



nightlife. Their relationship deepens.

My favorite scene takes place late in the week at a restaurant where the customers cook their meal at the table. Charlotte and Bob are out of sorts with each other. Charlotte is jealous, because she saw Bob with an unworthy companion. Bob is sad, because he hurt Charlotte. If Bob and Charlotte were lovers, this would be their first spat. But they are not lovers, and they cannot speak to each other of these feelings. They must simply endure. In this subtle piece of work, they sit through awkward moments in silence, while each understands that their mutual bond is more profound than either had been willing to admit.

The film also has its over-the-top scenes, such as Bob's guest appearance on Matthew Minami's television show, and the scenes where Bob and Charlotte sing karaoke and allow us to see into their hearts. But the film works because the characters' yearning is carried by facial expression and tenderness, which allows it to resonate with the viewer long after the images have faded.

4. COLD MOUNTAIN: 2003 Academy Award nominations: Best Actor, Jude Law; Supporting Actress, Renee Zellweger; Cinematography; Original Score, Gabriel Yared; 2 Original Songs; Film Editing.

Anthony Minghella's excellent adaptation of Charles Frazier's Civil War epic follows the separate lives of would-be lovers over the course of the war's bloody four years, as each clings steadfastly to the brief, bright memory of the other that dims with time. Unlike the yearning between the not-lovers in *Lost in Translation*, Inman (Jude Law) and Ada Monroe (Nicole Kidman) see each other very little before the sword of war severs their bond.

Their separation creates a situation no contemporary film could support: Ada and Inman must survive during desperate times without the touch, support or encouragement of the other. They must hold on to their love even after it has become no more real than the ghosts of the thousands lost to the war at home and on the battlefield. The last letter from Ada that reaches Inman says — If you

are marching, stop marching. If you are fighting, stop fighting. Come to me. — and when wounded Inman hears those words, he forsakes his military duty to walk back to Cold Mountain so that Ada might survive. But it's a very long, dangerous walk.

Ada is a Southern woman who does not believe in slavery, who feels the Southern cause is wrong. Inman goes to fight out of loyalty to the South, but he comes to the same conclusion as the war sears its futility and inhumanity into his brain, bone, blood and soul.

This is a dazzling film experience, and much of its pleasure comes from the actors: Kidman, Law and Renee Zellweger carry the principal roles with accomplished performances. Stellar among the smaller roles are: Natalie Portman, as a needy, young war widow; Philip Seymour Hoffman as an opportunistic preacher; Brendan Gleeson as an itinerant musician; Kathy Baker as Ada and Ruby's neighbor and friend; Eileen Atkins, the goat lady, who saves Inman's life; Giovanni Ribisi as a drunk, who betrays him; and Ray Winstone as the corrupt Teague, who wages war on the homefront.

5. IN AMERICA: 2003 Academy Award nominations: Best Actress, Samantha Morton; Supporting Actor, Djimon Hounsou; Original Screenplay, Jim Sheridan, Naomi Sheridan, Kirsten Sheridan.

Jim Sheridan's immigrant drama follows an Irish family making a new home in New York, and almost the entire film is anchored in the complicated relationships between father, mother and children. The parents, Sarah (Samantha Morton) and Johnny (Paddy Considine), have two young daughters, 11-year-old Christy (Sarah Bolger) and 7-year-old Ariel (Emma Bolger). But back in Ireland, they lost a child, Frankie, and the whole family grieves for the dead boy, especially Johnny, who seems to have lost his feeling for life.

Tender love and raucous good times show the parents' concerns for the girls, but the facts are that Christy and Ariel are self-reliant to an extent that overprotected American children would envy. They live in a tenement

in a bad part of the city, yet neither parent seems overtly worried about them. And the girls are very responsible, a possible source of envy for American parents.

When Halloween comes and the girls are eager to trick or treat, Sarah and Johnny allow them to knock on all the doors in their building. But only one neighbor comes to his door, which contains a bold KEEP AWAY painted on it. Mateo (Djimon Hounsou), sick and estranged from his family, discovers how lonely he has been only when the girls accept him as he is and show him affection. Sarah and the girls welcome Mateo into their fellowship, but Johnny, his feelings locked away, holds back longer.

A deeply humanist film experience, *In America* features incredible performances from all, especially Hounsou and the Bolger girls, who are actual sisters. But Sarah (Morton) is the heart of the family, and Morton's performance is profound and real.

6. MYSTIC RIVER: 2003 Academy Award nominations: Best Picture; Director, Clint Eastwood; Actor, Sean Penn; Supporting Actor, Tim Robbins; Supporting Actress, Marcia Gay Harden; Adapted Screenplay, Brian Helgeland.

Clint Eastwood's memorable film is so grounded in ties to community, church, kin, family and childhood friends that its many layers of conflict are difficult for viewers to sort out, because their roots are planted deeply in these sometimes unconscious connections.

Three boys grew up together in this rough part of blue-collar Boston: Jimmy



Markham (Sean Penn), Dave Boyle (Tim Robbins) and Sean Devine (Kevin Bacon). Jimmy and Dave have stayed in the old neighborhood, but Sean, a detective, lives elsewhere. The murder of Jimmy's grown daughter, Katie (Emmy Rossum), brings the three men together again and calls up the terrible secret that binds them together — Dave's kidnapping and molestation when they were kids. But the investigation into Katie's death also brings in Sean's partner, Whitey Powers (Laurence Fishburne), the outsider who sees things Sean can't or won't.

The men's bonds extend to their wives, since Jimmy and Dave married cousins: Celeste Boyle (Marcia Gay Harden) and Annabeth Markum (Laura Linney). But there's a world of difference between the two women. Annabeth is loyal to the core to her husband, her children, her church, her community. Celeste is troubled. She and Dave and their boy live in more fragile circumstances. Dave takes long walks, doesn't express his emotions, won't let Celeste in on what he's feeling. Celeste's hold on reality is shattered after Katie is killed, and she begins to suspect her husband of the murder.

Like a Greek tragedy, all the connecting lines are drawn, the drama that was set in motion 20 or more years earlier plays out, and the characters bound together by fate face demands more terrible than anyone can meet.

tier two

VERY GOOD FILMS 2003

Big Fish

City of God

Dirty Pretty Things

Elephant

Master and Commander

Monster

Seabiscuit

Thirteen

Veronica Guerín

Whale Rider

