



The Dog Days of August Spawned a Few Movies to Remember

The month of August is a lost 31 days in Washington. It is largely free of significant holidays, Congress is usually in recess, and seemingly everyone else follows suit, beating a hasty exit from town. The month itself doesn't have much of a track record for inspiring the poets and the novelists (and thus the moviemakers). If anything, August is usually lumped in with June and July to make "summer" movies. (Ever heard of the surfing classic *Endless August*? Me neither.) But within the past few years there have been a handful of movies with August in the title, usually related to some events therein, both fictional and actual. Here's a selection, along with a personal favorite with a tenuous connection to the man for which the month is named.

August

★★★

2008, Rated R, 88 minutes

In March of 2001, internet tycoon brothers Tom and Josh Sterling (Josh Hartnett and Adam Scott, respectively) are on top of the world, with just six months to wait before they can take their white-hot New York dot-com start-up to its IPO and cash out for hundreds of millions. Five months later, in August, 2001, their dream world is in peril as a major financial partner goes belly-up. They stand to lose everything if they can't find bridge funding to get them to September. When Tom, the ultra-cocky CEO with the mind for business, tries to convince Josh, the creative genius, to personally put up money, their blood bond gets its ultimate test. The coming doom one month in the future serves as an ironic backdrop unknown to the protagonists.

Black August

★★★

2007, Unrated, 116 minutes

Named for events of August, 1971, when jailed Black Panther George Jack-

son (Gary Dourdan) was killed during an attempted prison break from San Quentin, this low-budget biopic follows Jackson's life as a political radical. He is arrested, convicted, and sentenced to 11 years in prison for a gas station robbery and, while serving time, is charged with the death of a prison guard (he claims innocence). The movie follows both Jackson and his champions on the outside, a white lawyer who supports the Panthers' cause and a book editor (Darren Bridgett) who wants to publish Jackson's letters from prison — ultimately making him a cause celeb. Jackson's breakout attempt follows the death of his younger brother Jonathan who was killed in a courthouse kidnapping attempt meant to leverage George's release. The film plays up the conspiratorial nature of the historical events that also made UCLA professor Angela Davis a national figure.

August Evening

★★★

2007, Rated PG-13, 127 minutes

This deliberately paced drama follows illegal immigrant and recent widower Jaime (Pedro Castaneda) as he gets reunited with his estranged grown children in Texas. He is accompanied in his travels by his widowed daughter-in-law Lupe (Veronica Loren) who treats him as her own father. The two struggle to find new lives knowing that their codependent existence can only be temporary. The constant movement and uncertainty presents many stressful episodes, but they mostly wrestle with loss and disappointment. Stylistically shot and visually appealing, this would be best appreciated by those who love heavy layered, slice-of-life films. Think *The Station Agent* set in a Texas border town. In Spanish with subtitles.

August Rush

★★★

2007, Rated PG, 114 minutes

Musically gifted orphan Evan (Freddie Highmore of *Finding Neverland*) hears music everywhere. Even though unhappy with life in his boys' home, he tells his social worker (Terrence Howard) that he doesn't want to be adopted, sensing that the music he hears will ultimately lead him to his parents. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn his parents are musically talented hotties Louis (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) and Lyla (Kerrie Russell), who met for a brief affair resulting in her pregnancy. And we learn how he came to be an "orphan," spoiler details that I'll leave out. Evan escapes his boys' home to take up with exploitative street musician Wizard (Robin Williams) who gives him the name August Rush, convincing him that if his real name is discovered that he'll be sent back to the home. All the while, August continues to believe in the magic of the music that will ultimately bring back his parents.

Lonesome Dove

★★★★

1989, Unrated, 384 minutes (4 parts)

This movie fits the monthly theme because of lead protagonist Augustus "Gus" McRae (Robert Duvall). Gus, in my book, is a perfect character from a near-perfect novel that was made into a near-perfect miniseries. Gus and his fellow former-Texas Ranger partner Woodrow Call (Tommy Lee Jones) decide to abandon life in the "little fart of a town" they live in on the Texas border and strike out for the good life as cattle ranchers in Montana. To do so, they need to rustle few thousand previously stolen steers from Mexico and recruit a crew to assist them on their cross-continental drive. Along the way they encounter snakes, storms, hostile natives, rude Army officers, disrespectful bartenders, and a ruthless bandit (Frederic Forrest) with whom they have a long history. The gang includes Call's illegitimate son Newt (Rick Schroder) and former slave and master tracker Deets (Danny Glover). Their epic drive intersects with many equally interesting characters including Gus' disinterested former lover Clara (Angelica Huston), love-sick prostitute Lorena (Diane Lane), and a former fellow Ranger Jake Spoon (Robert Urich). The cast is stellar from top to bottom and my only disappointment with both book and miniseries were that they had to end. Author Larry McMurtry obviously heard the call as well, because several sequels and prequels were spawned in both paper and video forms, but in hindsight he should have left well enough alone. None of the others lived up to the original.

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