

Last week, I made a somewhat ambitious promise to sit down and come up with my top ten movie recommendations of all time. Seven days, eight Mountain Dew's, and about six hours on imdb.com later, here are ten films that I would suggest to just about anyone, within the rules I set up last week: It can't be anything too weird, or too popular, or too obvious. And I also ended up having to limit the time period to movies that have come out while I was alive. I aimed for a wide variety of genres and ratings, so please keep that in mind if you're thinking about renting any of these.

Here they are:

Kiss Kiss Bang Bang

2005, Action Comedy

More than ten years later after he developed his funny, self-referential style in the underappreciated *Last Action Hero*, writer Shane Black finally found his stride with directorial debut *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*. The story of a hapless thief (Robert Downey, Jr.) who finds himself mistaken for an actor and then aligned with a private investigator (Val Kilmer), *Kiss* is bursting with comedy, drama, a biting hardboiled storyline and two leads that bounce off each other with a joyful, perfect rhythm, especially when they're trying to get out of trouble. Which is pretty much all the time.

28 Days Later

2002, Horror

I like zombie movies. They're sort of the brainy – no pun intended – offshoot of the horror movie genre: Ever since George Romero started his infamous *Night of the Living Dead* series, zombie movies have become the perfect entertainment playing field for some pretty honest social commentary. *28 Days Later* is no exception: the British film follows a man (Cillian Murphy, in a breakout performance) who wakes up from a coma to find himself in a nightmare: 28 days ago an infection spread through the world, turning its victims into violent, hungry zombie-like creatures. The scenes with these 'infected' monsters are great, but it's the humans who will give you chills, as the lines begin to blur between order and anarchy. It's disturbing and brilliant and, if you like horror movies at all, a must-see.

Super Troopers

2001, Comedy

Sometimes you watch a movie over and over, and every time it gets just a little bit funnier. *Super Troopers*, about a band of hopeless state highway police, is the king of such movies. It's a throwback to the days of *Animal House* and *The Blues Brothers*, when men were men, beer was beer, and cops were...ridiculous. This is the kind of movie you'll be quoting for weeks afterwards ("these snozzberries taste like snozzberries!") and find yourself desperate to watch again.

The Professional

Gary Oldman is my very favorite actor. I love him as a gentle hero (you probably remember him as Jim Gordon in *Batman Begins*) but he's maybe at his best when he gets

to play psychopathic killers. And the villain of *The Professional* is one of his best, a corrupt cop that goes up against our hero Leon (Jean Reno), a hit man who finds himself the unlikely savior and guardian to a precocious 12-year-old (Natalie Portman, in her first film role). With Oldman, Reno, and Portman all on one screen, this movie quietly glitters through its tale of revenge and unrequited love.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

2004, Romantic Drama

People always talk about Jim Carrey's big "serious" role as Truman in the *Truman Show*, but I think the best straight work he's ever done was in "Sunshine." As Joel, the man who is willing to sacrifice all the good memories from a relationship so he can escape the agony of the breakup, Carrey manages to play reserved and withdrawn, shrinking from reality with a quiet, stubborn determination. Of course, Carrey has plenty of help from a truly stellar supporting cast, including Mark Ruffalo, Elijah Wood, Tom Wilkinson, Kirsten Dunst, and the luminous, orange-haired Kate Winslet. "Sunshine" is probably the kookiest movie on this list, but it's also the sweetest, with a haunting message about the worthiness of keeping all of the different parts of love.

Jackie Brown

1997, Drama

You may not even remember Quentin Tarrantino's flat-out best movie, *Jackie Brown*. The Pam Grier film about an aging flight attendant with a chance to steal enough money to turn her life around simply drips with 70's-style cool. But it's also got some depth. With Bridget Fonda as a lost beach babe and Robert Forster as an unlikely romantic hero, this was Tarrantino's actual masterpiece: a movie with a warm beating heart underneath all that glamorous editing.

The Muppets Christmas Carol

1992, Holiday/Family

When I was making this list, I really tried to stay away from holiday films. But no matter how many movies I wrote down –runners-up included *So I Married An Axe Murderer*, *Tombstone*, and *Little Miss Sunshine*, if you're curious – I just kept coming back to this one. There have been about a zillion different film versions of *A Christmas Carol*, but none as sweet, funny and gently wise as the one starring the Muppets. Besides, who couldn't love Gonzo as narrator Charles Dickens?

Better Off Dead

1985, Comedy

My absolute favorite kind of humor is the kind I call "just for no reason" comedy. I stop flipping channels every time I see that commercial about Abe Lincoln playing chess with a beaver ("he cheats!"), and I'll rewind "Loaded Weapon 1" over and over to watch Tim Curry's ludicrous 'Wilderness Girls' bit. *Better Off Dead*, starring the young John Cusak, is an entire movie full of those insane, 'just for no reason' moments. It's about a young man (Cusak) who decides to kill himself after his high school girlfriend breaks up

with him, only to get into one mishap after another whenever he tries to go through with it. Sample comedy: when Cusak's character Lane stares dejectedly at the gray glop his mom made for dinner – and the glop casually wanders off the plate by itself. Just for no reason.

Serenity

2005, Science Fiction

If I were making a list of TV recommendations, I would have to include the 2002 show *Firefly*, a short-lived Western about the future survivors of a great interplanetary war. FOX may have cancelled *Firefly* in its prime, but three years later we were lucky enough to get another chance at it, when mastermind Joss Whedon wrote and directed the film *Serenity* based on the series. *Serenity* achieves that rare feat of cluing in new viewers while satisfying the old, and ends up as a movie that can make everyone happy, with plenty of humor, action, drama, and interplanetary hijinks. What else could you ever need?

The Incredibles

Not that many people saw *The Iron Giant*, director Brad Bird's excellent first children's tale about a lonely boy that befriends an alien robot. But a few years later, Disney and Pixar were smart enough to give Brad Bird a couple of suitcases of money and a little creative freedom, and in exchange we all got *The Incredibles*, the story of a family of superheroes and their struggle with their own powers. *The Incredibles* was more than just a funny, shiny children's fable: it's also the rare family film that's brave enough to ask some questions: what makes people special? If lots of people become different, does that make everyone the same? I don't necessarily have the answers for you, but it always makes me happy to know that there's someone out there asking.