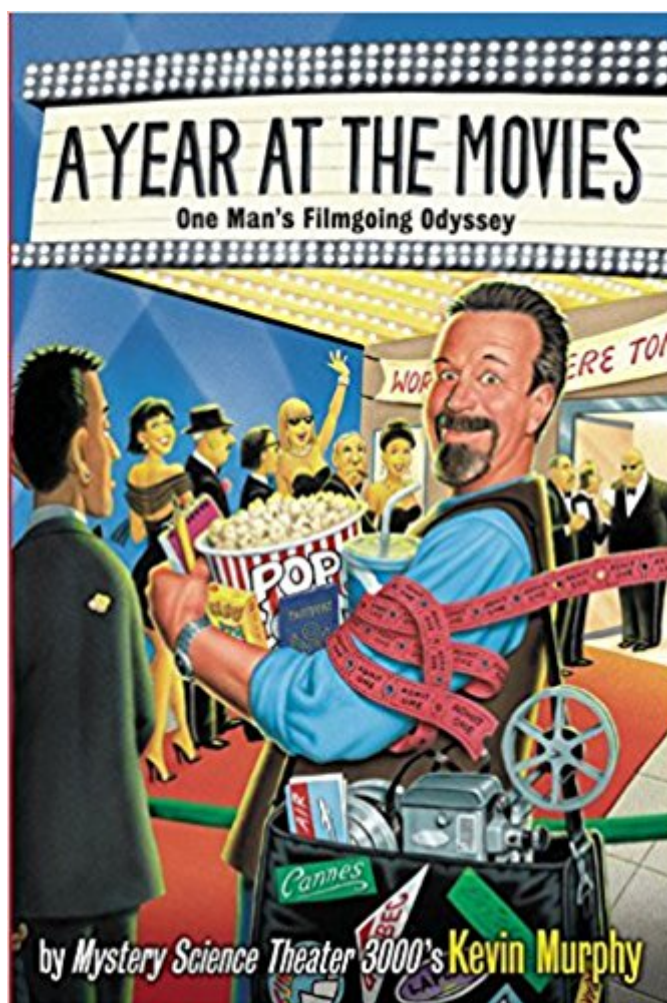


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# A Year At The Movies: One Man's Filmgoing Odyssey



## Synopsis

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.

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## Customer Reviews

Until they realize how much dreck Hollywood puts out, most people wouldn't mind having Murphy's job. Murphy, best known from the cult TV hit *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, set out to see a movie a day for all of 2001--and he's got the occasionally repetitive but usually amusing stories to prove it. He snuck into Cannes, roamed Route 66 in search of drive-ins, visited a midnight sun film festival in

Lapland, and lived for a week on (almost) nothing but concession-stand food. Few would argue with Murphy's harangues at shoddy theaters and dopey summer movies ("people watch them simply to be distracted and sort of entertained, and since I can do this watching a ceiling fan, I bristle at paying good money"), and his jolly geekdom makes for engaging company. He's a highbrow man of the people, and even when the occasional chapter falls flat or the book feels a bit slapped together, he'll still make readers eager to grab a paper and see what's playing at the local theater. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Kevin Murphy spent ten years as a writer, producer, and performer on the Peabody Award-winning series *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. He is coauthor of *The Mystery Science Theater 3000 Amazing Colossal Episode Guide*. He lives in Minnesota with his long-suffering, movie-tolerant wife, Jane.

An interesting journey of one man's goal to see a movie every day for a year. He travelled the globe to accomplish this and has witty and insightful observations on the role of films in different countries. The writer has a nice self-deprecating sense of humor and the book reads very fast. My only quibble is I wish he had done more short reviews of the films he saw.

For those of you who don't know, Kevin "Tom Servo" Murphy took it upon himself to "go to the movies" at least once a day for the entirety of 2001, and to put that experience down on paper. Given the amount of garbage that was passing for entertainment that year, this may seem like a fearsome challenge. But Murphy appears to have relished the opportunity to get paid for what most of us consider a relaxing leisure-time activity. And even acknowledging the aspects of movie-going that he disliked, one gets the impression that he at least enjoyed complaining about them. *A YEAR AT THE MOVIES* is a collection of essays written during that year-long adventure. Fifty-two chapters, one per week, detail everything that he felt worth mentioning. Murphy engages in several gimmicks during the course of his book. He attempts to find the smallest theatre in the world (apparently it's squeezed into some guy's house, and is an actual licensed and legal cinema). He brings six different women to the same date movie on consecutive days (his wife is described on the back cover as "long-suffering"). He smuggles in an entire turkey dinner on Thanksgiving Day (the man fits a table under his coat - if there was an Academy Award for table-sneaking, he'd deserve it). He attempts spending a week eating nothing but concession stand food (again, his wife is described as "long-suffering"). However, as entertaining as these exploits are, I was more interested in the

day-to-day things that Murphy picked up on during the year. He contrasts the service and attention to detail present at mom-n-pop, independent theatres to the impersonal, uncaring experience one might expect to see at the nearest massive movie multiplex (which Murphy humorously refers to as "googolplexes"). He looks at the reactions and discussions created by the small independent films, and counterpoints those thoughts with the ennui that seems to sweep over the audiences of the summer blockbusters, who become so uninvolved and distanced that they go merely to observe, to be vaguely distracted, and then to leave, never to think of the film again. That said, I was definitely amused by some of his goofier antics. Getting into multiplexes without paying, and pretentious folks who haunt his local movie theatre on Hong Kong Cinema Morning are just two of the subjects that meet with his brand of comedy. Murphy was a writer on the ever-witty television show, MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000, and a lot of those clever one-liners and quick humor are on display here. There's even a cameo by former MST3K host Michael J. Nelson, who gets dragged along to a viewing of Corky "Y'guys want some cookies?" Romano. Pity them. Or laugh at them. I did both. The only really negative thing I have to say is that there was no table of contents, and no index. So, when I look back, I have to randomly flip my way around the fifty-two essays to find exactly what it is that I want to reread. Unless I managed to remember the date, I'm simply lost. The book is written in chronological order of his cinema-going year, but the vast majority of the essays aren't time or season specific. It's a minor quibble to be sure, yet it would be handy to have a quick way to find his essay on, say, why movies about rich people are usually lousy, or on the best way to sneak into the Cannes film festival, or on what it's like to see films in the land of the midnight sun. I found A YEAR AT THE MOVIES to be a fun and occasionally thoughtful travelogue that maintains a good balance between being amusing and reflective. Murphy is definitely a fan of the movies, so his comments come from a love of the craft, and a sense of frustration when it doesn't live up to its potential. He comes across as a faintly snobbish curmudgeon in parts, but a very likeable guy all the same. He's definitely an aficionado of most aspects involved with movie watching, and I found his enthusiasm contagious.

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.

Mainstream films often suck the root, but sorry Kev ya gotta lighten up Francis. I just found this book too be too contrary, one chapter we are all sheep in the multiplex, later Kevin finds solace in the joy of the unwashed masses enjoying their low rent fare.

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