



A Year at the Movies: One Man's Filmgoing Odyssey

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For some of us, moviegoing is an occasional pleasure. Kevin Murphy made it his obsession, and he did it for you.

Mr. Murphy, known to legions of fans as Tom Servo on the legendary TV series *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, went to the movies every day for a year. That's *every single day*, people. For a *whole fricken' year*. And not only did he endure, he prevailed -- for this is the hilarious, poignant, fascinating journal of his adventures: the first book about the movies from the *audience's* point of view.

Kevin went to the multiplex, sure. But he didn't stop there. He found the world's smallest commercial movie theater. Another one made completely of ice. Checked out flicks in a tin-roofed hut in the South Pacific. Tooled across the desert from drive-in to drive-in in a groovy convertible. Lived for a week solely on theater food. Took six different women to the same date movie. Dressed up as a nun for the Sing-Along *Sound of Music* in London. Sneaked into the Cannes and Sundance film festivals. Smuggled an entire Thanksgiving dinner into a movie theater. And saw hundreds of films, from the Arctic Circle to the Equator, from the sublime to the unspeakable. Come along on a joyous global celebration of the cinema with a man on a mission -- to spend *A Year at the Movies*.

A Year at the Movies: One Man's Filmgoing Odyssey Details

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From Reader Review A Year at the Movies: One Man's Filmgoing Odyssey for online ebook

Jake Ambos says

A funny and surprisingly moving "diary" of one man's year spent watching at least one movie per day. Murphy's joy and love of life is infectious, and his anecdotes (such as setting up a Thanksgiving dinner in the theater as he watched MONSTERS, INC. with his family, and being stranded on a Pacific island immediately following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks) are priceless and heartwarming.

Joe Barlow says

Mystery Science Theater 3000's Kevin Murphy went to the movies every day for an entire year, and chronicled his adventures in this wonderful book. But it's not so much a collection of movie reviews as an examination of why we, as a culture, go to the movies. Some beautiful writing is contained in these pages, including Murphy's recounting of his visit to The Silent Movie Theater in Los Angeles, another trip to the world's smallest cinema (located in Australia), a pilgrimage to the few remaining Route 66 drive-ins, the experience of projecting Laurel and Hardy silent comedies to the enthusiastic patrons of a Mexican bar, and lots more. I have read this book many times over the years, and it never fails to make me happy.

Kate says

I was hoping this would be all movie reviews and sort of the movie version of Nick Hornby's awesome reading journal compilations The Polysyllabic Spree, Housekeeping Vs. The Dirt and Shakespeare Wrote for Money. Instead, Murphy tackles various themes of the moviegoing experience, e.g., extreme theaters, independent theaters, seeing the same movie at different theaters, theaters that serve food, etc, each week, and writes a short essay on each. It's not some revealing academic anthropology text, but it's moderately interesting and occasionally funny -- and there are some good reviews in there to boot.

4/16/09 - This book didn't make the cut to be kept -- going to sell.

Jason says

Tom Servo is beloved by me, so I was excited to read his real-life counterpart's (Kevin Murphy) yearlong adventure with movie theaters. While Murphy is funny, he needs a serious editor. A 360-page essay on the evils of multiplexes and Hollywood's formulaic storytelling is a bit much. And he's generally preaching to the choir, right? Nonetheless, Murphy has some interesting stories to tell about an ice-and-snow theater in Quebec, a film festival in the land of the midnight sun, and the smallest theater in the world. It was pleasant reading over the holidays while trying to block out the noise of my nephews tearing my parents house apart, but I don't know that I'd stick it in anyone's hands purposefully.

"Movies should be neither a waste of time nor a waste of money; that's what television's for."

Noah says

Being that I've become the de facto expert on yearlong daily projects I couldn't help but pick up this 2001 release when I spotted it at the Green Valley Book Fair this past fall. It certainly doesn't hurt that I'm a longtime Mystery Science Theater 3000 fan and the author was not only one of the writers, but the voice of Tom Servo. Based on that criteria alone, I figured there would be just the right blend of genuine movie love and sardonic humor for my tastes. And indeed there was. I thoroughly enjoyed following his attempt to see a projected movie, on a screen (even if it was one he set up himself a day), in public, every single day for a year (broken into 52 easily digestible chapters). Only a true lover of the cinema would attempt such a feat and I enjoyed the blend of thoughtful critique of the film industry, paired with the ridiculous antics that come with the territory of taking on such an overwhelming task. Hats off to Mr. Murphy on completing his task with aplomb!

Jessica says

Kevin Murphy spent many years as the lovable gum ball machine robot Tom Servo on Mystery Science Theater 3000, of which I have long been a devoted fan. In this book, he watches a movie every day for year, and also embarks on other stunts, such as seeing a movie in the smallest theater in the world, in the largest, exploring the concept of "date movies" and popcorn movies. The book is amazing, with Murphy's humor and love the movies shining through every page. His writing is superb, and he is also, well, wet-your-pants funny. But also very sweet. He takes his four-year-old nephew to see Monsters, Inc., he dresses as Santa Claus for the month of December and speaks lovingly of the reactions of the children who see him. I've read and reread this book many times, most recently in December of 2013, when I picked it up to reread the bit about Santa, and ended up reading backward through most of the book!

Reread 2018: It's interesting that he has a chapter on how IMAX is amazing, but how come all IMAX movies are boring nature documentaries?! And now there are major movies shot in IMAX, and I would love to have his thoughts on them. I also found it funny/sad that he twice uses Trump as a punchline about how tacky/ridiculous certain things are and now . . . yeah.

Erikka says

I didn't realize Tom Servo could write so well! I fully appreciated Kevin's quest and the many interesting ways he went about achieving it. I felt like he was a bit overly judgmental at times, that he was maybe a bit too stuck in the past (in the "golden age" before digital), and I wish he would have seen a wider variety of films (lots and lots of repeat views). However, it was a really fun book, quite funny, and at times very reflective and thoughtful. He also manages to make a book about things that are inherently time-restricted (movies) timeless by drawing from deeper truths instead of focusing on the films themselves. This keeps the book from becoming uncomfortably dated. I also appreciated his random stunts during some weeks that helped to bring a flourish to his journey (the Thanksgiving dinner cracked me up). I would totally recommend this book, not just to MSTies, but to movie fans and people who are entertained by yellow journalism (this harkens to Nellie Bly and the era of sensational fears for entertainment purposes, and it's just as entertaining.)

John says

Interesting premise: a film a day for a year (2001), grouped by weekly theme. Murphy doesn't (generally) focus on the films themselves, as much as the experience of them, which helps keep the narrative from feeling dated. Glad I read it, although I admit my enthusiasm did flag towards the end.

ALLEN says

Kevin Murphy, a current member of RiffTrax and for many years the voice of "Tom Servo" on television's Mystery Science Theater 3000, relates how, in 2001, he saw at least one movie a day. High points: Murphy's witty judgments and writing style, the broad range of movies he saw (everything from renowned classics to formulaic junk), and the many venues he saw them in, including many unusual foreign locales, posh revival houses, the Cannes film festival, and generic multiplexes (which he calls "Googolplexes"). Demerits: he only discusses about a third of the movies he saw, and in this reader's opinion spent too much time critiquing the alienating quality of those modern "Googolplexes." I'd rather he had not repeated his opinions of the small-screen atmospherics of suburban multi-screen theaters, and critiqued more films, at which he is superb. A longer review of this book is available at Amazon.

Jack Herbert Christal Gattanella says

This book reminded me of all the problems I have with moviegoing, but moreso and more importantly why I love it so, and why there can be adventure and excitement in going to a little dark room (or, in this case, sometimes in an igloo!) Murphy's travails are funny, insightful, and deep and dramatic at times too. It also has some personal significance for me as he went during a year when I was going to see EVERYTHING that was coming out to theaters, regardless of quality, so some of these mini-reviews took me back a-ways. For the average reader (that is not the rabid movie-goer I am) I would still recommend it as a fun week-by-week journal that looks at the philosophy of cinema and the ideas of it as well as the films itself. For any film buffs out there though, it's a MUST MUST MUST read.

Dan says

In 2001 Kevin Murphy (Tom Servo on MST3K during the Mike Nelson years) watched a publicly screened movie every day (except for one, because of a broken super-8 projector) and wrote a weekly essay about the filmgoing experience. He knows movies, and while there were fewer takedowns of bad movies than expected, it was well worth reading. It was funny (though as Kristen Wilson pointed out to me, often in dad-joke mode) and well thought out and written. He watched a movie in an igloo, projected on a beach, in Australia, in a public theater run out a guys house, you name it.

Aside from his love of film, what made this book for me was his antipathy towards advertising. Since 2001, advertising has become even more a part of the film experience and, along with other recently read books,

it's gotten me thinking about the deleterious effects of being constantly marketed to. Not the insight I expected when I picked up the book, but I'd be interested to hear him talk about the current scene given how strongly he reacted to it 16 years ago.

Recommended, but more to MST3K fans than to anyone else.

And since we're on the topic, my Top 10 Films from 2001:

- 1) The Royal Tennenbaums (which Murphy didn't care for)
- 2) Waking Life
- 3) Devil's Backbone
- 4) Mulholland Drive
- 5) The Man Who Wasn't There
- 6) The Pledge
- 7) Ghost World
- 8) Amelie
- 9) Donnie Darko
- 10) Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

Runner up: Tape

Lisa says

I loved MST3K so when my brother loaned me his copy of "A Year at the Movies" by none other than Kevin Murphy from the show, I dove right in. And was thoroughly entertained. Kevin watched one movie every day for a single year, and while he does occasionally have reviews of the movies he sees, the book is more about the movie-going experience from all angles, what he loves about movies, what he hates about them, and how he fell in love with the movies all over again. Each chapter is short--I told Tracy that had Kevin written this book, it would have been blog posts instead of chapters. It's a fast, entertaining read and all I wanted to do when I finished was go to the movies. Highly recommended!

meghann says

I loved Kevin Murphy on MST3K, and I am so glad that he, Mike and Bill are back together doing Rifftrax. I somehow came across this book and just had to read it. I thought it would give descriptions of the movies he saw (at least one a day for a year) and humorous stories about his experience. This book does contain those things, but it has so much more. On January 1, 2001, Kevin was cynical in regards to the movies currently being made as well as the multiplexes they are shown in. He felt that the entire moviegoing experience has degraded so much that we are content with mediocrity. Throughout the book he travels the world visiting all sorts of cinemas and seeing films that would never be shown at your local multiplex. He attended film festivals, analyzed how the movie experience changes based on where you sit, calculated the minimum armrest width to ensure comfort for you and your neighbor. He watched silent films accompanied by organists, saw a movie in a theater made of ice as well as all the big Hollywood releases (he did indeed see Pootie Tang). By the end of the year he realizes that great film experience can still be found, even in the

dreaded multiplex. I thought this would be a quick read for me, but I found myself taking my time with it and really thinking about my own experiences and tastes in film. What a cool way to spend a year.

John Pitcock says

Not expected, but still good

This wasn't exactly what I was expecting, but it was still good. And because of the unexpected, it took me awhile to get to where I was really enjoying the book. I made some notes to see a few theaters across the country if I'm ever in those cities... This was more about theaters and the movie industry than about a review of movies. Although we get some of that as well.

Nicolas says

Because I love Tom Servo, I really wanted to love this book. Unfortunately, that wasn't in the cards. It has it's funny moments to be certain, but the author comes across as angry and very bitter. It just wasn't a fun book. I wish it was.
