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This issue's rating system: Men who stare at...	★★★★ Films	★★★ Sports	★★ Barnyard animals	★ "World of Warcraft"
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FILM/GRADE	RATING/TIME	CAST	WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW	LOCAL TIMES
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opening this week >>				
THE BOX Grade: ★	Rated PG-13 for thematic elements, some violence and disturbing images. 115 min	Cameron Diaz, Frank Langella, James Marsden, Gillian Jacobs, Michele Durrett	PLOT: What if someone gave you a box containing a button that, if pushed, would bring you a million dollars...but simultaneously take the life of someone you don't know? Would you do it? And what would be the consequences? Norma Lewis, a teacher at a private high school, and her husband, Arthur, an engineer working at NASA, face an impossible moral dilemma. COMMENT: Cameron Diaz and James Marsden have a terrible moral dilemma in Richard Kelly's "The Box": Press a button on a mysterious container, they'll get \$1 million, and someone they don't know will die. What button, on whose box, did Kelly push to get the money to make this awful, preposterous thriller?	1:00, 4:10, 7:30, *10:15
A CHRISTMAS CAROL Grade: ★★	Rated PG for scary sequences and images. 95 min Additional \$3.00 charge for 3D	Jim Carrey, Bob Hoskins, Christopher Lloyd, Robin Wright Penn, Colin Firth	PLOT: Ebenezer Scrooge begins the Christmas holiday with his usual miserly contempt, barking at his faithful clerk and his cheery nephew. But when the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come take him on an eye-opening journey revealing truths Old Scrooge is reluctant to face, he must open his heart to undo years of ill will before it's too late. COMMENT: Carrey's zest for the undertaking comes through clearly enough — after all, the rubber-faced "Ace Ventura" and "Man on the Moon" actor has always been a contortionist. His Scrooge is exceptionally gaunt, topped by limp white hair, and features a downturned mouth below an Ichabod Crane nose. But on the whole, the film feels suffocated by its design, and the liveliness of Carrey and the rest of the cast (including Gary Oldman, Colin Firth and Cary Elwes) struggles to shine through.	3D: 1:20, 3:50, 6:20, *8:50 2D: (11:50), 2:20, 4:50, 7:20, *9:50
THE FOURTH KIND Grade: ★	Rated PG-13 for violent/disturbing images, some terror, thematic elements and brief sexuality. 98 min	Milla Jovovich, Elias Koteas, Will Patton	PLOT: The fourth kind, alien abduction, an alien encounter has been the most difficult to document...until now. In modern-day Nome, Alaska, since the 1960s, a disproportionate number of the population has been reported missing every year. Psychologist Dr. Abigail Tyler began videotaping sessions with traumatized patients and unwittingly discovered some of the most disturbing evidence of alien abduction ever documented. COMMENT: The flat-lining, alien-abduction thriller "The Fourth Kind" offers a close encounter that buries an interesting idea under a barrage of gimmicky, carnivallike hokum. The movie's unwieldy mix of degraded pseudo-documentary footage and "Unsolved Mystery"-style re-enactments is as unconvincing as it is distancing, making the small charms of "Paranormal Activity" all the more apparent by comparison.	1:30, 4:00, 6:50, *9:20
MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS Grade: ★★½	Rated R for language, some drug content and brief nudity. 93 min	George Clooney, Ewan McGregor, Kevin Spacey, Jeff Bridges, Rebecca Mader	PLOT: In this quirky dark comedy inspired by a real life story you will hardly believe is actually true, astonishing revelations about a top-secret wing of the U.S. military come to light when a reporter encounters an enigmatic Special Forces operator on a mind-boggling mission. It is an eye-opening and often hilarious exploration of the government's attempts to harness paranormal abilities to combat its enemies. COMMENT: A fun tone is undermined by disjointed storytelling in George Clooney's "The Men Who Stare at Goats," and it all starts with the disclaimer that opens the movie: "More of this is true than what you might imagine." What Clooney's producing partner, first-time director Grant Heslov, and his colleagues come up with is a hit-and-miss fictional narrative about efforts to create warrior monks who try to walk through walls or glare animals to death.	(11:40), 2:15, 4:45, 7:10, *9:30

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CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF MEATBALLS Grade: ★★★★★ (out of five)	Rated PG for brief mild language. 100 min	The voices of Bill Hader, Anna Faris, James Caan, Bruce Campbell, Mr. T., Benjamin Bratt	PLOT: Based on the popular children's book, a scientist tries to solve world hunger only to see things go awry as food falls from the sky in abundance. COMMENT: The latest unexpected delight from Sony Pictures Animation, "Meatballs" is a delicious farce and a backhanded slap at America the Obese — about fathers and sons, daring to be smart and the price of gluttony. It may be the funniest animated film of the year where visual puns and TV weather gags abound. Check out the recognizable childhood toys that Flint re-purposed for his mad scientist's laboratory. And in between the Jell-O mold diving, ice-cream sledding and the derivative, overdone action finale, Hader, Faris, Caan and the writers deliver a biting message that parents should love — celebrate smartness and ease up on the "easy" (junk) food before it kills you.	12:50, 4:15
COUPLES RETREAT Grade: ★½	Rated PG-13 on appeal for sexual content and language. 110 min	Jon Favreau, Vince Vaughn, Faizon Love, Jason Bateman, Kristen Bell	PLOT: Four Midwestern couples embark on a journey to a tropical island resort. While one of the couples is there to work on their marriage, the other three set out to jet ski, spa and enjoy some fun in the sun. They soon discover that participation in the resort's couples therapy is not optional. Suddenly, their group-rate vacation comes at a price. What follows is a hilarious look at real world problems faced by all couples. COMMENT: "Couples Retreat" suggests what life might have been like if the guys from "Swingers" had grown up, moved to the suburbs and turned into lame, sitcommy cliches. Under the direction of Peter Billingsley (Ralphie from "A Christmas Story"), another longtime Vaughn friend and collaborator making his first feature, "Couples Retreat" veers back and forth in a jarring way between crude sexual humor and supposedly poignant moments.	1:50, 4:40, 7:40, *10:30
LAW ABIDING CITIZEN Grade: ★	Rated R for brutal violence and torture, a scene of rape, and pervasive language. 107 min	Gerard Butler, Jamie Foxx, Viola Davis	PLOT: Clyde Shelton, who 10 years earlier witnesses his wife and daughter brutally murdered, returns to extract justice from the assistant district attorney who prosecuted the case against their killers. His vengeance threatens not only the man who allowed mercy to supersede justice, but also the system and the city that made it so. COMMENT: Shelton's impossible omniscience and his sadistically convoluted game-playing feel like a rip-off of the "Saw" franchise. His tactics become so predictable, you know the second you hear a ringing cell phone or see a character climb into a car that something is going to blow up real good, real soon.	(11:45), 2:30, 5:00, 7:45, *10:20
MICHAEL JACKSON'S THIS IS IT Grade: ★★½	Rated PG for some suggestive choreography and scary images. 100 min	Michael Jackson	PLOT: Glimpse into the final days of Michael Jackson in this documentary compiled from an nearly 100 hours of rehearsal and behind-the-scenes footage of the entertainer preparing for 50 sold-out shows at London's O2 Arena before his untimely death in June at age 50. Interviews with collaborators and close friends of the late performer are also featured. COMMENT: Watching "Michael Jackson's This Is It" will have fans grieving once again, but this time, it won't only be for the fallen King of Pop, but for what we lost — a brilliant entertainer who gave every inch of his body and soul for what might have been one of the most spectacular comebacks of all time. "This Is It" is a beautifully made, loving tribute that gives Michael Jackson what he so desperately wanted — affirmation that he indeed was the greatest entertainer of our time.	2:40, 1:40, 3:30, 4:30, 6:15, 7:15, *9:10, *10:00
PARANORMAL ACTIVITY Grade: ★★★	Rated R for language. 99 min	Katie Featherston, Micah Sloat, Michael Bayouth	PLOT: After a young, middle class couple moves into what seems like a typical suburban "starter" tract house, they become increasingly disturbed by a presence that may or may not be demonic, but is certainly most active in the middle of the night. Especially when they sleep. Or try to. COMMENT: Without financing, stars or more than a couple of special effects, first-time writer/director Olen Pelis has made a diabolically effective essay in irrational horror.	(12:00), 2:10, 4:20, 7:00, *9:40
SAW VI Grade: ★★ (out of five)	Rated R for sequences of grisly bloody violence and torture, and language. 93 min	Costas Mandylor, Mark Rolston, Betsy Russell, Tobin Bell, Shawnee Smith	PLOT: Special Agent Strahm is dead, and Detective Hoffman has emerged as the unchallenged successor to Jigsaw's legacy. However, when the FBI draws closer to Hoffman, he is forced to set a game into motion, and Jigsaw's grand scheme is finally understood.. COMMENT: It's still torture porn, more excruciating than scary. It's still all about the elaborate and gory "games" the victims must win in order to survive Jigsaw's test of character, redemption and humanity. Body parts are lost, guts spill and sharp objects pierce to the sound of screams in the night.	6:45, *9:15
STEPFATHER Grade: ★★ (out of five)	Rated PG-13 for intense violence, disturbing images, mature material, brief sensuality. 100 min	Dylan Walsh, Sela Ward, Penn Badgley, Jon Tenney, Amber Heard	PLOT: Michael Harding returns home from military school to find his mother happily in love and living with her new boyfriend, David. As the two men get to know each other, Michael becomes more and more suspicious of the man who is always there with a helpful hand. Is he really the man of his mother's dreams or could David be hiding a dark side? COMMENT: The best you can say about the remake of "The Stepfather," that serial-killer-in-mommy's-bed tingler of 1987, is that it efficiently goes about its business. The suspense is there, but because there's no mystery to this thriller.	6:30, *9:00
WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE Grade: ★★★	Rated PG for mild thematic elements, some adventure action and brief language. 101 min	Catherine Keener, Max Records, Benicio Del Toro, Forest Whitaker, James Gandolfini	PLOT: The adventures of a young boy named Max who, after being sent to bed for misbehaving, imagines that he sails away to where the wild things are. Max is loved by the wild creatures who make him their King, though he soon longs to be back home with his family. COMMENT: The beloved and award-winning children's book, written and illustrated 45 years ago by Maurice Sendak, still holds up beautifully today. In turning it into a feature-length movie, director Spike Jonze has expanded the story with a breathtaking visual scheme and stirring emotional impact. Only the thinness of the script keeps the film from reaching complete excellence.	12:30, 3:40

An * indicates Friday-Saturday late show times only. Parentheses indicate Saturday-Sunday matinee only.

— "Comments" from Christy Lemire and David Germain, AP movie writers; McClatchy Newspapers