

100 Favorite Movies, 2000-2009: Jeff Ignatius

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 30 December 2009 13:41

- [Buy Cheap Adobe Photoshop CS6 Classroom in a Book](#)
- [Discount - SnagIt 11](#)
- [Buy ElcomSoft Advanced Windows Password Recovery 3.51 \(en\)](#)
- [19.95\\$ 1Click DVD To iPod 2 cheap oem](#)
- [Download Autodesk 3Ds Max 2010](#)
- [Buy Autodesk AutoCAD Inventor Professional Suite 2010 \(64 bit\) \(en\)](#)
- [Discount - I.R.I.S. Readiris 12 Pro Asian MAC](#)
- [Buy Hazel 3 \(en\)](#)
- [Download Macpaw CleanMyMac](#)
- [Buy Cheap Sony Vegas Pro 8](#)
- [Discount - Adobe Prelude CC MAC \(Full LifeTime License\)](#)

The first thing to say about this list is that because of my nature, my favorite 100 movies from 2000 through 2009 are culled from viewing that would under no definition be considered comprehensive.

How little do I see? Of 45 Best Picture nominees so far this decade, I've taken in 31. So I've missed nearly a third, including winners *Gladiator* and *Million Dollar Baby*. (The other nominees I've so far skipped: At

onement

,

The Aviator

,

Chocolat

,

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

,

Finding Neverland

,

Frost/Nixon

,

Gangs of New York

,

Juno

,

Letters from Iwo Jima

,

Little Miss Sunshine

,

The Reader

, and

100 Favorite Movies, 2000-2009: Jeff Ignatius

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 30 December 2009 13:41

Seabiscuit

. For something drawn from broader experience, look at

[Mike Schulz's list](#)

.)

It is certainly possible that some of these movies, if seen, would be on this list. Based on what I know about myself and these movies, though, there's a far greater likelihood that bypassing them was a sound choice. That's a sign of a less-than-fully-open mind, certainly, but it's also a matter of priorities: Do I think this movie would reward my time investment as much as [a different movie, sleeping, Wii, etc.]?

My 100 favorite movies of the decade follow, with links going to essays written for [CultureSnob.net](#). After that are discussions about five filmmakers with multiple movies on this list.

The Top 10



1. [Memento](#)
2. *Pan's Labyrinth*
3. [Requiem for a Dream](#)
4. [Oldboy](#)
5. *The Royal Tenenbaums*
6. [No Country for Old Men](#)
7. [The Mothman Prophecies](#)
8. *Mulholland Drive*
9. [Donnie Darko](#) (original theatrical version)
10. [The Descent](#) (international version)

The Next 88 (in alphabetical order)

Adventureland

[American Splendor](#)

Amores Perros

[Ararat](#)

[The Aristocrats](#)

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford

Away from Her

[Batman Begins](#)

100 Favorite Movies, 2000-2009: Jeff Ignatius

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 30 December 2009 13:41

[Birth](#)

Brokeback Mountain

Burn After Reading

[Camera](#) (short film; YouTube.com/watch?v=hQIQgzRyBfY)

[Capote](#)

[Capturing the Friedmans](#)

City of God

[Collateral](#)

[Confessions of a Dangerous Mind](#)

Dancer in the Dark

[The Dark Knight](#)

The Deep End

The Devil's Backbone

District 9

[Dogville](#)

[Dominion: Prequel to The Exorcist](#)

Eastern Promises

[Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind](#)

Finding Nemo

[The Five Obstructions](#)

[Game 6](#)

Ghost Town

Ghost World

[Ginger Snaps](#)

Grace (2009, directed by Paul Solet)

[Happy Endings](#)

[Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban](#)

Helvetica

[A History of Violence](#)

[Holes](#)

[I Heart Huckabees](#)

[In America](#)

[Incident at Loch Ness](#)

[The Incredibles](#)

[Inside Man](#)

[Intacto](#)

JCVD

[Land of the Dead](#)

[Lantana](#)

The Last King of Scotland

Let the Right One in

The Lives of Others

[Lost in Translation](#)

[Moulin Rouge!](#)

[Murderball](#)

[The Orphanage](#)

100 Favorite Movies, 2000-2009: Jeff Ignatius

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 30 December 2009 13:41

[Perfume: The Story of a Murderer](#)
[Pieces of April](#)
[A Prairie Home Companion](#)
[The Prestige](#)
[Primer](#)
The Proposition
Rachel Getting Married
[Requiem](#) (2006)
[Shattered Glass](#)
[Spider](#)
[Spider Forest](#)
[The Squid and the Whale](#)
[Stone Reader](#)
Stranger Than Fiction
Talk to Her
[Teeth](#) (2007, directed by Mitchell Lichtenstein)
[Terminal Bar](#) (short film)
There Will Be Blood
Thirst (2009)
[13 Tzemeti](#)
[The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada](#)
Timecode
[Touching the Void](#)
[Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story](#)
[Trouble Every Day](#)
[25th Hour](#)
[28 Days Later](#)
Unbreakable
Up
Waking Life
WALL•E
[Wolf Creek](#)
[The Woodsman](#)
Zodiac (2007, directed by David Fincher)

The Final Two (because they amuse me and aren't showing up on many of these lists)

99. *Tongues and Taxis* (short film; YouTube.com/watch?v=tvJguvgtQfg)

100. *Monkeybone*

Discussions: Five Filmmakers of the Decade

100 Favorite Movies, 2000-2009: Jeff Ignatius

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 30 December 2009 13:41

In these sublists, the movies are ranked in rough order of preference -- i.e., the movie listed first is my favorite.

Christopher Nolan

Memento

The Prestige

The Dark Knight

Batman Begins



Nolan directed five movies released this decade; two of them are nearly perfect, one of them has unparalleled rigor for a superhero movie, and the other one has Heath Ledger's Joker casting an enormous shadow over (and therefore obscuring) its many flaws. The unnecessary remake of *Insomnia* was the necessary bridge between *Memento* and *Batman Begins* -- from independent to studio work -- but beyond it Nolan has made nothing but winners.

To be clear, I don't believe Nolan is a great filmmaker, and I'm skeptical he'll ever equal any of these four movies, even though he hasn't yet turned 40. The articulation and repetition of themes within dialogue (an unfortunate tendency after *Memento*) indicates that he doesn't trust the audience, and

The Dark Knight

shows that he's not very good at narrative problem-solving -- how to show this clearly (the skyscraper climax, for example) or resolve this loose end satisfyingly (everything from the ferry situation on).

Batman Begins

brought fair charges that he has difficulty choreographing and framing action sequences, and *The Dark Knight* was even worse.

Yet Nolan as a writer is exceptionally good at packing entertainments with thematic richness. Count the layers of corruption in *Batman Begins* (I end up with six), and notice three distinct self-righteous characters, with their approaches to doing "good" contrasted effectively without ever being belabored. *The Prestige* is a dense study of subverted identity and headstrong sacrifice, but it is first and foremost a tricky and kicky period thriller.

100 Favorite Movies, 2000-2009: Jeff Ignatius

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 30 December 2009 13:41

Put differently, his true gift is as a conceptual artist and architect, cleverly designing and building challenging, subtly daring movies around characters and ideas without losing sight of the story or audience.

The Prestige is premised on two polar-opposite secrets -- one revealed gradually, the other suddenly -- that make it nearly impossible to "solve" both parts of the puzzle on first viewing.

Batman Begins

spent an hour on glorified prologue before showing the Caped Crusader, yet those patient 60 minutes are integral in plot and theme. And

The Dark Knight

grabbed the suggestion of escalation in

Batman Begins

and took it to logical conclusions, with armed Batman wannabes, the Joker, Harvey Dent with his idealistic belief in the system burned away, and the title character with an erratic moral compass.

His second-best movie of the decade is *The Prestige*, and it saddens me that it didn't engender the kind of fevered, lavish scrutiny that

Memento

and

The Dark Knight

did. Adapted relatively faithfully from the solid Christopher Priest novel, Nolan's movie nonetheless has slightly different concerns, and it finds a perfect balance of darkness, humor, mystery, and resonance. The script's mechanics reveal themselves on second or third viewing, and it's a marvel of both misdirection and foreshadowing -- a fantastic magic trick.

Memento's genius is the way that the movie's construction is used to create audience empathy; we understand the challenges Leonard faces because we experience similar issues figuring out where and when we are, and what we're doing here, and what just happened. As with

The Prestige

, it's easy to give in to the movie, but from its

[opening shot](#)

forward, it's meticulously, gorgeously crafted as a narrative experience.

Best of all, Nolan had a confidence then that he's never been able to recapture. *Memento's* seeming ambiguity is actually something different: It's a filmmaker willing to let the audience find

100 Favorite Movies, 2000-2009: Jeff Ignatius

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 30 December 2009 13:41

the latent truth on its own.

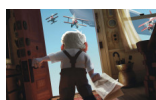
Pixar

WALL•E

The Incredibles

Up

Finding Nemo



Pixar could be said to have resurrected the idea of movies for the whole family, but I don't think that's true. *The Incredibles* is for middle-aged folks. *Up* is for old people, and those of us afraid of what we might be when we're old.

WA

LL•E

speaks of loneliness, first love, and the consequences of rampant consumerism.

Kids might like or love any of these movies, but they won't really *get* or feel them. Pixar is making movies that they can grow into and up with, and that the rest of us can love without reservation or shame.

David Cronenberg

Camera

Eastern Promises

Spider

A History of Violence



An odd thing happened with David Cronenberg this decade. He forsook his trademark body/biological horror and began making movies that were, on the surface, conventional.

This wasn't a gradual thing, really. His 1999 film *eXistenZ* had a serious anal fixation and played like a remake of his own

Video

drome

, and it ended a decade that also included the grotesqueries of

Naked Lunch

and

Crash

. So the feature trio of

Spider

,

A History of Violence

, and

Eastern Promises

looks positively mainstream by comparison.

It's anything but. What Cronenberg seemed to discover this past decade was subtlety -- not the blink-and-you'll-miss-it variety, but a reliance on tone and performance rather than goeey special effects or sexual deviancy. While his movies in the past have been unsettling because of the way they tap into and embody fear and disease, his recent movies have been fundamentally psychological.

Spider is an inside-out adaptation of one of my favorite books, as author and screenwriter Patrick McGrath turned the novel's narrator into a movie character who produces few intelligible words. The gothic portrait of mental illness -- in which Ralph Fiennes as the title character is largely a collection of tics -- mines and cleverly visualizes memory and fantasy, and although its ultimate revelation is no surprise, it also isn't the point. *Spider* feels like an all-access pass to a dark, private place.

The other three movies here are about dual identity, and more specifically about what we actually are even though we imagine ourselves as something else.

A History of Violence is, like its protagonist, bifurcated, and I think it's a little too broad in its small-town clichés to be entirely successful. But it has an exquisite, unresolvable tension that is given voice by one question posed about Viggo Mortensen's seemingly simple diner owner: "How come he's so good at killing people?"

Something about Mortensen obviously inspired Cronenberg, because his next movie -- *Eastern Promises*

100 Favorite Movies, 2000-2009: Jeff Ignatius

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 30 December 2009 13:41

-- also stars the actor, and has a nearly identical central theme. It has a similarly bizarre architecture, in the sense that the revelation that Mortensen's gangster/driver Nikolai is an undercover cop seems to be a twist for a twist's sake; the movie ends shortly thereafter, and his real identity barely furthers the plot.

Yet the genius of the movie -- why it's so good beyond its tightly circumscribed mob/nurse/baby plot -- is that Cronenberg *doesn't* do anything with the revelation; he lets it work by implication. The final shot, echoing *The Godfather Part II*, shows Nikolai -- finally the "king," in his parlance -- sitting pensively in the restaurant, and we project into a mind that he has declared blank: "I'm just a driver." We consider the tattoos, and the evil that he's done and seen in the name of law enforcement. He has put himself at risk by saving people, but we wonder how much of the good guy has been devoured by the bad one. He remains an enigma, but one senses regret, accentuated by the lovely, mournful eastern-European violin theme.

Best of all from Cronenberg this decade is *Camera*, an ostensibly whimsical six-minute short. It's basically a monologue spurred by those darned kids bringing a movie camera into a house, but the crotchety yet indulgent speaker has existential concerns: aging, death, the way a film gave him a disease in his dream As compact as Cronenberg's feature films are, this one packs a ton into a very small space, and it is the most playful he's ever been.

Guillermo del Toro

Pan's Labyrinth

The Devil's Backbone



An apparent believer in Scorsese's "one for me, one for them" philosophy, Guillermo del Toro has made a *Blade* movie and two *Hellboys* for "them" this decade. And if those mean that he'll continue to make the occasional brilliant personal movie, that's fine by me. The writer/director has grounded these two films -- one a dark fairy tale, the other a ghost story -- in history and a genuine sense of time and place, and as a result the vivid, beautifully executed fantastic elements have even more authority and resonance.

But what really sets del Toro apart is his empathy with children combined with his adult sophistication; he is in that way the anti-George Lucas.

Lars von Trier

The Five Obstructions
Dancer in the Dark
Dogville



I do not begrudge those who hate the agitating Dane; Lars von Trier makes it easy, as the documentary *The Five Obstructions* shows him to be, bluntly, a cruel asshole. (This is something that can be inferred from *Breaking the Waves*, *Dancer in the Dark*

k, and
Dogville

; seeing the man in action, though, is something else entirely.) Yet there aren't many filmmakers who, in 10 years, could produce three so stylistically disparate movies along with the marriage horror show

Antichrist

(which I have not yet seen). And three so disparate movies that are so distinctly good

. The Brechtian
Dogville

might be a baffling slog to most viewers -- it was for me for much of its running length -- but its perfectly calibrated conclusion justifies it.

Dancer in the Dark

combines grim, melodramatic tragedy with the widescreen musical, and there's naked authenticity in the central performance by Björk that's positively heartbreaking; she's different from the typical von Trier abused heroine.

The Five Obstructions, meanwhile, is a great introduction to how formal cinematic elements -- editing, for example -- dictate meaning. (In the movie, Von Trier forces his filmmaking idol to re-make a classic short movie five times, each with a different set of rules.) It's also lighter and clearer and more fun than anybody could expect from von Trier.