

THE GUIDE CULT FILMS

OUR PICK OF THE FILMS THAT HAVE WHEELED THEIR WAY INTO OUR HEARTS WITH THEIR WARMTH, HUMOUR, STYLE, VISION, EPIC TRAGEDY OR JUST PLAIN WEIRDNESS. THEY'RE THE ONES WE WATCH OVER AND OVER AND QUOTE ENDLESSLY. GET THE POPCORN READY.

WORDS BY ALICE WASLEY

What makes a cult film? It helps if it bombed at the box office and then gained a small but loyal following, which slowly built into a tribe of like-minded diehard fans. But it's also something that is passed from person to person like a juicy secret and your fondness for each of them reveals a little something about you.



▲ HEATHERS (1988)

High-school politics takes a very dark turn in this deliciously bloodthirsty satire. Winona Ryder's Veronica teams up with rebel JD (Christian Slater) as they infiltrate and systematically destroy the "Heathers" – the most powerful clique in school. Veronica: "Dear Diary, my teen-angst bullshit now has a body count." An off-Broadway musical version of this teenage bloodbath is set to open this month in New York.

Highlight: The scene in which Veronica and JD play strip croquet.

▼ CLUELESS (1995)

What happens when you combine Jane Austen, Valley-girl speak and a rotating wardrobe complete with mix 'n' match software? You get a frothy, witty, fashion-filled rom com with hidden depths (thanks Jane). Based on Austen's *Emma*, it stars Alicia Silverstone as Cher, the popular Beverly Hills high school girl who plays matchmaker to her friends while struggling to acknowledge her true romantic feelings.

Highlight: The dialogue – Cher: "No, she's a full-on Monet." Tai: "What's a Monet?" Cher: "It's like a painting, see? From far away it's OK, but up close it's a big old mess."



◀ CLERKS. (1994)

This low-budget black-and-white comedy launched the career of writer-director Kevin Smith and gained instant cult status. It follows a day in the life of two convenience-store clerks Dante and Randal as they banter about annoying customers, get chased out of a funeral and play hockey on the roof.

Highlight: The introduction of the much-loved characters Jay and Silent Bob, who have gone on to appear in several more of Smith's films, such as *Chasing Amy* and *Dogma*.

THE BREAKFAST CLUB (1985)

John Hughes sure knew how to give good high school movie. By chronicling one day of Saturday detention, writer-director Hughes looks at what happens when you throw various teen misfits together. Or, as they describe themselves: a brain, an athlete, a basket case, a princess and a criminal. Although a disparate bunch, they find they have more in common than they originally thought. Stars Molly Ringwald, Judd Nelson and Emilio Estevez.

Highlight: Ally Sheedy's character Allison's obligatory, but no less enjoyable, makeover. Also, Simple Minds' *Don't You (Forget About Me)* in the opening and closing credits.



▲ BLUE VELVET (1986)

David Lynch's strange and noirish erotic thriller follows Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan) when he returns to his hometown. After finding a severed ear, he embarks on his own investigation of its origin, during which he crosses paths with psychopath Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) and nightclub singer Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini).

Highlight: A sultry Isabella Rossellini bathed in blue light singing *Blue Velvet*.



▶ PULP FICTION (1994)

Quentin Tarantino's ultra-violent, garish, funny film about the intersecting lives of two hitmen, a gangster's wife, an ageing boxer and couple – Pumpkin and Honey Bunny – who decide to hold up a diner, didn't exactly fly under the box-office radar when it was released, but its quotable riffs and killer soundtrack quickly elevated it to cult status.

Highlight: Uma Thurman's Mia Wallace and John Travolta's Vincent Vega hitting the dancefloor in Jack Rabbit Slim's Twist Contest. Their slow twist will be channelled on D-floors everywhere forevermore.



DONNIE DARKO (2001)

More than a decade on we're all still scratching our heads about this one. Jake Gyllenhaal's Donnie has visions of a giant bunny only he can see, named Frank. Under the influence of Frank the troubled teen gets himself deeper and deeper into trouble. Strange things happen and we're left not really sure what's what. Also stars Maggie Gyllenhaal as Donnie's sister Elizabeth.

Highlight: The brilliant cover of Tears for Fears' *Mad World*.



THE VIRGIN SUICIDES (1999)

Based on the novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, Sofia Coppola's drama tells the story of five beautiful sisters from the perspective of a group of neighbourhood boys. They remain largely out-of-reach to the fascinated boys, essentially kept under lock and key by their strict parents, until they end their lives with a suicide pact. The mysterious, atmospheric tale of suburban tragedy is set in the 1970s and stars Kirsten Dunst and Josh Hartnett.

Highlight: The film's score by French electronica duo Air.

EMPIRE RECORDS (1995)

They have one day to save their beloved record store and their jobs before it's taken over by a chain. As it unfolds so do stories of drug addiction, unrequited love, head shaving and shoplifting. The day culminates in a euphoric Damn the Man themed rock'n'roll extravaganza.

Highlight: Has to be the will-they-won't-they-tension between a deliciously 90s, Doc-boots 'n' tartan-skirt-wearing Corey (Liv Tyler) and the gorgeous, floppy-haired, cardigan-clad AJ (Johnny Whitworth).



PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK (1975)

Peter Weir's eerie, enigmatic film, set in 1900, is about the disappearance of three girls and their teacher on an excursion to Hanging Rock in Victoria. The sight of them dressed in neck-to-ankle white frilly dresses, ribbons in their hair, vanishing single file into the rocks is hauntingly suggestive. Allowing us, the viewers, to fill in the blanks turns out to be far creepier than any blood-soaked horror film.

Highlight: No one ever looked at the humble picnic the same way again.



BEETLEJUICE (1988)

Thank God for Tim Burton. If the director hadn't cast Michael Keaton as the "bio-exorcist" Beetlejuice with his wild green hair, black-rimmed eyes and Robin Thicke-being-twerked-on-by-Miley-at-the-VMAs-black and white striped suit, then we may never have known how delightfully weird he can be. This stylised supernatural comedy follows a couple (played by Alec Baldwin and Geena Davis) who find themselves unexpectedly dead and try to haunt the irritating (and alive) newcomers out of their house with the "help" of Beetlejuice. It also stars Winona Ryder as goth teen Lydia. Reportedly Burton, Ryder and Keaton are currently in talks to make the sequel.

Highlight: The family being possessed during their dinner party and forced to sing and dance to *Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)*.

DAZED AND CONFUSED (1993)

Set in Texas in 1976, a glorious time when jeans were so tight they needed to be zipped up with pliers, this ensemble film follows the last day of high school when everyone is trying to survive being hazed, or getting drunk, stoned, laid or all of the above.

Highlight: A pink-pants-clad Matthew McConaughey drawing: "That's what I love about these high school girls, man. I get older, they stay the same age."



Honourable mentions

HIGH TIDE (1987)

"One Sunday when I was 14 and bored, I turned on the television and caught the opening scenes of a midday movie called *High Tide*, starring Judy Davis and Claudia Karvan. I fell in love with it IMMEDIATELY. I rushed to record it on my VCR, and spent a summer holiday watching it almost every second day for weeks. Claudia and Judy became two of my acting heroes and I go out of my way to watch anything in which they star. *High Tide* is not a well-known film, and the saxophone in the soundtrack can get a little overpowering at times, but the majesty of the sweeping shots, and the story – youth and grief and mother and daughter and beach and ageing and addiction and love all trundled together in a caravan park – is as powerful as it gets. It was for me, anyway. When I meet someone who knows it, they almost always love it as much as I do. It's a classic."

– Clare Bowditch, singer/songwriter.

KILL BILL (2003)

"I am a massive fan of all Quentin Tarantino films but this one in particular had a profoundly positive effect on me. Finally a director made a relatable female heroine. Tarantino and Uma Thurman came up with the story together while filming *Pulp Fiction*, and I think that's what made the film strong. Just goes to show, action movies fronted by women work and should be done more. Plus the soundtrack is my all-time favourite."

– Robyn Lawley, model and swimwear designer.

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (1975)

"*Rocky* is arguably the greatest cult film of all time. Directed by Jim Sharman who helmed the original stage show, it features Tim Curry, never better as transsexual Dr Frank-N-Furter, and Susan Sarandon! A brilliant tribute to science fiction and B-grade schlock horror films, it's loaded with great songs and great performances. And it was produced by Michael White, the star of my new feature documentary *The Last Impresario*, which premiered at the London Film Festival and will open DocWeek in Adelaide on March 4."

– Gracie Otto, actor and director.

AMERICAN PSYCHO (2000)

"Love the book by Brett Easton Ellis – masochistic and seductive."

– Dion Lee, fashion designer.

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