TOP 20 SATIRES OF ALL TIME

Satires are ruled by Murphy's Law: Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong. They poke fun at the ironies of life, exaggerate faults and weaknesses and tongue in cheek, turn tragedy into laughter. At times they take the form of spoofs like Scary Movie or the Austin Powers series, but the really good satires play like a drama, serious to the characters while the audience is left chuckling in disbelief as each relates their own experiences during his or her journey of life. Some of the movies we've picked were not marketed as Satire. We chose them because the underlying message of the movie remains a satirical commentary on the subject or situation covered.

Couples Company is pleased to present our top twenty list of the greatest Satire Movies of All Time.

1) M*A*S*H

- 1970: R
- Starring: Donald Sutherland, Elliott Gould, Tom Skerritt, Sally Kellerman, Robert Duvall, Gary Burghoff
- Director: Robert Altman
- 116 minutes

Few films have gone on to impact American culture like the original MASH. In 1970 we first met the characters of the 4077 in a biting commentary on the Vietnam War disguised as the Korean War in the film. The true genius of MASH is how Altman managed to take death, terror, blood and guts and turn it into a humorous dramatic masterpiece that gives life to the anxieties of running a field hospital and depth to the people whom struggle with mortality day to day. MASH is really a testament to strength people have when faced with adversity and how we cope with the unthinkable.

2) TIE: O BROTHER WHERE ART THOU?

- 2000: PG-13
- Starring: George Clooney, John Turturro, Tim Blake Nelson, John Goodman, Holly Hunter
- Director: Joel Coen, Ethan Coen
- 102 minutes

Homer's *Odyssey* is the inspiration for this hilarious film about three cons on the run in 1930s Mississippi backed up by an infectious soundtrack of backwoods bluegrass music and a cappella performances. Sexy, funny and a twisted glimpse at the redneck nature and know-it-alls, *Oh Brother Where Art Thou* is the perfect date movie and a tremendous opportunity to laugh the night away.

2) TIE: TO BE OR NOT TO BE

- 1942: G
- Starring: Carole Lombard, Jack Benny & Robert Stack

Copyright © 2003 Couples Company
All Rights Reserved

- Director: Ernst Lubitsch
- *99 Minutes*

Mix up a wife with a wandering eye, 1940's Europe, and espionage with a jealous actor and you have the backdrop of this WWII satire that ridicules the Nazi's and brings comic relief to war-torn America and Europe. Realize this film was made before we knew the true purpose of the concentration camps and before we realized nearly 12-million people of all faiths, races and various handicaps would become victims of Nazi racism. This film remains an interesting comment on US perceptions at the time and was quite risky for the director to make.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE is both the title and the password used by clandestine lovers, (a German officer and the actress) to arrange rendezvous. Only the husband starts to realize something is up when every time he begins the soliloquy on stage, a man leaves the theater. Carole Lombard's last role in the movies and she goes out on top with a stellar performance laced with witty dialog and quick jokes.

3) CHICAGO

- 2003: PG-13
- Starring: Renée Zellweger, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Richard Gere, Queen Latifah
- Director: Rob Marshall
- 113 minutes

This is one of those movies we had no idea would end up on this list having not seen the play and missing it in the theater. In fact, we went into it cold, rather reluctantly, not knowing what it was about or why it won Best Picture, as big budget musicals really aren't our thing. That said, imagine our surprise when we discovered, we love this movie, musical and all! Chicago mixes all of the distastefulness of celebrity and tabloid journalism in a satirical black comedy about getting away with murder by using the press and profiting from it afterwards. If you've ever had a cynical view of modern day journalism, Chicago, especially the scene with the reporter marionettes will leave you giggling the entire evening.

4) THIS IS SPINAL TAP

- 1984: R
- Starring: Rob Reiner, Michael McKean, Christopher Guest, Harry Shearer
- Director: Rob Reiner
- *88 minutes*

When this movie came out in 1984, we were in high school and too young to go see it so the first time we saw it was in 1987. For the pre-rap kids who grew up on Led Zeppelin, AC/DC, Foreigner and the then infant MTV, *This is Spinal Tap* remains the rockumentary that encapsulates the absurdity of teen obsession with bands, their lifestyle and the demigod status teens attribute to musicians. Much of this movie is adlibbed, with a real twist of irony: the band actually became quite popular in the LA club scene! Like the Monkey's: Monkey see, Monkey do? Is the film art imitating reality or reality imitating art? You decide. *This is Spinal Tap* remains a favorite with men and a benchmark in satirical realism!

5) FARGO

- 1996: R
- Starring: William H. Macy, Frances McDormand, Steve Buscemi, Peter Stormare, Kristin Rudrüd

Copyright © 2003 Couples Company
All Rights Reserved

- Director: Joel Coen, Ethan Coen
- 108 minutes

This is the story of a kidnapping gone terribly wrong and the pure encapsulation of dark comedy dripping with satire! The characters in Fargo epitomize the word character with special recognition for Frances McDormand's Oscar® winning performance as a pregnant police officer investigating the for-hire kidnapping and murder of a down-on-his-luck hapless car sales manager's wife. This is the first movie that really showed us what William H Macy is made of, as it left audiences craving more of the quirky humor and accents of the upper Midwest. Even those from the cheese belt and badlands found it realistic enough to laugh at themselves! Yah, sure, you betcha! You'll love this movie.

6) STALAG 17

- 1953: G
- Starring: William Holden, Don Taylor, Otto Preminger, Robert Strauss, Peter Graves
- Director: Billy Wilder
- 120 minutes

Fans of Hogan's Heroes will immediate recognize the genesis of their favorite sitcom in this 1953 poke at the POW experiences during WWII. Directed by Billy Wilder, Stalag 17 follows the adventures and misadventures of a group of US POW's waiting out the war and hassling their captors at every turn. The plot thickens when the Nazi's embed one of their own (Peter Graves) to spy on the prisoners and find out how a sabotage act against the Reich was committed. Somehow the prisoners must sneak one of their own out of the camp to save him from being hung for espionage. When they discover the mole, the way becomes clear. Stalag 17 is a classic wartime film that is both dramatic and wickedly funny.

7) CATCH-22

- 1970: R
- Starring: Alan Arkin, Martin Balsam, Orson Welles, Jon Voight, Bob Newhart, Anthony Perkins, Richard Benjamin, and Martin Sheen
- Director: Mike Nichols
- 121 minutes

This is one of those films you either love or hate. Here's the premise: We've all been there. A goal is in sight and you keep plugging away to get to it and just when you are about to get to it, the rules change and you have to start over, and over and over again! Catch-22 is slang for "Damned if you do and Damned if you don't", basically a no-win situation. For anyone who has served in the military or been accosted by the great bureaucracy of the Federal Government, Catch-22 seethes with irony. Set during WWII it covers a bomber pilot's quest to run enough missions to finally be discharged, only the government keeps changing the rules. Many of the performances are phenomenal. One tip, turn on Close Captioning. Many of the jokes are so quick you'll miss them without the subtitles!

8) WAG THE DOG

- 1997: R
- Starring: Dustin Hoffman, Robert De Niro, Anne Heche, Denis Leary, Willie Nelson, Andrea Martin, Kirsten Dunst, William H. Macy
- Director: Barry Levinson
- 110 minutes

Copyright © 2003 Couples Company
All Rights Reserved

Prior to January 2003, we thought this film was rather funny as it takes issue with the Clinton presidency, the Monica incident and the bombing of an Aspirin factory. Then we watched the plot play out, only rather than attacking some Soviet Block country enmeshed in civil war, to our horror we saw step-by-step the orchestration of *Wag the Dog*, even down to the song which hit number one on the Country charts, play out in our rush to smash Iraq. Only this time, there is no sexual scandal. Cross reference today's reality where the current cover-up begins in 1996 with our Vice President's involvement with an elite 28 member team called JINSA and its plan for global regime changes using US forces beginning with Iraq and ending with China. Never heard of JINSA? Our point exactly. You'll have to read international press like the BBC to find out what is happening in the US!

Like in the movie, rather than investigate and question the war, blindly the American public watches carefully orchestrated news footage of falling statues and screaming crowds planned to fall within camera shot. Like in the movie, the news media plays straight into the government's PR requirements and works hand-in-hand with the government to sell its war and deflect American attention from the economy and real issues at hand.

Yet turning the mirror on reality is what makes great satire as its absurdity is bought hook, line and sinker by the masses despite our knowing better. *Wag the Dog* captures this and reminds us, especially today to question what we're fed and asked to believe. This film is captivatingly funny and ominously sobering at the same time.

9) AIRPLANE

- 1980: PG
- Starring: Robert Hays, Julie Hagerty, Lloyd Bridges, Leslie Nielsen
- Director: David Zucker, Jim Abrahams
- 88 minutes

Considered one of the best comedy movies ever made, Airplane takes a satirical look at Hollywood blockbusters and classics while jabbing fun at the disaster movies so prevalent in the mid-1970's. This film is full of one-liners and catchy sight gags, (the airplane fin weaving through the clouds to the "Jaws" theme is a stand out!) interspersed with tongue and cheek commentary on pop-culture at the time. Yet it is timeless. Airplane watches today as well as it did in the early eighties and still socks you with a belly laugh that lasts the whole night through.

10) HEATHERS

- 1989: R
- Starring: Winona Ryder, Christian Slater, Shannen Doherty, Lisanne Falk, Kim Walker
- Director: Michael Lehmann
- 103 minutes

How can something so beautiful be so wicked? Most of us having graduated from high school have asked ourselves the same question. It seems in each class there is a pack of rich, beautiful, narcissistic witches roaming the halls that make everyone else's life miserable. But, take heart. Heathers is an black comedy about just that, only in this case, the witches get what is coming to them! Heathers refers to the in-crowd, all of whom happen to be named Heather except Veronica played by Winona Ryder. Beautiful and

Copyright © 2003 Couples Company
All Rights Reserved

spiteful, these girls rule the school and begin a trend of suicides for amusement by taunting their classmates. Yet in this pre-Columbine world, a lone male student with serious psychological issues and dark ways emerges and works to convince Veronica that the ultimate stunt is to plant a bomb in the school and blow up the entire class in one mass suicide. This is a delicious, wickedly funny look at high school and the perversion of teen angst. Perfect viewing prior to your 10-year High School reunion, though not necessary for the twenty year. Fortunately for society, even the witches grow up by then!

11) DOG DAY AFTERNOON

- 1975: R
- Starring: Al Pacino, John Cazale
- Director: Sidney Lumet
- 130 Minutes

Based upon a True Story: If you're looking for happy endings, this isn't your movie. But if you're looking for laughs and comedy in errors, you'll love Dog Day Afternoon. You see, these three guys go in to rob a bank, only as soon as the hold up starts, one decides he can't do it and leaves. Now there are two. So the empty the safe of its eleven hundred dollars...the bank had already transferred the funds early that day and this is just the beginning. Al Pacino is at his comic best as the leader of the bank robbers, constantly insisting to the bank employees he has a plan as they start to help him get out of this mess. The satire evolves through witty dialog and absurdity meshed with light drama and provides an entertaining evening on the couch. TOP

12) HISTORY OF THE WORLD PART I

- 1981: R
- Starring: Mel Brooks, Gregory Hines, Madeline Kahn, Harvey Korman, Cloris Leachman
- Director: Mel Brooks
- 92 Minutes

Monte Python is the eternal prankster and History of the World Part One is the troop's crowning achievement. Python makes history fun by making fun of it through their trade mark sight gags and 'roundabout dialog which can make the viewer dizzy. Rather than give it away, take an afternoon and prepare to laugh at everything from Moses and the 15, oops 10 commandments to the Roman Empire's reign. Just don't use any of the answers on a history test! TOP

13) 6 DEGREES OF SEPARATION

1. 1993: R
2. Starring: Stockard Channing, Will Smith, Donald Sutherland, Richard Masur, Anthony Michael Hall, Heather Graham
3. Director: Fred Schepisi
4. 112 Minutes

Will Smith delivers one of his best performances in this film as a slick con man praying upon a wealthy group of benefactors estranged from their college age children under the premise that each of us is only 6 people away from knowing anyone in the world. ergo the title. As each rich couple tries to figure out who this kid is, they encounter more and more people he has used. Yet, he grows on them and their fascination with him points out the faults in their own lives. The dialog is witty and the premise will have you pondering the possibilities...but you may need to watch it several times to get the ending! TOP

Copyright © 2003 Couples Company
All Rights Reserved

14) TO DIE FOR

- 1995: R
- Starring: Nicole Kidman, Matt Dillon, Joaquin Phoenix, Casey Affleck, Illeana Douglas, Alison Folland
- Director: Gus Van Sant
- 106 Minutes

Nicole Kidman shows us her comedic side, (and wins a Golden Globe® for Best Actress) in this dark comedy paralleling a real life murder situation. Like Fargo, To Die For takes real events and puts a twist on them with Nicole playing the central narcissistic character who believes only people who are on TV count because who would want to watch anyone who didn't count. Viciously funny, this movie illustrates the American public's fascination with the media, celebrity and ultimately our desire for justice, mob style. TOP

15) THE PLAYER

- 1992: R
- Starring: Tim Robbins, Greta Scacchi, Fred Ward, Whoopi Goldberg, Peter Gallagher
- Director: Robert Altman
- 116 Minutes

How do you get away with murder when your a big wig executive of a motion picture studio? This is the storyline The Player addresses. Half the fun of this movie is spotting all of the cameo appearances by Hollywood royalty, most of whom play themselves in this venomous look at the cutthroat culture that makes Hollywood what it is today.

Cameos By: Richard Anderson, Rene Auberjonois, Harry Belafonte, Shari Belafonte, Karen Black, Michael Bowen, Gary Busey, Robert Carradine, Charles Champlin, Cher, James Coburn, Cathy Lee Crosby, John Cusack, Brad Davis, Paul Dooley, Thereza Ellis, Peter Falk, Felicia Farr, Katarzyna Figura, Louise Fletcher, Dennis Franz, Teri Garr, Leeza Gibbons, Jeff Goldblum, Elliott Gould, Joel Grey, David Alan Grier, Buck Henry, Anjelica Huston, Kathy Ireland, Steve James, Maxine John-James, Sally Kellerman, Sally Kirkland, Jack Lemmon, Marlee Matlin, Andie MacDowell, Malcolm McDowell, Jayne Meadows, Martin Mull, Jennifer Nash, Nick Nolte, Alexandra Powers, Bert Remsen, Guy Remsen, Patricia Resnick, Burt Reynolds, Jack Riley, Mimi Rogers, Annie Ross, Alan Rudolph, Jill St. John, Susan Sarandon, Adam Simon, Rod Steiger, Joan Tewkesbury, Brian Tochi, Lily Tomlin, Robert Wagner, Ray Walston, Bruce Willis, Marvin Young, Scott Shaw, Patrick Swayze, Julia Roberts and Althea Gibson. TOP

16) DEATH TRAP

- 1982: PG
- Starring: Michael Caine, Christopher Reeve, Dyan Cannon, Irene Wort
- Director: Sidney Lumet
- 116 Minutes

This is our favorite Christopher Reeve film of all time. Reeve plays a homosexual play write trying to steal a play by a once prominent play write (Michael Cain), but in so doing the two devise a plan to kill Cain's wife. Only the local psychic keeps showing up. This film twists and turns toward climax and a surprise ending. Fast paced and riding on the strengths of great acting and a strong script, Death Trap will keep you mesmerized through the duration. TOP

Copyright © 2003 Couples Company
All Rights Reserved

17) EATING RAOUL

- 1982: R
- Starring: Mary Woronov, Paul Bartel, Robert Beltran. Ed Begley Jr.
- Director: Paul Bartel
- 83 Minutes

Ever had neighbors you can't stand? How about a whole apartment building full of them? Paul and Mary are a married couple and Paul loses his job. Then Mary gets raped by one of her neighbors, you see the entire building is full of swingers and this affronts Mary and Paul's morality. When Paul accidentally kills the swinging rapist, they discover their neighbors are quite wealthy and that murder might be a way to solve two problems: create a better living environment and get rich at the same time. Of course, you have to do something with the bodies...maybe open a restaurant?

Eating Raoul is funny and very sinister. It's a terrific satire on life, neighbors, convenient morals and the quest for the American dream. TOP

18) THE PINK PANTHER

- 1964: NR
- Starring: David Niven, Peter Sellers
- Director: Blake Edwards
- 113 minutes

Clouseau is a parody of the Agatha Christie sensation, Poirot, solving crimes and aggravating the police with satirical humor and site gags that basically make fun of detective novels. Suspicious, blundering, with a pompous little mustache and a sometimes impenetrable accent, Clouseau was always one step behind everybody else in the room. The Pink Panther introduced Clouseau hot on the trail of a famous jewel thief (David Niven), who may be planning to make off with an expensive gem known as the Pink Panther. Set in a European ski resort, this bubbly comedy is a wonderful dose of '60s style, from the famous Henry Mancini theme music to the presence of two of Europe's top sex symbols of the era, Claudia Cardinale and Capucine. TOP

19) REALITY BITES

- 1994: PG-13
- Starring: Winona Ryder, Ethan Hawke, Janeane Garofalo, Steve Zahn, Ben Stiller, Swoosie Kurtz
- Director: Ben Stiller
- 99 minutes

If Heather's is about high school, Reality Bites is about life as a twenty-something in 1990's America. Reality Bites is generation-X's view of the world (Gen X is people born between 1965 and 1974) where everything is full of confusion, handed down and not much to get excited about. A world filled with a pop culture currency of bad music and poetry slams. A world where as the second lost generation members of this tiny group are over shadowed by their elders (Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964) or worse yet ascribed to the next big boom, Gen Y (1975-1993). If you're a Gen Xer, you'll get this movie; if not, it may be hard to relate. Watch for appearances by David Spade, Renee Zellweger, Kevin Pollak, Jeanne Triplehorn.

Copyright © 2003 Couples Company
All Rights Reserved

20) THE FRISCO KID

- 1979: PG
- Starring: Gene Wilder, Harrison Ford
- Director: Robert Aldrich
- 119 Minutes

This was a toss up between two Gene Wilder Films that make fun of westerns: Blazing Saddles and The Frisco Kid. We chose the Frisco Kid as it is the lesser known of the two and we love the Rabbi/Cowboy angle.

Gene Wilder, a naive 19th-century Polish rabbi makes a sincere and sympathetic hero, his faith and courage seeing him through one crisis after another, and fresh-faced Ford makes an endearing scamp of a bank robber. The meandering adventure, overlong at two hours, takes its time as the duo traverses the gorgeous American countryside and end up in the bustling Barbary Coast San Francisco of the Gold Rush era. This film adds a new twist to Westerns and both endears and makes fun of them using comic satire and absurdity.

THE BIG PICTURE

- 1989: PG-13
- Starring: Kevin Bacon, Emily Longstreth, J.T. Walsh, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Michael McKean, Kim Miyori, Teri Hatcher
- Director: Christopher Guest
- 100 Minutes

A satire about the pitfalls of believing your own hype. Kevin Bacon plays a high-minded would-be filmmaker whose student movie wins a prestigious national award and an invitation to Hollywood. Before he knows it, he is being wined and dined by agents, producers, and studio executives, who treat him like the new Orson Welles--until he starts making his first studio movie. Then he becomes bait for the piranha-like bottom-liners, who teach him the unfortunate lesson that the flavor of the week often gets eaten alive.

THE HUDSUCKER PROXY

- 1994: PG
- Starring: Tim Robbins, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Paul Newman, Charles Durning
- Director: Joel Coen, Ethan Coen
- 112 Minutes

The Coen Brothers Strike again in this salute to the fast-talking comedies of the '40s, we follow Norville Barnes (Tim Robbins) and his amazing rise to the top. But he's only a puppet for the evil Sidney J. Mussburger (Paul Newman), who wants the company for himself.

Copyright © 2003 Couples Company
All Rights Reserved