

Full of fun, quotes, buzz and dozens of ideas for movies to rent that will make Movie Lovers feel better about Life, Movies and The Meaning of Life is the first pocket guide in The GOOD MOVIE GUIDE Series.

Movies and The Meaning of Life

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**MOVIES and
The Meaning of Life**

By

ZetMec

The GOOD MOVIE GUIDE Series

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MOVIES AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

**“A man is not old until regrets
take the place of dreams.”**

— John Barrymore

PART IV – It's a Wrap

“What would you do if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same, and nothing you did mattered?” — Phil, *Groundhog Day*

* ***Invasion of the Body Snatchers***

* ***Lost in Translation***

* ***Vertigo***

* ***Out of Africa***

* ***Lone Star***

* ***Mystic River***

* ***Stardust Memories***

“Keep breathing.”

— Sophie Tucker

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

When I was a kid, the first time I saw this movie, I was truly frightened by the horrifyingly simple possibility of seed pods floating down from outer space and slowly-but-surely taking over the world. Not only could such a takeover be well underway before anybody knew a thing about it, but, as a kid, the possibility of a stranger masquerading as a family member or parent wasn't just chilling, it was paralyzing. The true horror of this film, however, was the pod's ability to take on the face and personality of any human being while they slept. The metamorphosis was inevitable because no matter how you fought it, you had to sleep sometime. It was the nightmare you could never wake up from—it WAS your worst nightmare.

As I left the theater with some residual sense of apprehension, even at 8 or 9 years old I knew it hadn't happened...yet. Just like scary vampire stories, if everyone in the world were infected, there'd be nobody left to be scared. Besides, as a kid, I would know if my Mom was possessed by aliens and I'd be one of those people freaking out and swearing that "That's NOT my mother! I KNOW my mother, and that's not her!!!"

But this gem of a horror flick also taught me something about the freakish fear that comes with youth, stemming from the fact that as a child, for the most part, you basically have no control over your life and horrible things can always happen. Worst case scenarios lurk around every corner, but if the worst had already happened, we'd already be knee-deep in chaos. I have seen it on the Silver Screen—the possibility of an alien invasion—and so far, it's still just a nightmare. So far...it's not real.

**“All the mysteries of the universe,
all the answers to life’s questions,
can be found in a Spielberg film.”**

— Dawson (“Dawson’s Creek,” 1/20/98)

But relief isn't the only emotion that surfaces after watching this movie—there's also hope and resignation...hope that such things will never happen to any of us, and better times will prevail. Resignation, however, comes along too, because as inevitable as sleep is, it is, perhaps, the yet-unexplored parallel universe to regeneration, and to death. In this small cinematic nugget of reality dislocation, we see the delusional fears that evolve from sleep deprivation, and none of us are exempt. None of us can escape the fact that scary things can always happen, and some day, each and every one of us must face the fact we will lay down our head and close our eyes, once and for all. At that moment, we will no longer be ourselves...no longer be a part of this world. And death, it seems, is the most alien state of all.

Buzz: According to www.imdb.com, the biggest continuity error in this film is the fact that in the end, Becky instantly transforms into a pod person in Dr. Bennett's arms when it's firmly "established earlier that when pods are fully formed and the original falls asleep, they absorb all of their memories and dispose of the original body."

MOVIES AND THE MEANING OF LIFE
The Power of Love LIST:

P

1. Bagdad Cafe, 1990
2. Barbarian Invasion (French), 2003
3. Big Bad Love, 2001
4. The Blue Butterfly, 2004
5. Don't Come Knocking, 2005
6. E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial, 1982
7. Flight of the Navigator [Perhaps the most ingenious spacecraft on film], 1986
8. Garden State, 2004
9. Harry and Tonto, 1974
10. How to Deal, 2003
11. Last Holiday, 2006
12. Lilies of the Field [Hallelujah! Sidney Poitier shines the brightest of lights], 1963
13. A Man and a Woman (French) [A "driving" and unforgettable score!], 1966

Lost in Translation

Lost in Translation enriched my visual and emotional soul, which IS the meaning of life, don't you think? My theory is that man is mostly a reflection of his genetic code, coupled with the nurturing, or non-nurturing—sometimes soul-sucking—events of his youth, especially when he's inexperienced and vulnerable. After that, things don't change much.

Although we may like to believe we can change at the drop of a hat, the truth is, change is hard and meaning is relative. Continuing to dream the impossible dream and a lot of hard work may prepare us to succeed, but it's mostly a matter of luck—like who you know and timing. [Bob Harris, movie star, gets \$2 million for hawking whiskey in Japan.] We like to believe we are the captains of our destiny, but storms come up out of nowhere, and things go awry, no matter who you are or what you do. [Despite Bob's celebrity status, his Park Hyatt Tokyo drapes open automatically every morning.] If you can tough it out, though, you might live a little longer and glean a few more pieces of vital information about our universe and what makes us tick. [*More Than This.*] After all, it's an important role, because as sentient beings or thinking probes, endless fractal possibilities abound.

But, mentally, and in our corporeal bodies, the role of universal probe just doesn't cut it. As living, breathing, thinking organisms of the planet Earth, it's not good enough to simply gather information, motoring around like little bumper cars, gathering data for the benefit of our host or hosts. ["For relaxing times, make it Suntory time."] Whether we are the only sentient species in this part of the galaxy, or whether we are single cellular units on the body of a more complex being, or merely Children of God, the human race is not satisfied with its prime directive. ["Lip my stockings...Lip them. HEY! Lip

The Power of Love LIST, Part II:

P

14. Manhattan [A most marvelous homage to New York City and its iconic Gershwin rhapsody], 1979
15. The Opposite of Sex, 1998
16. Powder, 1995
17. Songcatcher, 2000
18. Sophie's Choice, 1982
19. The Station Agent, 2003
20. Stolen Summer, 2002
21. Volver (Spanish), 2006
22. Wide Awake, 1998
23. Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself, 2002
24. Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (Spanish), 1988

my stocking!"] We yearn; we aspire to seek enlightenment or just experience joy in lives often fraught with despair and failure—including the consistent failure to predict a future that would enable us to avoid pain and death.

So, what's left? A couple of things...love, for one. It's an old thought, sure, but it's true. If you truly love yourself and your life, you don't feel the same despair that many humans suffer. If other people love you, there's no greater chocolate/cafeine/adrenalin rush shooting through you like a high-powered fix than loving acceptance and approval. [Bob's suffering from a mid-life crisis, but he's crazy about Charlotte.]

Plus, there are at least two other visceral elements that help feed our souls and sustain us as conscious beings—music and the visual beauty of nature and the arts. Music can be deeply restorative and rates high amongst the tools of human transcendence; but movies...films...reflect visual experience in color, shape and form, and may well, at times, rival the power of music. *Lost in Translation* is not only replete with terrific musical atmosphere, but also with fine examples of both beauty in nature and the eyecandy of civilization. Mix this with humor of the human spirit played out in a story of loneliness, light, breathtaking loveliness, and loss, and it's no wonder Sofia Coppola won the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay.

Lost in Translation is a microcosm of a wonderful world shining through the absurdity of life in this 3rd Dimension. ["Ah, black toe."] Whenever I watch this move...which is often...it maketh me lie down in Zen gardens—it restoreth my soul. Thank you for my cinematic blessings, for they art many.

**“Never let yesterday
use up too much of today.”**

— Will Rogers

Vertigo

I was mesmerized the first time I saw *Vertigo*. It was brilliantly shot and paced, and the story, so absorbing in the beginning, seemed to twist back on itself and evolve into a different movie altogether—or, so I thought.

It first appeared that the circumstances of the detective's personal life (played by the incomparable Jimmy Stewart) are transitory compared to the haunting and spiritual journey of the obsessed woman he's investigating. As he, and we, are drawn further into the past life of Madeleine, who may have once lived as Carlotta in 19th Century San Francisco, we share a kind of madness waiting to find the resolution of an unfinished life too soon consumed by tragedy. And, of course, like many of us have come to expect from movies, resolution may come, but often at the expense of those involved in the journey.

Hitchcock's genius, however, changes the course of the plot when not only does the story shift, but also the genre, itself, changes. What starts as a sort of spiritual mystery, switches gears straight into a romantic drama, and then, shifts again into what we've come to know as Hitchcock's bread'n'butter—a suspenseful thriller, moving at an ever-quickenning pace.

And, of course, an unpredictable, but perhaps inevitable, outcome takes place that leaves you shaken by a feeling of futility of the kind that, in the end, makes a horrible kind of sense. It starts with phobia, but in the end, human obsession is the glue that holds this film together. The tentacles of obsession span the entire arc of *Vertigo* as Stewart deals first with his acrophobia, then his infatuation, disbelief, grief, a compulsion to recapture the past, and finally, his need for the truth at all costs.

“The older I get, the more I believe in what I can’t explain or understand, even more than the things that are explainable and understandable.”

— Lillian Gish

Vertigo is not only a masterful stroke of story-telling and story resolution, but is also the delivery system for the lesson that bad things can happen to ALL people, not just bad people, and none of us are immune to stumbling blocks such as love, greed, and fate. And if bad things can happen to good people, and bad luck is capable of rearing its ugly head at any moment, then we are...all of us...truly equal—always affected by forces greater than ourselves.

One bright note coming out of the darkness of our unpredictable mixed bag of luck is the fact that no matter how unlucky you may be, there's always a chance your bad luck can turn. There's the real possibility your luck may change, the planets will realign, or a paradigm will shift in your favor, and you could actually win, for once...after all. It is the lesson of limitless possibility—anything can happen, good or bad, at anytime; and that, in the end, is the lesson *Vertigo* drives home...in reverse. It's a tensely built and beautifully done film.

Buzz: Room 501 at the Empire Hotel, where Judy lives at the end of this film, is still a vintage hotel, alive and well at 940 Sutter Street in San Francisco, and still taking reservations.

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