



at that time or since. I like it because 0 indicates pure neutrality. If I am negative on a film, so is the sign of the number. Positive, the same is true. As I use it, it assumes film quality will follow a normal distribution curve. Each point away from zero corresponds to to some part of a standard deviation (perhaps approximately half a standard deviation). By the time one

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gets out to +4 (or -4) the films are rarefied enough that these ratings include the entire tails of the curve. Further, because people have suggested to me that this system does not have enough granularity, about one third of films rated +2, for example will be dubbed "high +2", another third will be "low +2".

There are only a handful of films I have given a full +4 to, and quite a few get -4. There is some question in my mind as to whether the system could be destroyed by a film coming out that is miles better than anything I have ever seen in the past. I don't think that is quite likely, but it is theoretically conceivable that I might in the future want to give out +5s. I give a -4 to films that I consider are really completely worthless, and that does not happen all that often, but there are a lot more really bad films than really good. As someone pointed out, you can consider a rating point half a standard deviation.

Examples of ratings (highly subjective):

- +4 A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS / FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH
- +3 THE NATURAL / CONAN THE BARBARIAN
- +2 PLACES IN THE HEART / ALIEN / ROAD WARRIOR
- +1 SUPERMAN / FLETCH
- 0 COCOON
- 1 SUPERMAN II
- 2 MAD MAX
- 3 DUNGEON MASTER
- 4 FIRE MAIDENS FROM OUTER SPACE / THEY SAVED HITLER'S BRAIN

0 is what I consider the mean for all films released. However 1 is probably the mean for all films I see in a theater. Since I try to avoid bad films when I am laying out money, the distribution of the films I see in theaters is skewed upward.

In general the differences in the various rating systems I consider much less important than a number of other factors. The most crucial is consistency in their application. Part of this is do not tie it to something that will shift a lot with time. For example, the dollar rating system--"this film is worth \$3 to see"--will be good only until serious inflation hits. It may not mean the same thing to a Canadian as it does to someone from the U.S. or to a rich person as a poor person. Unless the film industry gets considerably better or worse, a normal scale comparing against all films I have seen (like the one I use) is the least likely to suffer shifts with time.

It is also important that a scale be defined, particularly in the early days of its use, or when new people start trying to understand it.

A third important characteristic is granularity. Thumbs up vs. down is not very articulate. On the other hand I would feel very

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uncomfortable using a scale that rates films to four decimal places. Even assuming I was that sure I knew so precisely my feelings toward a film, I doubt that I could consistently apply such a scale. The real question is am I reasonably sure that I would give the same film the same rating a year later, based on a viewing, not on memory of what I had given the film.

Each of these characteristics is in support of the most important characteristic, that you want a scale to communicate a general feeling about a film quickly. In my reviews the capsule serves that purpose and the rating is like a capsule of a capsule.

I am periodically asked for a list of my +4 films. I don't have a fixed list in my head, but I would probably say (in no particular order after the first, and leaving out fantasy films, which I admit I tend to rate too high):

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS (My choice for all-time best)  
LAWRENCE OF ARABIA  
THE KILLING FIELDS  
EMPIRE OF THE SUN  
THE PATHS OF GLORY

SPARTACUS  
THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER  
THE PAWNBROKER  
INHERIT THE WIND  
THE LION IN WINTER--maybe  
THE COLOR PURPLE--maybe

Mark Leeper  
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619  
...mtgzfs3!leeper

It is inconceivable that the whole Universe was merely  
created for us who live in this third-rate planet of a  
third-rate sun.

-- Alfred Lord Tennyson

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HOT SHOTS! PART DEUX  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: Topper Harley is back hunting Saddam Hussein in the sequel to the very funny H\_o\_t S\_h\_o\_t\_s. To my taste it is not as funny as the first, but others may have a different reaction. Rating: low 1 (-4 to +4).

Being objective in writing a film review is nearly impossible even under ideal circumstances. Perhaps major film critics are able to be objective about the films they write about, but I doubt even that is true. My approach to the problem is periodically to remind people that I am writing about one person's experience with a film on one viewing--their mileage with a film may vary. Now, while this inescapable subjectivity is enough of a problem with a film such as H\_o\_w\_a\_r\_d'\_s\_E\_n\_d, it is far worse with a no-holds-barred comedy such as H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s!\_P\_a\_r\_t\_D\_e\_u\_x. Anybody builds up a resistance to a style of comedy eventually. My experience with Monty Python is that the earliest episodes I saw were, and still are, hilarious; episodes seen later lack that zing. Other people seem to have shared this experience: in spite of seeing episodes in a different order, they also find that what they saw before they became jaded are funny for them, but not so much what they saw later.

H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s!\_P\_a\_r\_t\_D\_e\_u\_x is the latest in the sub-genre of film and television satires punctuated with rapid-fire gags. I would claim the sub-genre was invented in 1976 with James Frawley's B\_i\_g\_B\_u\_s. But the sub-genre came to be led by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, and Jerry Zucker, who did an extended skit, "Fistful of Yen," in K\_e\_n\_t\_u\_c\_k\_y\_F\_r\_i\_e\_d\_M\_o\_v\_i\_e (1977). They made the 1980 film A\_i\_r\_p\_l\_a\_n\_e!, and the 1981 television series "Police Squad." One or more of the triple has been involved with many similar comedies since. Abrahams without the Zuckers directed B\_i\_g\_B\_u\_s\_i\_n\_e\_s\_s and W\_e\_l\_c\_o\_m\_e\_H\_o\_m\_e,\_R\_o\_x\_y. C\_a\_r\_m\_i\_c\_h\_a\_e\_l, then returned to the A\_i\_r\_p\_l\_a\_n\_e! style with the original H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s! and now H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s!\_P\_a\_r\_t\_D\_e\_u\_x.

H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s!\_P\_a\_r\_t\_D\_e\_u\_x begins by parodying, almost to the point of remaking, the first part of R\_a\_m\_b\_o\_I\_I\_I. However, the problem is not in Afghanistan but in Iraq, where Saddam Hussein is holding American hostages and several teams of would-be rescuers, including Col. Denton Walters (played by Richard Crenna), an old commander of

Topper Harley (played by Charlie Sheen). (Trivia question: what was the inspiration for Col. Denton Walters's name?) Topper Harley leads the rescue attempt.

Of course, a good deal of the fun is noting the film and/or television allusions and/or rip-offs. There are nice bits borrowing

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from \_ C \_ a \_ s \_ a \_ b \_ l \_ a \_ n \_ c \_ a, \_ L \_ a \_ d \_ y \_ a \_ n \_ d \_ t \_ h \_ e  
\_ T \_ r \_ a \_ m \_ p, and a particularly clever gag  
on \_ A \_ p \_ o \_ c \_ a \_ l \_ y \_ p \_ s \_ e \_ N \_ o \_ w. But how funny is the film? I would say it is  
funnier than the "Naked Gun" films, but not as funny as \_ A \_ i \_ r \_ p \_ l \_ a \_ n \_ e! or  
\_ H \_ o \_ t \_ S \_ h \_ o \_ t \_ s! But again, what is and is not funny is very subjective.  
I give \_ H \_ o \_ t \_ S \_ h \_ o \_ t \_ s! \_ P \_ a \_ r \_ t \_ D \_ e \_ u \_ x a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.  
(Avoid  
the closing credits if you have not seen \_ T \_ h \_ e \_ C \_ r \_ y \_ i \_ n \_ g \_ G \_ a \_ m \_ e.)

[Trivia answer: Richard Crenna played Walter Denton on radio and television in "Our Miss Brooks." His character was a dim-witted teenager who talked as if he had peanut butter on his tonsils.]

