



CLAIRE FOLGER Courtesy of Roadside Attractions

Casey Affleck, left, and Lucas Hedges star in “Manchester by the Sea.”

MOVIE MANIAC

Review: Casey Affleck shines in ‘Manchester by the Sea’

Casey Affleck finally gets the role he deserves in “Manchester by the Sea,” which opens in Wichita on Friday.

He completely inhabits his character in a roiling, full-bodied performance that is already deservedly winning best actor awards and is surely his ticket to an Oscar (he was previously nominated for best supporting actor for 2007’s “The Assassination of Jesse James by the



BY ROD POCOWATCHIT
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Coward Robert Ford”).

The film itself is quietly devastating at times, humorous at others. But it’s always engrossing as we get caught up in the ev-

eryday characters’ worlds.

Affleck plays Lee, a janitor working in Boston who is clearly not enjoying his life, drinking in bars, starting fights. He’s surly, taciturn, keeps to himself.

He gets a call one day telling him that his brother, Joe (Kyle Chandler, TV’s “Friday Night Lights”), has died of a heart attack. So he returns home to Manchester to deal with the arrangements.

In flashbacks (occurring throughout the film), we learn that Joe had had previous heart problems, so his death doesn’t seem that much of a shock to his son, Patrick (Lucas Hedges, who impressively holds his own against Affleck). He seems to take the news pretty matter-of-factly (a little too much so, really).

Lee is stressed, though, as he tries to handle everything. Then he discovers that Joe – in his

‘Manchester by the Sea’

★★★★½

Rated: R for language throughout and some sexual content

Starring: Casey Affleck, Michelle Williams, Kyle Chandler, Lucas Hedges

Written and directed by: Kenneth Lonergan

Showing at: Warren East and West

will – has left Lee sole custody of Patrick, something Lee decidedly does not want.

He grapples with what to do. And he outright refuses when Patrick suggests that the teen’s estranged mother come into the picture. That’s something Joe would never want, Lee says, even though it would relieve him of his parental duties.

Because he simply cannot stay in Manchester. We know that. And we soon learn why as his tragic past comes back to haunt him.

The strength of the film is its characters. We get to know them intimately. Patrick is pretty much your average teenager, as he plays in a band, juggles girlfriends and hangs out with friends. It’s a world he defiantly refuses to give up when Lee suggests he move to Boston with him.

And we get to know Lee’s pain, his weariness. We *feel* it. Especially when he’s reunited with his ex-wife, Randi (Michelle Williams, sure to attract supporting actress Oscar attention).

The film is certainly emotional, and at its core is an exploration of grief and guilt, and how people cope with it. Or in some cases, simply can’t.

Writer-director Kenneth Lonergan deftly handles the flashbacks, revealing at just the right times the motivation for what’s happening in the present. He lets his characters breathe. They’re beautifully realized beings with flaws and deeply rooted feelings.

Lonergan likes to explore relationships that are so familiar they can be utterly combustible at one moment, quietly comfortable the next. That’s what keeps us engrossed. He puts us right in the sometimes ugly middle of it all. He explored similar territory with his breakout debut “You Can Count on Me,” which starred Laura Linney and Mark Ruffalo as siblings who know all too well how to hurt each other.

“Manchester by the Sea” is a sometimes emotional experience, but it’s not a complete downer. It’s peppered with some very funny moments, thanks to Lonergan’s crackling script.

And while Affleck is astounding, the film around him falls just short of matching his greatness. Its potent second act is never matched in its third. And the film never really climaxes but ends. That may be the point – that life just simply goes on.

Regardless, “Manchester by the Sea” is a deeply felt, thoroughly captivating character study. One that lingers long after it’s over.

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'Birdman' is a daring and imaginative ride

BY ROD POCOWATCHIT
The Wichita Eagle

There's an almost uncomfortable intimacy in "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)."

The film is designed to look like it has been shot in one, long continuous take (it wasn't, but it's still a breathtaking technical feat). It's like we're eavesdropping, but in the same room, right smack dab in the midst of the action.

And there is action, even though it wouldn't sound like it in a movie about putting on a play that rarely leaves its theater setting or dressing rooms. Nothing blows up, but everything is combustible, from the personalities to the situations to the desperation that hangs in the air like cigarette smoke.

The film, masterfully directed by Alejandro G. Inarritu ("Babel," "21 Grams," "Biutiful"), is part dark comedy, part profound drama, part fantasy. But it's all a daring, imaginative ride.

And it's driven by a virtuoso performance by Michael Keaton, who at once makes us dismiss him as a washed-up has-been who squandered away all his chances while also making us root for him as the underdog to succeed.

Keaton plays Riggan Thompson, an actor whose claim to fame was starring in three movies as the comic book character "Birdman" (Keaton himself starred in the two "Batman" films directed by Tim Burton,

REVIEW

'Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)'

★★★★

Rating: R for language throughout, some sexual content and brief violence

Starring: Michael Keaton, Zach Galifianakis, Edward Norton

Directed by: Alejandro G. Inarritu

coincidentally). This made him a wealthy star, but after he refused to do the fourth "Birdman" film, his career plummeted.

Some 20 years later, he now is trying to re-invent himself on Broadway by directing, writing and starring in a play based on Raymond Carver's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love."

The play is being produced by Riggan's loyal best friend, Jake (an underused Zach Galifianakis), who is the real hero of the show behind the scenes. Naomi Watts and Andrea Riseborough star as the hopelessly insecure female leads, while Edward Norton plays Mike, a last-minute addition to the cast who proves to be conceited, unruly and backstabbing.

Also moping around the place is Riggan's daughter, Sam (Emma Stone), a recovering drug addict who works as Riggan's assistant but hates every minute



Alison Rosa/Courtesy of Fox Searchlight

Michael Keaton, left, and Edward Norton star in "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)."

of it.

The clock ticks as the play nears opening night, and as new troubles arise every step of the way, particularly from a snooty New York Times critic.

The film is darkly comic, but it's also surreal. We're left at times guessing what's really happening and what is just in Riggan's head, as he feels his control slipping. An unseen voice talks to him and eggs him

on, like a little devil sitting on his shoulder. It's more than his conscience, though, it's his confidence.

Inarritu's direction is technically magnificent, but it also allows for an acting showcase. And he guides the entire cast to superb performances — just about everyone gets a chance to shine.

Look for Keaton, Inarritu and cinematographer Emmanuel

Lubezki (who won an Oscar for last year's "Gravity"), in particular, to attract Oscar attention.

But what overshadows all that dazzling work are the film's meditations on our lives as flawed beings. Our obsession with stardom, our need to be loved, our yearning for forgiveness. And our desire to believe in something more.

That is "Birdman's" greatest power of all.

'INTERSTELLAR'

From Page 9D

daughter Murphy (Mackenzie Foy) discover a mysterious code that leads to equally mysterious coordinates out in the countryside. Soon enough, Coop has been enlisted on a top-secret, probably deadly mission to find a habitable planet outside the solar system, and he's cramming into a craft alongside three other astronauts willing to risk their lives to save humanity.

One of those scientists is played by Anne Hathaway, whose molten-brown eyes seem always on the verge of tears as

the crew rattles its way through black holes and wormholes and star stuff. Nolan stages their journey with impressive, even thrilling verisimilitude, juxtaposing the deafening rattle and thrum inside the rocket with the eerily quiet world just outside. And he brings just as much imaginative vision to the places they eventually discover, from the enormous, terrifying wave that threatens to engulf them on one watery planet to the tundra-like expanse of another.

Oddly enough, when the end of the world is near, only the developed West will see fit to respond: "Interstellar" is a remarkably monocultural affair, up to and including the British accents of co-stars David Gyasi and

Michael Caine, who intones Dylan Thomas with wearying obviousness throughout the production.

With his Chuck Yeager-worthy drawl and reflectiveness well honed from his Lincoln commercials, McConaughey makes for a compelling, even believable hero who is saddled with guilt over leaving his kids at home, perhaps never to return. (He breaks down with particularly convincing abandon when he receives a pivotal video missive from home.) But too often, the father-daughter dynamics that propel "Interstellar" — which Nolan co-wrote with his brother, Jonathan — feel shrewdly calculated, the emotionalism ginned up to a hysterically maudlin pitch.

Once Cooper and his colleagues cross back and forth between the space-time continuum, "Interstellar" falls into the talky trap, with the filmmaker trying to overcome plodding, drearily explanatory passages with Hans Zimmer's basso profundo organ music score and pummeling sound effects. (One of "Interstellar's" producers is the theoretical physicist Kip Thorne, whose research undergirds many of the film's most fascinating ideas about time and gravity.)

With the exception of a sympathetic computer named TARS — wittily voiced by Bill Irwin — there's precious little humor in "Interstellar," unless you count a surprise cameo that conjures

visions of the Hollywood satire "The Player" in its absurd bid for an entirely different brand of star stuff.

By the time Cooper realizes his rightful place in the grand cosmic soup — with the help of a scientist back home played by Jessica Chastain — the endgame becomes a protracted demand for tears that, for many viewers, will feel like distant Earth-bound artifacts themselves. "Interstellar" tries so hard to be so many things that it winds up shrinking into itself, much like one of the collapsed stars Coop hurtles past on his way to new worlds. For a movie about transcending all manner of dimensions, "Interstellar" ultimately falls surprisingly flat.

NEW FICTION

Michael Chabon's rich characters tell the tale in 'Telegraph Avenue.'

PUZZLES: 8C

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Readers share Christmas memories in photo contest



Courtesy of Cindy McVicar
Cindy McVicar remembers that her sister, Christine, warmed her bottom on a light at this holiday display on Douglas in the 1970s.

BY DENISE NEIL
The Wichita Eagle

The second annual Wichita Eagle holiday photo contest drew a festive mix of retro memories, adorable kid poses and Christmas-ready pets.

The Eagle asked readers to submit pictures that represented some of their best Christmas moments, and 39 of them did.

Judges had the difficult task of narrowing the field down to 12 favorites, and readers spent a week voting for the best ones. Nearly 650 people cast votes in the contest.

The winners, below, have come into some extra holiday cash. First place earned a \$200 gift card. Second place got a \$150 gift card, and third earned a \$100 gift card. Our honorable mention winner received a \$50 gift card.

First place

For years, my dad has been Santa Claus in the small town of Anthony. He is the perfect choice. He is the embodiment of the spirit of Christmas — kind, loving and generous. He has spent many weekend afternoons in his little house on Main Street, seeing the children of the town, asking them about their Christmas wish list and giving them candy canes. His real life job as a minister is not so different — taking comfort and hope to those in hospitals and jails, delivering meals to shut-ins, playing games with his youth friends and preaching the good news of Jesus.

He has brought joy to many people, but the birth of his first grandchild this year has brought immeasurable joy to him. Baby Hadley knows and loves her Grandpa, but had not yet met Santa Claus. This picture captures their first meeting — the wonder and joy of Hadley's face is reflected in her Grandpa's expression. The look they share is precious.

— Lyndi Schnelle, Wichita
Lyndi Schnelle is the daughter of Santa/grandpa John Schnelle, who is the pastor at Anthony Christian Church. She's baby Hadley's aunt. Hadley lives with her mom, Jordan, and dad, Lance, in Liberal. Lyndi posted the news of her photo's selection as a finalist in the contest on Facebook and urged her friends to vote for the picture daily. "I



Courtesy of Lyndi Schnelle
John Schnelle, aka Santa, visits with his granddaughter, Hadley.

just love it," she said of the photo, which she took. "It means so much to us."

Second place

Our parents use to take us to downtown Wichita to see the Christmas decorations. This photo was taken at a Christmas setup on Douglas sometime in the mid-'70s. My sister, Christine, "sat" on one of the canned lights while my brother, Carlos, and I egged her on with our laughter!

— Cindy McVicar, Wichita
McVicar, seen here with her brother, Carlos Ayala, left, and her sister, Christine Black, middle, remembers that this display was located down a few stairs near Douglas and Main, probably in 1973 or 1974. It was cold that night, she said, and her sister sat on the light to warm herself up. Heading downtown to investigate the Christmas displays was a tradition in her family.

Third place

This photograph is of my parents, Joe and Kathleen Gallatin, when they lived at 910 Congress Street in Emporia, Kansas. It was taken Christmas of 1960. My father worked at Meschke's, a men's clothing store, and my mother was secretary to the president of Kansas State Teacher's College



Courtesy of Laurie McDonald
Laurie McDonald loved this photo of her parents at Christmas dinner in 1960 so much that she had the slide made into a print.



Laurie Sparham/Courtesy of Universal Pictures
Javert (Russell Crowe, left) and Jean Valjean (Hugh Jackman) experience conflict in 'Les Misérables.'

‘Les Misérables’: Powerful story, beautiful vision

BY RICK BENTLEY
Fresno Bee

To transform the much-beloved “Les Misérables” from stage to screen, director Tom Hooper had to find a way to maintain — and amplify — the emotional power of the original words and music with the trappings of a big-screen production.

His efforts have created a beautiful and moving version of the stage production that's loyal enough to its origins to appease Broadway musical fans, yet is theatrical enough to stand as a feature film release.

“Les Misérables,” the musical based on the book by Victor Hugo that opens Tuesday, is a story of love, devotion, dedication and betrayal set in the years following the French Revolution. Jean Valjean (Hugh Jackman) emerges from 19 years of hard labor in prison — sent there for stealing a loaf of bread — and begins a new life.

Please see **‘MISERABLES’**, Page 2C

REVIEW

‘Les Misérables’

★★★½

(Opening Tuesday)

Rating: PG-13 for violence, adult situations

Starring: Hugh Jackman, Anne Hathaway, Russell Crowe, Amanda Seyfried

Directed by: Tom Hooper

Holidays bring memories of movies, family

I remember as a kid looking forward to the holiday season.

Not because of Santa or all the gifts — well, of course that was cool, too — but because of the movies.

Hollywood traditionally rolls out its blockbusters during the holidays, and it did when I was a kid, too.

My mom was a single working mother raising two boys. Money was tight, but she always somehow managed to take us to lots of movies at Christmastime. And I loved it.

My mom would even save some vacation time to take us during the day while we were on Christmas break. And after having watched the trailers months before in anticipation, we would carefully plan our movie agenda.

When the time finally came to go to the



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Please see **MOVIES**, Page 2C

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Fifth-grade girls agree: There are too many guns out there

If you're reading this, it means the Mayans were wrong. The world didn't end Friday. I figure the Mayans those many years ago decided figuring a calendar to 2012 was plenty long enough.

At any rate, we're still here. And the ones who aren't are being mourned. In a way the world did come crashing down for the residents of a tiny town in Connecticut. A horrific event that deliv-



BONNIE BING

ered an excruciating punch in the gut to that community. A jolt that was felt across our entire country. And the pain remains. And certainly not only with adults.

I have lunch with a group of terrific fifth-grade girls every Tuesday. I've done this for years, but this is an especially good group. We start each session with "highs" and "lows."

Sure enough, one student said her low was "the awful murders in that little town. Those were little kids," she said. She seemed to know more details than I wanted her to share with the group about the horrific incident. The subject kept coming up as we went around the table, so I

decided to ask, "What do you think can be done to keep this from happening again?"

One girl said, "I don't know, but we had a lockdown this morning. And I was scared." It was true. The school office had been contacted that morning to go to lockdown because there was a suspicious character in the vicinity of the school.

"We need to legalize guns," the well-informed girl said. "If only the police had guns, then regular people would quit shooting each other."

"Regular people don't shoot people. They shoot birds and stuff," was one response.

The statement "The bad people

shoot people. And the crazy people do, too," brought a discussion of whether all bad people are crazy and if crazy people are all bad.

There was not a consensus; most of the girls thought it would have to be looked at case by case. But they did agree there are too many guns out there, and that "crazy people should not be allowed to buy guns."

By the way, these girls have given gun control a lot of thought. The little girl who was killed in September by a drive-by shooter while she slept in her bed had been a third-grader at this school.

We finally got off the subject and had our Christmas party and talked

about what we wanted for Christmas. It ranged from a Kindle to "having dinner with my whole family with no fights."

They left wearing the matching necklaces I gave them along with the red ribbon I had used on the wrapping. Their spirits were high, wishing me "Merry Christmas" and giving me extra-big hugs.

Last girl out the door turned and said, "One more thing for Christmas, Miss Bonnie: No more shooting. They have to quit."

Yes. Yes, they do.

Reach Bonnie Bing at bingbylines@gmail.com.

PHOTOS

From Page 1C

(now Emporia State University). Aren't they a handsome couple? He in his midnight blue jumpsuit and she in her orange and black plaid dress, which coordinates with the turkey so beautifully.

A lovely meal was prepared to be shared in a special family time together. My sister and I weren't born yet when this photo was taken, but we experienced the continuing tradition that it portrays. This holiday meal's tradition included a formal setting which meant bringing out the fine china and sterling and serving a traditional sit-down family style meal. I have always loved this photo and thought it should be on the cover of Good Housekeeping because it is so stunning. To me it says simple elegance with family warmth and love



Courtesy of Nancy Farley

It took a lot of candy and cajoling to get Nancy Farley's grandchildren to cooperate for this photo.

at Christmas.

— Laurie McDonald, Wichita

McDonald said she has always loved this photo, which was kept in a collection of slides. A few years ago, she

had it made into a print so she could look at it as often as she wanted. Her parents are gone: Her father died in 1996, and her mother last year. But the picture continues to fascinate her. "It just strikes me as so

'American family,' " she said.

Honorable mention

What better way to depict the Nativity scene for our 2002 Christmas card but to have our own grandchildren play the roles? When our sixth grandchild was born, I realized I had all the parts for our own family Nativity picture. I made all the costumes, used the playhouse my son-in-law had made, had my two daughters encouraging the children, and I began shooting! Don't all shepherds have a sucker? The little one on the left needed a little encouragement to stay still. Five toddlers and an infant were a challenge, but the result is a true family treasure!

—Nancy Farley, Derby

Farley caught this photo by clicking and clicking and clicking and clicking the camera.

Contributing: *JesAnne Bouchard of The Eagle*

Lindsborg's 'Messiah' tickets on sale Jan. 2

BY BECCY TANNER
The Wichita Eagle

Tickets for the 132nd annual production of Handel's Messiah go on sale beginning Jan. 2 at Bethany College in Lindsborg.

The college's production of the Messiah is one of the oldest Lenten traditions in North America. The 2013 Messiah Festival of the Arts is scheduled for March 24-31.

Priority tickets of the Messiah performances and Bach's "St. Matthew Passion" go on sale Jan. 2 with general admission tickets going on sale Feb. 15. With priority seating tickets, people can save their seats from last year or have first choice at new seats.

The Messiah tradition in Lindsborg began in 1879 when 22-year-old Carl Aaron Swensson and his wife, Alma, arrived and he became pastor of the Bethany Lutheran Church. Within two years, he started Bethany College for the immigrant children of the parish to receive a higher education. Swensson had seen a community church in Illinois do a rendition of the Messiah and vowed to produce it in Lindsborg.

To purchase tickets: Beginning Jan. 2, call Bethany's Messiah Coordinator Blakely Bunning at 785-227-3311, ext. 8137, between 1 and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday or e-mail bunningb@bethanylbu.edu.

'MISERABLES'

From Page 1C

His new world of wealth and power is threatened when he's recognized by Javert (Russell Crowe), a man whose devotion to the letter of the law goes beyond the obsessive.

The honorable Valjean is willing to return to prison because of his parole violation, but he must first complete a promise he makes to a dying Fantine (Anne Hathaway), a young woman from his factory who has turned to a life of prostitution to pay for her daughter's care. Valjean's efforts to keep that promise force him to once again seek a new identity and home. This leads him to a divided Paris poised on the brink of revolution.

Hooper started with one huge advantage. The timeless and powerful story resonates with a conscious-shaking force no matter the medium. In a world where there are no

Hooper gives the actors a stunning backdrop to work against, creating a 19th-century Paris that feels so real you can almost smell the sewers.

absolutes, two dedicated men strive to protect the purity of their convictions.

The always surprisingly versatile Jackman turns in a masterful performance as a man who emerges from a shattered life to become a champion of truth and justice. Jackman's expressive face and competent singing voice bring a depth to the role that serves as a centerpiece for telling this dramatic tale.

Crowe's Javert represents a devotion more to the letter of the law than its spirit. It's only when he faces the harsh truth that rules have to be treated with a fluidity that he comes face-to-face with his own demons. Crowe brings a thuggish quality to the role,

but his thin voice is often a distraction. Javert's words should create emotional earthquakes, but Crowe's work is little more than a tremor.

Anne Hathaway is tres magnifique. Hooper was smart enough to know that while the actress might not have the singing skills of those who have played the role on stage, Hathaway's acting abilities more than make up for any musical deficiencies. Hooper leaves the camera on her face as she sings the show-stopping "I Dreamed a Dream" with such haunting refrain that it makes you think that this must be what it's like when angels cry.

Some people are given Oscars; others earn them. Hathaway has more than earned a gold statue.

The film is loaded with powerful supporting players, particularly Samantha Barks as the suffering Eponine and Eddie Redmayne as the love-sick Marius.

Hooper gives the actors a stunning backdrop to work

against, creating a 19th-century Paris that feels so real you can almost smell the sewers and feel the rats running across your feet. It's these sweeping vistas that justify making the stage musical into a film.

There are a few small problems, such as the staging of the "Master of the House" scene that feels more like a Tim Burton production — possibly because of the casting of Helena Bonham Carter. From a cinematic point of view, it feels out of place.

And, it's hard to get past Crowe's crooning.

Overall, Hooper has taken the stage play and elevated it visually to counterbalance the weaker voices. The combination of the powerful story and his beautiful vision makes "Les Miserables" a winner.

One word of warning. If you aren't a fan of the musical, "Les Miserables" is very operatic in design with almost every line of dialogue sung. If you revolt at the idea of that style, then another holiday selection should be made.

Lake Afton schedules new winter programs

BY RYAN WRIGHT
The Wichita Eagle

Wichita State University will hold several new programs this winter at Lake Afton Public Observatory, including "Life Story of a Star," "Journey to Jupiter" and three astrophotography programs.

In "Life Story of a Star," visitors will get a chance to view various stages in a star's life cycle through the observatory's 16-inch telescope.

The first presentations will be Jan. 4 and 5 from 7:30 to 10 p.m. The program will run through the end of April.

"Journey to Jupiter" will take guests on a journey to the largest planet in our solar system. In the program, the many moons and cloud features of Jupiter will be explored.

The program will begin Jan. 18 and will have various pre-

sentations on Fridays and Saturdays through April.

An astrophotography program will also be offered. Anyone with a camera that has a removable lens can take celestial photos using the observatory's telescope as a giant telephoto lens.

The program will feature Jupiter, the Orion nebula and the first quarter moon. and will take place on various Saturdays monthly.

Admission to the observatory is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children, free for children under 6.

There's also a family special that admits two adults and their immediate children or grandchildren for \$15.

The observatory is on MacArthur Road at 247th Street West in Lake Afton County Park.

For more information, go to webs.wichita.edu/lapo.

MOVIES

From Page 1C

movie, I remember a rush of excitement wash over me as we got in the car.

Then as we'd arrive at the theater, I'd marvel at the lighted marquee like I had never seen it before, the flickering neon lights dancing overhead.

As we opened the shiny doors to the theater, I remember the first smell of popcorn wafting through the lobby, and it made my mouth water. I remember the ticket-taker greeting us, and I thought he had the most awesome job ever.

I'd run to the wall and gaze at the posters advertising coming attractions. I'd study the artwork, memorize the tagline, and point out which films looked good to my mom. She'd always smile and nod her head.

After that, we'd go wait in line to get our snacks. I remember seeing the popcorn lit up in the glass bins, on display like masterpiece paintings in an art gallery.

Then we'd find a seat — never too close to the screen or too far — and settle in.

Then the lights would dim. Adrenaline started coursing through me — or maybe that was the butter from the popcorn hardening my veins — but no matter. It was a thrill every time the movie was

about to begin.

Then the previews of coming attractions would start, as I cursed the late-comers who blocked my view of the screen. Don't they know the trailers are the best part? I'd rather have a tooth pulled with rusty pliers than miss one.

And we'd always stay through the film's end credits, of course. Every person worked hard on that movie, I thought, and by golly I was going to read every single name.

After the movie was finally over, all that usually remained in the theater would be workers sweeping popcorn off the floor — and us.

So, you see, I've always been a movie maniac.

My mom recognized early on this love of movies. And she made sure that I got to experience them.

They not only made me happy then, but they made me what I am today. I'm a fledgling filmmaker, at best, but I've somehow managed to make three features and scores of short films. Something I thought could never happen.

So those holiday seasons of watching movies with my mom not only taught me to follow my dreams, they taught me to believe in the impossible.

But most of all, to believe in myself.

Thanks, Mom. See you in the popcorn line.

4

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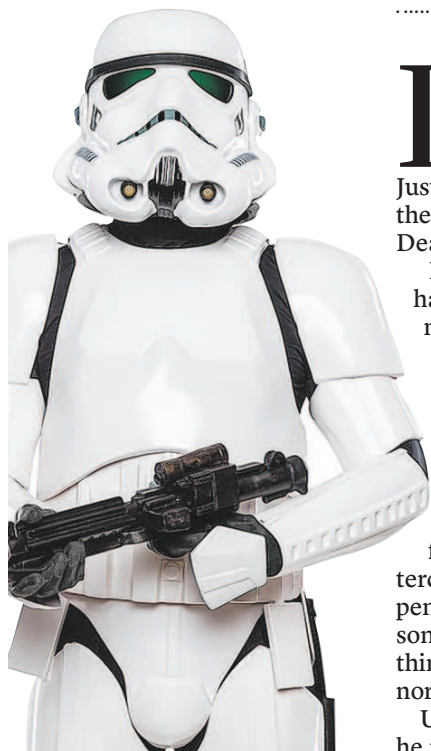


Mark Hamill, left, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford star in "Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope."

File photo

If I were a Stormtrooper on that blasted Death Star

MOVIE MANIAC
BY ROD POCOWATCHIT



In celebration of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," a fantasy letter

Dear Mom,
There's never a dull moment with life in the Galactic Empire. Just last week there was quite the disturbance here at the Death Star.

It seems Princess Leia (who has gone back to wearing cinnamon rolls on the side of her head - like *that* will ever be a thing) escaped Detention Block AA-23. I'm certainly glad I wasn't on watch duty!

I heard that Jim heard a big explosion a couple of floors down, got on the intercom and asked what happened. The trooper on duty said something like, "Uh, everything's under control. Situation normal."

Uh, situation *not* normal, as he refused to give out his oper-

ating number and shoot the intercom! So Jim sent a squad up, only to find Princess Leia being rescued by some dude named Luke Skywalker and a smuggler named Han Solo. And a Wookiee!

There was a big blaster shootout that left the lobby in *complete* disarray. Hilda on the cleanup crew was none too happy. She said, "If it's not 'scrub the Imperial toilets,' it's 'put the fire out in Detention Block AA-23.'" At least *she* gets paid overtime.

But I do have bad news. My roommate, Bert, was shot and killed in the rumble. It's OK, though. He snored and had stinky feet. Besides, we Stormtroopers aren't supposed to have any emotions. We're just supposed to go about our duties with no questions asked, always wearing our helmets. I mean, what do the higher-ups think we are? Clones?

But I digress. The Princess escaped by leading her cohorts down to the sewage trash com-

ONLINE

See Rod Pocowatchit's review of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" Friday morning on kansas.com/movies.

pactor. Can you believe that? Everybody knows that that's where the deadly Dianoga sewage monster lives! *Ew.*

Somehow the Princess and her boys escaped that, too, and made it to their Millennium Falcon ship - if you can call it that. I mean, really, what a piece of junk! How that made the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsecs is beyond me!

Apparently, they got away because some Obi-Wan Kenobi fellow sneaked in and turned off the tractor beam. While I was on duty, even. I was mortified!

And I had just asked Bob, "Do you know what's going on?"

He said, "Maybe it's another drill."

Argh! So we had to file a report. I mean, honestly, the amount of paperwork around here is going to kill all the trees

on planet Endor!

But we got ours, though. While the rebels were escaping, Lord Vader challenged Obi-Wan to a light saber duel, and won! Ha! Don't mess with the dark side, fool!

But Lord Vader was none too keen on the Princess escaping, *no sirree*. Now we all have to pull triple duty on our watch shifts!

Oh, by the way, I did get a new roommate, and do you know what he said? "Aren't you a little short for a Stormtrooper?" I mean, really!

Uh-oh. The Imperial alarm is going off. I think this could be it. The attack on the Death Star by the rebel strike force. I have to man my position.

I have a bad feeling about this. But don't worry, Mom. We got this. Force, *schmorse*.

Love always,
Johnny, Stormtrooper operating number LS-007

Rod Pocowatchit: 316-268-6638, rpocowatchit@wichitaeagle.com, @arawd

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY SALE All Items Marked Down



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Arts & Culture

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Fan Randall Aviks poses Tuesday in his west Wichita apartment with his “Star Wars” memorabilia. Aviks was 7 when he first saw “Star Wars.”

Force still strong with local ‘Star Wars’ fans

“Star Wars: The Force Awakens” opens with mega-blockbuster spectacle
Fans recount their love of the previous films

BY ROD POCOWATCHIT
rpocowatchit@wichitaeagle.com

They’ve seen a glimpse of Leia looking forlorn. They’ve cheered when Han Solo said, “Chewie, we’re home.” And they’ve all debated why Luke Skywalker is so elusive in the trailers.

Unless you live in a galaxy far, far away, there has been no escape from the gargantuan level of excitement surrounding “Star Wars: The Force Awakens,” which officially opens on Friday.

Fans are giddy that they will see their favorite characters from the original “Star Wars” trilogy again (Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford and Carrie Fisher) while being introduced to a slew of newcomers (Daisy Ridley, John Boyega and Oscar Isaac) who will soon be household

“I LITERALLY JUMPED OUT OF MY CHAIR, I COULD NOT BELIEVE WHAT I SAW, AND I’VE NEVER BEEN THE SAME SINCE.”

Randall Aviks

names.

Randall Aviks of Wichita likens the phenomenon to reuniting with old friends.

“We love these characters. We love Han Solo. We love Princess Leia. We love Chewie. We love Luke. And we want to see what happens to them.”

THE FIRST REACTION
Aviks, 45, remembers the



Derek Richardson, owner of Hero Complex Games and Entertainment, says “Star Wars” fueled his thirst for knowledge.

rush of seeing the original 1977 “Star Wars” film.

“Life changed. Bam! Right there!” he said. “The minute you see those spaceships come overhead. You see C-3PO and R2-D2 bumbling around and rebels scrambling. I had never seen anything like that before in my life.”

The Wichita comic book artist and actor was 7 years old when he first saw the movie.

“I literally jumped out of my chair,” he said. “I could not believe what I saw, and I’ve never been the same since.”

Curt Caster, 51, had a similar experience.

“It was the first time that I felt awe at a movie theater,” said Caster, a Wichita engineer. “I knew that this was something that was really going to mean something to me.”

Wichitan Jodi Goff loved

‘Star Wars: The Force Awakens’

As of Friday afternoon, these theaters still had available tickets for sneak preview screenings on Thursday:

Warren Theatre west: In 2D at 11:15 p.m. and midnight; in IMAX 3D at 1:30 a.m.

Warren Old Town: In 3D at 10:10 p.m.

“Star Wars,” but it was “The Empire Strikes Back” that really made an impression with her.

“When Darth Vader said, ‘I am your father,’ we all stood up and screamed ‘nooooo!’ And then cried our eyes out. Saw it five more times and still couldn’t believe it each time.”

For Derek Richardson, owner of Hero Complex Games and Entertainment in Wichita, it all started even before he saw “Star Wars.”

“The summer when I was 5,” he said, “I went to the Crest Theatre and saw the poster for ‘Star Wars.’ I begged my mother to see it.”

And that set the course for his life, in a way.

SEE FANS, 2C

VIDEO

See “Star Wars” fans show off some of their collectibles at www.kansas.com/video.

Fan memories

In a Facebook post, we asked people how they felt after the first time they saw “Star Wars” (responses are edited):

- “Durango, Colorado, summer of ‘77 with my grandmother and little sister. I was 13 and totally blown away. I bought the soundtrack and listened to it over and over. I probably saw it 20 times that summer.” – Brian Curtis
- “Like anything was possible.” – Joshua Cates
- “I was excited. I came out making light saber sounds and running around like an X-Wing fighter. My father was cool enough to take me back to see it six more times at the Wichita mall on Harry. My two boys are in the living room playing ‘Star Wars’ right now.” – Erick Riedell
- “Amazed! Especially because it was the first movie I had ever seen in a movie theater. My twin brother was a huge fan from then on. It’s a major childhood memory.” – Trish Dool
- “‘Empire’ was the first movie I saw that I can remember thinking about for days afterward. I wanted to know what happened next, and I was very worried about the safety of the characters. It was heavy.” – Allen Wilkie
- “Enthralled. I was born the year it came out, but I do remember seeing ‘Return of the Jedi’ in theaters. I wanted to marry Princess Leia, be Han Solo and turn my dog into a Wookiee. Many sticks in the yard served as blasters and light sabers.” – Joshua Sanders
- “I felt like that was the coolest school field trip I ever got to go on. That’s right, they loaded our entire 4th grade class up on buses and took us to the movie theater.” – Gar Chandler
- “That another galaxy existed far far away.” – Danny Yoger
- “Ready to find Han Solo and profess my undying love.” – Becky Gard
- “I thought it meant all my ideas about God were true and everything my Christian parents had told me were lies proven false. And I told my mom I was going to become a Jedi and prove her wrong.” – Bradley Dean Sommerfeld
- “Like I could conquer the world ... and I was 7.” – Tim Hudson
- “The same way I do now. It was the first movie I went to with my father. This year I take my 7-year-old daughter to the new one.” – Tye Pameticky
- “Loved it enough to see it about 14 times in the theater.” – Lee Ann Mulford

Today in our community

Sedgwick County Zoo, Westar Energy and the City of Wichita are teaming up to give away firewood and mulch this winter. The firewood and mulch is provided from Westar Energy’s ReliabiliTree tree trimming program and the City of Wichita’s forestry tree pruning and removal operations. Sedgwick County Zoo is proud to be part of a program that benefits our citizens, reduces waste and conserves our natural resources. The wood is normally delivered between 3:30 and 4:30 p.m. daily.

Jeff Beasley
Vice President,
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