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Ending

From Page 6B

cinematic finish goes back as far as 1902, when Georges Melies decided to have his astronomers crash back to Earth instead of spending the rest of their lives twiddling their thumbs on the moon.

In the decades that followed, directors continued to evolve their endings. In 1939, they approached a level of Darwinian perfection. That year and the three that followed brought a bounty of classic finishes: the return to Kansas in "The Wizard of Oz," the sled reveal of "Citizen Kane," Bogart's hill-of-beans speech in 'Casablanca," the frankness of Rhett not giving a damn in "Gone With the Wind."

These movies finished where they should, with scenes that both startled and made sense. We couldn't foresee that Dorothy had drawn from her real life to create the Emerald City, but once she did, we believed that she would.

Other endings would build on their forebears: John Wayne retreating silently and meaningfully off a porch in John Ford's "The Searchers," Michael Corleone's reluctant metamorphosis in the first "Godfather." In 1991, Hannibal Lecter ushered out "The Silence of the Lambs" by telling us that he was "having an old friend for dinner," reinforcing that he had indeed survived and was up to more mischief. Also, it was a witty pun, and we are suckers for a witty pun.

Eight years later, Paul Thomas Anderson offered an ending to "Magnolia" that quite literally dropped from the sky, as frogs rained down across Southern California. The scene continued at once, logically if surreally, the foreboding that came before, while also offering up a sly biblical reference. And we love a sly biblical reference, especially if it involves animals.

Try, on the other hand, to name a worthy ending you've seen in the last year in a popular movie. Perhaps your mind wanders to "The Avengers," where for 25 minutes we watch New York blow up so we can eventually see a leather-clad Scarlett Johansson måke a wisecrack. Or maybe it goes to "The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn — Part 2," in which a head-ripping bloodbath on an icy plain turns out to have existed in the mind of a psychic member of a clan called the Volturi.

Who should we blame for this drop-o Pity, first, the poor director working in the modern era. Go for the happy and you're accused of the saccharine. Go for the ambiguous and they'll throw tomatoes at you. As an audience, we've seen almost every conceivable ending, so directors try urgently, desperately to surprise.

Technology has made it harder too. An ending is instant fodder for a snarky tweet – after all, it is what's freshest in our minds when the phones go back on. There is neither time nor space for an ending to ferment into a classic. (If "Citizen Kane" came out today, it could well spawn the trending topics #Rosebud and #Stupid-Endings and be out of theaters within weeks.)

The mechanics of Hollywood also contribute to the problem.

We now develop so many movie ideas based on pitches," said Ben Affleck, director of "Argo" and "The Town." "And the thing about a pitch is that it does a pretty good job figuring out the first and second acts, but no one ever sits down and works out the third act.'

Meanwhile, when the films are eventually made, studios test and test some more, so that an ending might well be chosen by a random assortment of people who happened to have a few hours free at

Who should we blame for this drop-off? Pity, first, the poor director working in the modern era. Go for the happy and you're accused of the saccharine. Go for the ambiguous and they'll throw tomatoes at you. As an audience, we've seen almost every conceivable ending, so directors try urgently, desperately to surprise.

Sometimes the messiness is intentional. Filmmakers want their movie to be like life, and for most of us, life just kind of keeps meandering along. "I wanted it to be a slice of life," said "This Is 40" director Judd Apatow when asked why his movie seems to keep jumping around to different possible endings. "And life is very random and nonlinear.

The biggest tentpoles, devised in a petri dish by the biggest studios, have their own problems: They are forced to satisfy an ever more demanding teenage audience with bigger spectacle, which is why the building-jumping showdown at the end of "The Amazing Spider-Man" feels longer than the entire history of Marvel

But why is it so hard for virtue-laden movies with Oscar-winning directors to exit cleanly? There was only one way to put this issue to bed: to ask the people re-

Tom Hooper was first up. "I pride myself on endings because I think it's the most important thing," he said.

But if it's so important, why are there so many false finishes in "Les Miserables"? "The challenge with films that end with the hero dying is that it can leave you really hopeless, and so we had to transcend the tragedy of his death and turn it into something positive.'

Next, Steven Spielberg. Asked about the prevailing feeling that he should have wrapped "Lincoln" at an earlier moment,

he didn't concede the point. In fact, he said he didn't struggle with the ending as much as he did other issues. "The great challenge was not how the story would end but what it would cover," he said. "Tony (Kushner's) original draft was 550 pages.

As for Jackson's wish to see the shooter, Spielberg had an explanation. "We just knew we wouldn't show the assassination, because it would sensationalize the story. It would have suddenly focused the movie on the shooter, not the

Finally, Ang Lee. He said he knew the idea of pulling the rug out with an it-wasall-a-metaphor twist was tricky. "It's very hard, because you asked people not to believe what you just told them," he said.

So does it surprise or bother him that there's a backlash? "Well, Asia in particular loved the ending. It's more about the journey itself there," said Lee, offering an intriguing cultural hypothesis. "We probably don't feel this way as much in Amer-

"Life of Pi" is a big hit in China, so perhaps Lee is on to something. Perhaps we'd all feel differently about its conclusion if we were to travel to Beijing to watch it

Staff writers John Horn and Amy Kaufman contributed to this report.

From Page 7B

JULY:

Who'd have thought the cheesy words "Hey, Sexy Lady" would go so far? South Korean singer PSY's video of his song "Gangnam Style," emerges this month and the rest is history — it will become the most watched YouTube clip of all time. At the London Olympics, young athletes like the ebullient gymnast GABBY **DOUGLAS** and swimmer **MISSY** FRANKLIN, both 17, shine, but MICHAEL PHELPS — now 27 — still shows fellow swimmers how it's done, and 70-year-old SIR PAUL McCART-NEY delivers a soulful "Hey Jude" at the opening ceremony. Meanwhile, **QUEEN ELIZABETH II** gamely participates in a sketch in which she parachutes into the stadium.

AUGUST:

Fifty years ago this month, **MARI-LYN MONROE** died, and look how a '50s icon has become a 21st-century phenom. Her platinum locks, slightly parted ruby lips, and curvy, clinging styles are copied by actresses and singers from MADONNA to TAYLOR SWIFT to LINDSAY LOHAN to RI-HANNA to NICOLE KIDMAN. And there are a slew of Marilyn-themed enterprises on the horizon. Meanwhile, crusty **CLINT EASTWOOD**, 82, makes our night at the GOP convention with his infamous "empty chair" chat with President Obama. It becomes one of the enduring moments of the campaign, if also the most puzzling.

SEPTEMBER:

The most uninhibited person on the planet is now officially DUNHAM, who gets naked at the Emmys - she sits naked on a toilet and eats a birthday cake, to be precise, in an opening skit. At the MTV Video Music Awards, the boy band One Direction makes its mark as a new teen-girl obsession. But look who's also making waves: BILL CLINTON, 66, who rocks the Democratic Convention with an energetic speech that shows he can still inspire the masses. As for little SASHA and MALIA OBAMA, the country does a double-take: in four years they've become two mature and fashionable young women.

OCTOBER:

Binders full of women! Big Bird! Malarkey! Debate season is on, so let the instant memes begin. This is the first election where you could have followed the debates purely via Twitter. Surprise, **DUNHAM's** in the news again - and let no one doubt the value of pop-culture prominence, however ephemeral: Her new book deal with Random House is reportedly worth more than \$3.5 million. But let's hear it for another 50th birthday: Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" is back on Broadway exactly a half-century after it first premiered, and it's getting some of the best notices of the season.

NOVEMBER:

BOND. JAMES BOND. Embodied by the tough and chiseled **DANIEL** CRAIG, the world's most famous British spy is in better shape than ever as the franchise marks its 50th anniversary with "Skyfall," regarded by many as one of the best Bond films. Another iconic image doesn't fare so well: Lohan's turn as Liz Taylor in a new TV film is pilloried. Sometimes the original just shouldn't be touched. And hail to the first statistician to achieve pop-culture cred: Blogger NATE SILVER scores with his spot-on predictions of the election's outcome. And we must mention the oldest pop-culture hero of the year: ABRAHAM LINCOLN is back, courtesy of STEVEN SPIELBERG's movie and a typically mesmerizing performance by **DANIEL DAY-LEWIS.**

DECEMBER:

As the year ends, the world is abuzz with news of a royal pregnancy. Soon, a baby will be one of the biggest celebrities in the world. But for now let's give a shoutout to the ROLLING STONES, whose average age is 68plus, slightly older than the average Supreme Court justice. In five concerts marking their 50th year as a rock band, the grizzled foursome shows the world they still have the power to rock huge arenas (at huge prices), and upstage celebrity guests like LADY GAGA with their own charisma. Along with aging rockers McCARTNEY, SPRINGSTEEN, THE WHO and PINK **FLOYD,** they dominate a televised benefit for storm victims. As for **MICK JAGGER**, who at 69 hasn't lost any of those "moves like Jagger," we can only say, to paraphrase the famous movie line: "We'll have what he's having."

Predictions

From Page 1B

- 61. This time, things will be different · unless they aren't.`
- 62. Just to be difficult, during the holiday season you will wish people "a happy Christmas and a merry New
- 63. One day while typing on Twitter, you'll be forced to wonder, "Why am I
- 64. Opposing sides in the National Hockey League stalemate will come to a settlement, just in time for the spring

65. The situation with Iran will turn

- into an international crisis for several weeks, but moderation will diffuse the matter — for the time being. 66. Doh! The end may finally be in
- sight for "The Simpsons" after, like, 57 years on television. 67. Progress will be made on immi-
- gration reform.
- 68. Concerns will continue to rise about the safety of the James River bridge on Old Highway 50.

- 69. The rumor will spread that the Mead building in Yankton is haunted.
- 70. A rumor will also spread that the *Press & Dakotan* building in Yankton isn't haunted. (Don't believe it, man.

Just do not believe it.) 71. You will have a compellingly strong urge to want to drive across Meridian Bridge in a car, even though this made you nervous when you could do it.

- 72. Nicolas Cage will be in a movie that sucks.
- 73. A curious holiday tree-trimming trend: Sales will be brisk for Christmas ornaments shaped like rifles.
- 74. What do you mean no "Lincoln" sequel?!
- 75. Did you ever think the price of gas would hit \$2.75 a gallon again?

- 76. Americans will continue to buy into the false idea that Congress should run its finances like a household, making it easier for wealthy finance sector leaders to push for their next cash cow that will come at the expense of everyone else — privatization of Social Security and Medicare.
- 77. "The Hobbit" franchise will make short, stocky dwarves the new mythical sex symbol for females around the world, replacing those tired, pale vampires of yore.
- 78. My Bloody Valentine will finally release the follow-up to their seminal 1991 album "Loveless."
- 79. The NBA championship belongs to ... the Los Angeles Clippers? 80. An effort to achieve statehood for Puerto Rico will pick up, but make little
- 81. Someone will market a smartphone app that claims to have a "gay-
- dar" function. It won't work. 82. Attempts to rein in the Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United ruling that opened the floodgates to unlimited campaign contributions will be thwarted by well-monied political interests and lobbying groups — which seems only fit-

- 83. There will be an explosion of "selfie" photo exhibits and contests.
- 84. Don't look for a quiet year in Egypt. 85. It will be another year of warmth
- records across the planet.
- 86. After a relatively quiet weather year in 2012 — droughts will do that, you know — stormy skies return to the scene somewhat this year.
- 87. The Minnesota Vikings' Adrian Peterson will win the league's MVP honor. 88. A new research study reveals that dogs can laugh — and just wait until you find out what they are laughing at.
- 89. Fans of "Gilligan's Island" will be surprised to discover that there are still people who are fans of "Gilligan's Is-

90. Picture this: "Angry **Birds: The Movie."**

- 91. An increasing number of English teachers across the country will complain about students writing in "Twitter" shorthand and with emoticons.
- 92. The Old-Time Fiddlers Jamboree in Yankton will once again not include a laser show.

- 93. "Les Miserables" will come to Yankton — briefly.
- 94. The Los Angeles Angels will win the World Series.
- 95. With Disney taking over the "Star Wars" franchise, there will be rumors of Johnny Depp joining the cast as a sort of "Darth Sparrow" character.
- 96. With the 40th anniversary of the release of Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon," you'll listen to the album for the umpteenth time and realize just how timelessly true some of the lyrics are for
- 97. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving the federal government the authority to impose and collect income tax. You won't celebrate.
- 98. You'll find yourself increasingly watching Me-TV.
- 99. Mel Gibson won't be making many headlines this year, which will amount to the best career move he's made in a very long time.
- 100. Congress won't even be able to agree to disagree.