

From Stage to Screen

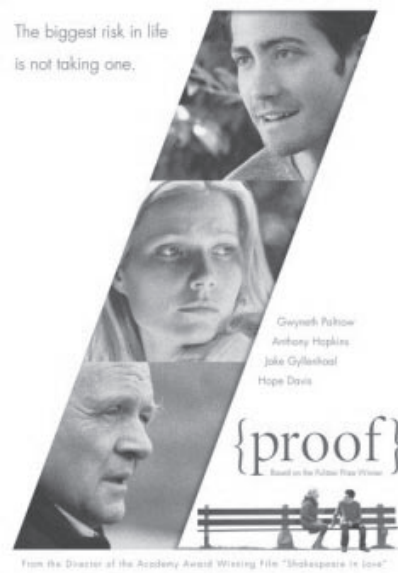
Paltrow does the math

BY COLE SMITHEY

Proof

4.0/5.0

Starring Gwyneth Paltrow, Anthony Hopkins, Jake Gyllenhaal & Hope Davis. Directed by John Madden. Rated PG-13, 100 mins.



Proof, based on David Auburn's wildly popular stage play, is a sensitive take on the same mathematical milieu and emotional terrain that Ron Howard traversed in the Academy Award-winning picture *A Beautiful Mind*.

Gwyneth Paltrow gives a highly polished performance as Catherine, the loyal daughter to her mentally ill mathematician father Robert (Anthony Hopkins), whose death throws her into a spiral of depression. Catherine grapples with doubts about her own sanity as her narrow-minded sister Claire (Hope Davis) makes claims on their father's house while posturing as Catherine's caretaker. Jake Gyllenhaal walks a perfectly ambiguous line as math nerd Hal, a former student of Catherine's father, intent on seducing his way into examining hundreds of scribbled notebooks left behind by the groundbreaking mathematician. Director John Madden skillfully liberates the Pulitzer Prize-winning material from its stage-bound confines toward a terse emotional drama that only suffers due to the miscasting of a wilting Anthony Hopkins. *Proof* is a winning drama that oscillates with confidence and emotional tension.

Having directed Paltrow in her Oscar-winning performance in *Shakespeare in Love*, and in the London stage production of *Proof*, John Madden keeps a subjective camera on Catherine to amplify the sarcastic wit and intellectual charm that she uses to shield herself from the world around her. With her casual romantic

irreverence and moments of inspired clarity, the 27 year-old Catherine is a beguiling and complex creature bordering on the enigmatic. Catherine's astute verbal gymnastics that she displays to humorous effect in conversations with Claire and Hal hint at her mathematician's mind that gradually becomes the film's narrative touchstone.

Through seamless flashback discussions with her father we realize that Catherine's sustained fear of his genetic predominance of mental illness is a well-founded concern. The degree of Robert's inadvertent influence becomes the sticking point for the story when Catherine reveals that she has authored a mathematical "proof" that is every bit as innovative as her father's best work.

It's unfortunate that Anthony Hopkins occupies a role better suited to an unknown stage actor who would have brought an unexpected vigor and variety to the film. As it is, Hopkins' British countenance sits at jarring odds to Paltrow's distinctly American demeanor. Hopkins resists creating a character, choosing instead to rely on his bag of well-worn vocal inflections to indicate a nagging confusion about the world around him and his character's mental limitations. His scenes support the story but never rise to any remarkable degree of emotional impact beyond what we recognize through Catherine's reckoning with a man she admires and fears.

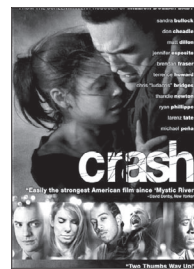
The film's once confusing, and ultimately satisfying, title gathers meaning as the story unfolds. Catherine is searching for any kind of evidence that she's not doomed to suffer from the same mental illness that overtook her father, but she's also inextricably driven to completing the same kind of attention-grabbing math proofs that he finished. And yet it's only by imaginatively tapping into her memory of him that she accomplishes the proof that no one near her believes she could have authored. Catherine herself struggles so much with the question of whether she or her father wrote the earth shattering proof that she retreats for several days to rewrite the complex formula from scratch.

A heartbreaking moment comes when Hal and Claire show their lack of belief in Catherine's ability to have written such an ingenious math proof, and we witness the immediate disconnect between the romantically driven Hal and his more opportunistic side that rankles our hopes for their relationship. More significantly however, the moment proves Catherine's initial interpretation of Hal's ulterior motives as correct. The movie shows us in a very literal way just how elusive finding proof of intention can be.

Cole Smithey's DVD Shelf

DVD Reviews

BY COLE SMITHEY



Crash
Movie: 4.0/5.0
DVD features: 2.0/5.0
Rated R, 100 minutes

Screenwriter Paul Haggis (*Million Dollar Baby*) makes an impressive directorial debut with a telescoping deliberation

on American race prejudices as viewed through a lens of day-to-day life in the melting pot of Los Angeles. Haggis rivals Robert Altman's nimble ability to balance numerous characters across a broad narrative canvas. Multiple story threads intertwine around a racist cop (Matt Dillon) and his honest partner (Ryan Phillippe), a duo of black car thieves (Larenz Tate and Chris "Ludacris" Bridges), a Los Angeles District Attorney (Brendan Fraser), his thin-skinned wife Jean (Sandra Bullock) and a sexist police detective (Don Cheadle). Promising hotshot actor-of-the-moment Terrence Howard is outstanding as Cameron Thayer, a successful television director whose dignity is challenged by his high-maintenance wife (Thandie Newton) and the fascist demands of his social milieu. *Crash* is a provocative drama that aligns with the socially conscious American theatrical dramaturgy of the '30s and '40s. Special features include an audio commentary track with co-writer/producer/director Haggis, co-writer/producer Moresco and actor/producer Don Cheadle, a behind-the-scenes featurette and a music video for Kansas' "If I..." Aspect ratio is 2.35:1, with sound quality rendered in choice of Dolby Digital 5.1 or 2.0. (Lion's Gate Entertainment)



Fever Pitch
Movie: 3.0/5.0
DVD features: 4.0/5.0
Rated PG-13, 103 minutes

The Farrelly brothers (*There's Something About Mary*) soften their customary inclination

toward gross-out humor with a tender and earnest adaptation of a novel by Nick Hornby (*High Fidelity*). Avid sports fans will appreciate the all-engrossing passion that Ben (Jimmy Fallon) has for his local Boston Red Sox as he comes to realize that he must redirect some of that hardened loyalty to his newfound love Lindsey (Drew Barrymore). A school teacher by day, Ben lives for the annual baseball season when he can sit among his extended family at Fenway Park and cheer for the team that's given his life meaning since he was 11 years old. As much as Lindsey admires Ben's youthful dedication to baseball, she wants more to be valued by the man she loves. Jimmy Fallon finally shows his big screen "stuff" alongside the well-matched Drew Barrymore in a crowd pleasing romantic comedy that's rooted in the love of the game. Special features include deleted scenes, a gag reel, a commentary track with Peter and Bobby Farrelly, two behind-the-scenes featurettes, Fox Movie Channel Presents "Making A Scene" and Spanish and French language options. Aspect ratio is 2.35:1 anamorphic widescreen, with sound quality presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround. (20th Century Fox)



Frank Miller's Sin City
Movie: 5.0/5.0
DVD features: 0/5.0
Rated R, 146 minutes

Frank Miller's *Sin City* is a high contrast tour de force cinematic adaptation of Frank Miller's hugely popular and wickedly

grotesque graphic novel homage to the hard-boiled style of Dashiell Hammett and Mickey Spillane. Director Robert Rodriguez teams up with Miller and Quentin Tarantino to direct a TKO of a movie that resonates with Tarantino's awe-inspiring *Kill Bill* pictures. Mickey Rourke, Bruce Willis, Benicio Del Toro, Michael Madsen, Elijah Wood, Josh Hartnett, Rutger Hauer, Rosario Dawson, and Jessica Alba are just some of the dream cast playing unpredictable characters that take your breath away. Filmed with state-of-the-art special effects *Sin City* is a lush stylized dark and gritty film that weaves together three Frank Miller stories ("The Big Fat Kill," "The Hard Goodbye" and "That Yellow Bastard") with visually striking results that threaten to addict audiences to the movie for repeated viewing. It's a film that lives on in your memory like a fantasy nightmare where real living people morph into super-action visions of beguiling elegant brutality. Special features include only a short featurette. A bonus laden special edition is due out in time for Christmas. Aspect ratio is 1.85:1 anamorphic widescreen, with sound quality delivered in standard Dolby Digital Surround 5.1. (Buena Vista Home Video)



Devo: LIVE 1980
Live Music Artifact: 5.0/5.0
DVD features: 1.0/5.0
Not Rated, 75 minutes

With a fury of pure punk subversion, pop music geniuses DEVO perform 21

down-and-dirty live versions of such classics as "Whip It," "Snowball," "Girl U Want," "It's Not Right," "Planet Earth," "Secret Agent Man," "Uncontrollable Urge," "Mongoloid" and "Freedom Of Choice" against a post-apocalyptic stage set of artistically-lit milk crates. Wearing tatty jumpsuits and their signature flowerpot hats the visually arresting band of self-proclaimed "spudboys" takes liberties with the rock music idiom in an energetic set that defies description. Suffice it to say that this "Target Video" production is an undiluted example of what was great about '80s music (even if most of it was written in the '70s). Tracked by the CIA for their rebellious attitudes, DEVO are revealed as a group of grown men who showed their younger peers what rockin' modern music was all about; "In the land of the free, use your freedom of choice." Special features include a black-and-white clip of the band performing "Praying Hands" and "Shrivel Up" at the 1979 "M-80" concert in Minneapolis. Aspect ratio is not provided. Sound quality processed in choice of stereo or Dolby Digital 5.1. (Music Video Distributors)