

Collected here are a few short film reviews written for PARIS TIME OUT

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The Blue Planet

Directed by Alastair Fothergill and Andy Byatt for the BBC Natural History Unit this is a rare virtuoso documentary about the planet's oceans. Years in the making and a project of enormous exploration and research, many of its sequences are beautiful, baffling, humbling and terrifying. Bizarre deep-ocean micro-organisms flash and glow like miniature showgrounds. Orca whales appear to gratuitously play bat and ball with grown seals. Swirling cones of migrating sardines are set upon by fish, mammals and birds alike. And the largest creature on earth, the incredible Blue Baleine whale, 30metres long and weighing 120 tonnes, majestically surfaces, takes air and dives again into that unimaginable (but slightly more imaginable by virtue of this doco) big, big blue.

Love Actually

In this directorial debut, Richard Curtis takes the winning formula of his big hits as screenwriter (Four Weddings and a Funeral, Notting Hill) and multiples it by a factor of three. Though only one wedding and one funeral here, this time we also have kids, Christmas, a touch of patriotism and love itself. An impressive acting list includes Hugh Grant, Liam Neeson, Alan Rickman and Emma Thompson, along with luminous extras Billy Bob Thornton (as US president) and (a walk-on) Claudia Schiffer. Despite such talent and plenty of funny scenes, much here is too facile even for this genre. As one of the film's characters says, perhaps cleverly parodying this very film's opportunism: "This is shit, isn't it?! Solid gold shit!"

Master and Commander

On the other side of the world

With this quiet, beautiful and subtle story inside a big, brave, blustering one, Peter Weir has adapted the historical maritime novels of Patrick O'Brien and come up with a surprisingly entertaining film. Set in 1805 during the Napoleonic wars, an English ship, HMS Surprise, captained by nautical genius 'Lucky' Jack Aubrey, (and played by a truly commanding Russell Crowe), tenaciously pursues a French ship, against overwhelming odds. Though full of impressively staged war and gore on the high seas, the story at the heart of the storm is the civilised tussle between Aubrey and the ship's surgeon, Stephen Maturin, (played by Paul Bettany), a proto-Darwinian naturalist and man of enlightenment and between duty to country and duty to science, learning and friendship.

Crush

It's a fairly safe bet from the outset of this rollercoaster quest for love in the lives of three, 40-something, high-achieving, but nevertheless single, women friends in a small English country community that ultimately all will be well before the final frame. But as usual in the English romantic comedy (with Andie Macdowell as wayward school headmistress Kate), one must first endure some lesson in life. In this case that love may have to be found in unlikely and 'unacceptable' places, and that one's friends better get used to it. An excess of swelling strings (and organ) on the soundtrack will remind one not only when to laugh and when to cry, but that one is in fairly predictable territory.