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A Prophet (+ + +) is a gritty and riveting French-made movie that's more reminiscent of the rags-to-riches tale of "Scarface" than the wrongly accused story line in "Papillon." It shows how Capitalism's core principles of hard work and competition are perverted by criminals. Capitalism is often blamed for the excesses of its evil twin, Corruption.

Avatar (+ +) is a 3-D version of Disney's "Tarzan" and "Pocahontas." Once again, the Noble Savage must fight off "civilized" invaders, who are driven by the profit motive to kill and destroy all that is naturally good. In these Hollywood fantasies, tribal leaders are never corrupt or barbaric. Other than the business-is-evil plot, the movie is quite a site to see.

Broken Embraces (- -) is a pretentious soap opera with a contrived plot. It's a Spanish version of when Harry met Mateo. They are both the same person who fell in love with the aspiring actress Lena (Penelope Cruz), who was the mistress of a very powerful older man. There's a gay son and also an illegitimate son. The plot was as dizzy as watching Avatar in 3-D. Ms. Cruz is beautiful, of course, and looks remarkably like Audrey Hepburn. In the Obama administration, OMB Director Peter Orszag seems to be directing a personal documentary as weird as this flick.

Crazy Heart (+ +) is a genre movie that Hollywood loves to make about a has-been character who is played by a has-been actor. The tale of overcoming alcohol and drug addiction and dysfunctional family relationships is uplifting, and usually earns the has-been actor an award from his peers. Jeff Bridges does play the role of a dissolute Country Western singer as though he has been there and done it. Mickey Rourke played a similar role to perfection in *The Wrestler* (2008).

Get Low (+) should get Robert Duvall an Oscar nomination for best actor. He does a great job playing Felix Bush, a hermit who lives all alone in the backwoods. One day a priest arrives to inform him of the death of someone he knows. He then gets the idea to have a funeral party for himself, while he is still alive. Bill Murray's performance as the undertaker is funny, though not an award winner.

Inception is a fast-paced mishmash of "The Matrix", "The Day After Tomorrow", and all the James Bond flicks. It is also weirdly similar to "Shutter Island." Both feature Leonardo DiCaprio in the lead role as a psychologically troubled individual in a psychological thriller. In both movies he has to deal with a deranged wife. Actually, he is getting a bit typecast since he had the same problem in "Revolutionary Road."

Invictus (++) , directed by Clint Eastwood, features an incredible performance by Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela. The great man was a truly inspired leader of his nation when it most needed inspiration. We could all use some inspired leadership these days.

Red (- - -) is a new genre flick starring aging actors as action heroes. The previous one was "The Expendables" starring Sylvester Stallone. This one stars Bruce Willis, Morgan Freeman, John Malkovich, and Helen Mirren. The first three play to type. Mirren takes on a new role as a retired CIA agent having a blast with some machine guns. While I am sure that the Magnificent Four had lots of fun making the movie, it's all very dull stuff. Red stands for "retired and extremely dangerous."

Salt (+) is entertaining if you like predictable and implausible spy thrillers starring Angelina Jolie. If you do, you'll be glad to know that this is likely to be the first of a series of Bond-like sequels featuring the girl with all the tattoos.

Secretariat (+++) was a good movie, not a great one. But the horse was awesome. In 1973, this American Thoroughbred racehorse became the first US Triple Crown champion in 25 years, setting new race records in two of the three events in the series--the Kentucky Derby and the Belmont Stakes--records that still stand today. At Belmont, Secretariat won by an incredible 31 lengths at an average speed of 37.5 mph.

Sherlock Holmes (-) is a big bore. Robert Downey, Jr. and Jude Law portray Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, respectively, as though they are in a buddy movie. There isn't much chemistry between the two, though many of the clues require a knowledge of this science. In the movie, Sherlock Holmes decodes yet another Da Vinci Code of yet another secret society with yet another mysterious symbol. He also thwarts the evil plans of a Lord Blackwood to rule the world. It's as though Sherlock Holmes is both James Bond and Professor Robert Langdon.

Shutter Island (++) is a really entertaining psycho drama directed by Martin Scorsese. It's a Hitchcock genre flick with lots of allusions to Hitchcock's classics, including "Psycho," "The 39 Steps," and "Vertigo." As Bob observed in "What About Bob?": "Roses are red, violets are blue, I'm psychophrenic and so am I." Also, as the bumper sticker warns, "Just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean that they aren't out to get you!"

Solitary Man (++) is a genre film about a divorced man who is disconnected from his family, friends, and life in general. He is seeking, but not finding, happiness in the arms of a younger woman. The lead is played by Kirk's son, Michael Douglas. It is a variation on a theme played by Bill Murray in "Lost in Translation," George Clooney in "Up in the Air," and just about every Woody Allen movie. This flick is a bit self-absorbed, like its protagonist, but good fun.

The Expendables (-) is an action movie for aging Baby Boomers. It is comforting to see that Sylvester Stallone is aging like the rest of us. The movie is a bit nostalgic. Instead of Islamic terrorists or former KGB agents, the bad guys are a Latin American dictator and the usual Ugly American rogue CIA agent.

The Ghost Writer (+) is certainly an entertaining mystery thriller directed by fugitive sex offender Roman Polanski. After watching it, I can understand why the CIA might have pushed the Swiss authorities to finally nab him last September. On January 22, 2010, a California Superior Court judge ruled that Polanski must return to be sentenced. The movie is about a former British prime minister who is accused by the International Court of Justice of illegally arresting four British citizens, who are suspected of being Islamic terrorists, and renditioning them to be tortured in another country. The PM has to stay in the US, which doesn't recognize the jurisdiction of the court. Of course, the CIA is behind it all.

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (+ +) and **The Girl Who Played with Fire** (+) show what sort of mayhem can result when a young girl is traumatized by her dysfunctional family, particularly her abusive father. The first movie is better than the sequel, which has too many logical lapses. A third movie in this trilogy is on the way. Hopefully the girl with the tattoo will stop playing with fire and find peace and happiness in a stable Swedish family of her own.

The Last Station (++) is about the final days of Leo Tolstoy's life. In later life, he became a fervent anarchist and pacifist, and a really bad husband. His ideas on nonviolent resistance were to have a profound impact on Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. The acting is superb, featuring Christopher Plummer as the great Russian novelist and Helen Mirren as his wife. They lived happily together until the beginning of this movie when she discovered that he had changed his will, giving his copyrights to the public rather than to her.

The Next Three Days (+) is about a professor played by Russell Crowe. This professor is quite different from mathematician John Nash, who was played by Crowe in "A Beautiful Mind." This one is determined to break his wife out of prison after she is wrongly sentenced to life for the murder of her boss. There have been lots of boring, mindless movies this year. This one requires that you don't use your mind to question some of the implausible turns in the plot. However, it isn't boring.

The Social Network (+++) is a really interesting movie about the formative years of Facebook and its founder Mark Zuckerberg. He created an amazingly successful and valuable social networking website, yet seems to suffer from Asperger Syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder that is characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. To succeed, he tramples over business associates and friends. That's why we have lawyers in America, as the actor playing Harvard University President Larry Summers points out in one memorable scene. There is a happy ending: Everybody got rich after they settled their cases out of court. The system works!

The Town (- -) is another bank robbery flick with all the usual suspects, stereotypes, and clichés. I'm not sure why it received any positive reviews, but it did. Ben Affleck directed and stars in the movie. His acting was a notch better than the nearly comatose performance of Jon Hamm, who played the FBI director. Hamm also plays the lead role in "Mad Men." I'm starting to wonder if he is always in a stupor rather than acting like he is in one.

Up in the Air (+) has received rave reviews for George Clooney's portrayal of a detached human resources expert, who specializes in firing people from their jobs at companies that outsource his skill. His one great accomplishment is logging 10 million frequent flier miles. By the way, I researched and wrote today's Morning Briefing while I was up in the air on a WiFi-enabled flight to California yesterday. Very cool!

Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps (-) blames almost everyone for the financial crisis. While names have been changed to protect the innocent, it's obvious that Oliver Stone mostly blames Wall Street, in general, and Goldman Sachs, in particular. The movie was a bore. The plot was clumsy. The acting was uninspired. I don't recall any mention of the government's involvement in causing the crisis. Maybe that will be in another sequel, "Wallshington: They Sleep Together."

Winter's Bone (++) is a bone cold tale about a 17-year-old young woman who is forced to take care of her two younger siblings as well as her mentally ill mother. Her father is missing after getting arrested for running a meth lab and jumping bail. The "country noir," which won the 2010 Sundance Grand Jury Prize, is set in the Missouri Ozarks. Jennifer Lawrence is outstanding in the lead role on a near-mythical quest to save her family from ruin.

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