

FILM TRaC*

*teen reviewers and critics

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REVIEWS

The Catch

(2011, dir. Rithy Panh)

History is a progressing archive of the past and present, but our records are often one-sided, highlighting a favored retelling of events while letting alternative perspectives fall into obscurity. Directed by Rithy Panh, *The Catch* is a movie that subverts this pattern by providing unique insight on the lives of Cambodians during the Vietnam War.

The film follows a Cambodian village under the control of the Khmer Rouge—a militant, communist regime with agrarian ideals—and their imprisonment of a U.S. fighter pilot who crash-landed in the dense Cambodian jungle. After apprehending the pilot, the village's leader tasks a group of young boys with keeping an eye on their new prisoner. As the next generation of Khmer Rouge comrades, the boys take their responsibility seriously, especially a village boy named Pang, their troop leader. Together, they guard and tend to the captive pilot, allowing viewers to glimpse at the harsh reality of wartime in 20th century Cambodia.

The historical context of *The Catch* is introduced through film of U.S. aircrafts dropping bombs on Cambodian land, of the ensuing explosions and damage. These authentic clips of black-and-white footage are scattered throughout the film, adding to its unique character and nuanced realism.

As the story unfolds, principal themes—like the young boys' lack of innocence due to war—are handled with delicacy, such that the film retains its intimate complexion while veiling the innermost thoughts of its characters. Sweeping shots of the village and the surrounding farmland are contrasted with close-ups of characters' faces, especially those who feel strong emotions. Pang, the most eager and dedicated of the village boys, is one of the few characters besides the stranded U.S.

pilot who consistently has their face in close or sole proximity to the camera. Rithy Panh's distinct play on distance allows the complex effects of war to shine.

The Catch embodies the phrase "show, not tell" and is laced with subtle expressions of life amid war. The opening scenes, for instance, include several clips of Cambodians running through shadowed trees and torrents of rain to bomb shelters as the United States continues their explosive nightly assaults.

When the pilot is apprehended by the Cambodian villagers, everyone, including the children, are armed with guns or sharpened wooden branches for spears. In the village, the kids are often seen carrying these spears as they run underneath elevated houses made of wooden stalks and bark. Everything in the film, from the militant attitudes of the children to the absence of basic amenities such as furniture and food, tie into the reality of wartime in Cambodia.

In the 1960s, public opinion concerning America's continued involvement in the Vietnam War flared: protests erupted across the United States calling for peace. Now, even with the Vietnam War almost fifty years behind us, the devastating effects it had on Vietnam's neighbors like Cambodia often go unrecognized.

Rithy Panh doesn't argue for or against war, communist ideology, or stolen youth in *The Catch*. In fact, viewers would be hard-pressed to find an argument in the film at all. The only characters who express a direct viewpoint are members of the Khmer Rouge who impose their social beliefs on the village. The U.S. pilot, though imprisoned by the Cambodian villagers, doesn't do or say anything that would indicate his opinion on the war, his station as a U.S. fighter pilot, or his captors

as strongly negative or positive. Moreover, the interactions between the foreign pilot and his young guards aren't charged with hatred or love, even at the end of the story. The film's undefined message may confuse its audience, but it is the honest, uncensored portrayal of human experience that makes *The Catch* remarkable.

-Lauren M.

■

Directed by Rithy Panh, *The Catch* is set during the Vietnam War in a Cambodian village under attack by American bombers. An American pilot who crashed while bombing the area is taken prisoner by the villagers under orders from the Khmer Rouge; a group of children is assigned to look over him. The soldier slowly gets to

know the kids by participating in their daily lives: as they bring him along with them, he fishes and dances with them, and shares little knick knacks, like paper airplanes and string telephone. Despite the language and cultural barriers, the kids and the man form a bond, the kids affectionately dubbing him "OK", the only word they understand in English. Through his experiences with the villagers and the kids, OK becomes disillusioned and dejected with the war effort, grieving over the life that he left behind with his wife and child. Although they don't fully understand OK's inner turmoil and the desperate position that he is in, the film makes it clear that the children learn to see beyond OK's role of imperialist and enjoy his company, and almost see him as part of their group, in a way. The one character that refuses to step beyond the boundaries set for them



by their society and circumstances is an older boy, Pang. Pang is defined by his relationship with the Khmer Rouge, who absorbed him deep into their ideology and later their ranks, as the absence of his parents made him extremely vulnerable and susceptible to influence. For honor's sake, and the general desire to please his mentors, Pang remains cold and defensive towards OK to the very end.

The Catch weaves a story that humanizes the participants of a conflict created in the midst of the Cold War. Pang becomes increasingly more violent throughout the film because the only source of stability and validation in his life is the Khmer Rouge, who encourage that violence in him. OK becomes the perpetrator of bombings in Cambodia because he was likely drafted and bought into American anti-communist propaganda. The overarching idea of both of these character arcs caution against powerful entities that may use their resources to fuel violence and distrust between various groups of people.

The movie is visually conventional, with shots of the village and the jungle that surrounds it that are effective in conveying the actions and events of the film, but don't stand out much otherwise. However, one very interesting visual element of *The Catch* is the usage of actual footage of the bombings that took place in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. These scenes serve to drive the point that these bombings were devastating, showing the destruction raining from above and erasing everything in its way on a massive scale. Having these scenes in the movie really puts into perspective how intensely the lives of the villagers were demolished over the course of the war.

Overall, *The Catch* proves to be a compelling story that captures a glimpse of humanity and compassion during a horrible period of human history, truly shining with its interpersonal writing.

-Sofia K.

Grave of the Fireflies (1988, dir. Isao Takahata)

Ghibli Studio is known for their films' abilities to strike emotion, and this film lives up to the reputation: *Grave of the Fireflies* is undoubtedly one of the most heart-wrenching animated films.

Grave of the Fireflies tells the tale of two siblings, Setsuko and Seita, living in war-stricken Japan. The tale is told, however, through Seita, the older brother, after he had already died as a result of the tragedies of war. The film relays its messages as an

and simplicity of the lives the children lived.

There was a combination of fantastical youth, and mundane everyday tasks that the two needed to complete for their survival, that only animation could capture. The film was bright and vivid when displaying moments of happiness and togetherness, showing illuminated fields of fireflies as the children explored them throughout the long nights. However, it managed to also capture the intense feelings of isolation that Seita, a child who had to take on an adult role, must have experienced. His small

Despite survival being the main goal of the two, the film captures so vividly the childish essence in the tasks, because they are in fact children. There are messages of anti-war, anti-child-negligence and so forth, but the bond of sibling love could not be barricaded regardless of their circumstances.

-Aeri Y.

■

Grave Of The Fireflies weaves a heart-wrenching tragedy about children in Japan



anti-war movie, embedding the "victories" of a country with the devastation that follows for the other.

The animation enhances the heartbreak

figure in the large desolate countryside, with corroded roads and empty homes, emphasized that Seita was indeed alone when he too needed someone.

during the later half of the second World War, thrusting the audience into the gritty and bloody reality of war through the perspective of two children on the losing side of the fight while still managing to

include the light hearted and beautiful components of most Ghibli movies.

Grave Of The Fireflies excels at painting a balance between the brutal nature of the war and the simple lives of the two child protagonists, Seita and Setsuko. It's easy to connect with these characters in the way that they possess a superb human-like quality. Every one of Setsuko's small childlike fidgets, shuffles and utterances reflects the hours of hard work that went into each frame of creating a realistic character.

The animators manage to drop the viewers onto the level of the children; allowing us to celebrate the little beauties of life just as the children do, such as the tasty-looking fruit drops, the pretty fireflies or the warm rice. Watching the protagonists enjoy these little victories away from the grim and depressing nature of the late-war environment they live in allows us to connect with them on a deeper emotional level that beautifully sets up the eventual tragedy.

-Oscar G.

You Resemble Me (2021, dir. Dina Amer)

In *You Resemble Me*, a rebellious yet protective young girl roaming the streets of Paris becomes a woman labeled "France's first female suicide bomber".

When Hasna and her younger sister Mariam are separated by France's foster system, Hasna struggles to find her identity, turning to drugs and prostitution, and eventually getting manipulated into working with a terrorist group.

Based on the true story of the 2015 Saint-Denis raid, the plot of the movie is familiar to a large portion of the audience, but the narrative around her at the time of the attacks was confused and simplistic. Dina Amer, the film's director (who covered the event extensively as a reporter), seeks to tell the story from a new angle: Hasna, the main character, is shown to be incredibly complex.

Amer attempts to humanize Hasna through the film by putting the viewer directly in her shoes. The film's style matches Hasna's state of mind – when she

is happy, it feels almost like an ad for The Gap, when she's overwhelmed, it warrants a seizure warning. Most noticeably, Hasna is played by three different actresses (including Amer herself) during the movie, emphasizing her struggle to find her own identity. When the actress changes, Hasna's face is animated to ripple slightly from face to face.

You Resemble Me asks a lot of hard questions without really answering them, but it doesn't really need to. Amer toes the line between humanizing and sympathizing with Hasna, between explaining her actions and excusing them. It successfully evokes sympathy from the viewer, although the face animation tactic feels too obvious and patronizing to the audience, as if Amer doesn't trust us to differentiate the different actresses. While the choice to use multiple actresses for Hasna to convey her confusion, the facial animation feels like a choice made by a more crude hand than the rest of the film.

You Resemble Me tells the story of a strong girl, a caring sister, and a traumatized yet determined young woman – a multifaceted person, and not simply "France's first female suicide bomber".

-Olive E.

■

Weird: The Al Yankovic Story (2022, dir. Eric Appel)

"My whole life, all I've wanted is to make up new words to a song that already exists," pontificates 20-something "Weird" Al Yankovic (Daniel Radcliffe) in *Weird: The Al Yankovic Story*, a biopic spoof focused on the musician.

In *Weird*, Al is raised in a cookie-cutter suburban family with strong anti-polka values, before he leaves for California

to pursue his musical dreams. After being asked by his roommate (and later, band-mate) to "open up a package of my bologna", Al is struck with inspiration to parody The Knack's "My Sharona". When his song blows up on a local radio station, Al catches the attention of Dr. Demento (Rainn Wilson). Fame, fortune, and kooky hi-jinks follow, including a whirlwind romance with early 80s-era Madonna (Evan Rachel Wood) and several near-death experiences.

Like Yankovic's music, *Weird* doesn't shy away from over-the-top stylings. From excessively somber scenes depicting young Al contending with his father's violent hatred for polka and parody, to a poorly animated, guacamole-induced acid trip, *Weird* feels like five different genres rolled into one film. Jam-packed with loud performances (most notably Wood's hilarious, unhinged Madonna), *Weird* bursts with exaggerated satire.

Yankovic's punching bag of choice is low-hanging fruit: Hollywood's outpour of musician-biopics in the last ten years (*Elvis*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Rocketman*, etc), so its jokes often feel unchallenging. But when executed properly, this isn't a problem. *Weird* uses easy jokes like Yankovic uses chewing sounds in "Girls Just Wanna Have Lunch": excessively, shamelessly, and hilariously.

Some of the film's jokes are more unexpected (a storyline in which Al develops a grudge against Michael Jackson) and just as funny. The funniest moment in the movie is the culmination of this sense of humor, a plot twist that calls back to the easy, throwaway-feeling jokes.

Weird features a suffocating load of celebrity cameos, some charming (Quinta Brunson as Oprah) and some groan-inducing (Lin-Manuel Miranda as a healthcare worker who inspires "Like A Surgeon"). In moments like these, *Weird*'s satire is less sharp; it feels less like it's poking fun at the stacked casts of the biopics it parodies and more like the writers got



distracted by counting the celebrities they could fit into the film.

The film, a Roku TV original, is the channel's bid at joining the streaming big leagues. A desperation to legitimize the film as something more than Roku

jokes does not a good movie make; viewers may find themselves glancing at their phones from time to time. But what more does one need from *Weird: The Al Yankovic Story*?

-Olive E.



TV's typical low-budget B-movies shines through in the sheer number of celebrity features.

The story of *Weird* isn't terribly engaging. It finds itself in a pitfall of the satire genre: in constantly mocking itself, it fails to convince the audience why it's worth their emotional investment. Though the viewer is rooting for an accordion-playing goof, he's still built on standard motivations and challenges.

Weird is successful at what it sets out to be: a funny, 108-minute long SNL skit (its origins are in a 2010 mock trailer, with many of the same jokes). It points out the clichés that can be found in every pop-star biopic favored by the Academy and the public from the last 10 years. The film's success as a satirical joke machine makes the film enjoyable, if not terribly substantive. An hour and a half of funny

***Wendell & Wild*, 2022**
(2022, dir. Henry Selick)

Directed by Henry Selick, *Wendell & Wild* is a recent addition to the Halloween movie watchlists of many. This whimsical but incredibly serious story takes us on an adventure with Kat, a troubled teenager who is desperate to reconcile with her past.

Katherine "Kat" Koniqua Elliot faces a traumatic loss at a young age, derailing her life and sending her into the juvenile justice system. There, years later, she finds herself sent to a Christian private school as part of the new "Break-the-Cycle" program, focused on rehabilitating troubled teens.

At the school, Kat meets a rich cast of characters like Raul, a timid and talented artist who identifies with Kat through their shared misfit identity, and Sister Helley, a nun who sees herself in Kat, and tries to mentor and protect her.

Kat doesn't only meet humans at her new school, however, she also discovers her demons. Wendell and Wild live in the demon realm, on the head of their father, the great Buffalo Belzer. To escape the confinement of their father, the two brothers make a deal with Kat: they will raise her parents from the dead if she summons them into the human realm. The deal goes wrong and the demons end up meeting someone other than Kat at the other side of the threshold.

Wendell & Wild is visually stunning. The style is reminiscent of Slick's *Coraline*, with its exaggerated shapes, creative settings, and loud character designs. The demon world is the highlight of this stop-motion style. The Scream Faire, a carnival of souls, is literally built on top of Buffalo Belzer's gut, the souls inhabiting it made out of paper, to give them a weightless, floaty appearance.

Wendell and Wild spend their days planting hair with magic cream on Belzer's scalp, the hair taking up the shape of elongated coils that look almost like a fantastical forest growing around the demons. Their confinement also makes creative use of Belzer's nose. When he finds out about the demon brothers' plan to build a Dream Faire, he confines them in his own nostrils, where they eventually

use Belzer's snot to make recreations of themselves and sneak away.

The movie has an incredible level of diversity in its cast and its characters. With a predominantly non-white group of characters and cast, as well as positive trans representation, *Wendell & Wild* is a breakthrough film in the stop motion genre.

Voice acting talent for many of the characters is outstanding. Lyric Ross as Kat and Sam Zelaya as Raul both create voices that not only match the characters' personalities but enhance them, bringing real emotion into their performances and making the characters feel that much more complete. Keegan-Michael Key as Wendell and Jordan Peele as Wild also do an amazing job at not only creating individually fun and charismatic characters, but also building a dynamic relationship between the brothers that is a joy to watch.

That dynamic is one of the best parts of the film. Wild's relaxed attitude contrasted against Wendell's more uptight and anxious personality make for great, lively dialogue. And when the brothers get into mischief together, one can't help but wonder how far their hi-jinx will go.

Wendell & Wild proves to be an enjoyable experience with the negatives



heavily outweighed by the positives in both its writing and production value. It is a film that brings up topics that are often overlooked in American culture and politics, while managing to stay beautiful, engaging, and accessible to a wide audience.

-Sofia K.

■

Real Women Have Curves (2002, dir. Patricia Cardoso)

Real Women Have Curves by Patricia Cardoso is a coming-of-age story of a young girl living in LA during the early 2000s.

Ana Garcia is a recent, and very bright, high school graduate, but her dreams of pursuing a higher education are thwarted by her family's financial troubles and by her mother's insistence that she work at the family factory.

Ana's family is complex and lively: she lives with her cousins and aunt, her adoring grandfather, and her reliable father. Ana's older sister, Estela, is a determined woman whose clothing factory struggles to keep up with rent. Most importantly though, Ana's mother, Carmen, becomes the catalyst for her transition to independence.

The two women play important roles in each other's lives: Ana puts her mother at the center of her universe and Ana's mother puts Ana at the center of hers.

Their relationship is complicated by the multitude of insecurities that Carmen can't help but project on her daughter, often berating Ana about her weight or perceived laziness and indifference. At first, Ana internalizes her mother's words, believing herself to be unattractive and unworthy. But the more life experience she gains over the course of the film, the less value she places on her mother's words, instead allowing herself to gain confidence in her own abilities.

Ana also learns to be empathetic to her mother after having experienced the same type of work that Carmen does and learning about her scars. So when



Ana decides to accept her invitation to Columbia in spite of Carmen's wishes, she still finds it in herself to push her pride aside and ask her mother's blessing on the day of her departure. The same could not be said about Carmen though: Ana leaves her home without her mother's approval. Despite this, the movie ends on a hopeful

note.

The movie is visually beautiful. The film uses a muted, yet colorful palette. It works especially well with Ana as we get to see splashes of her repressed personality through clothing that often utilizes bright, solid colors. The palette also plays into the film's themes of youth as the vivid hues create a lighter, hopeful atmosphere despite the difficulties that Ana faces.

Real Women Have Curves is mostly enjoyable, with a relatively engaging plot, cultural insights, and beautiful cinematography. However, it lacks a satisfying conclusion to Carmen's arc.

If you are looking for a realistic take on family dynamics this could be your movie, but it's not the best watch when searching for a satisfying story.

-Sofia K.

■

Ghost World (2001, dir. Terry Zwigoff)

Ghost World is the subversive story of teenage cynics Rebecca (Scarlett Johansson) and Enid (Thora Birch).

After graduating from high school, they plan to get jobs and live together, but a rift in their relationship grows when Enid develops an interest in a middle-aged man, Seymour (Steve

Buscemi).

Adapted from a comic book, *Ghost World* is filled with shots of Enid and Rebecca silently reacting to (most often, judging) the people that they come across; it's easy to imagine a snarky thought bubble hanging above their heads.

Ghost World is defined by teenage en-

nui, with Johansson and Birch's deadpan performances putting the viewer in their angsty shoes. "I just hate all these extroverted, obnoxious, pseudo-bohemian losers," complains Enid to Rebecca.

I found *Ghost World* funnier and more insightful than its boy-focused peers like *American Pie*, but, unlike these movies, *Ghost World* is unlikely to land with the demographic it focuses on, teenage girls.

As a teenage girl, I found some of the indie film-world in-jokes inaccessible. This begs the question: does *Ghost World* really aim to portray the lives of teenage girls, and who is its intended audience?

When the movie's jokes are references to Zwigoff's previous projects, *Ghost World* feels like it's written by and for middle-aged men, and it accidentally becomes a critique of its true, "obnoxious, pseudo-bohemian" target audience.

The two teenage girls *Ghost World* focuses on are defined by their idiosyncrasies, which make them (Enid in particular) so similar to pretentious middle-aged men that Enid develops an obsession with one. These idiosyncrasies are exactly what are meant to endear them to the viewer, convincing the male cinephile that perhaps teenage girls can be sophisticated and intelligent!

In placing value on Enid and Rebecca through their uniqueness from other teenage girls and their similarity to middle-aged men, *Ghost World* is both putting down teenage girls as a whole and elevating middle-aged men.

It's important to note that *Ghost World* portrays every character with a level of irony and critique. While the viewer rolls their eyes and laughs at Enid, Rebecca and Seymour's angst, it is also recognized that Enid and Seymour are severely unhappy in their lives. Because the film recognizes the stakes of Enid and Seymour's depression, it subverts the trope of romanticizing cynicism and disillusionment. Perhaps the viewer is meant to laugh and relate to Enid initially and then gradually realize the

fallacy in doing so.

But regardless of how critical *Ghost World* is of its intended audience, the intended audience is still clearly the middle-aged man. Even if a pretentious, middle-aged man becomes more self-aware after watching *Ghost World*, he is still the person most affected by it. *Ghost World* fails to engage authentically with teenage girls and instead uses them as a vehicle through which to tell a story more appealing to the middle-aged man.

-Olive E.

■

Don't Breathe

(2016, dir. Rodo Sayagues)

When burglars break into a person's home, they have to be three things: swift, cautious, and quiet. In *Don't Breathe*, these traits are put to the test when three thieves break into a blind man's home in search of his hidden fortune. However, what they thought would be an easy job quickly becomes a nightmarish fight for survival when the blind man awakens to the sound



of unwanted intruders combing through his home. A hair-raising cat and mouse chase ensues between the calculating blind man and the wayward burglars who must find a way out of his fortified house.

Don't Breathe is characterized by its dynamic shots and dark colors. The dark setting projects the deadly cat-and-mouse chase between the deranged blind man and the two wayward burglars as they delve deeper into the house, uncovering its harrowing secrets as they search for an exit.

I was very surprised by the direction



Don't Breathe took, particularly surrounding the blind man. The movie did not play into the notion that blind people are hapless and incapable. In fact, the movie contradicts that notion entirely by portraying the blind man as cunning, if not reliant on his enhanced sense of touch and hearing to guide his hunt for the home invaders. This increases the thrill of the film's jump scares and action shots tenfold.

-Lauren M.

■

Nope

(2022, dir. Jordan Peele)

Jordan Peele's latest film, *Nope*, follows the lives of two siblings, Haywood Jr. and Emerald, who inherited their father's horse company after his mysterious death in broad daylight. The movie is dumbfounding, but it is a film that is also captivating, metaphorical, and still very humorous. The mystery of this film, however, is what is it about? The movie contains a series of symbols, unexplained events, and open-ended scenes that lead into the theory that the movie's purpose was in fact to puzzle, to leave the audience with more questions than when first entering the theater, to leave the audience arguing over what the symbols represented. The unanimous silence with the closing of the film undoubtedly depicted that Peele

achieved that, if it truly was his goal.

What was impossible to ignore, however, was the film's distinct style. Peele's infamous use of crisp cinematography made the film feel surreal, from the desolate landscapes to the eerie isolated theme park that is featured throughout. He repetitively used close ups that put emphasis on symbols or details—a single key, a deranged monkey, a mirror—with a shot long enough to ask, "What does he wish to achieve showing this imagery?"

Viewers may need to watch this film multiple times in order to fully understand or appreciate its complicated beauty and artistry. As a Jordan Peele film, it will not disappoint and lives up to his previous works.

-Aeri Y.

■

The Key

(1987, dir. Ebrahim Forouzesh)

The Key is like a dull blade that stabs the audience with a confusing story and invigoratingly antagonizing scenes. The movie discusses a strange "what if?" where a young child and his baby brother are left alone for what feels like years.

That doesn't make it a bad movie per se: *The Key* felt like it wasn't meant to be enjoyed, but was instead made to convey emotions in an interesting and new way.



The movie doesn't make you feel things through heartbreaking scenes or great triumphs. Instead, it puts the watcher in an uncomfortable midway position where they can't help but jump up in down in anguish as a little boy outrageously struggles to get a house key from under a cabinet, all while his house is filling with deadly gas, and his baby brother screams in the background.

This type of film is endearing at first, but when the realization hit that this was what the whole movie was, I couldn't help but slouch in my chair and pry my eyes open for the surprisingly short one hour and twenty-seven minutes.

The movie's visuals felt creative at first but it was almost as if the people working on the movie got bored as well when it feels like the same shot has been shown many times before: déjà vu does not feel like a tactic commonly used in film.

The acting felt believable and real, with a quiet performance from Amir Mohammad Pourhassan heavily aided by the house he unknowingly destroys throughout the film. This duo of set and actors creates a real and harmoniously discordant environment that is multidimensional and high stakes.

I admire *The Key* from afar and see the good parts, but amidst the action and carnage of this movie, I failed to appreciate it.

-Gus P.Z.

■

Pan's Labyrinth

(2006, dir. Guillermo del Toro)

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* tells a story of innocence lost in a fight between good and evil during the Spanish Civil War.

Arguably one of director Guillermo del Toro's best works, *Pan's Labyrinth* has been regarded for the beautiful yet terrifyingly eerie story the movie tells through impressive world building, strong acting, incredible cinematography, and special effects. Taking place during the Spanish Civil War, a pivotal moment in the history of Spain, it explores themes in Spanish history and culture, and follows the innocent 11-year-old Ofelia, who escapes into a twisted mystical reality.

Guillermo del Toro conveys the main theme of *Pan's Labyrinth* on how innocence



has no place in the fight between good and evil. The movie's main antagonist, Captain Vidal, is a sadistic killer, keeping time on his watch and shining his shoes to illustrate the order and rule-obsessed nature of the Nazis in the 1940s. Guillermo del Toro displays his evil nature by including scenes of the captain torturing and murdering various characters in brutal manners, to further characterize Vidal as the evil of this story.

Ofelia escapes the horrors of the Spanish civil war into a magical world of her own creation in which Guillermo del Toro shows her communicating with a faun, fairies and monsters that don't exist to anyone else beyond her innocent imaginative world. The fantastical elements of Ofelia's journey mixed with the depressing realities of the Spanish Civil War in *Pan's Labyrinth* make for an exciting yet scary and suspenseful mood, enhanced by the powerful soundtrack consisting of long string notes and chilling vocals. The music isn't always scary, but it is constantly chilling to match the unsettling aesthetic of

the movie.

Although it was released in 2006, *Pan's Labyrinth* is a powerful movie today for its primary theme of innocence having no place in war which is still prevalent in our present society, as civilian lives, often children, still face the terrors of war to this day.

-Oscar G.

■



MOVIE SUMMARIES

The Catch

(2011, dir. Rithy Panh)

An unpolished gem of a war/drama movie, *The Catch* tells the story of a village in Cambodia during the secret bombing campaign of 1969. This is a top notch performance from Cyril Gueï, but the ending of the movie felt a little rushed. -GPZ

Grave of the Fireflies

(1988, dir. Isao Takahata)

A heart-wrenching film about a brother and sister trying to survive in Japan at the end of WW2 takes an unabashed look at the horrors of war by heightening the contrast between the protagonists' childhood innocence and the terrible conditions of their lives. A must-see. -OE

Girl, Interrupted

(1999, dir. James Mangold)

A young woman, Susanna Kaysen, feels lost with her identity. After becoming institutionalized, Susanna is introduced to the eccentric patients that arguably help and hurt her on a journey to self-discovery and understanding. Almost too realistic, yet, somehow, dreary and rebellious. -AY

The Menu

(2022, dir. Mark Mylod)

Incredibly thrilling and bone-chilling story of a couple who visits Hawthorne, a lavish restaurant on a remote island. From the amuse bouche to the final dessert, last minute guest Margot is troubled: can she find Chef Julian Slowik's weakness and save herself from the horrors of Hawthorne and its empty-headed guests? -SL

You Resemble Me

(2022, dir. Dina Amer)

A great and unique exploration of identity, family ties, and how one's experiences might bleed over into every aspect of their future. Creates a complex and nuanced story of a woman who lost her footing in life due to childhood neglect, and ended up taking a turn in the wrong direction. -SK

Black Bear

(2020, dir. Lawrence Michael Levine)

A young writer living with a couple in their country house: a meta story of a movie within a movie within a movie. The constant switching of positions provided a weaving and different storytelling pattern unlike anything I've seen before. -GPZ

Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery

(2022, dir. Rian Johnson)

Washed-up celebrity friends invited on a weekend getaway that turns gruesome. The story's twists and turns are engaging and unpredictable, with compelling and funny performances from each actor (notably Daniel Craig and Janelle Monae). However, the mystery didn't feel as sharp and didn't live up to the precedent set by its predecessor. -OE

Halloween Ends

(2022, dir. David Gordon Green)

A truly awful film. The final entry in the Halloween series, and the culmination of a nearly fifty-year-long story. Poorly written and filled with unlikeable characters, it wasn't nearly as scary as the earlier movies. -OG

The Shape of Water

(2017, Guillermo del Toro)

Guillermo Del Toro's take on the classic misunderstood monster trope does not stray far into niche cultures or experimental aspects, but that simplicity makes the film even better, giving it a classic sense. Guillermo Del Toro provides an alluring and enchanting watch. -GPZ

Jennifer's Body

(2009, dir. Karyn Kusama)

Action-packed, comedic, campy movie asks the question, "what if a teenage girl queen bee became a raging, demonic, serial killer?" Its dark and current humor is sharp and poignant while its use of light to evoke tone and mood is effective but overwhelming. Not for the faint of heart. -GPZ

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