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 JODI PICOUULT'S CAPTIVATING BESTSELLER IS NOW A LIFETIME ORIGINAL MOVIE!



FILM: THE HIGHS; The Movies of the Year

By A. O. SCOTT
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1. 'MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD' -- I surprise myself with this choice, but Peter Weir's old-fashioned high-seas adventure surprised me with its energy and sweep. The battle sequences are appropriately rousing and bloody, but the film's greatest accomplishment is its recreation of the hierarchies and rituals of the British Navy during the Napoleonic wars. Russell Crowe plays Jack Aubrey with all the charisma of a 19th-century rock star, and Paul Bettany is terrific as his intellectual pal, Stephen Maturin. The best war movie in a year of war movies, and one of the best ever.

2. 'MYSTIC RIVER' -- Clint Eastwood has transformed Dennis Lehane's wintry New England thriller into a mighty modern tragedy, directed with elegant gravity and sustained by some of the best performances in recent American cinema. Sean Penn, as a father undone by the murder of his daughter, confirms that he is the best screen actor of his generation.

3. 'THE SON' -- Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's wrenching study of paternal grief is a stripped-down complement to the grand opera of "Mystic River" and a rebuke to Hollywood's habit of equating revenge with redemption. Olivier Gourmet, playing a Belgian carpenter with a sore back and a battered soul, grounds this quiet allegory in the pedestrian rhythms of work and sorrow.

4. 'SPELLBOUND' -- Jeffrey Blitz's documentary about eight young contestants in the National Spelling Bee is suspenseful, moving, funny and thrilling. In exploring an odd American subculture, it also paints a remarkably detailed picture of modern life in all its glory and eccentricity.

5. 'THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS' -- Another view of modern life, both eccentric and glorious, from the Québécois director Denys Arcand, whose portrait of a dying Montreal intellectual becomes both an elegy for the dreams of the 60's generation and a biting critique of that generation's failures.

6. 'THE MAN WITHOUT A PAST' -- Aki Kaurismaki's tale of an amnesiac who finds love and happiness among the homeless of Helsinki is a wry humanist parable shot in clean, midnight-sun colors and accompanied by the best soundtrack of the year. It should do for Finnish rockabilly what "O Brother, Where Art Thou" did for bluegrass.

7. 'THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE' -- Dazzling visual nonsense from Sylvain Chomet, whose first feature is a riot of grotesque animation and perverse storytelling, transmitted from a bizarre planet where the laws of physics and the rules of narrative don't quite apply. A planet called France.

8. 'FINDING NEMO' -- Pixar's latest triumph cleverly preaches to the parents while treating their children to wild and colorful adventure. The film's watery world is

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leading men children to wild and colorful adventure. The film's watery world is animated with state-of-the-art technology, but like all great movies, its real achievements are its vivid characters and its meticulous storytelling.

9. 'BUS 174' -- This Brazilian documentary, directed by Felipe Lacerda and José Padilha, explores the hijacking of a Rio de Janeiro bus in 2000. Alternating between television coverage and interviews with police, survivors, social scientists and acquaintances of the hijacker, the filmmakers construct a devastating account of the poverty and violence that wrack urban Brazil, and also of the decency that survives in the face of such cruelty.

10. 'A MIGHTY WIND' -- Christopher Guest's latest fake documentary, which assembles a gaggle of fictitious folkies for a reunion concert, is the best movie about bad music since "Spinal Tap." Eugene Levy and Catherine O'Hara, playing the star-crossed sweethearts Mitch and Mickey, add a note of bittersweet romanticism to the general silliness.

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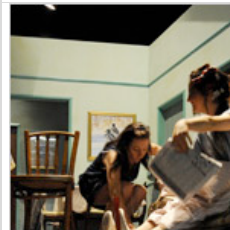
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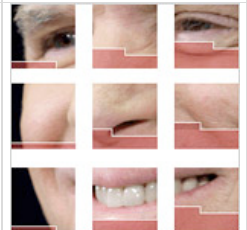
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