas for the World Grand Prix. The road to the championship is bumpy as Mater gets caught in an adventure with international espionage. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Owen Wilson, Larry the Cable Guy, Michael Caine, Cheech Marin, Joe Mantegna, John Ratzenberger.

Pixar is golden. Except for *A Bug's Life*, they have spotlessly delivered not only family-friendly but perfectly constructed films. The screenplays for *The Incredibles* and *WALL-E* are admirably comparable to any live-action film.

I have some trepidation about this goofy looking sequel merely from the fact the producers are already making huge money from the licensing (toys, beach towels, posters, Kleenex, etc.). My reservations are eased simply because this is a Pixar product. Their track record speaks for itself, so this may well be fun summer viewing for the whole family.

Why does Pixar succeed when so many production companies fail? They have respect. They respect their audience and they respect themselves. Their productions are built with care.

Often movies produced for children are created haphazardly. The plots are slapped together and often illogical or simply stupid. The language is rudimentary; the humor includes scatological and adult themes.

Pixar carefully crafts works that are appropriate for children and also treat them as if they have functional brains. Much can be learned from these folks.





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued



Bad Teacher (R for sexual content, nudity, language, some drug use) Raunchy, foul-mouthed middle school teacher must find another sugar daddy. Cameron Diaz, Jason Segel, Justin Timberlake, John Michael Higgins, Lucy Punch.

Since a lax, casual culture has become pervasive in our public schools, this storyline does not seem at all outside the realm of possibility. But at a time when female teacher/male student sex scandals have become commonplace (a standard for late night talk-show jokes), can our culture withstand this piling on?

The apple on the desk is telling. First, and most obviously, the “Eat me” note. Nice. What a delightful message to post on your ad. For Christians, the use of the apple has a double meaning. Go ahead, bite the apple being offered here—see if it improves your life.

Also

Conan O’Brien Can’t Stop behind-the-scenes documentary of the comedian as he works through his anger over losing *The Tonight Show*

A Better Life drama; gardener in East L.A. struggles to keep his son away from gangs and immigration agents while traveling across town to perform landscaping work for the city’s wealthy landowners

General Orders No. 9 “a breathtakingly poetic meditation on the state of Georgia and its cultural, moral and geographical birthright ... historical maps, architectural artifacts, lyrical narration and exquisite landscape cinematography ... synthesizing imagery and iconography vital to reconciling the cultural and territorial identity of Georgia, and by proxy the entire American South.”





DVD RELEASES

June 21



The Adjustment Bureau (PG-13 for brief strong language, some sexuality, a violent image) Matt Damon, Emily Blunt, Natalie Carter, Anthony Mackie. ([Watch the trailer.](#))

Matt Damon stars as a man chased by literal agents of fate. Damon's character strives to break free of his predestined path and forge his own identity.

This is typical existential stuff. It purports that we are not directed by fate or God or any other external force, rather we are agents of our own free will who create our own path, meaning, and values.

That all sounds great until you start thinking about it. If the only defining aspect of humanity is our free will external of any Higher Being, then we are, likewise, superior to any moral code beyond what suits our needs. It is reduced-vision philosophy such as this that tumbles men into nihilism. Not good.

For an alternative regarding the sovereignty of God, see this [blogpost](#).



Unknown (PG-13 for some intense sequences of violence and action, brief sexual content) Liam Neeson, January Jones, Diane Kruger, Bruno Ganz, Frank Langella, Aidan Quinn. ([Watch the trailer.](#))

Dr. Martin Harris (Liam Neeson) wakes from a coma to discover someone has taken his identity. He fights (violently, of course) to prove he is who he says he is.

What is identity? How are we defined? By our own self-identification or by others' view of us?

This storyline dovetails with the plot of *The Adjustment Bureau*, above. Is man the result of himself, or of forces outside of his own mind?

These are interesting questions, therefore it is critical for us to pay attention during the film's final act to uncover exactly where the film relates its answer. This will tell us what messages are being delivered by the filmmakers.





DVD RELEASES, continued

Also

The Eagle adventure drama; young Roman soldier endeavors to honor his father's memory

Cedar Rapids comedy; Small-town salesman Tim "is about to get a kick-start because, for the first time in his 34 years, he's headed to a 'major' metropolis - Cedar Rapids, Iowa - where he must try to save his company at a do-or-die insurance convention that, for him, will be entirely nonconventional; The hotel wedding that Tim and his friends crash is for two women. Same-sex marriage has been legal in the state of Iowa since April 3, 2009, when the Iowa Supreme Court unanimously upheld a lower court's ruling that there was no legitimate governmental interest in denying gay and lesbian Iowa citizens civil marriage licenses." (from [imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com))

It didn't take today's culture brokers long to capitalize on what a great thing Iowa's voters did for them. Lots of laughs, huh?





DVD RELEASES, continued

June 28



Sucker Punch (PG-13 for thematic material involving sexuality, violence, combat sequences, language) Emily Browning, Jena Malone, Jamie Chung, Carla Gugino, Jon Hamm. ([Watch the trailer.](#))

Even more self-creation stuff. A teenage girl suffers abuse in a mental asylum. She escapes into a fantasy world she has created in her own mind. Which is more real to her—the fantasy or the horrors of reality? While fantasy is always fun to watch, it's a great delivery system for worldview.

We often find the fake world of the film to be presented as comparable or even superior to the real world. Then comes the eventual questioning of which world is actually real (think *The Matrix*). This blurring of the line between reality and fantasy promotes, often subconsciously, the idea that our world is defined not by established rules and shared experiences, but by the perceptions of the individual. If there

are no shared experiences, there is no shared morality or expectations. Again, man is left to fend for himself. He defines the universe as he sees fit, and his moral beliefs become situational rather than stabilizing.





DVD RELEASES, continued



Season of the Witch (PG-13 for thematic elements, violence, disturbing content) Nicolas Cage, Ron Perlman, Stephen Campbell Moore, Robert Sheehan, Christopher Lee. ([Watch the trailer.](#))

A young girl is accused of being a witch who is causing a plague. Two Teutonic knights (Cage and Perlman) are tasked with taking the girl to a monastery for

trial. Along the way, predictable things happen until these things are interrupted by the predictable ending.

Shocks of shocks, the religious leaders are hard-nosed and brutish. The disillusioned knights (who deserted a Crusade) are the deliverers of wisdom and justice.

When I was a child, knights were the good guys who did good things. Since the 1960s, that has slowly changed until, now, if a character is a knight he can still be good but must desert his post, turn on his leaders, or openly show remorse for the terrible evils he has done in the line of duty.

The same can be said for the way modern-day knights—our soldiers, airmen, seamen, and marines—are presented in today’s stories. Filmmakers should be ashamed.

Also

Barney’s Version drama; “a ride through the life and memories of Barney Panofsky, a hard-drinking, cigar-smoking, foulmouthed 65-year old hockey fanatic and television producer”

Beastly drama/fantasy/romance; “modern-day take on ‘Beauty and the Beast’”

Warrior’s Way action/fantasy/western; “A warrior-assassin is forced to hide in a small town in the American Badlands after refusing a mission.”

Beneath Hill 60 drama/history/war; “extraordinary, true story of Oliver Woodward and his secret platoon of Australian tunnelers who go deep beneath WWI German lines. to defend a leaking, labyrinthine tunnel system packed with enough high explosives to change the course of the War”; Australian production





Culture Links

Joanne Kaufman [gives us an opinion essay on Oprah](#) in the *Wall Street Journal*:

To watch Oprah, who just wrapped up 25 years of syndicated pastoral work - her last hour of power, number 4,561, aired Wednesday - was to be part of a congregation of true believers.

Oprah was nothing if not a secular chapel. Countless celebs and civilians came on to confess their sins, to push their *mea-culpa* memoirs, and to seek absolution or redemption (good for the soul and for ratings). Some of the acolytes, that is to say guests, like psychologist Phil McGraw, heart surgeon Mehmet Oz, Food Network star Rachel Ray, and interior designer Nate Berkus, became the anointed.

Ask yourself: How was your thinking, your morality and spiritual base-line affected by “pastor” Oprah? Her phenomenal marketing wizardry has affected us all, whether or not we acknowledge or even realize that fact.

Aerosmith's Steven Tyler [expresses his pain and regret over having aborted a child](#) back in 1976.

It was a big crisis. It's a major thing when you're growing something with a woman, but they convinced

us that it would never work out and would ruin our lives. ... You go to the doctor and they put the needle in her belly and they squeeze the stuff in and you watch. And it comes out dead. I was pretty devastated. In my mind, I'm going, *Jesus, what have I done?* [[Here's another helpful link on this subject.](#)]

His girlfriend and mother of this child, Julie Holcomb, relates:

[H]e must have been traumatized witnessing the death of his first-born son in such a horrific and direct way. Steven watched the baby come out and he told me later ... that it had been born alive and allowed to die. Steven told me later that it had been a boy and that he now felt terrible guilt and a sense of dread over what he had done. I could not imagine a world where a tiny baby could be born alive and tossed aside as worthless without ever seeing his mother's face.

Interesting to see someone this “big” seem to acknowledge the abortion was wrong. Maybe that accounts for his tenderness now during *American Idol* interviews when people talk about their special-needs children or about losing a child. Pray he will remember those emotions and use his celebrity status to impact our culture for life.





Culture Quote

The costumed superhero has survived since 1938, constantly shifting in tone from decade to decade to reflect the fears and the needs of the audience. The current mainstream popularity of the superhero has, I think, a lot to do with the fact that the Terror-stricken, environmentally-handicapped, overpopulated, paedophile-haunted world that's being peddled by our news media is crying out for utopian role models and for any hopeful images of humankind's future potential!

– *Superman* writer, Grant Morrison who
“began mixing science fiction and left-leaning politics in late seventies Glasgow”

from [The Big Issue in Scotland](#). 06-17-11

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“All other heroes are merely faded copies of Jesus. My children put on my boots and stomp around the house; in the same way, we dress up our heroes in Jesus' traits and pretend to touch divinity. This may explain why we insist our heroes be more than just normal people. They are extra-ordinary. They are super-human, more like God than like us, and they tell us how to live.... Our opinions of what God should act like, the concepts of what we consider heroic, are within us for a reason and that is to give us the ability to identify God when He reveals Himself to us.” - Scott Nehring, *You Are What You See*, 172, 182



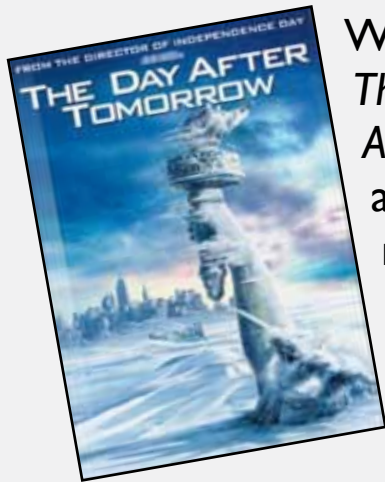


Movie Watching Tip

Who is the Villain?

One good way to identify a film's agenda is to recognize what type person the villain is.

One way filmmakers slip agendas into their movies is by identifying the villain of their story with a particular group of people. While it's obvious that all groups (and individuals within those groups) are capable of evil, it's common for the villain of a film to be representative of a political, social, religious, or philosophical segment of society. In this way, the villain represents a way of thinking, and a filmmaker can use a broad brush to characterize those groups or ideas with which he disagrees.



When a filmmaker identifies the villain with a political party (usually Republican—*The Contender*), job (usually corporate executive—*Wall Street*, *Michael Clayton*, *Aliens*), or social group (usually Christian—*Kinsey*, *Footloose*, *Stigmata*) he is allowed to paint all people within that sphere with the villainous acts of the movie's bad guy.

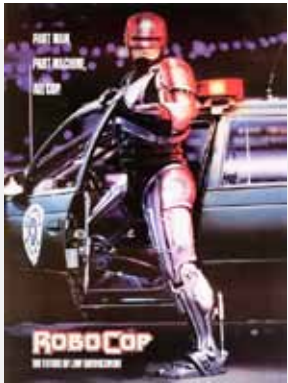
Examples of this type of targeted characterization are found in *The Day After Tomorrow* where the Republicans are the ones responsible for not helping in

continued pg 14





MOVIE WATCHING TIP, continued



the face of catastrophic polar ice cap melting; also in *Robocop* where the corporate leaders are worse than the crime boss and his murderous thugs.

When you are introduced to a villain, pause and consider their role in society. Do they have a prominent role in politics, business, or culture? What is said about their occupation, their identifying philosophy? And why is that considered to be evil?

Another great example of how the characteristics of a villain can paint a whole people-group with broad strokes is *Deliverance*. It has become second nature in today's culture for big-city people to liken the average, small-town man of questionable employment and hygiene as being just like the seething rednecks who ordered Ned Beatty to "Squeal like a pig!" and taunted Jon Voight with "You have a real pretty mouth, don't ya?"

Think about how often these quotes and many others have been tossed around. Realize they are assigned to men who have merely lived a simple life in an out of the way place. Such stereotyping might make the filmmaker's job easier but it should be considered just shy of libelous—and should alert a discerning movie audience to the real intents of the film's makers. 📺





IS PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN CHRISTIAN?!

by Scott Nehring

This is why I get irritated with so many online film critics.

[Nate of Randumblog.com](http://NateofRandumblog.com) recommends *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* because “Blackbeard’s ship contained a Christian missionary who actually lived his faith.” Ack! Wrong!

(* SPOILER WARNING *) There is a Christian missionary on the ship who espouses Christian ideals. The problem is *he chucks it all away* for a damp mermaid. Not quite Christian is it—that inter-species dating thing?

If I hear another Christian try to pry biblical meaning out of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, I’ll scream. Just because you’re a Christian and you like something doesn’t mean you have to pretend it’s more wholesome than it really is.

Listen to me: there’s nothing Christian about these films. They’re all fronted by a lying, stealing, drunkard pirate who jokes about murdering and raping. If that doesn’t make you ponder the (lack of) biblical values of these films, how does this suit you:

Here is the official poster for *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*. See, we have Captain Jack Sparrow looking cool.



But wait. What’s that hanging to the left of his beard? Let’s take a closer look...



It’s the Islamic Star and Crescent. Now why is that there?





Wait a minute. It's on all the posters for the movie.



Sharp viewers may remember that Sparrow claims to carry multiple symbols to cover himself 'just in case.' One problem: that was in an earlier movie. Let's take a look at the old *Pirates of the Caribbean* logo, back when it was narratively relevant to have such a symbol, and compare it to the symbol for *On Stranger Tides*.



No Islamic coin.



Zoinks! There it is.

Even if Sparrow's claim to carry multiple symbols to cover any eventuality is truly part of who he is, where is the cross or the Star of David? The ankh or the Lotus? Why use just that one?

Perhaps it's a result of some simple history. You see, Jack Sparrow is loosely (very loosely) based on an English pirate named John Ward who was also known as Yusuf Reis because he was a Muslim. Ward/Reis was a Barbary Pirate in the early 17th Century.

That's all well and good, but it doesn't explain why the filmmakers would insert the symbol into *On Stranger Tides*, especially since the longer Depp portrays the character, the less resemblance he bears to any obscure historical figure. It also doesn't explain why Sparrow doesn't sport the symbol in any of the previous movies.

Remember, the image on the poster is no more accidental than Depp's mascara. It's there for a reason.

I don't know about you, but this raises a huge red flag for me, particularly when such a production can have a lasting impact on my children. 📺





At Rest

[Daniel 12:13](#)



Laura Ziskin (1950–2011)

Producer

Laura Ziskin was a groundbreaking figure in the film world. Her ascension into the upper echelons of the industry was an inspiring feat for many women. She helped produce some of the biggest movies over the past thirty years, including *The Eyes of Laura Mars*, *No Way Out*, *Pretty Woman*, *What About Bob?*, *Hero*, *To Die For*, and *As Good As it Gets*. She is best known for producing the Spider-Man trilogy which became the highest grossing film franchise in Sony Picture Entertainment's history.

Diagnosed with Stage-3 breast cancer in 2004, Ms Ziskin became an advocate for cancer patients and created the Stand Up to Cancer fundraisers which ran on all three networks.





“Scott Nehring has created a wonderful mix of history, story structure, and discussion **important to people of faith** who are film students, industry insiders, culture creators and **those who analyze film without checking their minds, ethics and morals at the door.**” - John Bucher, instructor, L.A. Film School

Information

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

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

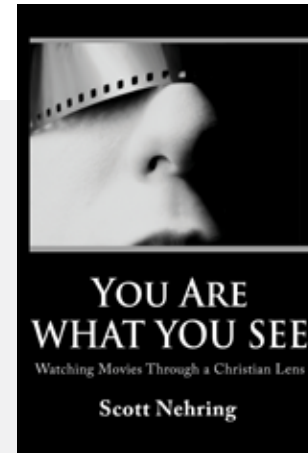
Scott is an award-winning screenwriter and film critic whose reviews have been published on a number of websites across the United States, Australia, and India including Reuters.com, USA Today.com, *The Chicago Times*, FoxNews.com, and a variety of local news stations across America.



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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