

Film Capsules December 2014

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[Diplomacy](#)

Not Rated. Genesis 22:9-12.

The filmmakers effectively open up a stage play that condenses into one night a series of confrontations between two strong-willed men in Paris during August of 1944. The men are General Dietrich von Choltitz, the recently arrived Nazi governor of Paris, and Raoul Nordling, the Swedish consul-general who has spent so much time in the City of Lights that he loves it like a native. He risks his freedom, maybe his life, by sneaking into the German's office in order to convince him not to follow Hitler's orders to totally destroy the city before retreating—the Americans are already in the suburbs of the city. We already know the answer to Hitler's famous question, "Is Paris burning?" even if we have not seen the film by that name. Thus the drama is not in the outcome, but in the exchange between the two men, Nordling arguing from a rational and ethical perspective, von Choltitz from a "follow orders at all costs" perspective. The latter also has a dilemma that startles his visitor when it is revealed. Hitler has just issued a law that orders the arrest and execution of the family of any soldier that does not carry out his orders—and von Choltitz loves his wife and children very much.

[The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1](#)

Rated PG-13. Psalm 10:17-18.

This next to the last installment of *The Hunger Games* series finds the heroine Katniss Everdeen embedded with the rebels in

their underground city in District 13. She is grieving that her lover Peeta was left behind by those who rescued her in the last episode, so she is in no condition to become the Joan of Arc figure that the rebel leaders want her to become. It is imperative that she agrees to go on TV as the symbol of freedom so that the revolutionaries from the 12 districts become united in their fight against the dictatorship of Pres. Snowden in the Capitol. This is a fascinating story focusing on how opposing powers use propaganda against one another—Pres. Snowden tortures and bends Peeta's mind so that he goes on television to persuade the rebels to stop their fighting. Because this is not the final film of the series, it leaves us with a cliffhanger.

[Rosewater](#)

Rated R. Psalm 69:1; Isaiah 43:2; Isaiah 61:1.

Jon Stewart of *The Daily Show* steps behind the camera to direct the script he adapted from journalist Maziar Bahari's memoir *And Then They Came For Me*. In Tehran to cover the Iranian elections and demonstrations, Bahari was arrested and imprisoned as a spy for the West. Ironically, the evidence was a tape of a Daily Show skit in which a Daily Show cast member posing as a fictional spy interviewed the journalist. The Iranian authorities were unable to see that this was just a comedy sketch and not a genuine interview! This is a well-filmed true story of courage and pluck under the pressure of mental and physical torture, and yet laced with surprising humor. Blindfolded most of the day, the prisoner at first knew his brutal interrogator by his voice and the scent that he used, rosewater. For an inspirational film, don't miss this one.

[The Theory of Everything](#)

Rated PG-13. Job 7:1-4; I Corinthians 13:7.

This stand up and cheer biographical film ought to inspire you to take stock (especially during this season of Thanksgiving) of your own life and fill you with a sense of your personal good fortune, at least when compared to so many afflicted by diseases. Based on Jane Hawking's *Traveling to Infinity: My Life With Stephen*, the film expertly tells the story of the life of cosmologist Stephen Hawking from the days when he courted Jane at Cambridge through the years in which he was diagnosed as a victim of Motor Neuron Disease while at the same time he is developing his brilliant theories about time and space. Hawking is a non-believer, but Jane is a devout Anglican who endures incredible hardships herself in giving him the support that prolongs his life beyond the two-years of the doctor's diagnosis, thus allowing his brilliant mind to work. Others also lend support, showing what can happen when all lay aside their own needs to help another with greater ones.

[Low Down](#)

Rated R. Romans 6:23.

The title of director Jeff Preiss's film might make you think of Woody Allen's 1999 jazz film *Sweet and Low Down*, but this is true story—and a very dark one. Based on Amy-Jo Albany and Topper Lilien's screen adaptation of Albany's memoir, *Low Down: Junk, Jazz, and Other Fairy Tales from Childhood*, it is the story of jazz pianist Joe Albany is told through the eyes of his daughter. Set in the mid 1970s in L.A., it is a bittersweet father-daughter film in which Joe wants to be both a successful jazz musician and a loving father, but he loves too much the highs that heroin brings him.

Whiplash

Rated R. Psalm 109:16; Colossians 3:12.

Although billed as a film about a student jazz drummer and his brilliant teacher, this film belongs also in the “Monster” category. Ambitious Andrew Neyman is excited that legendary jazzman and teacher Terence Fletcher has invited him to join the studio band, but their relationship quickly turns sour when the perfectionist instructor insults, humiliates, slaps, and hurls objects at him when he and other hapless students fail his expectations. Thus this can be seen as a parable of two forms of leadership/teaching—a brutal dictatorial form based on fear that dehumanizes for the sake of perfection; or a warm, inspirational approach that seeks to draw out the best in a person. I was struck by the similarity of themes between this and the animated fantasy film *Babe*!

Interstellar

Christopher Nolan’s film begins in a Midwestern cornfield, but this is no *Field of Dreams*, though the relationship between a father and daughter is just as close—until the father makes a fateful choice that will drive a breach between them lasting for decades. This is pure science fiction in that it is an exploration of big concepts and ideas rather than what was coined over a half century ago, “space opera,” the latter employing the s-f genre merely for action and thrills. Set in a not too distant future when over population and climate change have turned the earth into a dustbowl, former NASA pilot Cooper must set forth through a wormhole near Saturn to find out what happened to NASA teams sent there ten years earlier seeking another planet on which at least a portion of beleaguered humanity might survive. There are still lots of things in this film I do not understand, as there was decades ago after seeing *2001: Space Odyssey*, so I look forward to seeing this one again. What I did understand is that this is

an emotional tale of survival and sacrifice, as well as of big ideas and questions.

Big Hero 6

Rated PG. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Romans 12:9.

In this Disney animated film that blends Japanese with American themes, the action takes place in a colorful San Fransokyo where two brothers, both computer and robot geniuses, live. The younger, the teenaged Hiro, wastes his talent on creating bots to fight in illegal back alley matches, whereas Tadashi is a university working at a lab to develop an inflatable robot that looks after its owner's health. When Tadashi dies in a mysterious fire at the school, the grief-stricken Hiro retreats into a funk, refusing even the offer to become a student at the university. When he learns that the fire had been started by a man who has stolen an invention of his thought to be lost in the fire, he goes into action, aided by his brother's delightful robot called Baymax and four of Tadashi's friends, the six thus becoming the superhero team known as Big Hero 6. This is a lot of fun for children and adults, with the film showing the benefits of teamwork based on love and the search for justice.

Selma

Not yet rated. Amos 5:21-24

I have not yet seen this film, but judging by the advanced reviews this is a fine depiction of the events surrounding the great 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery. The flaws of Dr. King are revealed as well as his well-known courage and eloquence. The politics explored are not only those of Dr. King's dealing with the White House and Alabama's State House,

but also with trying to cooperate with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) whose young members had been working in Selma well before Dr. King arrived, and who thus feared being shunted aside. Even Malcolm X enters the picture in one scene. The praise of the critics is almost effusive, both for director Ava DuVernay and screenwriter Paul Webb, and also for the cast, headed by two British actors, David Oyelowo as Dr. King and Carmen Ejogo as Coretta Scott King.

On Video

In our area these two excellent documentaries came and went before word of mouth could generate an audience.

Citizenfour

Rated R. Isaiah 5:20; John 3:20.

The story of Edward Snowden unfolds at times in real time in Laura Poitras's amazing documentary. The central portion consists of excerpts from the 8 days she and journalist Glenn Greenwald spent interviewing him in the Hong Kong hotel room to which he had fled after he downloaded the thousands of files he was able to access when he worked for the NSA. Alarmed at the widespread illegal spying by the agency upon Americans and the leaders of foreign governments, he had made the fateful decision to blow the whistle—with, as the film shows, incredible results in the US and around the world. Everyone concerned about government over-stepping its bounds should watch this—and maybe go back and reread George Orwell's *1984*. Watch out for Big Brother!

Glen Campbell ... I'll Be Me

Rated PG. Psalm 143:5; Psalm 49:15.

Director James Keach's camera follows the beloved "Rhinestone

Cowboy" just about everywhere during the almost two years of his "Farewell Tour." This really was such a tour because, as we see in a scene with his doctor, tests have concluded that he has come down with Alzheimer's disease. There are great scenes of love and courage as sons Cal and Shannon also play in his touring band, plus daughter Ashley. A highlight is he and Ashley playing the intricate "Dueling Banjos," Campbell on his guitar, and she on her long-necked banjo. Always close at hand is his wife Kim, caring for him and sometimes struggling to get him to take a shower or tend to his health. Amazingly, though he was not aware of the year and had to resort to a teleprompter to be able to sing the words of the songs, he remembered the intricate music—and retained his keen sense of humor as well. A beautiful tribute to a man who brought us so much beauty through his music!