

## EDITOR'S LETTER



### Hooray-ish for Hollywood

It could be fairly said that 2011 wasn't a banner year for movies. (Or for much else, for that matter. See also: the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, the global economy, the euro, Arab dictators, the Kardashians.) When one of the most regular logos on movie titles belongs to the comic-book publisher Marvel, you know it's not 1939 anymore—the year that was arguably the high-water mark of American moviemaking. But we have a big Hollywood Issue to put out, so let's try to look on the bright side.

For those with upper-middlebrow taste in movies—which is to say, most of us—there were a number of bright spots. Youngish old-timers such as Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese produced endearing family classics of lasting value in *War Horse*, *The Adventures of Tintin*, and *Hugo*. If these two masters have an heir, it is most surely David Fincher, who, like them, is a protean filmmaker of remarkable range and talent. His 2007 film, *Zodiac*, was brilliant but largely overlooked. *The Social Network*, on the other hand, became a part of the conversation in 2010 the way few movies have since *All the President's Men*. With *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, he's made a taut, immersive film that causes you to forget the superb Swedish film trilogy based on the same Stieg Larsson novels—no mean accomplishment.

George Clooney's *The Ides of March* will slip easily into the pantheon of political films and thrillers, and when you couple it with his moving, nuanced role in *The Descendants*, well, he had a pretty decent year. When it comes to Meryl Streep and her portrayal of Margaret Thatcher in *The Iron Lady*, the Academy should assign handicaps to the rest of the competition, the way they do to duffers in a club golf tournament. It's the only hope to even out the field given Streep's constant, almost otherworldly talent. And throughout the year, there were pockets of unbridled enjoyment—*Bridesmaids*, *Midnight in Paris*, *Captain America*, the fourth *Mission: Impossible*—movies that provide the sort of theatergoing pleasure that generally eludes the vast, award-giving industry that thrives on the fringes of creative endeavor.

In pulling together this Hollywood Issue—our 18th—we've made the best of things, culling from the high points of 2011. And, as we have in the past, we also look back at the stars and filmmakers who once made going to the movies such a magical experience, back in that faraway time before superheroes, children's toys, and even board games replaced wars, literary classics, and epic love stories as fodder for producers and studios.

With the death of Elizabeth Taylor, Sophia Loren, at 77, is one of the last reigning goddesses from Hollywood's golden age. Unlike Taylor, Loren began life not as a cosseted protégée of the studio system but as an illegitimate urchin, starving on the streets of Pozzuoli, near Naples, before, during, and after the war. Her first break came when she was a runner-up in a local beauty contest (for which her grandmother had yanked down a household curtain to make a dress). Loren worked for a few years in low-budget Italian films before arriving in Hollywood in 1957 with perfunctory English and a voluptuous presence so pronounced that *Time* magazine later noted she could have consumed her leading men “with half a glass of water.” Hollywood had no idea what to do with her, so she made her own way, ramping up to serviceable English in 20 days and then finding in Cary Grant the perfect foil to her sultry beauty in the 1958 film *Houseboat*.

What is most astonishing about Loren's story is not her success—she was the first to win a best-actress Academy Award for a non-English-language performance (in 1960's *Two Women*)—but rather the hardships she endured at virtually every stage of her life. As she put it to contributing editor Sam Kashner for his story “Sophia's Choices,” on page 370, “My life is not a fairy tale.” Even after Loren had achieved international fame, she suffered at the hands of the Vatican, which condemned her romance with her mentor, the still-married producer Carlo Ponti, and later at the hands of Italian authorities, who confiscated the villa she and Ponti shared near Rome as well as the art on its walls. The Italians sent Ponti into exile and Loren to prison in a controversial tax-and-currency-violation case. So how wonderful it is to find Loren still radiant at her grand apartment in Geneva, and still able to summon her “marvelous cascading laugh, halfway between a tease and a call to joy,” as Kashner aptly describes it.

— GRAYDEN CARTER

