

## The Feel-Good Hit of the Summer

*In a world...where people won't shut up in movie theaters...a toddler finally earns his ticket stub.*

A Bill Zam Production

At three years, four months and five days old, we took my son Jordan to his first film at a movie theater.

Unless you count *Batman Begins*, that is, which he attended as a fetus in IMAX (In Mother At Time). The sound system was so loud I actually worried about the baby's development. It was the only movie we'd seen in the theater as a family and I've waited impatiently since then to renew that adventure before it's too late. I adore the cinema, and in another three years my older son Michael will be 13 and want no Parental Guidance whatsoever.

Couldn't we have brought Jordan to a theater sooner? If you need to ask that question, we hate you.

By "we," I mean *anybody who has ever been to a movie*. We want to hear the movie, not your child. Obvious exceptions to this rule include people who yell, "don't go in there!" at horror films, people who spend the duration of a film loudly asking their spouse to explain the plot, and junior high students, who are required by law to spend their theater time trying to out-fart each other. But the rest of us – people who pay the price of a month's diapers to enjoy the full cinema experience – want to put your baby back in the womb. Since the theater doesn't have a rewind button (yet), we can't. In order to not be those parents, we waited.

DVDs became Jordan's testing ground. He spent plenty of time with *Baby Einsteins* and *Wonder Pets!*, but his real love, which he got from his father and brother, is superheroes. In the late 2000s good comic book movies have flowed like a cape in a stiff wind, so it's been a difficult wait. Before I brought Jordan down the footlit aisles for a feature-length film, I needed to gauge his attention span.

*Spider-Man, Fantastic Four, Iron Man...*we screened them all in formats adjusted to fit my television set (how accommodating!). We even watched *Batman Begins* again, this time on DVD. I worried about the baby's development again, but this time it had to do with the dark subject matter, not cell generation. Jordan embraced every minute. He also loved the *X-Men* films so much he started calling me Cyclops when I wore sunglasses. The only disturbing behavior to report was the occasional assault on his brother with the Wolverine claws he begged us to make out of cardboard, tin foil and an old pair of gloves. When those gloves went on, I knew I could take the figurative kid gloves off. I made plans to take him to the new *Wolverine* film.

What better way to gently introduce a three-year-old child to the sensory overload of modern cinema than through a psychologically traumatized, persecuted mutant who smokes cigars and gores people with razor-sharp claws at the drop of a hat? And the nudity? Says it right here in the online summary: "brief." Wolverine may be an X-Man, but the film is only PG-13. I'm being flippant, but my Z-Chip is more relaxed than the V-Chip. My perspective as a parent has always been to expose my children to the Unsuitable Materials of the world through, well, my perspective as a parent.

My kids are eventually going to seek out adult content on their own, and their generation doesn't require the elaborate planning I employed to see Farrah Fawcett's breasts in *Saturn 3* after school at Neil Toddman's house.<sup>1</sup> An already forgettable movie, I'm ashamed to say I don't even remember the breasts; just the forbidden thrill of Neil's two-syllable challenge: "It's R."

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<sup>1</sup> Mom, just kidding. We were only playing Intellivision before Little League, I swear!

Today's heroes also present something those of my childhood frequently did not: a gray area. Like in life, the line between good and evil isn't always clear, and I try to educate my children about difficult choices using these movies as a vehicle. If that vehicle happens to be a badass, remote-controlled Bat-tank with full body armor and missiles, even better. It's a great way to hold a little boy's attention.

As we made our way to the theater, ready for some good old-fashioned gratuitous violence, I thought of the Christmas when my older son was three. Michael also loved superheroes and we surprised him with a Wolverine punching bag, the inflation of which nearly collapsed my lung. He punched the bag once and it said in a deep, scary voice, "My claws will take you down!" He ran screaming out of the room before it even popped back up. Maybe I introduced him to Wolverine a little too early.

I'll admit it. Sometimes my perception of what my children can handle is too aggressive. I arrived at the appropriately named Crossroads Theater at a crossroads. What to do?

I switched it up. In fact, I switched to *Up*, a film about an old man who spends a lifetime dreaming of exotic adventures, and the little boy who joins him on one in a house suspended by helium balloons. I've spent several pages convincing you that the first film should have been *Wolverine*, but the Christmas recollection made me retract the claws. Despite all my arguments about preparing Jordan for the world's evils, I reminded myself that children are blessed with but a few years of innocence. There would be plenty of time for violence and mayhem later.<sup>2</sup>

My parental perspective was replaced by Digital 3D, and the results were two thumbs *Up*. While there was chatter, chair kicking and loud chewing throughout the film, I'm proud to say that none of it came from my row. The experience was pure escapism. In addition to watching the floating house, I spent a lot of time watching my son's little legs levitating off the floor and listening to his guttural laughter – the kind of genuine, unbridled laughter that only comes from children. If you're a little more guarded and you're gonna tear up in public, I highly recommend the 3D glasses.

I also highly recommend the movie. If you've seen it<sup>3</sup>, you know that sometimes our greatest adventures happen in the confines of our own little homes. If you haven't, go check it out. And please, silence those cell phones and pagers – it could be some little boy's first adventure with his old man.

*Bill Zam is back and better than ever at [www.billzam.com](http://www.billzam.com).*

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<sup>2</sup> 2:45 matinee of *Wolverine* next week.

<sup>3</sup> SQUIRREL!