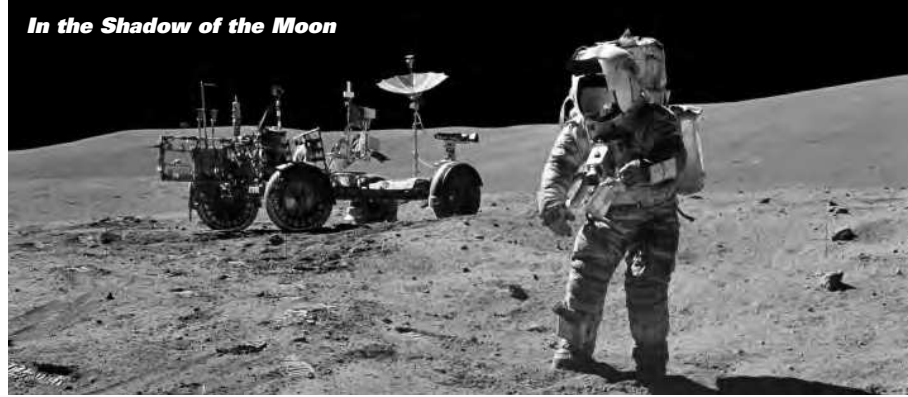


lyric from a forgotten Dylan song: *I don't belong to her / I don't belong to anybody ... I'm not there, I'm gone.* (12/6/07)

8. *In the Shadow of the Moon*

Lately, seeing “Ron Howard” attached to a film is a sure-fire way to evaporate my interest. But we owe a great deal to Howard (*Apollo 13*) for helping promote *In the Shadow of the Moon*, the spectacular documentary of the Apollo astronauts. What *Wordplay* did for crossword puzzles, *In the Shadow of the Moon* does for the space program. This is to say, it makes it *breathe*. Except for a soap-box ending, it's a masterpiece, evoking pride, laughter and astonishment. Footage unearthed after 30 years appears crisp, even recent, having been remastered in high definition, but the decision to forgo a narrator is what makes *Moon* an experience you won't soon forget. After hearing the astronauts speak for themselves, even the hardest cynics will rediscover their inner patriot. (10/11/07)



9. *Atonement*

From its expert setup — one steamy afternoon at an estate of repressed desires — to the seamless effect of its multiple and overlapping storylines, this is the film Merchant Ivory Productions always wanted to make. But here, Joe Wright (*Pride and Prejudice*), who at 35 is already one of the few sure things in Hollywood, directs. As young Briony, a dangerously naïve aspiring writer, newcomer Saoirse Ronan is equal parts innocence and

malice, easily holding her own against the top-notch Keira Knightley and James McAvoy. Balanced, intelligent and densely imagistic but also spry and incredibly tender, *Atonement* suggests jeopardy everywhere while at the same time allows us to believe in redemption. It is one of the very best-designed films this year, with the keenest use of light — natural and artificial — in recent memory. In this adaptation of the Ian McEwan novel, only the ending feels blunt; otherwise, this is

a stirring adaptation of a superb book. (1/10/08)

10. *No End in Sight*

The forward-looking title, while accurate, is a misnomer, given that *No End in Sight* examines with precision and authority the origins of our invasion of Iraq. The lack of a strategic recovery plan — the filmmakers spent more time on *No End in Sight* than President Bush spent preparing for postwar Iraq — doomed our mission from the start. These and other failures are laid at the doorstep of the White House, which repeatedly ignored key personnel to promote a pro-invasion agenda. The revelations are so numerous they defy summarization. Among its many highlights is the range of officials willing to speak on camera, including Jay Garner, a grizzled former general unable to hide his dismay. A sharp, powerful and definitive document, if one that turns a little smug in the middle, *No End in Sight* is more reliable than the administration it chronicles, a fact I find profoundly discomfiting. (9/13/07)

THE OTHER TEN



The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford A demanding art Western nearly three hours in length, *Assassination* manages, by virtue of its performances, to hold your attention throughout. Pitt's Jesse James arcs wonderfully, from laid-back to wildly paranoid, even if it takes almost an hour for the film to coalesce around him. Casey Affleck leaves behind

the muttering insouciance of earlier roles to give a mature, if earnest, performance; along with *Gone, Baby Gone*, Affleck had a year on par with Philip Seymour Hoffman. *Assassination* recalls the nuance and poetry of *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, its quiet beauty superbly photographed by Roger Deakins, who also shot *No Country for Old Men*.

Away From Her The story of a couple, still sexy and flirty into their 60s, forced apart when one of them succumbs to Alzheimer's. Elements of mystery emerge naturally — is the afflicted truly deteriorating, or is this revenge for a partner's past indiscretion? — but Julie Christie largely is responsible for the surprising grace of *Away From Her*. Christie is sensual and casually elegant throughout. *Away From Her* misses when it tries for the ethereal — some scenes are bizarrely aglow, like waking dreams — but this is a sweet, complex and stirring film about the presentness of the past and the elusiveness of the present.



Charlie Wilson's War Tom Hanks is at his easygoing best in *Charlie Wilson's War*, as is Philip Seymour Hoffman, playing a CIA hothead who bursts in on a cloud of expletives and proceeds to steal every scene he's in. If the film plays a little fast and loose with the facts, well then, it's a comedy. Julia Roberts resurfaces as strong, sexy socialite who appears almost omniscient at times, while Amy Adams (*Enchanted*) has great things ahead. A fitting tribute to a flawed but simple man who got America off the fence when it counted, *Charlie Wilson's War* is as delightful as it is unbelievable. (1/3/08)

God Grew Tired of Us This is the story of the “Lost Boys of Sudan,” the refugees who escaped extermination in their native country only to face lions, starvation and bombing raids in the African desert. Almost as remarkable as their courage is their facility with the English language, which they use with great respect and emotion. “I don't know where I am,” says one boy, “and where I am supposed to be in the future.” When the boys are relocated to Pittsburgh and Syracuse, their experience is in turns amusing and heartbreaking.



great fun. Racial mixing has never been handled more gently as in this fine film about wanting to be a regular when life gives you extra-large. (7/26/07)

Hairspray *Grease* with a conscience. If Traci Turnblad's (Nikki Blonsky) plumpness doesn't alienate her, her progressive values will: This is 1962 in un-integrated Baltimore, but Traci, who lives to dance, can see a future in which whites and blacks shake their booty together. Exuberant and purposeful, *Hairspray* is full of comedic gems, largely (so to speak) in the person of John Travolta, who crosses over to play Traci's mom in a size 60 fat suit. It's

Into Great Silence A documentary of simple majesty, if one that takes great patience, *Into Great Silence* is a three-hour visit to the monastery of Grande Chartreuse. The film, like the 1,000 year-old monastery it chronicles, is rhythmic and repetitious, but also beautiful and deeply felt. The monks speak very little, mostly to pray and sing, a memorable exception being the “brief period of conversation” they're permitted for recreation on Sundays. If you can make it to the end of *Into Great Silence*, you will not be disappointed.

Juno Comparisons to *Little Miss Sunshine* are inevitable, but *Juno* better resembles *Garden State* and *Rushmore*, two music-propelled coming-of-age films that captured, at least briefly, the attention of a generation. But *Juno* is less whimsical and more mature than those films. Yes, it's about teen pregnancy, but Ellen Page's *Juno* is a beautifully complex creature, literally growing before our eyes with every passing scene. This is a great film about returning the love you're given and keeping your promises — in other words, it's about growing up. (1/10/08)



Lars and the Real Girl What happens when a special-needs young man takes a sex doll for his girlfriend in rural Wisconsin? You get a tender fable by the name of *Lars and the Real Girl*. Screenwriter Nancy Oliver (*Six Feet Under*) strikes a perfect balance between morality tale and offbeat comedy, while Ryan Gosling builds on last year's *Half Nelson* with a stunning performance. Patricia Clarkson (*The Station Agent*) contributes in a supporting role as the wise doctor who keeps the locals from overheating. (11/1/07)

Michael Clayton Workmanlike but brilliant in places, *Michael Clayton* is the story of a man in crisis. Actually, two men: 30,000 hours into defending a carcinogenic weed killer, attorney Tom Wilkinson breaks down and becomes a whistleblower, at which point George Clooney is called in to clean up the mess. Wilkinson is superb in a supporting role, his every scene a revelation. When he asks Clooney, “Then who are you?” he's simultaneously bonkers and completely lucid. Clooney breaks type to play a sleepy-eyed fixer who, after a lifetime of mistakes, vows to do something right. That a half-crazed Wilkinson can lead him there is part of the beauty of *Michael Clayton*. (10/25/07)



Ratatouille The story of a rat who was born to cook. Not that culinary excellence puts Remy, the hero of *Ratatouille*, in good stead with his fellow rodents, let alone the humans at Gusteau's, the restaurant where Remy cooks. Director Brad Bird (*The Incredibles*) scores again with this tale of how easily we misunderstand what is new, peculiar or different. Stand-up comic Patton Oswalt, a sophisticated maniac on stage, steals the show as Remy. (7/12/07)