

Laina with Late April Movies
Posted On:December 31, 1969

Laina At the Movies
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Late April 2014

Draft Day

I have to admit that in all my years of schooling, I never went to a single football game. This amazed my husband, a one-time Stanford coach who watches football with an expert's eye. He loves me anyway.

I do get a football (and other sports) fix in movie-going. I love the drama much better than the games themselves. The latest is Draft Day, which covers the events on the annual day of the NFL draft of college players into professional football teams. In effect, we are watching a behind-the-scenes horse-trade system in which team managers negotiate, trick, and bargain to get the best picks for their teams.

Kevin Costner plays general manager Sonny Weaver who has several issues going simultaneously on that big day: picking his own dream team after several seasons of just being the son of the former (and now dead) coach who always had his way. The second issue was that his girlfriend (played by Jennifer Garner) has just told him that she is pregnant and his immediate response was not what she wanted. And the third issue was that his mother wanted to distribute his father's ashes on the field that very day.

The fun of this fast-moving film was watching Weaver navigate these shoals, without the certainty that it would come out right. I particularly liked that too rare element of principle that seemed to motivate Sonny Weaver in his hesitation over picking the biggest man on campus (a smug college player) over someone with more personal integrity.

This was a fascinating film, and provides a full dose of the testosterone (and money) that goes with football. How nice to have that moderated by the pregnant girlfriend, a very tough mother, and some universal human values.

The Lunchbox

This small independent film was charming and revealing of modern Mumbai's city life. In this story, the famous lunchbox deliverers who never make a mistake have made one: the lunch intended for a young wife's husband goes instead to another man. Both discover the mistake when the woman asks her husband how he liked the day's lunch (lovingly cooked to rekindle his interest in her) and he praises the lunch that did not have in it what she cooked.

The recipient of this lunch, a widower contemplating early retirement, recognizes that it was superb---not like the commercial lunches that he usually ordered and received.

The two of them start enclosing notes in the lunches and have a friendship and intimacy that surprises them both. When the woman, in sorting her husband's clothes for washing smells them and realizes that he has been having sex elsewhere, she says that it is time to meet her pen-pal. The rest of the story is for you to enjoy.

And one more thing of note in this film is the role of smell. One needs to consider the constant smell of curries, spices, and fruit and vegetables all on the good side---and the smell of a philandering husband and that of a man approaching old age (the remembered smell of his father) play a large role in the film.

My reactions to life in India are not enthusiastic, although many people find it enchanting. I cannot take the hordes of largely unwashed humanity, the overcrowded trains, the apartments of even middle class people that are suffering from no maintenance for too long, the lowest class of workers from villages doing menial and low-paid labor, the children begging and conning grownups so that they can live to beg another day...I fail to be enchanted.

But fortunately this is a film and we have not yet created smella-vision.

Transcendence

We can know that Summer is coming when we get a movie about mad (or bad) scientists who start out meaning well but then do great harm. Summer is also the time for movies about the end of the earth, the earth threatened by aliens, or robots threatening the future of human beings. We are particularly afraid of robots.

Transcendence is a sophisticated version of these perennial themes with a plot so complicated that when I dozed off, I almost lost the thread of what they were trying to do. Dozing off was not a good sign either.

Johnny Depp, always wonderful, played the role of an Artificial Intelligence scientist who was working on what might become a breakthrough in the evolution of human beings: humans who could have strength and brilliance by melding with AI machines. His hope of improving the human race was cut short by an assassination attempt by a group of anti-AI terrorists. Before he could die, his scientist wife Evelyn, played by Rebecca Hall, uploaded his consciousness to the internet, where his image seemed to continue his existence.

The rest of the film is the conflict between the anti-AI terrorists (but are they really terrorists or saviors of the human species?) and Evelyn carrying out her husband's instructions, which ultimately seem to involve replacing humans with Artificial Intelligence beings. The FBI is also involved: first in trying to track the terrorists and then later siding with them.

Mary Shelly's Frankenstein was the first of these explorations of the consequences of untrammelled science. Just because we can do something should we do it? Science is a mighty force, and it is probably right to have some caution over its uses, but the paranoia surrounding science smacks more of ignorance than of wisdom.

Is consciousness wisdom? Can there be consciousness without a body? If one can be cured of all illnesses and have organs and limbs replaced when they are damaged, does this mean that we might never die? And if we do not die, why should we be procreating new life? And let me ask you all: do any of you like the idea of living hundreds of years, even if you live forever as a 30-year-old and not, as Jonathan Swift imagined in book three of Gulliver's Travels, that you would be 80 years old forever?

If you do not doze off in Transcendence, tell me if you can make sense of it.

The Other Woman

This is admittedly a light-hearted comedy, but what made it particularly good was the character study (and performances) of three women. Leslie Mann played Kate, a darling airhead, married to a seeming dreamboat of a man. Cameron Diaz, a successful lawyer, was falling in love with a dreamboat almost too good to be true. And Kate Upton (Amber), a voluptuous innocent, was having an affair with a dreamboat who claimed he was trying to get a divorce. Their lives come together when they find out that their respective dreamboats are the same man. After their initial rage and grief, they team up to get even.

The fun in this film is watching three very different women (spirit, brain, and body) growing into a very supportive sisterhood.

The one problem for me was that this dreamboat really was a loving and indulgent charmer to each of these women. His sin was cheating on them all, but had they not caught him, they would have continued happily into the future. Their revenge almost seemed cruel to me. I take much more pleasure in the comeuppance of really bad men; this fellow was not a villain.

NETFLIX RECOMMENDATION

Hart's War

I somehow missed this 2002 movie when it first played. The surprise to me was how very good Bruce Willis and Colin Farrell were in their leading roles, and the rest of the casting was extraordinarily good.

Hart (Farrell) plays a third year Yale law school student who becomes a lieutenant

caught up in the Battle of the Bulge near the end of World War II. He is captured by the Germans in their brief resurgence in late 1944 and sent to a POW camp run by a German colonel Werner Visser (played brilliantly by Marcel Iures) and the senior officer of the POWs is Col. William A. McNamara (played by Bruce Willis, in what may be the best performance he has ever done).

Two Black pilots are captured after bailing out of their plane and are brought to the camp; being officers particularly offends some of the enlisted men, one bigot in particular whose pre-war experience was a cop in St. Louis. Young Lt. Hart is already there, trying to establish his authority as an officer which some of the enlisted men resent, knowing he is a Yale man and son of a senator.

One dark night, the bigot is murdered and one of the black officers, Lt. Lincoln A. Scott, played by Terrence Howard, is accused of the murder. The German colonel, coincidentally a Yale Law School graduate, permits the Americans to conduct their own military trial. Hart is assigned to defend the accused.

This is a fascinating movie, thrilling and full of ideas, and offers a historic back look into how we used to be.