

# SO, UM, WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT?

## (AKA THE INTRODUCTION)

Who hasn't walked into a video store on a rainy weekend and thought to themselves: 'Why am I here? I haven't the faintest clue what to rent ... and now the children are screaming for sugared goods! Oh dear God, where's my Valium? Get me out of here!'

It's a commonplace dilemma, and one that's usually followed by a lightheaded spell and a quick trip to the emergency room, thus placing an unacceptable burden on our public health system.

Never again will you be afflicted with this scourge of indecision. You will walk into the video store with an Anthony Robbins-esque purpose that will shock, awe and frighten those around you. *That Movie Book* is a weekend-by-weekend guide that will take you on a journey through time and space, and by 'time and space' I mean film genres, trends, filmmakers and themes. It is a toolkit for your very own couch-based film festival. You'll find yourself with enough DVDs to effectively slaughter each weekend of the year, relieving you of all that pointless sunlight and exercise.

Like any good cultish exercise, each weekend will be structured by a theme, actor, director or genre. The Friday night film is the easy introduction movie. If you enjoy that, then the Saturday flicks go deeper into that world. And then, of course, there are the Sunday movies — those are for freaks. Or people under house arrest.

So whether you're bored, housebound or infirm, your level of commitment is catered for, no obligation. Just like Scientology, only we're quite upfront about the aliens (see the 'They will come from above!: when movie aliens attack' chapter).

I can't promise that you will love every film in this book. I can, however, promise that I've tried to trawl through a wide mix of available DVDs, some highbrow, some lowbrow, some certifiably deranged. You're about to travel from India to Indianapolis, covering almost a hundred years of moviemaking. Keep an eye out for special themes at special times of the year (Christmas, Mother's Day, The Autumnal Sacrificing of a Virgin, et cetera).

My chief hope is that this book will give you something to talk about. To me, cinema comes alive when people can debate, share and ravish it together. My dream is that you emerge from each weekend awash with not only a lot of enjoyment, emotion and strong opinions but also a crippling vitamin D deficiency.

Have fun.

# FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?!

## WHY MESSING WITH DNA IS A BAD IDEA

Scientists. What dicks.

When they're not turning harmless atoms into city-levelling bombs or scaring away the opposite sex with their own woeful lack of personal skills, they're busy performing crimes against nature ... or so say the movies. And whilst it seems patently obvious to you and I that no good can come of combining a monkey and a jellyfish, genetic engineering is a popular pastime amongst the scientist set. When will they learn? So, fetch some supplies, gird thy genetic material and prepare to be terrified.

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## FRIDAY NIGHT FILM

**Jurassic Park** (US) (1993)

Director: Steven Spielberg

Stars: Sam Neill, Laura Dern, Jeff Goldblum

Dinosaurs made from hermaphrodite frogs?! That is the idea behind this nineties mega-blockbuster that made every ten-year-old boy want a Tyrannosaurus Rex-themed birthday party to go with their Velociraptor-themed nightmares.

Sam Neill plays a surly palaeontologist with an unfeasibly attractive girlfriend in the form of Laura Dern. They are both invited to the island hideaway of an eccentric millionaire. This turns out to be <music swells> a giant theme park filled with genetically reborn dinosaurs crafted from the DNA (care of ancient mummified vampire mosquitoes and topped up with the genetic juices of a few West African tranny frogs). Along for the ride is a charismatic mathematician (contradiction in terms?) Dr Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum). Dr Malcolm's repeatedly brushed off suggestions that dinosaurs might not take well to being in captivity prove to be well founded. The dinosaurs rebel as only dinosaurs can: by eating tourists and demanding a profit-sharing deal on the back end of any movie spin-offs or sequels. But mostly by eating people. And some lawyers.

To director Steven Spielberg's credit, this is some of the most marvellously assembled, brilliantly entertaining popcorn cinema ever made. In spite of decades-old effects, it's still thoroughly convincing. In some ways, the combination of animatronics and computer trickery is MORE realistic than the complete CGI universes we see these days — there's a certain weight and physics that is hard to fake. But *Jurassic Park* also offers a witty script delivered by talented actors with just the right amount of cinematic awe. And if that's not enough, it's all delivered with a ham-fisted cautionary message about respecting nature. What more could you possibly ask from a nineties blockbuster?

The only downside to *Jurassic Park* is that the huge advances in computer imagery featured in the film were also the inspiration George Lucas finally needed to make his Star Wars prequels.

On second thoughts, fuck you, *Jurassic Park*.

## SATURDAY FLICKS

### **Splice** (US) (2009)

Director: Vincenzo Natali

Stars: Adrien Brody, Sarah Polley, Delphine Chanéac

I don't know about you, but I love a happy accident. Like finding fifty bucks in your pocket, or a rogue icy pole in the back of the freezer, or that time I accidentally cloned a sexy human-mouse hybrid with an Oedipus complex. Man, that was weird ...

Welcome to grossly underrated horror/sci-fi flick *Splice*, from equally underrated Canadian director Vincenzo Natali. Clive (Adrien Brody) and Elsa (Sarah Polley) are lovers and geneticists working on the holy grail of world food problems: homegrown meat. Imagine if you could grow meat humanely in a lab — what would be the implications for farming? Consumer prices? The environmental impact of not having all those farms? And, of course, how amazing would the look of confusion be on the face of all the animal liberationists?

Clive and Elsa are trying to lovingly raise what appears to be a sentient rump steak and it just keeps dying. So they try something new — using a mixture of Elsa's and animal DNA. The result is Dren. Initially Dren is kind of like a genetic turducken, with elements of mouse, scorpion, shark and, of course, human. She grows from a large mouse until she looks like a toddler with warped developmental issues. She then rapidly ages into a tempestuous, sexy chimera.

Once you get past this movie's slight preoccupation with lame CSI-style science montages, this Canadian French co-production is one of the more fascinating explorations of genetics. Sarah Polley and Adrien Brody have fantastic onscreen chemistry and make for a believable couple, while the existence of Dren places a series of

very complex obstacles in the way of their relationship. The most suspenseful, icky and thrilling moments in *Splice* come from seeing how the sacred temple of human flesh has been perverted. It's a deeply sexual film, reminding us that the most profound act of genetic creation is indeed sex and all of the messy, fun and painful bits that come with that act. But, more than anything, it is an awesomely messed-up, skin-crawling flick.

### **Gattaca** (US) (1997)

Director: Andrew Niccol

Stars: Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, Jude Law

As we continue our weekend of horrifying genetic mutations, now prepare to be terrified by ... um ... very well-groomed genetically engineered astronauts.

*Gattaca* is set in a not-too-distant future where everyone has collectively decided to dress as though it's the 1940s. In this world, all of your potential medical 'defects' — heart problems, inadequate height, left-handedness — can be screened out before you are born. This process will render you 'valid'. Valid gets the best jobs, the best partners and the best Brylcreem for your 1940s hairdo.

Vincent Freeman (Ethan Hawke) dreams of being an astronaut. He is capable, fit and smart, but he is also born naturally, or 'invalid' as his class is derisively termed. So Vincent hatches a plan to buy a valid's genetic identity. Enter Jerome Morrow (Jude Law), a world-class athlete. At least, he was, until he broke both his legs. Jerome is in need of cash and the sizeable chip on his shoulder isn't helping. Hawke begins the job of transforming himself into Jerome by borrowing samples of blood, skin and hair that he can use for genetic screening. But will he pull it off?

New Zealand-born director Andrew Niccol is known for making thoughtful, creative and beautiful Hollywood movies (*The*

*Truman Show*, *Lord of War*), but this film still stands out as one of his best. He's created a genteel world where discrimination is implied and accepted. The retro stylings of *Gattaca* inspire comparisons to racial segregation of the not-so-distant past. Many critics have complained that the film is lacking in emotion but to me *Gattaca* feels classy and cool. Hawke has a steely intensity about him. With every step he takes his fragile world could topple — if just one stray hair or a random fleck of skin gets through the system, his plans will fall apart. Alan Arkin effortlessly wisecracks his way through the film as an ageing detective on the hunt for the missing invalid. But the film belongs to Jude Law, playing a man who was born with every opportunity laid in front of him then had them all cruelly taken away. He's the character your heart ends up bleeding for as he spirals down a path of self-loathing and self-destruction.

## THE SUNDAY MOVIES

**Black Sheep** (New Zealand) (2006)

Director: Jonathan King

Stars: Oliver Driver, Nathan Meister, Tammy Davis

They say that New Zealand has more sheep than people. What would happen if they wanted to take over? This is the terrifyingly funny prospect posed by *Black Sheep*.

Meet Henry (Nathan Meister). Henry does not like sheep because of a cruel joke his sadistic brother pulled with a bloody sheepskin in their childhood. Things are so bad, in fact, that he became sheep-phobic and had to move away from the family farm. When Henry returns years later to sell off his share of the farm he discovers that his brother has become an even more sadistic prick

and is genetically altering his flock, turning them into murderous, flesh-eating monsters. Clearly, when there's no more room in hell, the dead shall graze in New Zealand.

*Black Sheep* is a very gory black comedy that is at its best when it's being as weird as possible. New Zealand's answer to something like *Shaun of the Dead* (though not quite as clever), this similarly mixes slapstick, blood-splatterin' gore with some cute political undertones. The effects are decidedly lo-fi, with plenty of latex guts and corn-syrup blood. It works, though, and a movie like this should be a bit rough and tumble.

The film owes a lot to Peter 'Lord of the Rings' Jackson, whose earlier movies (like *Braindead*) were classic splatter-fests. *Black Sheep* also cleverly messes with our perception of Kiwis as folksy inbreds who say 'bro' a lot. (What? Don't look at me like that, they do!) The dialogue and acting can be a little hokey, but hey, it's a movie about killer sheep.

## **The Fly** (USA) (1986)

Director: David Cronenberg

Stars: Jeff Goldblum, Geena Davis, John Getz

And finally, be terrified by an overly talkative Jewish guy who may also be a large insect. With a mullet.

Jeff Goldblum is back again this weekend as Seth Brundle, the geeky inventor of the world's first teleporter. After accidentally locking himself into his invention with a housefly, Goldblum begins to evolve into a human-fly hybrid from the inside out. It also stars Geena Davis (with a decidedly aerated hairdo) as Goldblum's lover, who may be impregnated with his infected seed.

A good horror movie should scare you, but a great one will show you what's scary about real life. Those are the sorts of movies that Canadian director David Cronenberg makes: horror movies

with brains, wit and heart. The more invasive, the more penetrative, the more aggressive his horror is, the better the movies are.

*The Fly* is one of my favourite Cronenberg movies. Yes, it's terrifying, but it's also sexy and smart, with some of the best-written monologues of all time. The very concept of this movie sounds absurd and, in fact, if you see the campy original 1950s version of this story you'll see it is very stupid indeed. But Cronenberg's unique treatment turns it into a visceral assault that hooks into one of our greatest vulnerabilities: disease. *The Fly* cuts deep into that terrible fear of being attacked from within by something you can't fight, reason with or even see.

# ALL-NIGHT BENDERS

If you happen to spend a lot of time awake while everyone else is asleep, you'll know that the world can seem a bit alien at night. Cities and towns take on a wholly different personality depending on whether it's 2 am or 2 pm. It's not just the lighting that's different on this stage — the cast and soundtrack are also entirely different. And sometimes, on just the right night, with the right players and the right music, these nights can become something special.

Moviemakers have long known this, which is why the 'all-night bender' movie is one of the more vibrant of these sub-sub-subgenres. There was *The Allnighter*, an eighties turkey starring the Bangles' lead singer Susanna Hoffs (written and directed by her mum), and then the 1978 'classic' *Thank God It's Friday*, which followed the staff and patrons of an LA disco called The Zoo on a Friday night. It's pretty bad, but it is worth seeing just for the early appearances by Jeff Goldblum as a sleaze and Debra Winger as an innocent wench. So fetch the Red Bull and percolate the coffee: strange and wondrous things happen in the middle of the night.

## FRIDAY NIGHT FILM

### **Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle** (USA) (2004)

Director: Danny Leiner

Stars: John Cho, Kal Penn, Neil Patrick Harris

After a night of smoking marijuana, two roommates (Harold, a low-ranking Korean investment banker, and Kumar, an Indian med student) head out on the town with the munchies. Their goal is to find two things: more drugs and a fast-food joint. Instead they stagger aimlessly across New Jersey, are attacked by raccoons, subjected to eighties romantic-pop and have their car stolen by Doogie Howser.

If you're not a fan of puerile teen comedies then don't expect to like *Harold and Kumar*. It is every bit as stupid as you imagine it to be, but it's also infinitely funnier than it deserves to be, especially for a film made by the guy responsible for *Dude, Where's My Car?* The filmmakers seem to have disregarded all the boundaries of good taste with wild abandon (the only way to do so). It's unpredictable, charming and frankly a bag full of fun. Kal Penn and John Cho have phenomenal chemistry. The film acknowledges cultural stereotypes like the studious, weak Asian and the gifted Indian doctor and then proceeds to, quite rightly, completely ignore their race and just play them as characters.

Though the main reason to watch this is Neil Patrick Harris. Harold and Kumar pick up a hitchhiking fictionalised version of Harris, who is drifting alongside the road tripping balls. He tries to talk Harold and Kumar into picking up some prostitutes (Harris is in real life openly gay). He ends up stealing their car, outpacing a cheetah (long story) and then snorting a line of coke off a supermodel's arse cheek. It's fun.

## SATURDAY FLICKS

**Go** (USA) (1999)

Director: Doug Liman

Stars: Katie Holmes, Sarah Polley, Jay Mohr

Your all-night party could also be a really bad trip. Welcome to *Go*. Take a dodgy drug deal, two soap stars, an angry check-out chick and some militant bouncers and you're in for a really bumpy night. *Go* might be a bit over the top but it has some brilliant black comedy that makes it a totally worthwhile bender.

Director Doug Liman, with his first decent-sized Hollywood budget, created a night of chaos and questionable decisions. The relatively young cast get to have a lot of fun. Check-out chick Ronna (Sarah Polley) has an angry strength about her. Timothy Olyphant stars as Todd, a drug dealer, and experiments with the steely intensity and unpredictability that would later prove popular in TV series *Deadwood*. And Tye Diggis does a very good impression of the coolest person on Earth.

When *Go* was first released it was frequently described as a 'young *Pulp Fiction*' but that incorrectly sells it. Whilst I love Tarantino, he didn't invent the circular story structure nor was he the first to write snappy pop-culture-laden dialogue. I think *Go* is far more interested in capturing a sense of a certain time in a certain city.

There are certain plot twists that stretch the bounds of plausibility, and by all accounts it's a pretty poor facsimile of true rave culture (hard to come by at the best of times), but as a fun night of LA-style bedlam, it's damn entertaining.

## **Superbad** (USA) (2007)

Director: Greg Mottola

Stars: Michael Cera, Jonah Hill, Christopher Mintz-Plasse

*Superbad* follows two horny high-school buddies and one disastrous night of aborted partying. A lot of people are gonna say that *Superbad* is just another crass and puerile teen flick. And they're right. It's also wading in just about every bodily fluid this side of the pancreas. But it's a film about teenage boys — to *not* be crass and puerile would be a gross misrepresentation. In fact, the reason this comedy works so well is because it's so honest about everything. The jokes ring completely true (even if they are about creative ways of hiding an erection), while the warm, grainy, almost seventies tones and funky soundtrack make everything feel so familiar. But when you dig down into it, *Superbad* has a real heart.

Which I suppose isn't surprising given that Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg started writing this when they were thirteen. Michael Cera and Jonah Hill are perfectly cast as the central characters. Sure Michael Cera can only really do one character — nervous, naïve nerd — but he does it so well. As the highly strung yin to Cera's dopey yang, Jonah Hill brings a foul-mouthed fury to the film as Seth, a guy who says everything that pops into his horny teenage mind. That said, the leads get a run for their money from veteran players Seth Rogen and Bill Hader as two police officers trapped in their own arrested development, and Chris Mintz-Plasse's character 'McLovin' is the breakout star.

*Superbad* lags a bit in the midsection, and I think there are a lot more elements of adolescence that they could've mined in addition to dick jokes, but the honesty of *Superbad* provides its biggest laughs — and its heart.

## THE SUNDAY MOVIES

### **Dazed and Confused** (USA) (1993)

Director: Richard Linklater

Stars: Jason London, Wiley Wiggins, Matthew McConaughey

It's May 1976 and school's out ... forever. It's the last day of term. That doesn't just mean freedom for those graduating from this Texan high school but also initiation for the next year's incoming freshmen. This entails a vicious paddling for the boys (Catholic school?) and a public tomato sauce and mustard shower for the girls (definitely a Catholic school). Of course for the seniors, it's party time.

*Dazed and Confused* follows twenty-four students, ranging from incoming high schoolers to a creepy toolie hanger-on in the form of Matthew McConaughey. There's hooking up, drinking, bullying, more drinking and then there's some more hazing scenes that are difficult to contextualise in polite company.

I think the principal achievement of *Dazed and Confused* is how oddly timeless it feels. It's set in the mid-seventies but the emotions and little vignettes that director Richard Linklater puts together still have an evocative potency. The movie immediately transports you to high school via the superjet of nostalgia. It's obviously a very autobiographical film for Linklater (he grew up in Texas) but he also invited the young cast to give him feedback, and a number of the most memorable scenes were the result of the stars' own input. Of course, this openness was just one of the many reasons the film was a nightmare to work on for Linklater, who was using studio money to make a film for the first time. It all went awry, with producers and executive producers even going so far as to start directing actors behind Linklater's back.

Of course in retrospect none of it matters: the film is a beautiful, funny, wistful and critical look at the cruelties of high school.

## **After Hours** (USA) (1985)

Director: Martin Scorsese

Stars: Griffin Dunne, Rosanna Arquette, Verna Bloom

But my top all-nighter is a little known Martin Scorsese flick from 1985 called *After Hours*. Office worker Paul (Griffin Dunne) meets a girl. They arrange to catch up. But he loses her number and, whilst trying to track her down, his whole night goes to shit. Above anything else, this is a movie about the personality of New York City, and all of its crazies who come out at night. Soon Paul finds himself the suspect in a string of burglaries in the area and he becomes the object of a witch-hunt by a posse of SoHo locals, sadomasochists, angry cabbies and ice-cream-truck drivers.

You can thank Jesus for this one. Martin Scorsese, the famed New York director behind movies like *Goodfellas* and *Raging Bull*, had originally set his heart upon making a movie called *The Last Temptation of Christ*, in which Jesus was to be depicted with a wife and kids and played by Willem Dafoe. Much to Scorsese's surprise (though no one else's), this proved to be a difficult film to get funded. *After Hours* was the backup plan.

There are a couple of stories about how this film came into being. The first is that it was based on a screenplay by one Joseph Minion, who wrote it as part of a university film assignment. The much better story is that a decent chunk of the first thirty minutes appears to be lifted from 'Lies', a 1982 public radio monologue by Joe Frank, the great LA-based radio artist. He was apparently never officially credited at the time but was later 'paid handsomely' to forget about it.

Regardless, the end result has a palpable sense of chaos that runs perilously close to the absurd. Apparently Scorsese told cameraman Michael Ballhaus to light up the imagery one notch brighter than reality, one notch darker than fantasy. It's not a bad description for the whole piece.

# RECUT

## MOVIES THAT HAVE HAD THEIR ENDINGS CHANGED

You know, it still shocks me to this day that Darth Vader was not only Luke's father but that he was also a completely unaware ghost who secretly had a penis, and that that penis had a split personality — one of which is played by Brad Pitt who was destined to kill Dumbledore and all he needed to do was click his heels five times to go back home which, in spite of all the apes, was actually Earth. But the real twist was when Vader actually turned out to be Keyser Söze and the penis was his childhood sled all along.

See, once upon a time the job of ruining movie endings was the domain of dickhead film critics like me. However at some point Hollywood decided that they were even better equipped to ruin movie endings. Movie studios change or reshoot endings all the time to keep audiences happy. And by 'audience' I mean a group of demographically selected people with very little to do during business hours. They are the dreaded 'Test Audience'. The studio will test how this group will respond to an early cut of the film. Any element of the movie that makes them less likely to tweet 'omg transformers wuz hektik!!!' is sliced, reshot or digitally erased. The problem with this is that if, say, *Bambi* were to be made today, the shooting of the mother would've been replaced with a bevy of magical woodland creatures belting out a peppy musical sequence about the value of togetherness and merchandising.

These test audiences have a lot to answer for. Rom-com *The Break-up* was meant to end with Jennifer Aniston miserable and alone. However, in real life, Brad Pitt had just dumped Jennifer Aniston. The fact that she couldn't hold down a man in a fictional world as well was just a little too much for the test audience to bear. There's a similar case for *Die Hard 4.0* (or *Live Free or Die Hard*, as it is hilariously known in its homeland). In order to avoid a US classification of NC-17 (which many cinema chains won't show) the film's ending was cut down. Blood was digitally removed and Willis's iconic, thunderous catchphrase 'Yippee-ki-yay, motherfuckers' was obscured by gunfire, because watching hot globules of lead perforating innocent bystanders is less offensive than the F-bomb.

Live free, indeed.

And so this weekend we embark on good movies that have, for better or worse, had their endings changed.

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## FRIDAY NIGHT FILM

**Pretty Woman** (USA) (1990)

Director: Garry Marshall

Stars: Richard Gere, Julia Roberts, Jason Alexander

*Pretty Woman* is, by all measurable standards, a classic romantic comedy. Boy meets girl, boy discovers girl is a hooker, boy buys girl nice clothes and they both live happily ever after ... *Pretty Woman* has a kind of perennial charm about it; Roberts, with her little southern drawl, lights up the screen, and Richard Gere will never make as much sense as he did when he wore shoulder pads. It's a glistening fairytale of a simpler time.

But *Pretty Woman* wasn't supposed to look like this. The original script was called *Three Thousand* (a reference to the fee that Julia Roberts' character, Vivian, charges for her services) and it was much grittier than the film that eventually made its way onto the big screen. Vivian was a prostitute with a drug problem and, in the end, Edward Lewis (Richard Gere) dumps her and she returns to the streets in a crack-fuelled rage.

That could be, perhaps, why Meg Ryan, Michelle Pfeiffer and Daryl Hannah all turned down the role that eventually went to a 21-year-old Julia Roberts. By all accounts both the screenwriter, JF Lawton, and Disney insisted that they were happy with what ended up in cinemas. But let's be honest: we were cheated, plain and simple, out of watching Julia Roberts in a tailspin of ill-begotten class-A drugs. Instead we ended up with a decade of beige romantic-comedy star vehicles.

## **SATURDAY FLICKS**

### **Australia** (Australia) (2008)

Director: Baz Luhrmann

Stars: Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman, Bryan Brown

Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* was so over-hyped before its cinema release that it was never going to be able to live up to expectations. It was the film that was supposed to save the Australian film industry, heal the Stolen Generation, cure cancer, slice bread and eradicate premature ejaculation.

*Australia* was epic in every sense of the word. Part love story, part paid-for outback tourism advertisement, the story unfolds over four years. Beginning in 1938, it tells the tale of Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman), a British aristocrat, her drover (Hugh Jackman),

her Indigenous adopted child and a shitload of computer-generated cows struggling to survive on an Australian cattle station called Faraway Downs.

In the original climax, Hugh Jackman was meant to meet his sticky end in the bombing of Darwin but this tragedy was a little too harrowing for the Hollywood studio execs. (What? Had they not seen *Romeo + Juliet* or *Moulin Rouge*?) The tragic ending was filmed and shown to test audiences and they didn't like it either. So after 'intense' discussions with Twentieth Century Fox, Luhrmann agreed to rewrite the ending. <insert mental image of Baz pouting in his jodhpurs>

The resulting film is what I like to call a hot mess. *Australia* smacks of a film that was half-written, shot, edited, rewritten, re-shot and re-edited before they sat down, watched once more and decided to spend \$20 million on blowing up Darwin and herding some CGI cattle off a cliff. Parts of it are exhilarating, eerie and gut-wrenching, but the plot's big turning points have either too much or not enough emphasis, and are usually in the wrong spot. The entire last half of the movie could easily have been shifted earlier for a punchier ending. It's not that Baz has bitten off more than he can chew, it's that he's bitten off more than he *should've* chewed and then pig-headedly insisted on munching through it all, even if it does take two hours and forty-five minutes.

Yes, *Australia* is beautiful; yes, I cried a bit in parts. But let's face it, the outback looks awesome and I'm a pansy. The biggest surprise is still Nicole Kidman — her comic timing as the stuck-up English bitch is flawless. It's that or they had someone going through frame by frame adding expression to her face. Either way, it works for me.

## **Clerks** (USA) (1994)

Director: Kevin Smith

Stars: Brian O'Halloran, Jeff Andreson, Marilyn Ghigliotti

The career of Kevin Smith is American indie-film legend. He first emerged with this film, *Clerks*, a semi-autobiographical story of a convenience-store clerk who's called in to work on what is set to be the worst day of his life. Smith begged, borrowed and sold his comic-book collection to make the film for next to no money. And in spite of some occasionally wooden acting and rudimentary camera work, Kevin Smith's gift for amazingly profane but brilliantly wrought dialogue shone through. He litters the film with hilarious tirades and verbal sparring matches about sex, hockey, *Star Wars* and life in the suburbs. The interplay crackles along but somehow always feels completely authentic. *Clerks* captured the plight of a generation of suburban slackers and earned Smith both cult status and enough money to buy back his comic collection. And more than ten years later he got to make a sequel where a sex act is performed on a donkey. Win.

Except this happy tale was not always so. Originally *Clerks* ended with the main character being shot dead. Kevin Smith has since said that it was an ending he'd felt obligated to do, that someone pulling a piece and popping a cap in a nearby arse was simply the 'done thing' in indie films. Of course, several bigwigs in the movie business talked him out of it. And so we land ourselves with a far more consistent, open-ended finale.

Call me crazy (and it would be medically accurate to do so) but I tend to think that the original ending was poignant and tragic. It was a film about the pointless menial lives of two New Jersey dudes who work pointless menial jobs that could quite possibly kill them. After developing such an emotional connection with them it makes for a legitimate punch-in-the-gut ending. I reckon he should've stuck with the original, but feel free to debate this amongst yourselves ...

## THE SUNDAY MOVIES

### **Little Shop of Horrors** (USA) (1986)

Director: Frank Oz

Stars: Rick Moranis, Ellen Greene, Vincent Gardenia

It's a surprise to me that *Little Shop of Horrors* isn't mentioned in the same hallowed breaths as other musicals like *Grease* and *The Sound of Music*. I suppose the presence of a giant flesh-eating, baritone-belted alien with a close likeness to a circumcised penis head might have something to do with it. Whatever the reason, *Little Shop of Horrors* is a thing of camp, disturbing wonder.

Seymour Krelborn (Rick Moranis) is a fumbling, woefully inadequate assistant working at a rundown florist on Skid Row. His life changes when a total eclipse of the sun heralds the arrival of a new plant. Although quaint at first, it soon becomes clear that this plant is a very dangerous thing (I'd say somewhere around the time it decided to eat Steve Martin, who plays a nitrous oxide-addicted rebel dentist with a penchant for violent sex).

The doo-wop, early Motown inspired soundtrack is fantastically catchy, complete with Supremes-style backing singers narrating the whole film. The production is brilliantly staged, particularly the giant alien plant, which was operated by several puppeteers directed by master puppeteer Frank Oz, the hands and mouth behind Yoda, Miss Piggy and Kermit the Frog.

Originally the movie ended with a US\$5 million, 23-minute sequence where the alien plant scales the Empire State Building and the main characters are killed off. Test audiences responded very badly to the notion of the leads being killed. (Frank Oz explained that this was a by-product of its adaptation from the original stage musical version to screen. At the end of a musical the cast come out and take a bow, so there's an element of artifice and pantomime that

the audience accept in theatre that they don't in cinema.) And so a happier, more open-ended conclusion was filmed. The original ending was briefly attached to the DVD as an extra feature before it was recalled. Nowadays, you can still see it in its entirety on YouTube.

### **Fatal Attraction** (USA) (1987)

Director: Adrian Lyne

Stars: Michael Douglas, Glenn Close, Anne Archer

Don't fuck with Glenn Close. Anyone with that angular a jawline should not be trifled with. And don't let the bouncy ringlets fool you: one way or another, she's gonna get you like a Blondie song.

Such is the lesson of *Fatal Attraction*, the story of Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas, the go-to guy for high-class eighties sleaze), a 'happily' married man who has a weekend fling with book editor Alex Forrest (Glenn Close). That is, *he* thinks it's a fling; *she* is deranged. Alex starts rocking up at his work and home, meets his family pets, claims to be knocked up and ... Let's just say someone ends up dead. It's compelling, tense stuff. *Fatal Attraction* even inspired countless psychiatric PhDs on erotomania (not a made-up term, I swear) and, whilst I have a few reservations about the coded message behind portraying the only independently careered female in the movie as a sociopath, *Fatal Attraction* is still a great thriller.

But in the original version, Alex met quite a different end where she commits suicide and makes it look like Dan did it. This ending remained for several months in post-production and was released in Japan. But test audiences in the US felt that Dan and his wife, in particular, deserved revenge. So director Adrian Lyne shot the iconic and drama-filled sequence in the bathroom ... the result? Ah well, you'll see. Curiously though, there are websites that will edit the original ending onto your DVD, if you so wish.