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11:14 (+) is a dark comedy using the multiple flashback technique of “Run Lola Run” and “Vantage Point.”

88 Minutes (- - -) was 105 minutes too long. Al Pacino has made some really good movies and some really bad ones. This is probably his worst. The entire genre of serial killer movies is getting a bit stale. This one attempts to revive the standard plot focused on when-will-he-strike-next? with a who-done-it? twist. Don't waste your time on this tic-toc flick.

Appaloosa (+ + +) is one of the finest Western movies I've seen in a long time. I enjoyed it so much, I reckon I might go see it again. The cast including Ed Harris, Viggo Mortensen, and Jeremy Irons is just great. It reminded me of “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.” It is just as funny, but looks and feels more like a dusty Western. This movie beats “Brokeback Mountain” and “2:10 to Yuma.”

Australia (+) is an epic, which means that it is too long. It starts out as a quirky remake of “African Queen” with Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman playing Katherine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart. I did learn from the movie that on February 19, 1942, 188 Japanese warplanes attacked Darwin, Australia in two waves. It was the same fleet that had bombed Pearl Harbor, though a considerably larger number of bombs were dropped on Darwin than on Pearl Harbor. The attack killed at least 243 people and caused immense damage to the town. These were by far the most serious attacks on Australia in time of war, in terms of fatalities and damage. They were the first of many raids on Darwin.

Body of Lies (+) isn't about the subprime mortgage crisis. It is yet another movie about how American officials and operatives do both the worst and the best they can to fight Jihad terrorists. This one, directed by Ridley Scott, is among the better of the genre. Sadly, the 9/11 attacks may have set the stage for the current world financial turmoil. The Fed responded to the terror attacks by lowering the federal funds rate from 3-1/2% to 1% by June 25, 2003. One year later, the Fed, still worried about the fragility of the economy and the potential for deflation, cautiously started to raise the funds rate in a series of 17 “measured” hikes of 25bps that brought it to 5-1/4% by June 2006. The tightening was too incremental and too predictable, allowing Wall Street's financial engineers to run amok, gaming the financial system with little risk.

Brideshead Revisited (+) is an English period flick based on Evelyn Waugh's great novel, first published in 1945. The movie is a bit long, but worth the time if you enjoy English period flicks.

Charlie Wilson's War (+ + +) is a very funny movie about a deadly serious subject. Tom Hanks is great as Congressman Wilson who basically ran the biggest covert war in American history by providing the money and weapons that Afghanistan's freedom fighters needed to defeat the Soviets during the 1980s. That was the beginning of the end of the Soviet Empire. It was also the beginning of a new round of geopolitical turmoil as the freedom fighters turned into terrorists. The difference between the two is always a matter of perspective of course. Wilson tried unsuccessfully to get Congress to fund a reconstruction program for Afghanistan so that all the young boys orphaned by the Soviets wouldn't grow up to be anti-American terrorists after we did so much to liberate their country. He concluded sadly, “These things happened. They were glorious and they changed the world. And the people who deserved the credit are the ones who made the sacrifice. And then we f*****d up the endgame.” When the last Soviet soldier walked out of Afghanistan on February 15 1989, there were many who echoed the words of Pakistan's military leader General Zia-ul-Haq: “Charlie did it.” The General came to power in a military coup on July 5, 1977, overthrowing Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was hanged on April 4, 1979. After assuming power, he began a program to enforce an Islamic legal system, a significant turn from Pakistan's predominantly Anglo-Saxon law, inherited from the British. Pakistan started work on developing a nuclear bomb in January 1972 under Bhutto, in response to India's development of nuclear weapons. Pakistan detonated the first Islamic bomb in 1998.

Frozen River (+ +) is yet another movie about illegal immigration. "Under the Same Moon" (+) and "The Visitor" (+ +) are two other recent movies about the subject. They are all worth seeing. This flick was especially well done and shows why good people may be forced to break the law when faced with a desperate need to protect their kids. People will take great personal risks not just to survive, but also to improve life for their children.

Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull (-) is a propaganda movie. Members of Russia's Communist party are outraged about the group's portrayal and are calling for the film to be banned in the country to prevent "ideological sabotage." I completely agree, though I think it is a propaganda film by Hollywood's Scientologists! If you aren't a disciple of L. Ron Hubbard, you'll still enjoy the movie if you believe in the Roswell conspiracy and UFOs. (I suggest that the next sequel should be "Indiana Jones and Peak Oil" based on the geological theory of American geophysicist M. King Hubbert.)

Hancock (-) wasn't as awful as I expected. Will Smith's degenerate superhero is an uninspired attempt to do something different and original with a very overdone genre. The talented and beautiful Charlize Theron saves the movie as well as Will Smith.

Iron Man (-) is one of the better super hero flicks. The problem is that the genre has been overplayed with too many super heroes and too many sequels. If you've seen all the Superman, Batman, and Spiderman movies, you've seen most of this one already.

Juno (+) could have been marketed as "Little Miss Sunshine" gets pregnant when she is 16, gives up her child for adoption, and everyone lives happily ever after. The movie ends with the adolescent couple singing a duet and strumming guitars. Hollywood has removed all the angst from out-of-wedlock births. While Hollywood fiddles, our moral standards burn.

Mama Mia (+) is fun, especially if you know all the lyrics to the Abba songs and can sing along with Meryl Streep, who has a good voice, and Pierce Brosnan, who doesn't. See it after you go to The Dark Knight, if you need a more upbeat and mindless film.

Married Life (+) suggests that the Spitzers and the Patersons are not the only married couples with adultery issues. At least there is no evidence suggesting that any of the partners in either of these two challenged marriages contemplated poisoning their spouses to protect them from the pain of a breakup. That's the premise of this film which is a light-hearted version of Bergman's painful "Scenes from a Marriage." Chris Cooper does his usual shtick as the guy who loses control of his life. Pierce Brosnan gets the blond, as usual.

Milk (+) is about Harvey Milk, a gay community organizer in San Francisco, who became the first openly homosexual non-incumbent man to win an election for public office in the US. He was a civil rights activist who succeeded in defeating Proposition 6, which would have made firing gay teachers--and any public school employees who supported gay rights--mandatory. Ronald Reagan, who was the former California governor, opposed the proposal because it violated individual rights.

Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day (+) is an adult version of "Enchanted." Indeed, Amy Adams plays the lead ditsy blond in both films.

Mongol (+) is about Genghis Khan, the early years before he went on to create the Mongol Empire through military conquests. It's an epic movie with a love story about GK and his wife, though he was mostly on the road conquering and rarely home in their yurt. Another famous conqueror, Attila the Hun, was also close to his wife. Whenever he came home, she would cheerfully say, "Hi Hun!"

Quantum of Solace (- -) is one of the worst of the James Bond flicks. It's boring. The plot is plodding. The villain is a wimp. Daniel Craig is one of the better Bonds, but even he can't save this bad movie.

Rachel's Wedding (- -) Have you ever been to a really bad wedding and badly wanted to leave? If you haven't and want to experience one, then go see this annoying movie full of really annoying dysfunctional characters, bad music, and jerky camera work. The main theme seems to be that we can all get along tolerably well, if we all accept that we are all dysfunctional.

Rambo (+) shows how steroids have helped aging star Sylvester Stallone retain his hulking physical presence, without improving his ability to grunt more than a few words in a two hour movie. The geriatric action hero takes out an entire genocidal army division in Myanmar. Fortunately, the editing is very fast so the flying body parts are thankfully a blur. Our hero is brought out of retirement to save a missionary church group with the aid of a few mercenaries. One of them observes that sometimes you have to send the Devil to do God's work. It's time for Stallone to retire.

Religulous (+) is Bill Maher's funny, thought-provoking, and sacrilegious take on religion. If there is a Heaven, he certainly won't be admitted through the pearly gates.

Righteous Kill (- - -) with Al Pacino and Robert DeNiro is just as bad as "88 Minutes" with Al Pacino. DeNiro should stop making cop movies. He should also avoid comedies. Pacino should retire from acting having peaked early in his career with "The Godfather" trilogy and Scar Face.

Sweeney Todd (+ +) is another quirky masterpiece from director Tim Burton and the incomparable actor Johnny Depp, who also sings reasonably well in this macabre musical inspired by the tale of the Count of Monte Cristo. There is almost as much red ink flowing in this movie as there has been recently in the stock market. Until this passes, I suggest we all stay away from sharp objects. The movie is very good, but it can't beat the great Burton/Depp classic, "Edward Scissorhands."

The Bank Job (+ +) is based on an actual 1971 robbery of a London bank's safe deposits, which were full of lots of valuables as well as some embarrassing photos. It's all good fun, and fast paced. Wall Street's financial engineers also pulled off a great bank job and are now embarrassed by the consequences. However, they made out like bandits and probably won't go to jail, though perhaps some should.

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas (+) is a disturbing perspective on the Nazi concentration camps from the point of view of the family of the Commandant of the camp, particularly his 8-year-old son.

The Children of Huang Shi (+ +) is about a young English reporter who goes to China during the late 1930s when the Japanese invaded the country and the Chinese Nationalists and Communists fought them and each other. This true story is about how the young man saves an orphanage of young Chinese boys from enlistment by the Nationalists or death by the Japanese by trekking them 700 miles over snowy mountains. In this Hollywood adaption, the good guys are the Communists.

The Dark Knight (+ +) is really a one-man show starring Heath Ledger playing the Joker in the latest Batman sequel. He was amazing. His performance was evil, cruel, intimidating, and very funny. The other actors and the scenes without him were just background noise. He had the best and most unforgettable quips and lines. The combination of his makeup and facial expressions transformed him into a manic Marcel Marceau. His death is a great tragedy for filmdom.

The Duchess (+ +) is a period piece set in the 18th century based on a true story about Georgiana Spencer, who became the Duchess of Devonshire in a loveless marriage. The similarities with the story of Princess Diana (Spencer) are quite remarkable, though not as tragic.

The Kite Runner (+ + +) should be seen as a double feature following “Charlie Wilson’s War.” The US did a great job of helping the mujahedeen foil the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Unfortunately for us, these freedom fighters turned into the Taliban and turned against us by providing al-Qaeda safe harbor. The Kite Runner is based on a novel, but it accurately depicts the misery caused first by the Soviets then by the Taliban.

The Other Boleyn Girl (+ +) proves that history is almost always stranger than fiction. That’s because even the best fiction writers can’t imagine just how badly humans can behave. That’s why some of these more successful writers have turned to writing historical novels based on real events. This movie is based on British author Philippa Gregory’s recounting of the short life of Henry VIII’s second wife who he bedded and beheaded.

The Visitor (+ +) is another recent movie about the plight of illegal aliens in the US. The other one is “Under the Same Moon.” Both of them make you want to open up the borders and shut down the INS. While America may not be winning any popularity contests overseas, it’s remarkable how many foreigners would like to live here. Both movies were well made with solid casts.

There Will Be Blood (+ + +) is an intense movie that is very reminiscent of “Citizen Kane.” Daniel Day Lewis is an intense actor, who brilliantly portrays a heartless oil man during the early days of the oil industry in California.

Traitor (+) is a thriller that is a bit too predictable and not very thrilling. The story, written by comic Steve Martin, is humorless and stars Don Cheadle as a Moslem spy or terrorist, who is always morose. There is one scene with an interesting twist that provides a happy ending.

Under the Same Moon (+) is about a nine year old Mexican boy who leaves home to go to Los Angeles. He intends to find his mother, who he hasn’t seen for four years because she has been working as an illegal alien, sending money back home to support her son and his grandmother, who just passed away. Perhaps, instead of building a wall along the border with Mexico, we should open it up. The surprise is that they may not come now that the US is falling into a recession, and there are fewer jobs. Indeed, the 4/9 WSJ reported that “ebbing numbers of illegal immigrants could help diffuse a tough election-year issue.”

Vantage Point (+) is fun to watch if you don’t mind the “back-to-the-video-tape” repetition from different vantage points of the assassination of the President’s body double. There are some interesting plot twists and a long, implausible car chase scene around traffic jams in a crowded city in Spain.

Vicki Christina Barcelona (+) is Woody Allen’s latest film to subject us to his dysfunctional fantasy life. I think he made the movie so that he could hang out with Scarlett Johansson and Penélope Cruz in Spain for a few weeks. His recent films are more like plays where every actor talks like Woody, who is becoming more pretentious as a wanna-be great artist.

W (+) is Oliver Stone’s bio-flick about W. Apparently, after researching President George W. Bush’s early years and career, the controversial director decided he could play the story relatively straight. George W. comes across as a well-meaning, if not a very bright Texan, who didn’t live up to his Poppy’s expectations. Sadly, he also didn’t live up to most of our expectations.

Wanted (- -) is a fast-paced composite of “Fight Club” and “Matrix” that goes nowhere fast. Angelina Jolie replays her role in “Mr. and Mrs. Smith” without Mr. Smith.

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