

Nicolas Cage Holly Hunter
RAISING ARIZONA



Richter's favorites

BY CHRIS RICHTER

As the century comes to a close, it seems that everyone wants to come up with "best of" lists. ESPN has the 50 greatest athletes of the century (Secretariat ranked above Dr. J, go figure). *Entertainment Weekly* published newsstand specials documenting what they believe to be the 100 greatest moments in all forms of entertainment. Newspapers and channels like CNN and MSNBC all believe moments in history can be ranked, from the most important to the least important.

Well, I'm going to jump off the bridge just like everyone else. This week's column is a list of my favorite movies. I'm not giving you a list of the century's greatest or of movies that many film scholars lionize with pretentious passages on mise en scene and symbolism. These are movies I love and will watch whether they're being shown in their unedited forms or on TNT. It's tough to come up with a list like this, so here are ten that didn't quite make the cut: "Babe" (1995), "Bound" (1996), "A Fistful of Dollars" (1964), "It's a Wonderful Life" (1946), "Hard Eight" (1996), "Airplane!" (1980), "The Usual Suspects" (1995), "North By Northwest" (1959), "The Game" (1997).

Here are my top ten, in no particular order.

• "Out of Sight" (1998) — I tell people about this film whenever I get the chance. It has become my favorite movie. It tells the story of Jack Foley (George Clooney), a career bank robber who crosses paths with Karen Sisco (Jennifer Lopez), a federal marshal. Forced into close quarters during the opening scenes of the film, a spark ignites between them, making them wonder "what if?" What if she weren't a law enforcement officer? What if he weren't a bank robber? What if they'd met under different circumstances, like in a bar? These questions go unanswered as the two are forced apart. Foley gets involved in a diamond heist, and Sisco is hot on his tail, I mean trail. Their game of cat and mouse eventually brings them together for a passionate rendezvous. There are so many good things about this film: the characterizations, the direction, and the dialogue. However, the chemistry between Lopez and Clooney is impossibly perfect.

• "Cinema Paradiso" (1988) — This is a movie-lover's movie. Winner of the 1990 Oscar for best foreign language film, it's the story of a middle-aged film director, Salvatore, whose memories of home and the most important man in his life are triggered by the news of the man's death. The film is told in flashback as we watch Salvatore grow from a boy to a man. His love for movies develops from his relationship with Alfredo, the town projectionist. After an accident leaves Alfredo blind, he allows the boy to operate the projector. Mixed in is a priceless and heartbreaking story about Salvatore's first and only true love, Elena. The ending of the film is perhaps the most perfect ending I've ever seen to a movie.

• "Rear Window" (1954) — My favorite Hitchcock film. It can be seen as a commentary on America as a voyeuristic nation. It stars Jimmy Stewart as L.B. Jefferies, a photographer sidelined by a broken leg. He spends his days spying on his neighbors with a pair of binoculars. He becomes suspicious of one of his neighbor's actions and suspects there might be foul play involved. After convincing his

girlfriend (Grace Kelly) that something is going on, they investigate with nearly fatal consequences. The film was shot using basically two set pieces. Grace Kelly shows why I think she is the most beautiful woman who ever appeared on a movie screen. It's a great suspense film in the Hitchcock tradition.

• "The Graduate" (1967) — The New American Cinema burst onto screens in the second half of the '60s. Mike Nichols' "The Graduate" showed America the anxieties young people face when stepping into adulthood. It stars Dustin Hoffman as Ben Braddock, a recent college graduate unsure of where he wants his life to go. He gets involved with Mrs. Robinson, his father's business partner's wife. However, he soon falls in love with Elaine Robinson, Mrs. Robinson's daughter. This romance, while real, hits a snag when Ben's relationship with Mrs. Robinson is revealed. It's a wonderfully comic film with a great performance by Hoffman and a perfect soundtrack by Simon and Garfunkel. Ben and Elaine's look at the end of the film perfectly captures the uncertainty and excitement everyone feels when they make that step into adulthood.

• "Cool Hand Luke" (1967) — Paul Newman as Jesus Christ? Weird, huh? That's one of the interpretations of "Cool Hand Luke." I prefer to see it as a movie about a man an outlaw who comes into a prison camp and turns things upside down, grappling with authority. Maybe it isn't such a stretch. But at its core, it's a film about standing up for yourself, about injecting life into the people around you. And it's a real man's film. Not like the pumped-up testosterone-fests of today. And women, don't watch this film with men because when it gets to the car-washing scene, the man you are with will drool more than Homer Simpson at the thought of doughnuts.

• "Say Anything" (1989) — I want to be Lloyd Dobler, John Cusack's character in "Say Anything." He's smart, funny, carefree. And everyone likes him. Lloyd's in love with the class valedictorian, Diane Court (Ione Skye). He takes a chance and asks her out. They go to a party and by the end of the night, Diane is smitten with Lloyd. He's perfect in her eyes. The film follows their love over the course of a summer, one in which Diane is faced with many tough "life" decisions. Technically, it could be placed in the 1980s teen love drama/comedy genre. But it's different. It's much more real and the characters are much more likeable than in other films. And, like at

the end of "The Graduate," Diane and Lloyd leave filled with anxiety and excitement about the future.

• "Raising Arizona" (1987) — My favorite line in "Raising Arizona" makes no sense out of context. It's right as H.I. (Nicolas Cage) walks in and proposes to Ed (Holly Hunter). He sees a friend of his and says, "Howdy Curt." Forget "Fargo." This is the Coen brothers' best film, by far. H.I. is a convenience store hold-up man, Ed a police officer. They find love and want to have a child, because there's too much happiness for them not to have a critter. But they can't. So they decide to steal one from Nathan Arizona, Sr., the furniture king of Arizona. All-hell breaks loose as the two try to be good responsible parents and avoid the law. The music is hilarious. Trey Wilson's performance as Nathan Arizona, Sr. is priceless ("I don't know what his damn jammies looked like. They had Yodas and sh*t on them"). It's a riot.

• "Wings of Desire" (1987) — Forget "City of Angels." This is the real deal. Directed by Wim Wenders, it's the story of an angel who is unhappy with his existence. He falls in love with a circus performer but can't court her because he's not human. When he learns he can trade eternal life for mortality, he does and pursues the love that made him give up his divinity. It's in German, so there are subtitles. It's meditative and philosophical, so it can be a bit slow at times. But Peter Falk is in it. It's such a passionate story about love and sacrifice that you'll quickly forget you're reading at all.

• "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (1981) — The first installment of the Indiana Jones trilogy is basically an extended version of the old Saturday afternoon serials. It's a great adventure story with romance and action. It harkens back to the action/adventure films of the 1940s, when heroes were tough and smart with a hidden soft side. Harrison Ford creates a memorable character in Dr. Jones, an archaeologist attempting to get his hands on the Ark of the Covenant before the Nazis do. Karen Allen plays his love interest, Marion Ravenwood. She's almost as tough as he is and can drink any man under the table. It's just a lot of good fun.

• "Casablanca" (1942) — Did you know "Casablanca's" screenplay was written as the film was being made? It makes Michael Curtiz's story of love in Nazi-occupied France even more amazing. Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, Ilsa Laszlo (Ingrid Bergman) walks into Rick's. She and her husband, Victor, are trying desperately to get out of town. The problem is that Nazis are pursuing Victor. The only person who can help is Rick (Humphrey Bogart). However, Rick and Ilsa's steamy past clouds their vision. It's a wonderful love story. The comedic touches thrown in with Bergman's desperate vulnerability and Bogart's deceptively tough visage make this a film that belongs on every "best of" list