



The Main Feature

Season 45 – Issue 12 – Screening 12th March 2026

Girls Will Be Girls

India/France 2024
118 mins Certificate 15

Director/Writer	Shuchi Talati
Photography	Jih-E Peng
Editor	Amrita David
Music	Sneha Khanwalkar Pierre Oberkamp
Art Director	Arzoo Ali
Costume Designer	Shaahid Amir
Preeti Panigrahi	Mira
Kani Kusruti	Anila (Mother)
Kesav Binoy Kiron	Sri (Boyfriend)
Kajol Chugh	Priya (Room-mate)
Devika Shahani	Ms. Bansal (Teacher)
Nandini Verma	Divya



Our presentation tonight is a coming-of-age drama set in the 1990s in a stern co-educational boarding school in the Himalayan foothills. The film has a distinctively feminist (or non-misogynist) perspective, and deals sensitively with the first pangs of desire and the relationship between a protective mother and a rebellious daughter.

The film opens with 16-year-old Mira appointed as the first female Head Prefect in the school's history. She is earnest, book-smart and demure. Mira is seemingly comfortable with the school's strict rules, which include warnings about fraternising with the boys, and checks on skirt lengths and appropriate white socks. The school expects its students to respect "our age-old Indian culture, and live according to it." In that spirit, Mira calls out a group of boys for up-skirting and – after some reluctance from the staff – is relieved to see the offending boys eventually suspended. Mira boards at the school for some of the time (sharing a room with the slightly louche Priya) but otherwise goes home at night to her mother Anila, an ex-pupil. Mira befriends Sri, a freshly-arrived International student, slightly older, charming and worldly-wise and with a keen passion for astronomy. Their (covert) friendship blossoms into romance, kindling Mira's body awareness and sexual feelings. Anila finds out about the relationship, and is initially concerned that it will affect Mira's grades, but she bonds with Sri and allows the two to study together at home. Mira is increasingly wary of her mother's almost flirtatious behaviour with her beau (cue a toe-curling dancing scene). Mira and Sri eventually sleep together. Rumours start at the school, imperilling Mira's

academic reputation, but she is forcefully defended by her mother. Mira has to contend with the angry suspended boys and re-thinks her strained maternal relationship.

The film is written and directed by Shuchi Talati, who channelled her own experience in a similar school environment, annoyed that “girls got the shame” whilst boys were given the benefit of the doubt (even from female staff). It is her debut feature and also the first acting roles for those playing Mira and Sri. Talati insisted on a majority-female crew to ensure a “safe space” for the young cast.

The film was premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2024, winning 2 gongs including an Audience Award and subsequently became a “festival darling” winning 23 other awards (and securing 44 nominations) at 28 different locations around the globe. It was snapped up by Amazon Prime Video for most territories and – a very brief release in the UK aside – thus did not trouble the box office.

Critical response was unfailingly favourable (it has a 100% rating on Rotten Tomatoes). The London Times praised its “deadpan realism” and the “flawless” performance from Panigrahi. The Observer gushed that “[this] is a drama that plays out in charged looks and tacit connections...Talati’s work with her young cast is first-rate.” The Guardian commended “a quiet film...Panigrahi plays Mira with such poise and intelligence, conveying her innermost thoughts with a slight lift of the chin here or lingering look there... it’s hard to believe this is her first lead role.” Variety added that “the way [it] presents female teen sexuality — sensitively, sensuously, mischievously — is practically revolutionary in the broader context of Indian cinema” and noting that “it is a slow and deliberate narrative, with a pace that reflects the emotional currents of Mira’s life. Acclimating to its lingering rhythm, its loitering sensibility, takes time. [It] offers a sensitive and distinctive take on the fraught dynamics between mothers and daughters.”

To add one negative note, I’ll quote an IMDb reviewer, who wrote “[It] fell short of expectations with its inconsistent narrative and unremarkable character development. The storyline lacked depth, making it difficult to connect with the characters or their motivations. The pacing felt uneven, and the humour often missed its mark... I don’t recommend it at all. So don’t waste your time watching this movie.” Must have been a bloke.

It is a slow film. The male characters are all under-developed (we glimpse Mira’s father, who seems a supportive sort but isn’t around much). Compared to many other “coming-of-age” films, the female perspective and the absence of titillation/flesh are welcome. The rather mechanical coupling scene feels awkward (but is probably more realistic than in most film treatments).

I suspect this might be one of our more divisive films but – as always - your views will be welcomed!

Eugene Smith



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Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by close Tuesday 17th March
Discs of most of our previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

Kevin Maher (Film Critic of The Times) offers his perspective on film run-times

Hey, cinemagoers, how's the numbness? Did you need to stand up and stretch during the phenomenal 197 minutes of **Avatar: Fire and Ash**? Did you make it through 162 mins without cramping to the closing credits of **One Battle After Another**? Are you still reeling from 170 mins of (Tom) Cruise-controlled mayhem in **Mission: Impossible, The Final Reckoning**?

Yes, movies are getting longer. It is a fact. Average running times have been on an upward, and outward, trajectory for more than 100 years, expanding in a slow and steady creep from 70-something minutes in the 1920s to roughly 120 minutes today.

Excessive running times, however, matter now more than ever because of the perception that cinema is in a state of existential crisis. It is, apparently, about to be swallowed up by the streamers. It is why Claire Binns, the creative director at Picturehouse cinemas, has announced that directors should be making their films shorter to make cinema audiences more "comfortable" and to ensure the profitability of the sector. Longer films, in essence, mean fewer showings. A bigger Avatar for the fans means a smaller return for the cinema. The demand for shorter films is, Binns said, "a wake-up call to directors".

Is it really? It feels like nostalgia to me. A warm and fuzzy yearning for a time when mercifully slim films such as **Annie Hall** (93 mins) and **Driving Miss Daisy** (99 mins) won best picture Oscars and family hits such as **Toy Story** (81 mins) and **Short Circuit** (98 mins) did not require an interminable block-booked day at the multiplex.

In reality, excessively long movies are here to stay. They are a conspicuous function of the media environment into which they are released; one dominated by streaming, content creation and digital platforms. The streamers, through their promotion of "binge watching" practices, have taught us all to consume huge quantities of visual entertainment that is not constrained by some idealised 90-minute paradigm to which the multiplex still clings.

Even when movies aren't made directly for the streamers, they are made because of the streamers. The key word here is "immersion". Studio marketing departments consistently claim that loud, overlong blockbusters are giving us an immersive experience that is, allegedly, unavailable with the streamers. **Avatar** is immersing us in the fantasy worlds of Pandora. The most recent **John Wick** (169 mins) was immersing us in the realm of tedious ultraviolence. The **Dune** sequel, at (166 mins) was immersing us in the desert landscape of Arrakis. **Avengers: Endgame** (181 mins) was immersing us in the last creative gasp of the Marvel universe.

Meanwhile, as the cost-of-living crisis continues to bite, there is now a direct correlation between running time and so-called value. As multiplex ticket prices nudge up towards (in central London at least) £20 plus, these three-hour megamovies suddenly seem comparable to a bumper pack of Aldi lavatory paper. **Avatar: Fire and Ash** is, by most creative and dramatic metrics, a truly terrible film. But by length it offers the thrifty cinemagoer an immensely satisfying experience and one that surely explains the film's \$1.3 billion global box office so far.

The difficult truth, ultimately, is that a good film needs to be as long as it needs to be. Kevin Costner used to say that right before he made the three-hour flop **Horizon: An American Saga — Chapter 1**. He is right, though. I saw the full three-hour cut of **Bardo** by Alejandro González Iñárritu (The Revenant) at the Venice Film Festival in 2022 and it was a near-mystical experience. Perfect and dreamlike in every way. Negative word-of-mouth, though, meant that Iñárritu cut back the movie by 22 minutes before release. The new version was flat, formless and dull. That film needed to be as long as it needed to be.

Point being? Long films are not the problem, whether they be in multiplexes, on digital platforms or both. **The real enemies of cinema's future, and the ones that might bring it down in the end, are bad films.**

Comments and reactions to: **Thelma** (shown 28th February 2026)
 No of reaction slips received = 24 Average score = 6.92

Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	1	7	9	7	~	~

Position	Film	Score	Reactions
1	Mr. Burton	8.41	29
2	Touch (Snerting)	8.20	30
3	Conclave	8.15	34
4	Frantz	7.91	32
5	The Dressmaker	7.73	26
6	Perfect Days	7.34	29
7	Thelma	6.92	24
8	Chevalier	6.80	25
9	Maria	6.16	25
10	Jimi - All is By My Side	4.77	26
11	A Christmas Tale/Conte de Noel	3.72	25

A lovely film!

Light but fun!

Very enjoyable. First half a bit long. Well-acted by June Squibb and Richard Rowntree

A really important point of view. Sad at times. How do you plan ahead?

Good fun but perhaps a spoonful too much saccharine

Enjoyable film

Alarming! A little uncomfortable at times – I must accept more help!!

What fun – [like] Driving Miss Daisy – touching, delightful

A recommendation to enjoy every opportunity, every day. Tenacious – I want to be as adventurous when I am 93 years old!

Good to see the older generation showing us how to live life in old age – and get their own back!

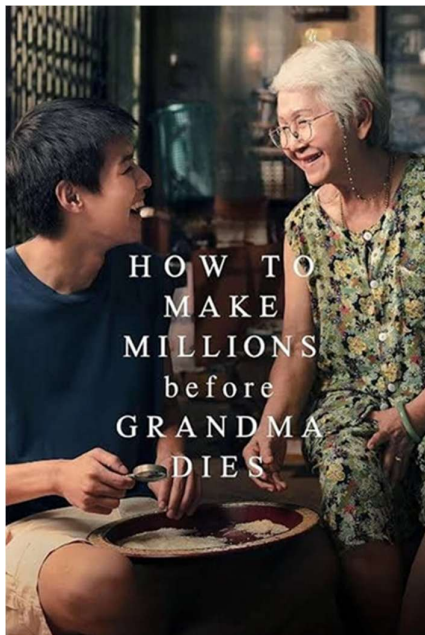
June Squibb was amazing – remarkable for her age

Sometimes a little uncomfortable – perhaps because it was too near to the truth!! Even so it was very enjoyable

A very pleasant watch

A great, lively and believable performance of Thelma. Realistic and relatable individual characters by the cast and well supported by Ben

Our Next Film – How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies – 26th March 2026



It's a good, solid bittersweet dramedy about families and family legacies – Kermode and Mayo

An audience-pleasing tear-jerker that set box-office records across southeast Asia – The Times

With an engaging cast led by dimpled actor and pop singer Putthipong “Billkin” Assaratanakul and 78-year-old Usha “Taew” Seamkhum, it renders universal the central message of cherishing those we love while there is still time - Variety