

UNDER THE SKIN

Director: Jonathan Glazer
Writers: Walter Campbell, Michel Faber
Stars: Scarlett Johansson, Jeremy McWilliams, Lynsey Taylor Mackay
Strength: Fantastic cinematic shots, a compelling premise
Weakness: Too long for a movie with very little dialogue
Runtime: 108 minutes
Rating: 2.5/5

PLOT: A mysterious woman seduces lonely men in the evening hours in Scotland. Events lead her to begin a process of self-discovery.

REVIEW: Scarlett Johansson plays a mysterious extraterrestrial stalking unsuspecting lonely men along the West Coast of Scotland. After assuming the appearance of an unfortunate Scottish dame,

Johansson's unnamed alien prowls the streets in a cargo van, pretending to need directions in an effort to seek out unsuspecting loners willing to throw caution to the wind and accept a ride only to meet their doom at her slaughterhouse lair.

Jonathan Glazer directs *Under the Skin*, which was inspired by Michel Faber's 2001 novel of the same name.

However, while the movie borrows the core premise of the book, Glazer trades out a number of key details in the interest of a significantly more subtle narrative. While many may show displeasure at this, the end result is a beautiful and haunting movie that prioritizes nuance at nearly every turn, sacrificing traditional moviemaking elements to provide an

opportunity for thoughtful insight into the human condition. That said, despite its "Scarlett Johansson is a seductive alien" marketing hook, fans of the actress or the sci-fi genre will probably find *Under the Skin* is too abstract for mainstream appeal. While it succeeds as contemplative artistic expression, moviegoers who were expecting a detailed story about aliens hiding in plain sight will be left quite unsatisfied. Also, it felt like many of the scenes could have been made shorter and thus create a more tighter experience. Still, for viewers who are not put-off by a philosophical glimpse at humanity through the unique, and callous, perspective of an extraterrestrial creature living (and hunting) among us; there are plenty of interesting ideas and gorgeous visuals to appreciate in *Under the Skin*.



RANG RASIYA (2014)

Director: Ketan Mehta
Writers: Sanjeev Dutta, Ketan Mehta
Stars: Randeep Hooda, Nandana Sen, Paresh Rawal
Runtime: 132 minutes
Strength: Accurate portrayal of 19th century India, good depiction of Raja Ravi Varma
Weakness: Too artistic for the mainstream audience, first part of the movie is too slow
Rating: 2.5/5

PLOT: A look at the life of 19th century Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma.

REVIEW: Art-centric biopics are a rarity in Hindi cinema. There isn't anything of significance; therefore, *Rang Rasiya* can't be compared to anything. Writer-director Ketan Mehta's cinematic celebration of the life and times of Raja Ravi Varma skillfully harmonizes the sweep of period drama, the allure of pretty images and the impact of emotional intensity on a wide canvas that delivers more than just pretty frames. The film articulates ever-relevant truths about the continuing assaults on artistic freedom and the huge gap that separates the exuberance of the imaginary world from the cruel exigencies of real life. The remarkable story of the 19th century Kerala-born painter who altered the

face of Indian art forever by taking the icons of Hindu mythology out of the temples and royal palaces is told through flashbacks and the fragmentary reminiscences of Raja Ravi Varma's illustrious protégé, Dhundiraj Govind Phalke.

This film has been adapted from Ranjit Desai's Marathi biography of Raja Ravi Varma which probes multiple themes - freedom of expression, religious bigotry and class divides, and the dilemma of a woman who dares to surrender herself completely to the man and artist she loves. The film swings from the highs represented by the unrestricted passion that drives the process of creativity to the lows brought on by the interventions of self-appointed guardians of conventional religious belief. *Rang Rasiya* is bolstered appreciably by the strong performances by the two principal actors - Randeep Hooda as Raja Ravi Varma and Nandana Sen as his muse in Bombay, Sugandha Bai.

Rang Rasiya is by no means a perfect film, but for the manner in which it tackles an extensive range of important themes related to the place of art in a tradition-bound society, it is an impressive achievement.

CLASSIC REVIEW

CINEMA PARADISO (1988)

Director: Giuseppe Tornatore
Screenplay: Giuseppe Tornatore
Stars: Philippe Noiret, Enzo Cannavale, Antonella Attili
Runtime: 155 minutes

PLOT: A filmmaker recalls his childhood, when he fell in love with the movies at his village's theater and formed a deep friendship with the theater's projectionist.

REVIEW: If ever a movie came from the heart, it was Giuseppe Tornatore's nostalgic *Cinema Paradiso*. A successful but jaded film director recalls his Sicilian childhood: he was a cheeky scamp called Totò (Salvatore Cascio) helping out in the cinema booth, learning to love movie magic and becoming a friend to the old projectionist Salvatore (Philippe Noiret), in a special place whose movies were censored by the local priest, and whose interior was designed to look like a church, with an altar under the screen.

There's a scene in which Salvatore confesses to the appalled priest his doubts about the loaves and the fishes. It is perhaps down to Ennio Morricone's syrupy score with its disconcerting melodic resemblance to *I've Never Been In Love Before* from *Guys and Dolls*. There's no doubt about the brilliance of its central scene: by twisting the projector's glass screen on a fine summer's night, Salvatore reflects the movie image out into

the town square, spread over a neighboring building, for a glorious open-air performance. It must be said that *Cinema Paradiso* is such a memorable and beautiful film largely thanks to the outstanding direction of Giuseppe Tornatore. The motion picture is a massive achievement for Tornatore as he is able to give us a movie that is sensitive, humane, and full of emotion. Not only that, he also provides us with scene upon scene of gorgeous cinematography that perfectly captures the Italian countryside. I will never get enough of those scenes and always relish being swept away by those wonderful visuals.

