

Film Capsules August 2014

[Begin Again](#)

Rated R. Psalm 69: 1-3.

A film set in the music record world, this is also a good father-daughter story. It is made by the people who gave us the delightful *Once*, also about musicians and the creative process. Shot on location around Manhattan, it rivals the films of Woody Allen in showing us the colorful, upbeat sights of the metropolis. Both main characters—a young woman who composes her songs and has just been betrayed by her lover, and a music arranger who has just been fired from his record company—begin their lives over when they are drawn together by the woman's performance in a small club one night. You leave the theater filled with memories of good music and the feeling that life does offer the possibility of starting over again.

[A Most Wanted Man](#)

Rated PG-13. Psalm 2:1; Isaiah 5:20.

There are two good reasons to be sure to see this international spy thriller. It is based on John le Carre's novel, and, most compelling of all, it is your last opportunity to see the late Philip Seymour Hoffman carry a film. He is masterful as a German intelligence agent in Hamburg tracking down a recent half-Russian, half-Chechen immigrant who managed to escape from a Russian prison. Is he a Muslim terrorist, or truly a refugee? Hoffman's agent tries to hang onto a shred of decency while working in a system totally devoid of ethics, other than the obsession with "national security. This fine film is a fitting tribute to a great actor.

[Snowpiercer](#)

Rated R. Ezekiel 22:23-25, 27-28.

One of the best dystopian sci-fi films since *District 9*, this film explores issues raised by the current debate over the growing gap between the 1% and the 99%. After a scientific experiment to prevent global warming has gone wrong, freezing to death most of humanity, a few thousand survivors are kept alive aboard the train to which travels a circuit that encircles the earth. The bulk of the passenger almost starve in the filthy rear cars, whereas the paying passengers live up front, and in the luxurious engine lives the man who created the train, treating with disdain those at the back. Will the current rebels fighting their way forward fail as all others have in the past?

[Wish I Was Here](#)

Rated R. Deuteronomy 11:18-20.

Some of the critics have been harsh on this comedy-drama, but I loved it because it explores the spirituality of a Jewish family. The father is an agnostic, though he experiences what he calls epiphanies that make him aware there is something out there, whereas his teenaged daughter has so embraced her grandfather's Orthodox faith that she wears drab, long dresses and wants to shear her hair. The theme of reconciliation between the grandfather and his two estranged sons is beautifully handled, coinciding with an unforgettable, upbeat death scene.

[The German Doctor](#)

Rated PG-13. Psalm 7:14.

Creepy sums up my feeling while watching this Argentinean film based on the fact that Dr. Josef Mengele, the Auschwitz "Angel of Death" found refuge in Patagonia after the collapse of the Third Reich. He befriends a family with an adolescent daughter and tells them that as a geneticist he can increase her

abnormally small stature with a hormone treatment. Part of a colony of Nazi expatriates, the Doctor moves into the hotel owned by the family, quickly ingratiating himself, although the father remains suspicious of him. So too is a Jewish teacher at the local school. As news of the apprehension of Adolph Eichmann is carried on TV, she thinks she knows the identity of the mysterious "German doctor."

[Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#)

Rated PG-13. Luke 19:41-42.

The best of all of the "Apes" pictures, in my opinion, the story takes place ten years after the 2011 film. The apes, led by Caesar, live in Muir Woods above San Francisco. The humans are barely surviving in the ruined city. Their plan to go into the mountains to repair a hydro dam so they can have electricity again leads to the first contact between the two species. The two leaders want peace, but can they keep their less discerning followers in check?

[Lucy](#)

Rated R. Genesis 4:a; Proverbs 4:17.

A thriller based on the pseudo-scientific claim that we use just 10% of our brains, this globe-spanning tale is exciting but overly violet. Scarlett Johansson's character begins using an increasing amount of her brain after ingesting a new compound. Soon she can understand Mandarin, "hear" the thoughts of others, and bend time and space to her will. She even travels back millions of years in time and meets the famous hominid, also named Lucy, and performs a god-like act that calls to mind Michelangelo's famous "God and Adam" fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. A lot of fun if you can take the violence.

[Earth to Echo](#)

Rated PG. Leviticus 19:34.

Either a homage to, or a rip-off, of Steven Spielberg's *E. T.*, this is about three boys and a girl who must have the most careless parents in Nevada. They are able to stay out all night with their bikes as they attempt to help a metallic owl-like alien return home, while also trying to elude the adult team that is trying to capture the little fellow and study him. Along the way the boys pick up a girl who proves to be a big help. I would have liked this better if the filmmakers had not used the "found film" technique, begun by *The Blair Witch Project*, in which all we see is what cameras used by the characters show us. Very unsettling, most shots being so shaky!

[And So It Goes](#)

Rated PG-13. Philippians 2:3.

Not one of director Rob Reiner's best, this is a character redemption film in which a cranky realtor is transformed when the custody of a little granddaughter he didn't know existed is thrust upon him. Best thing about the film is that this is the first time Michael Douglas and Diane Keaton have appeared in the same film. Add this to your list of films that treat seriously romance between seniors rather than as a joke.

[Planes: Fire & Rescue](#)

Rated PG. Romans 12.16.

Beautiful animation in this sequel, but a so-so story about Rusty the crop dusting plane who goes West to learn to be a firefighter.

[The Hundred Foot Journey](#)Rated PG.

After the family matriarch dies during an act of political violence that destroys the family restaurant, the Kadam family leaves India and wanders for a time through Europe. When their

old van breaks down near a French village, the father comes across a closed restaurant that he decides is the perfect place to start over. However, the proprietor of the two-star Michelin restaurant directly across the road—the hundred feet of the title—is highly upset by his plans to open “The Madison Mumbai.” There ensues a long tussle that ignites an act of intolerance among a few xenophobic villagers, but which ironically leads the oldest son toward the unexpected career of a master chef of French cuisine. The food is gorgeously photographed, and the romances of the father and the son are charmingly underplayed. A wonderful film that lives up to the claims of the TV campaign promoting it! Best of all, it stars Helen Mirren.

[Get On Up](#) Rated PG-13.

Chadwick Boseman is outstanding as “The Godfather of Soul,” James Brown, in this warts and all film biography. And Nelsan Ellis matches him scene for scene as Brown’s long-suffering second banana Bobby Byrd. This is a film that demands close attention because it jumps back and forth in time, recalling Brown’s boyhood poverty, his rise to fame as a member of the Famous Flames; his fighting back against the white-owned record company so that he gains control of his career; his entertaining the troops in Vietnam where his plane lost an engine to enemy gun fire; his preventing a riot in Boston following the murder of Dr. King; and much more—including his drinking and wife abuse and some other less savory moments. But most of all, the film celebrates the incredible artistry of a man who gave his audiences all he had, with Boseman performing those incredible gliding dance moves that added so much to James Brown’s performances. This is a film with a social justice undercurrent that will thrill those who love the music left us by this consummate artist.

[Guardians of the Galaxy](#)

Rated PG. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Although most will enjoy this special effects-laden film as just another summer blockbuster filled with fighting, those who prefer films with deeper meaning might be surprised at how many intimate moving moments there are. Our interspecies Guardians—a thief, a green-skinned female transformed into a fighting machine; a humanoid walking tree with very limited vocabulary; a hunk who has trouble understanding metaphors; and a genetically enhanced talking raccoon—

Documentaries

[Life Itself](#)

Rated R. Romans 8:28 (NIV).

Based on film critic Roger Ebert's book of the same title, this is not just a look at his life, but a profile in courage as he copes with the cancer that had led to the removal of his jaw and his mobility. We learn much about his personal life, as well as what it takes to be a film critic. I had known little about him—for instance that his wife was the African American civil rights lawyer named Chaz—even though he was usually the first film critic I wanted to read when a new film came out. Well worth the trip to the eastern suburbs to see this one!

[The Hornet's Nest](#)

Rated R. Psalm 120:6-7.

A father-son team embedded themselves with US soldiers for almost two years to report for ABC News the Afghan War. Their footage, shot with cameras attached to their helmets, give a vivid picture of combat as we hear bullets whistling by and the sound of explosions from mortars or IEDs. In their pursuit of a vicious Taliban leader they stir the hornet's nest of the title when they close upon his hideout in eastern Afghanistan.

A good tribute to our men dedicated to caring for each other and for the victims of the Taliban who cross their paths.