

Valentine's movies: Meg Ryan does not rule the day

By Jack Clifford
Oregon Daily Emerald

Romeo and Juliet. Bonnie and Clyde. Thelma & Louise. Ben and Joon.

Turner and Hooch?
OK, so not all of Hollywood's couplings are thrilling or romantic. In fact, the last one, pairing a big, hairy dog and Tom Hanks, isn't even legal.

Nevertheless, there are quite a few flicks on your local video store shelves that can lend a sense of unity to your Valentine's Day plans. Be forewarned, however, the following recommendations, in no particular order, take a somewhat offbeat look at relationships — Meg Ryan fans should look elsewhere.

"Harold and Maude" (1971) — Bud Cort and Ruth Gordon star in this cult classic about a 20-year-old sexually repressed, always depressed young man (Cort), who falls in love with a life-loving, vibrant 79-year-old (Gordon).

Harold pretends to kill himself on a regular basis — gleefully torturing his controlling mother in the process — until he meets Maude, who spends her free time posing in the nude for an artist friend and stealing strangers' cars.

Their taboo relationship flusters society's morals police — a priest, a military captain and a psychologist — but the couple revels in a newfound appreciation for life. Enjoy the fun, but set aside a hanky or two for the ending.

"Raising Arizona" (1987) — When H.I. McDonough (Nicolas Cage) and Edwina (Holly Hunter) meet for the first time in a prison check-in room, well, you just know these two lovebirds are meant for one another.

This movie is to love what

Fabio is to romance; you've never seen such over-the-top sentiments played for this many laughs. (Fabio is kidding with his attempts at sex appeal, isn't he?)

The Coen brothers throw every directing and camera trick they know into "Raising Arizona," but it's Cage and Hunter who deserve plaudits for their roles as newlyweds searching for a baby, any baby. One of the Arizona quintuplets does just fine until his parents discover the little one missing.

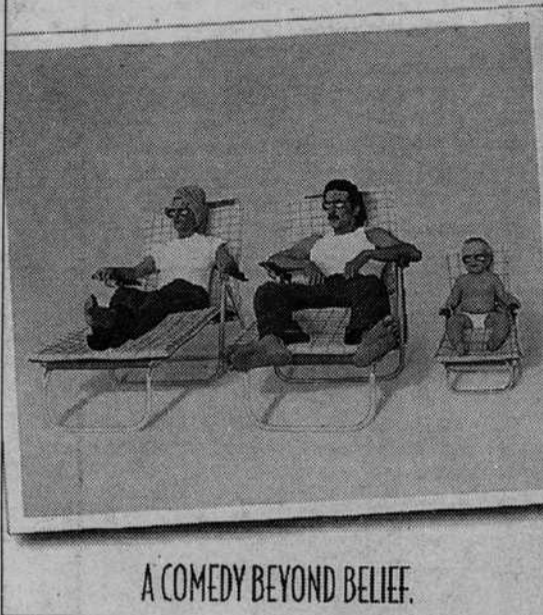
If you're thinking about getting married, watch this flick first to see exactly what you and your future partner might be getting into.

"True Romance" (1993) — Quentin Tarantino wrote the script for this Tony Scott film, so expect a lot of red, as in blood. Don't let that scare you off, however, because this movie is very well-done, with some solid acting from a colorful bunch.

Christian Slater and Patricia Arquette star as the lovestruck pair, on the lam from Arquette's past — she plays a prostitute named Alabama — following a messy confrontation with her pimp. Slater is Clarence, a geeky comic-book store employee, who falls for Alabama after one date that includes a triple-header of bad kung-fu flicks.

Christopher Walken plays the pimp's boss chasing the two; Dennis Hopper is cast as Clarence's

RAISING ARIZONA



A COMEDY BEYOND BELIEF.

Courtesy 20th Century Fox Films

Romance really isn't all just sunshine and living the good life.

out-to-lunch father; Val Kilmer is the ghost of Elvis; and Brad Pitt shows up as a stoner.

Yes, love rules in the end, despite the cornucopia of carnage along the way.

"Badlands" (1974) — Terrence Malick has directed just three movies in his lifetime: "Thin Red Line," last year's surprise challenge to "Saving Private Ryan" for best movie of the year; "Days of Heaven," which stars a very young Richard Gere; and "Badlands," a simple, yet powerful piece of work starring Martin

Sheen and Sissy Spacek, both whom look about 15 years old in this movie.

The story somewhat follows Charlie Starkweather's infamous 1950s murder spree across the Midwestern plains, but it is really about how two people in love will do just about anything for the other.

Sheen plays a dim-witted philosopher type and Spacek is excellent as a young girl torn between what's right and what's comfortable. A few scenes — a burning house, a car chase and a slow dance between the renegade pair illuminated by a car's headlights — are simply stunning.

Pay attention to the dialogue in this movie because that's where you'll glean the most about misguided romance.

"The Graduate" (1967) — If you've never seen this Dustin Hoffman star-making effort; rent it now. Hoffman is recent college graduate Benjamin Braddock and his sexual liaisons, first with a married woman (Mrs. Robinson) and then her daughter, are sheer excellence.

"Ladyhawke" (1985) — The mystic approach in movies is normally a turn-off, but this Rutger Hauer/Michelle Pfeiffer medieval venture actually works. Matthew Broderick also stars, although his wisecracking character is mildly annoying.

The plot here revolves around an ill-fated pair — Hauer and Pfeiffer — who are doomed to

never consummate their passion for each other. He's a wolf by night when she is in human form, and she's a hawk by day when he is a man.

They travel the countryside, searching for a sorcerer who can reverse the curse. A simple movie, but if you're in the mood for a tale with a twist, this is the one.

"Heathers" (1989) — Never has teenage angst been so fun to watch. Winona Ryder stars as one of the Heathers, the name for a high school clique, and Christian Slater is her dopey boyfriend who decides that the elite group needs a little re-education.

So many classic lines and scenes in this one, so just stay focused on the movie, not your movie-watching partner.

"Matador" (1986) — If you want bizarre, then this Pedro Almodovar movie is your pick for the evening. The Spanish director has made a living out of bringing the strange and wacky to the screen, and this black comedy is out there.

The story focuses on a retired bullfighter who still has a thirst for the macabre, so he commences to play "olé" with a few human targets. Until he meets his match, that is, in a love interest/femme fatale.

It's always a treat to watch Almodovar in action, with his penchant for striking visuals and zany dialogue, but "Matador" is truly a piece of art. Some people might be turned off by the movie's opening scene, but those who persevere will not be disappointed.

Just remember as you watch these alternatives to "Sleepless in Seattle" and other such schlock, love and romance isn't always synonymous with wine and roses.

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