Seven Days...

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As a rule, film critics never uni-
versally agree on anything, but in
compiling their annual top-ten film
lists for the past year, almost all
have seemingly echoed the oft-re-
peated sentiment – 2000 was not a
good year for movies. If nothing
else, such a disposition made for
some rather interesting lists. Some
of the more upper-echelon critics
populated their compilations with
independent films unseen by much
of the movie-going public – indus-
tries made up nearly half of Roger
Ebert's choices, though he named
Cameron Crowe's Almost Famous
as his top pick of the year. Other
film columnists chose movies that
would probably not make top ten
lists in better years – one critic listed
Bryan Singer's X-Men as one of his
top choices, admittedly a superb
superhero movie, but not the kind
of film many would expect to receive
top honors in a year-in-review piece.

I can only admit partial agreement
with the slant towards labeling Y2K
as a movie wasteland. Without
question, many of the movies re-
leased this past year lacked the pio-
neering spirit of 1999's crop – the
originality of films like David O.
Russell's Three Kings, David Finch-
er's Fight Club, and the Wachows-
ki Brothers' The Matrix were regre-
tably absent from most of the fare
offered in last year. Yet, there were
plenty of solid entertainments to be
had in 2000 – films like Almost Fa-
amous, Shaft, The Patriot, and the
 aforementioned X-Men proved to be
worth seeing, even if they remained
seated comfortably within the
boundaries of convention. And for-
tunately for moviemakers, there
were some truly excellent films produced
this past year that perhaps didn't
shine so brightly as some last year's
offerings, but proved stellar all the
same. Here are some of the movies
I thought to be tops in 2000:

Cast Away (Dir. Robert Zemeck-
is, Starring Tom Hanks, Helen
Hunt) A movie that dared to take risks in
a year where most Hollywood pro-
ductions decided to play it safe, Cast
Away stands as a testament to the
strength of good storytelling, acting,
and directing in an era where many
movies tend to feel far too artificial.

Cast Away, under the competent di-
rection of Roger Zemeckis – whom
earlier this year scored big with au-
diences but not with critics with his
supernatural thriller What Lies Be-
neath – is profound, powerful, and,
simply put, breathtaking. Gor-
diously directed and peerlessly
acted, this film does tend to drag a bit,
and would have come off even better
with more judicious editing.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon
(Dir. Ang Lee, Starring Michelle
Yeoh, Chow Yun Fat, Jen Yu)
Ang Lee's artsy action film took many
critics by surprise with its blend of
tale-tale storytelling and
thrilling martial arts, earning it nu-
merous honors among many critic
circles and at several film festivals
this past year – all rightfully de-
served. Crouching Tiger represents
fantasy filmmaking at its very best –
even if there was ever a movie deserving
of the description "magical," this
one would be it. Lee's endlessly
imaginative direction compliments
the romantic story nicely, while the
fight sequences (choreographed by
Woong-yung Yuen of Matrix fame)
are undeniably awesome, arguably
the best hand-to-hand combat scenes
ever put to film. Highlights include
an intense battle between Shu Lin
(Michelle Yeoh) and Zhang Ziyi
(Jen Yu) that sends the two female
protagonists leaping across rooftops
and soaring through courtyards, and
an imaginative sword duel that takes
place in the trees. Not to worry
though, there's plenty of heart
amidst this spectacle – the chemistry
between Yeoh and Chow Yun Fat as
unrequited lovers Shu Lien and Li
Mu Bai is fantastic. An absolute
cinematic stunner.

Chicken Run (Dir. Peter Lord
and Nick Park, Starring the voice
talents of Mel Gibson, Miranda
Richardson, Julia Sawalha)
Aardman's clay animated feature
perfectly demonstrated that all the
technological gimmicks in the
world won't a good animated pic-
ture make – unless there's a good
story and great characters to back it
up (case in point: Disney's
Dinosaur). A wonderfully
funny and touching film, Chicken Run
never slacks in its sense of fun or its
sense of imagination. The movie
overflows with memorable characters,
including plucky hen Ginger
 voi de Julia Sawalha),
the delightfully malicious Mrs. Tweedy (voice of Mi-
 randa Richardson), eccen-
 tric Fowler (voice of Ben-
njamin Whitrow), and "The
Lone Free Ranger" Rocky
the Rooster (voice of Mel
Gibson). An extremely
funny script by Lord and
Park tops off this cinematic
gem.

The aforementioned
flicks stood out from the
crowd, but that is not to say that
they were the only films of merit.
Some other films of 2000 worthy of note:

Almost Famous (Dir. Cameron
Crowe)

High Fidelity (Dir. Stephen
Fears)

U-571 (Dir. Johnathan Mowitz)
The Patriot (Dir. Roland Em-
 merich)

Traffic (Dir. Steven Soderbergh)

X-Men (Dir. Bryan Singer)

Titan A.E. (Dir. Don Bluth and
Gary Goldman)
The Perfect Storm (Dir. Wolf-
gang Petersen)

Shaft (Dir. John Singleton)

Mission: Impossible 2 (Dir.
John Woo)