



# 2003's 10 best movies

An S&B film reviewer separates wheat from chaff, because that's what they do in Iowa

by Bradley Iverson-Long

Ah, 2003, the year of *Gigli*, the movie with an absurd enough name and plot to dethrone *Ishtar* as a synonym for bad. The year of sequels from every movie from last year. The year *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Matrix* trilogies finally ended. The year of Jeremy Blodgett, and the year of Kay Nguyen. In 2003, 254 movies were released, and somehow I saw 41 of them. These 10 were the best:

## 1. Capturing the Friedmans

When I reviewed this film back in October, I said "Capturing the Friedmans raises a lot of difficult questions, and a lot of difficult issues. To paraphrase an old saying, truth is BETTER than fiction." Well, this documentary on the dissolving of a family was better than everything else this year. The subject matter, the investigation of hundreds of counts of sexual abuse, was straight out of *Law and Order*, and the stunning voyeuristic home videos finally validated the family camcorder. Director Andrew Jarecki deftly left the Friedman's guilt excruciatingly unresolved. This audacious film forces the audience to reassess their opinion of America's preoccupation with publicity-hyped sex crimes.

## 2. Lilja 4-Ever

This story of a 16-year-old girl living in the former Soviet Union is easily the most depressing film of the year. Unable to survive in her poverty-stricken homeland, Lilja tragically and unwittingly enters into the international sex trade. Swedish writer/director Lukas Moodysson, known for his ebullient comedies (if known at all), felt obligated to tell this gritty tale to make Sweden and the rest of the world aware of plights of millions of children. This very political, very feminist film is immensely powerful, if not easy to sit through.

## 3. In America

This charming sweet but sad tale of one family's immigration to New York City was the most U.S.-positive movie of the year. An Irish family tries to escape the loss of a child, and is immediately swept up in the magic of the Big Apple. Some moments are too sweet or too stale, but many scenes were downright enchanting. All in all, it's a beautifully told story, and it's the only movie this year that made me cry.

## 4. 21 Grams

I promise, this is the last sad movie on my list! All of the components of this film; Benicio Del Toro's toughness, Sean Penn's sadness, Naomi Watts' beautiful yet tarnished fragility, Guillermo Ariaga's philosophical screenplay, and Alejandro González Iñárritu's thoughtful direction and editing which subverts continuity even more than *Memento*, make this a gripping two hour experience.

## 5. School of Rock

All hail comic and rock god Jack Black. This Black vehicle, in which

he fraudulently becomes a substitute teacher and turns his class into a rock band, plays like a suitable-for-children version of his band, Tenacious D. Black, with help from some very talented kids, puts on the comedic performance of the year, and quite possibly his life. But at least he stuck it to the man, with rock and roll.

## 6. Kill Bill, Vol. 1

This movie once again proved that samurai swords have their place in cinema, which is driven into some dastardly foe's midsection. Quentin Tarantino compressed just about every Hong Kong action movie into this gory love letter to exploitation cinema. The blood starts dripping in the opening scene, and never lets up. The best part about this movie is that it's only half over—*Kill Bill, Vol. 2* opens April 16<sup>th</sup>.

## 7. Spellbound

Sure, ninjas are great in movies, but so are 12-year-old know-it-alls. This documentary covering the National Spelling Bee is a complete, riveting story about the American dream and quest for perfection. And it finally makes the word Darjeeling dramatic.

## 8. Intolerable Cruelty

These days, marriage is inundated with attacks from pop stars, cities of sin, reality television, and, if you'll believe our president, friendly homosexuals. However, the funniest attack in recent memory is in this screwball divorce comedy that has the fastest jokes of the year. Ace attorney George Clooney and exquisite ex Catherine Zeta-Jones are two star prizefighters in this romantic brawl from the Coen Bros.

## 9. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

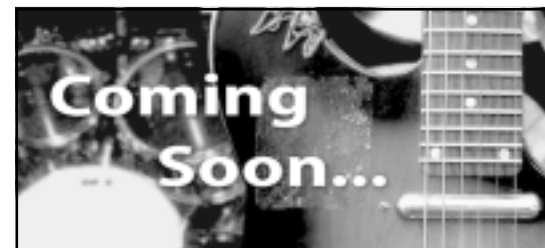
*Return of the King* is the final piece in one of the most impressive accomplishments in cinematic history. Sure, we all knew Frodo and the gang would succeed, but they did so in grand, and unfortunately long, fashion. It's unlikely we'll ever see another 11 hour movie about hobbits and orcs again, so be sure to relish this one.

## 10 (tie). X2: X-Men United and Pirates of the Caribbean

Hollywood actually did put out some good big-budget movies this year. But I think it was just these two. Both had talented directors (Bryan Singer and Gore Verbinski) and hunky leading men (Hugh Jackman and Johnny Depp) in rather kitschy leading roles. Both films were successful because they interjected humor into the action and intrigue, realizing that pirates and dudes with metal knives in their hands are rather funny.

## Movies 11-20:

*Whale Rider, Lost in Translation, Gigantic: A Tale of Two Johns, Finding Nemo, Down with Love, The Belleville Triplets, 28 Days Later, Winged Migration, To Be and To Have, The Station Agent.*



## Giselle

Wednesday, Jan. 28 at 8 p.m.

## Roberts Theatre

The box office at Bucksbaum Center for the Arts opened to a line of students and teachers stretching to the other side of the building at 12 p.m. on Monday, January 19. By 12:45, the box office was sold out and many students had to go home empty-handed. The objects of desire were tickets to the Moscow Festival Ballet's production of *Giselle* in Roberts Theatre this Wednesday at 8 p.m.

The Russian dance company, comprised of 50 dancers, is led by artistic director Sergei Radchenko, a former dancer and member of the Bolshoi Ballet in Russia. The troupe was founded by Radchenko in 1988 and has performed all over the world, touring in Europe, Asia and the U.S.

The company will be performing *Giselle*, a ballet written by Adolphe Adam and first performed in 1841 at the Paris Opera. The story revolves around a young girl, Giselle, and her love affair with Count Albrecht, a man who is already engaged to another (a woman named Bathilde) but tricks Giselle into believing that he is a villager named Loys.

Giselle's mother and Hilarion, a hunter who is in love with Giselle, both suspect that Loys is not who he says he is. Giselle's mother tries to frighten Giselle from interacting with Loys by telling her stories of the Wilis, spirits of dead love-spurned, but Giselle ignores her. Hilarion finds proof of Loys' true identity and exposes Count Albrecht as a fraud. When Giselle hears the news, she is devastated and commits suicide.

In the second act, as Hilarion pays respect to Giselle at her grave, the Wilis appear and scare him before summoning Giselle to join them. She does, and when Count Albrecht arrives at her grave, she is forced to dance with him until he dies of exhaustion. She does her best to sustain Albrecht, and just as he seems about to die, dawn breaks. Giselle's spirit is sent back to her grave and Albrecht is left alone.

-Dale Mackey

## One more top 10 list

### Pam Iverson Mother of Bradley Iverson-Long '05

I need to make a big disclaimer for my list. I feel like I haven't seen the best movie of the year, or top two or three, and that's very likely, since I haven't seen *21 Grams*, *Elephant*, *Capturing the Friedmans*, *In America*, all of *Finding Nemo* or *Pirates of the Caribbean*. So I feel like this is the top 3-12, nothing I absolutely loved the way I felt about *Far From Heaven* and a couple of others last year. And it could change next week. With that, here goes:

1. Cold Mountain
2. Mystic River
3. Spellbound
4. American Splendor
5. The Triplets of Belleville
6. School of Rock
7. Whale Rider
8. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King
9. Down with Love
10. Bubba Ho-Tep

# Removing reality from realism

Former film reviewer Jeremy Blodgett '03 returns and picks his top 10 movie list of last year

by Jeremy Blodgett

In 2003, I rediscovered a passion for film. I consequently watched fewer films, and savored every awe-inspiring and every cringe-inducing moment.

In 2003, Hollywood all but ran out of aesthetic gas, rediscovered schlock, and still made back their investments. But the industry is changing, and the intelligent filmmaker is no longer forced to look abroad for solace. And in the middle, as always, is Miramax and their Arty-wood movement. These are all good things.

In 2003, documentaries found audiences, and hence distributors. I, unfortunately, found few documentaries and they are grossly underrepresented on my list.

Realism in fictional films, however, had little place in 2003. Every film on my list, as I look at them as together, depicts a search for alternatives to reality. A fabulous reality tempered by the incredible, the magical, and the 21st century spiritual. In 2003, people put their faith into stories once again.

In late 2003 and early 2004, everyone is a critic, and everyone has a top ten list. Do I have one of the top ten best ?top ten best film? lists. Email me for a copy.

In early 2004, I made this list. I wrote down each name as it came to me. When I got done, the order looked good, so I kept it.

## 1. In America

Not one moment rings false. Writer/director Jim Sheridan turns a camera onto his own coming to America experience with the same innocence and acuity as Christy, his young heroine, looks to her world through a camcorder. A statement of powerful optimism, told with unpresuming grace. The film is anchored by two of the most incredible, focused, nuanced, and mature performances of the year,

those of 12-year-old Sarah Bolger and 8-year-old Emma Bolger.

## 2. Lost in Translation

A film that descends on your being and wraps around you like a well-worn blanket. The pieces are all here: astounding actors, a solid script, the visual and cultural palate of Tokyo, and a keener sense of observation and behavior than any other film this year. Less a narrative than a visual mood poem.

## 3. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

An unprecedented phenomenon. I find the most insightful comments on Peter Jackson's adaptation to come from those few critics unfamiliar or unimpressed with Tolkien's novels. To expand on the idea of one such--David Edelstein, critic for Slate.com--who likens the film to those of Kurasawa, one day this trilogy will be viewed with the same wonder, excitement, and humanity as we can watch *The Seven Samurai* today, especially by those who have never heard of Tolkien.

## 4. Kill Bill Vol. 1

What can I say, F?kin' irresistible!

## 5. Monster

As we left, I turned to my friend and asked what, after seeing *Monster*, I was supposed to leave the theater with, what was the message? Even though I still cannot answer the question, it stays with me, just like the film. And everywhere I go, Aileen goes with me, and I cry for those who run in place for a lifetime.

## 6. School of Rock

How does this work? It doesn't hurt to have a decent writer, an indie film god directing, and a slapdash comedien

with more genuine rock 'n roll passion than the last 25 years combined. Now put humility on drums and an unwavering faith in storytelling on backing vocals. Tell the bouncer to stop special effects, fancy cinematography, and ego at the door.

## 7. Northfork

Straight out of the dark, unswept corners of the American dream. A stark, barren, and haunting fable of a town being cleared to make way for a dam. The ambitious mythology grows out of the amazing residents we meet along the way in a town that modernity arrives at only to destroy. Visually and conceptually breathtaking.

## 8. 28 Days Later

What some call a zombie flick I prefer to call a low-budget experiment in cinematography and narrative style, infused with cogent social critique. Danny Boyle also made *Trainspotting*, which is a deadly serious, but very funny film. *28 Days Later* is a deadly serious, but thrilling and scary film.

## 9. Whale Rider

A modern day tribal village adjusts to the changes that come about with age, youth, and influence from the outside world. Not a visually stylistic film, but a wonderful, enriching story. Watch with your family or loved ones, when you're having a bad day, or when you just need a positive outlook on everything.

## 10. Big Fish / Elf (tie)

Big Fish is about a father and the stories he tells his son. Elf is about a human raised as an elf who attempts to readjust to society. Both are well crafted, unpretentious, magical journeys, but an even better reason for them to split a slot is because one day, when I have children, I'd love to share both of these films with them.



# Three sissies and a dummy

See three abused Catholic girls and Adrien Brody's triumphant return as a ventriloquist

by Bradley Iverson-Long and Kay Nguyen

Bradley: Usually in this space, I'd be the tactful host, welcoming you back to Grinnell, which even John Kerry's stepson thinks is really cold, with the hope that my faux kindness would lure you into reading at least the first paragraph about tonight's movie. But not today, because I shouldn't be welcoming you back, you should be welcoming me. Partly because I've been away for longer, but also because I've come back to a new place, with new habitable buildings, new parking lots in front of dorms, new sidewalks, new Quad uniforms, and new people. Man, the turnover at this school seems really high.

Kay: Sadly it is. But since I've already got a semester to recondition myself, it's not very overwhelming now. Relax, Brad! We have some good entertainment this weekend.

## The Magdalene Sisters (R)

K: Um, can I take my words back? *The Magdalene Sisters* is not entertaining the way *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Ring* is. However, it shines in a different shade, that of horror and sorrow struck up by real life events. Writer/director Peter Mullan interviewed survivors of the Magdalene asylums—a modern time Dantean inferno that punished misused maids in a filthy well-disguised laundry service. The business cleaned, not only people's wash, but also the supposed sins that the maids supposedly committed, like talking to flirty guys or getting raped. It takes two to tango, yet the real culprits just danced on while their partners were tangled up and wasted away inside gloomy halls of a "rehab" convent.

Mullan put all the stories together into a searing account of how ridiculous prejudices sold women off to the Devil and let it rage and foul religious Ireland for almost three decades until the last such convent was closed in the mid 90s. Margaret (Ann-Marie Duff), Benardette (Nora-Jane Noone) and Rose (Dorothy Duffy) are three of the miserable ghosts lurking beneath the soaked drapes and bubbles. They each have their own stories, and they get together for an escape. Sister Bridget (Geraldine McEwan) is there to push the girls to the limit, to thwart their plan, torture them and ultimately, to mock the hell out of the prestigious Catholic church of Ireland.

This film is rough and depressing. However, to find such tragic beauty in movies nowadays is rare. I recommend watching it but coming back to Harris the next day for the light-hearted *Dummy*—at Harris everything is there for a reason. One last gasp: you get to hear lots of Irish accents!

## Dummy (R)

B: Remember *The Pianist*? Adrien Brody was inarguably amazing in



A dejected yet delectable Dorothy Duffy stands naked in front of a Catholic nun in *The Magdalene Sisters* photo courtesy imdb.com

it. So, being the smart, talented actor that he is, how does he follow a tale of survival during the Holocaust? By playing a still-living-with-his-parents ventriloquist whose dummy is his id, of course. The progression is staggeringly obvious.

I haven't seen *Dummy*, so I don't know just how much of a step backwards this is for Brody. After all, one of the main characters is Fangora (Milla Jovovich), a punk rocker who desperately turns to klezmer music in search of success. Yeah. At least it's all supposed to be a comedy, and a romantic comedy at that—Brody's love interest is his unemployment officer. The summaries of *Dummy* I've read list lots of antics that quite likely are funny onscreen, but just look bizarre in print.

Screwball comedy is a great diversion from the wind slicing across Mac Field, but be warned, some say the sugar content in *Dummy* is unhealthy high. So romantic diabetics may want to limit their intake. Again, I know nothing, but it seems like *Dummy* would probably appeal to fans of movies like *Love, Actually*, which, conveniently, I missed as well.

## Cheun Gwong Tsa Sit

### Happy Together (R)

B: Two Hong Kong gay lovers road trip to Buenos Aires, only to be stranded without a car and without each other, left to cope alone. This melancholy movie by the genius Wong Kar-Wai isn't concerned with the plot as much as the emotions of these two men, stuck in a world apart from their own.

### Heaven (R)

B: Why would Cate Blanchett set off a bomb in an Italian skyscraper? And how would she feel when her target wasn't blown to bits? These are the questions this movie spends most of its 97 minutes answering, in an Italian police questioning room. The other big question in the film: what happens when the police's English interpreter (Giovanni Ribisi) falls in love with this possible terrorist? The film does raise interesting debates, but it isn't extremely engaging. Director Tom Tykwer (*Run, Lola, Run*) isn't very adept moving at a slower pace.

### Cultural Film

### Movies of Color: Black Southern Cinema

B: Hey kids, it's an hour-long documentary about independent African-American moviemakers prior to World War II. Watch and learn that there were black film pioneers before Sidney Poitier and Spike Lee.

## Movie Times

### The Magdalene Sisters

Fri 4:30 & 8:30 p.m., Sat 1:30 p.m.

### Dummy

Sat 4:30 & 7:30 p.m., Sun 1:30 p.m.

### Happy Together

Fri 10:30 p.m. (S. Lounge), Sat 8 p.m. (S. Lounge), Sun 1:30 p.m.

### Heaven

Fri 8 p.m. (S. Lounge), Sat 10:30 p.m. (S. Lounge), Sun 8 p.m.

### Movies of Color: Black Southern Cinema

Fri 8 p.m., Sat 8 p.m., Sun 1:30 p.m. (ARH 302)

Free soda is available before each movie at the Harris Center.

Free popcorn is available before each 7:30 p.m. movie at the Harris Center

## Coming this quarter

Here are some of the films that will be coming to Grinnell before Spring break:

Harris: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Man Without a Past*, *Lost in Translation*, *School of Rock*, *Love, Actually*, *Swimming Pool*, *Elephant*, *Winged Migration*, *Camp*, *American Splendor*, *Lilja 4-Ever*

South Lounge: *City of God*, *Afterlife*, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Casablanca*, *Harold and Maude*, *Repo Man*, *Aimee and Jaguar*, *Secretary*, *Little Otik*, *Clue*, *Delicatessen*



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