Film review openings

Jason Reitman's "Juno" is just about the best movie of the year. It is very smart, very funny and very touching; it begins with the pacing of a screwball comedy and ends as a portrait of characters we have come to love. Strange, how during Juno's hip dialogue and cocky bravado, we begin to understand the young woman inside, and we want to hug her.

Combine (1) a mysterious threat that attacks a town, and (2) a group of townspeople who take refuge together, and you have a formula apparently able to generate any number of horror movies, from "[Night of the Living Dead](http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-night-of-the-living-dead-1967)" (1968) to "[30 Days of Night](http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/30-days-of-night-2007)." All you have to do is choose a new threat and a new place of refuge, and use typecasting and personality traits so we can tell the characters apart.

Ang Lee's "Life of Pi" is a miraculous achievement of storytelling and a landmark of visual mastery. Inspired by a worldwide best-seller that many readers must have assumed was unfilmable, it is a triumph over its difficulties. It is also a moving spiritual achievement, a movie whose title could have been shortened to "life."

After opening with one of the most terrifying flying scenes I've witnessed, in which an airplane is saved by being flown upside down, [Robert Zemeckis](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/robert-zemeckis)' "Flight" segues into a brave and tortured performance by [Denzel Washington](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/denzel-washington) — one of his very best. Not often does a movie character make such a harrowing personal journey that keeps us in deep sympathy all of the way.