

Mountains of the Moon is number ten on my list. The rousing period-drama chronicled Sir Richard Burton's expeditions along the Nile River in the late 1800s. Roger Deakins' stunning cinematography gave the film sweeping grandeur, while the script (by William Harrison and director Bob Rafelson) kept the story personal and intimate. The film focused on the bitter rivalry between Burton, played magnificently by Patrick Bergin, and his protégé, John Hanning Speke, played with equal aplomb by Iain Glen. As Burton's wife, Fiona Shaw turned in a fiery supporting performance.

Number nine is the talking-head independent sleeper, *Metropolitan*, this year's answer to *sex, lies, and videotape*. Set in Manhattan during Christmas break, the film follows a group of dapper Dan's and debutantes as they stay up late talking about sex, lies, and the meaning of life. First-time director Whit Stillman elicited quietly impressive performances from a cast of unknowns and newcomers.

Written and directed by Alan Alda, [Betsy's Wedding](#) was a vibrant slice-of-life, which mixed a few dramatic moments into a big bowl of whimsical humor. Molly Ringwald and Dylan Walsh were wash-outs as the bride and groom, but thankfully Ally Sheedy and Anthony LaPaglia seized the spotlight with their wonderful comic performances. Amid last summer's superheroes and special effects, this comedy about people was a welcome change of pace.

[Vital Signs](#) was dismissed by most critics as "MTV Doctors," but I found it to be an engrossing look at the grueling third year of medical school. Although the cast members were unknowns, their performances were surprisingly self-assured. Director Marisa Silver wisely silenced the soundtrack during the riveting surgical scenes and allowed the operations to generate their own suspense.

[The Hunt for Red October](#) was an epic potboiler, consummately directed by suspense-master John McTiernan. Alec Baldwin and Sean Connery brought commanding star power to the lead roles, while Sam Neil, Scott Glenn, and Richard Jordan anchored the film with sturdy supporting performances. Credit also goes to screenwriters Larry Ferguson and Donald Stewart, who gracefully navigated *Red October* through a story line full of twists and turns.

Arachnophobia, number six on my list, was the most nerve-wracking creature feature since *Aliens*, thanks in large part to Frank Marshall's lively di-

rection. Billed by Disney as a "thrillomedy," this comic horror film starred Jeff Daniels as a doctor in a small town over-run by spiders. This extremely well-crafted thriller was the year's ultimate movie high: it left you simultaneously exhausted and exhilarated.

Talk Radio meets *Heathers* is how I'd describe number four on my list, *Pump Up The Volume*—one of the most pleasant surprises of the year. For a high school movie, *Volume* was unusually intelligent, literate, and provocative. Christian Slater was captivating as a painfully shy high school student who could only express himself through his pirate radio broadcasts. Writer-director Allan Moyle brought intensity and style to the innovative story line.

Number three on my list is *Longtime Companion*, the first feature film to tackle the AIDS epidemic. The movie featured an exceptional ensemble cast, as well as exquisite direction and editing. Virtually every actor in the film deserved accolades, but none more so than Bruce Davison as a man who tenderly cares for his dying lover. Director Norman Rene and writer Craig Lucas set a new standard of authenticity for depicting gay characters on screen. *Longtime Companion* was one of the year's most powerful films ... and surprisingly also one of the most humorous and uplifting.

Number two on my list is *GoodFellas*, Martin Scorsese's masterfully directed gangster epic. From an impressive ensemble cast (featuring such power houses as Robert De Niro), it was little Joe Pesci who emerged to make the biggest impression as an explosively temperamental psycho. Scorsese pulled out all the stops and came up with one the most dazzling pieces of filmmaking in recent memory. The 30-minute cocaine sequence alone qualifies *GoodFellas* as a superior film.

Finally, every year there is usually one film which offers the complete cinematic package: an intelligent script, inspired acting, expert direction, breathtaking cinematography and a compelling story line. This year that film was *Dances with Wolves*, an epic Western about a Civil War soldier who joins a tribe of Sioux Indians. The film featured Oscar-worthy performances across the board, especially those by the Indian actors. Kevin Costner, superb in the lead

role, made a surprisingly polished directorial debut. Beautifully photographed and visually spectacular, *Dances with Wolves* was a remarkable ac-

complishment for any director, let alone a first-time director.

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