REVIEWS

The main purpose of a review is to describe and express a personal opinion about something which the writer has experienced (e.g. a film, a holiday, a product, a website etc.) and to give the reader a clear impression of what the item discussed is like.

Description and explanation are key functions for this task, and a review will normally **include a recommendation** to the reader.

What is the purpose of a review?

1 to interest and entertain the reader

2 to describe the subject of the review to the reader

3 to convey the writer's opinion about the subject of the review

4 to promote the subject of the review

5 something else?

Features in a review

- an eye-catching title
- basic details about what you are reviewing
- further information about key details (e.g. people, location, etc.)
- a detailed summary of what you are reviewing (e.g. the plot)
- a mixture of past tenses (e.g. to give information about a film) and present tenses (e.g. to make a plot sound exciting)
- a style that is suitable for a specific audience
- evocative adjectives
- a balanced discussion of any positive and negative aspects
- a recommendation about what you are reviewing or a summary of who might enjoy it

GETTING ECO-FRIENDLY WITH ALIENS



When choosing the best film of the last decade, James Cameron's Avatar has to be up there among the greats. With this movie, the director took a flying leap into another dimension – super-sleek 3D – leading those in the know to breathlessly declare a new level had been reached in the art of film-making. The film emerged as an eminently watchable and hugely entertaining sci-fi spectacular, but it did seem unable to decide if it wanted to wipe out every blue-skinned extra-terrestrial in sight or get all touchy-feely and eco-friendly with them.

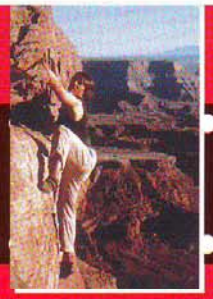
The movie takes us one hundred years or so into the future, when planet Earth is trying to solve its energy issues by mining the rarest of all minerals – the charmingly named 'Unobtainium'. Naturally, this mineral is only to be found on one particular planet far, far away, deep in jungles swarming with quirky-scary CGI creatures, under a giant tree. This tree, unfortunately, just happens to be the spiritual home of the planet's native race – the Na'vi. These hugely tall, blue aliens have pointy ears and flat noses, ethnic beads and dreadlocks. A mining company from Earth has set up a quasi-military base there, and is preparing to drive the aboriginal inhabitants off their land, led by the psychotic Colonel Quaritch (played by Stephen Lang).

But the mining corporation also has a scientific unit led by Dr Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver), which seeks merely to study the inhabitants, get to know them, and (importantly) to make 'Avatars' in the shape of Na'vi. These 'Avatars', which the humans remote-control from their base into their jungle, can communicate peacefully with the blue giants in their own exotic, subtitled language and attempt to convince them to leave of their own free will.

Our hero – and 'Avatar pilot' – is Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) a retired soldier, now wheelchair-bound after dreadful injuries. He is blown away by the liberating virtual reality that his new-found Avatar alien body affords him. He revels in his jungle adventures, and although he at first schemes alongside the mining corporation to facilitate the upcoming military invasion, he soon falls in love with the beautiful female alien, Neytiri (Zoe Saldaña) and switches sides. Sully sees a glimmer of hope: a chance to be happy and in love. When the invasion comes, he sides with the Na'vi.

The digitally created world integrates seamlessly with real-life actors, and it's all undeniably impressive. The film's special effects are certainly spectacular, especially on the big screen. However, it's difficult to tell if cinema as a genre has really evolved or not. But take away the mind-blowing special effects, and the director's huge reputation, and you have a truly fascinating story about a money-obsessed company developing technology in order for humans to sneak into the lives of aliens and destroy their natural habitat. What an interesting idea it is – and this is what makes the film worthwhile.

M:I MISSION: IMPLAUSIBLE



Shortly before Mission: Impossible *2* opened in the United States, the Wall Street Journal ran a front-page story about an editing genius who was called in at the last hour to reorganise the film. Seemingly, the critics were concerned that John Woo's highly anticipated sequel to Brian de Palma's unbelievably complicated but hugely entertaining Mission: Impossible was a bit hard to follow. Now that the finished product has been released, it's possible to report that the sequel, at the very least, has a story line that makes sense. It's klunky, it's goofy, it has holes big enough to drive the entire United States Marine Corps through, but at least it can be followed. Thank heavens for small mercies. And industrious editors.

M:I 2 is the kind of movie that intelligent, self-respecting critics (there are seven of us, globally) hate to review. Because it's a summer blockbuster, because it's already a mammoth hit in the United States, and because, despite its faults, it's quite an engaging film, it seems almost churlish to say anything negative about it. Thus, let me preface my remarks by stating that, while M:I 2 is not nearly as good as the original, it isn't a dud.

This time out Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) is forced to abbreviate a rock-climbing vacation in order to save the world in general and Australia in particular from a lethal virus that has fallen into the hands of fiendish villains. Well, in fact, the fiendish villains, though very, very cruel, are such ninnies that they have only secured one half of the virus and need the other half in order to bring the world to its knees. In exchange for returning their half of the virus, or all of the virus, or some combination thereof, the villains are demanding the nice round sum of £37 million.

It is a little unclear why the unspeakable forces of pure, unadulterated evil are asking for a measly £37 million when £3 billion and complete domination of New South Wales seems a more reasonable asking price.

But never mind.

It's a great relief when the tangled threads of the plot finally coalesce. In a way it's almost a shame that Woo had to even bother with a plot since all anyone really wants to see in a John Woo movie is some good-looking guy – or John Travolta – cavorting on a motorcycle, plunging through plate glass windows, just generally raising hell.

Review Guidelines

• The review should be relatively short with opinions delivered in a clear, concise manner.

• The factual material must be correct. Check all facts pertaining to the writer and the literature.

• The review should be firm and assertive, not wishy-washy. A reviewer must have a strong opinion.

• The reviewer is entitled to whatever opinion he or she has of the work be it positive or negative, but the opinion must be substantiated with details and examples.

• The reviewer should establish a voice, tone, and personal style that make the review interesting.

Bridget Jones's Baby review - Renée Zellweger kooks up a storm

It’s been a rocky road into middle age for the shambolic, cripplingly body-conscious and serially unattached Bridget Jones. Or rather, two roads. A bit like Gwyneth Paltrow in Sliding Doors, only with a diet regime that's taken considerably longer to pay off, Bridget's entire life journey has bifurcated drastically before our eyes.

If you’re going by Helen Fielding’s books – the third of which, Mad About the Boy, was published back in 2013 – Bridget’s now a widow with two small children, following the death of her shining-armoured suitor Mark Darcy in a car accident. She’s dating a 29-year-old called Roxster and browsing lonelyhearts sites on the internet.

What else has changed? For starters, Mark – that would be Colin Firth, resuming through clenched teeth his default task of playing Colin Firth – is still alive, though their relationship has fizzled out and left Bridget single all over again. It’s his caddish rival Daniel Cleaver who gets a funeral as the film begins, an authorial rethink mainly dictated by Hugh Grant’s point-blank refusal to be in it.

Stepping into that breach is Patrick Dempsey, as the enigmatic Yank whose tent Bridget fatefully mistakes for her own at a music festival, giving him a roughly 50/50 chance – the other’s Mark – of being her babyfather.

Either way: phew. Kooking up a facial storm right from the legitimately hilarious opening credits, Zellweger feels back in charge of the character again, and even her excesses are easily indulged, after the tonally hideous detour of 2004’s The Edge of Reason. Nothing here, thank everything that’s holy, is as misjudged as that film’s excruciating singalong in a Thai jail. There’s especially bright fun to be had with Sarah Solemani, playing the anchorwoman of a TV news show Bridget keeps accidentally sabotaging in a producing capacity. These scenes pop plentifully.

If you were going to carp, you might accuse the movie of getting wheezy in the third trimester. The who’s-the-daddy plotting only gives Firth and Dempsey stray moments you could really call funny: they're *both* playing straight man to the daffy heroine, which doubles the number of notionally romantic scenes without upping the comedy.

Meanwhile, the idea of this trio forming a polyamorous unit is the kind of briefly progressive conceit you just know is going to be thrown over for a straight-choice finale. They supposedly shot three endings, and while Thompson helps matters by saving herself a slam-dunk of a laugh for the delivery room, this only just gets the film across the finish line. It's a comeback you root for, then, even while it’s wobbling and occasionally falling in the mud. But goodwill gets it home.

Young Adult Fiction
Title: Vicki Silver: The Stolen Gem
Author: Alissa Wood

I grew up on the Hardy boys and liked Nancy Drew even better when I read her books to my two kids, so I was overjoyed to read on the back cover how author Alisa Wood began writing “The Stolen Gem” at the age of 14 and by the time she graduated from high school had completed seven in the series. Wow! If this novel is any indication she has real talent as a mystery writer, handling dialogue, action and the interplay among characters with the sophistication of someone twice her age. And she has one incredible advantage over them. She not only knows her audience, she was a recent member of the age group she is targeting. That said, this saga steams forward on plot action rather than character development or atmospheric setting. We have a good idea of the thief a third of the way through and there aren’t many surprises as far as a “mystery” goes. Typically it’s, “Everyone split up and look for clues.” Oh, there are a few red herrings, but I wish Alyssa had taken a bit more time with her heroine’s attorney parents—she describes Vicki and her older sister’s home life by saying, “The way their parents ruled the household was to turn everything into an argument, a legal argument, and ‘to the victor go the spoils.’” Now that is original and would be fun for the reader to experience first hand.

I have to say that I was caught up in Vicki Silver’s enthusiasm and “can do” attitude. This is also one series in which girls know how to handle themselves in a fight. I even liked her over-the-top, foot steps in the shadows, paranoia. The major problem these undercover teen-aged sleuths face is that grown-ups, such as the police, don’t believe them. There is a slight switch in Chapter 2 away from Vicki’s 3rd person point of view to get some information across to the reader, but I don’t think most readers would even notice; and what a good climax this story has! Two other things I particularly liked were ending the book with the friends going to a clichéd, male-hero action film (nice contrast) and the dedication, which includes many of the author’s English teachers. They have a lot to be proud of. And the advice she follows--to base fictional characters on real people—serves her well.

Keep them coming, Alissa. Meanwhile I’ll look for Vicki, CJ, Joe and Justin at the Ultimate Pizza. I know another mystery awaits them. Next time we adults will be paying more attention.