

## PRETTY WOMAN

A lovable, free-spirited hooker teaches a successful businessman to let loose and live a fuller life than money can buy—all the while, growing into her respectability and self-worth. Ok, ok...if ever a movie was made in production, and not by its concept...this film rocketed Julia Roberts to superstardom, and for every good reason. Gorgeous, unique, earnest, and all at once powerful (smarter than her character, but still so capable of playing her simplicity), with a seismic laugh—I never understood the contrarian who claimed not to be possessed by Julia’s charms. And as for Richard Gere...suave, unbelievably handsome, serious, and still sweetly vulnerable. Their chemistry was electric, and it didn’t much matter that the gender tropes in this film were only moderately challenged by this prostitute’s journey to independence. Heartwarming, still, that Roberts “rescues him right back” by opening his cold, rich heart to fun and true love. Can’t think of a more romantic rags-to-riches makeover classic.

## MEMENTO

There was something about this guy’s struggle with memory, identity, and...purpose that resonated deep within my core. His disorientation with existence was all too familiar to me—I felt like, on both a symbolic and literal level, I shared some elements of his disease. In my teen years, I was inspired to write quotes all over my own bedroom walls—little nuggets of insight and truth—to help me cope with my lostness and piece together who I was. To boot, the innovative filming and inside-out storytelling techniques of this modern noire became iconic, and upped the ante for every thriller to follow.

## THE MASK OF ZORRO

Ok, so my truth is...this movie makes my list. This cast was hotter than my young mind could handle—Antonio Banderas and Catherine Zeta Jones probably lit certain screens on literal fire. And Sir Anthony Hopkins gives what is, I'm sure based on the dismissible genre of the piece, one of the most underrated performances of his career. All the actors in this film were dynamite—even the villains were tragically human while making your skin crawl. A deeply visceral work, it has everything—stunning scenery, set design, and cinematography; the aforementioned smoking-hot yet deeply-moving cast; a great blockbuster storyline with all the major themes covered (family, betrayal, loyalty, heroism, children in need) and unending action; and sooooo many laughs to keep it moving! (Antonio Banderas slays me with his fool's journey from zero to hero.) It's a spaghetti western, a superhero story, and an epic romance all at once. That cheesy theme song will never leave my mind, and I must have watched this one on VHS about a hundred times.

## THE WAR OF THE ROSES

The original *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (which itself could have been a contender), this film epitomized the dark comedy genre—my favorite of all movie classifications when done with a touch more dark than comedy...like this one. Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner tear each other apart with divorce dysfunction until they literally have to kill each other, and all the things they think they care about come crashing down in the process...also literally. Every tragic misstep of the way, we're crying because we're laughing, and we're laughing away the pain of the empathy we feel for their once-beautiful, fast-dying relationship. The viewer's secret? To the last, we

sense these bitter characters still love each other madly— which compounds the unforgettable humor of their final moment together into a gut-wrenching *douleur exquise*. No surprise this classic was directed by Danny DeVito (ugh, “Throw Mama from the Train” is another!) who has truly stood the test of comedic time.

## FACE OFF

There are so many ways I could have gone with my final pick (especially with Cage’s counterpart 90s-action-hit *The Rock*, or Travolta’s equally evil *Broken Arrow* performance...) but this one holds my memory hostage—dark, gruesome, hilarious, clever, and screamingly entertaining. If it isn’t clear yet that I’m a sucker for good performances...whether you like them or not for their personal quirks, Travolta and Cage are both masters of the craft. And 90s action-thrillers like this one WERE a craft! They so carefully toed the line between outrageous and intimate, cheesy and profound. The trope of the murdered child motivates a powerful sympathy for Travolta 1; some crude tonguing and bad-ass strutting give Cage 1 a devilish appeal...all at once Cage 2 has our hearts with his earnest desperation, and Travolta 2’s calm mania has us shaking in our skivvies. Throw in a hot, innocent daughter and a sexy bad-guy’s love interest, and suddenly, we’re actually left wondering: If a good guy and a bad guy could literally switch faces and take over each other’s lives, who would have the most to lose?