We've all been there. Late Saturday afternoon, standing at Blockbuster looking at nearly empty shelves where the only new releases available are tweener movies or slasher flicks.

So what do you do? Most of the time, we either pick up something that is pure garbage ("Fantastic Four" or "The Island") or else walk back out and stop at the store to grab even more alcohol to deaden some of the boredom we're about to encounter. Because now our evening is going to consist of channel surfing 'til our fingers bleed or putting in the nearly worn out DVD of "Spider-Man" or "Lord of the Rings" (or, in my house anyway, my wife subjects me to the 200th viewing of either "Ocean's 11" or "Ocean's 12"). After such an exiting evening, the Miller Brewing Company's stock rises 3 points on Monday once they get the results of how much beer I've consumed just to make the whole thing bearable.

So with those shudder inducing images in your head, let's look at some movies you might have missed up until now that I think most people would enjoy. For the most part, these are not blockbusters or even classics, but good to very good films that have gotten less play then they should have for one reason or another. The comedies I'm mentioning would be qualified as "light comedies"…not the guffaws and cringes you get from a "40 Year Old Virgin" or "American Pie", but simpler films that won't split your sides with laughter, but will make you smile, make you think, and definitely entertain you. There are also some action films and dramas on the list, depending upon your mood. Again, these aren't the types like "Hotel Rwanda" or "Million Dollar Baby" that are great, but too much of a downer for most people on a Saturday night. Rather these are the types that you will enjoy sitting back and watching without needing to check to see if Dr. Kevorkian's number is on speed dial after you're finished.

NOTE: With all of these, including the secondary ones I'm including at the bottom, I'm recommending to NEVER watch them on pay television, as the editing and commercials totally ruin them.

Light Comedies:

High Fidelity (2000). One of my all-time favorites is this John Cusack film about the exploits of a neurotic DJ/vinyl record store owner as he copes with breaking up with his girlfriend. I only wish I were so glib and well adjusted (relatively) when I broke up with a girlfriend. But then again, a movie about a man drinking too much, crying a lot, and stalking to the point of getting restraining orders delivered wouldn't exactly be "Citizen Kane" now, would it?

Great use of breaking down the fourth wall as Cusack constantly talks to the camera about his problems and potential solutions, and some funny brief fantasy scenes as well (including Cusack talking to Bruce Springsteen). Jack Black is at his best as one of the grungy/elitist record store clerks. The eclectic casting continues with Catherine Zeta-Jones, Lily Taylor, and Lisa Bonnet playing love interests, with Tim Robbins taking a very bizarre and hilarious turn as the ex-girlfriend's new love interest.

Almost Famous (2000). Staying with the music theme for a moment with Cameron Crowe's magnificent semi-autobiographical about a 15 year old boy (Patrick Fugit) who is unknowingly hired by Rolling Stone magazine to review an up and coming band during their tour (Crowe actually did write for Rolling Stone as a teen, covering groups such as

the Allman Brothers Band and Deep Purple). As the wide eyed prodigy embarks on the first adventure of his life, he gets closer to the band members then he should risking his attempt to maintain neutrality. He also forms a bond with lead groupie, “Penny Lane” (Kate Hudson) and the other two “Band-Aid” members that travel with them. Billy Crudup and Jason Lee are the faces of the band as the Jimmy Page and Robert Plant type guitarist and lead singer, respectively.

In Good Company (2004). We should all be so lucky to age as gracefully as Dennis Quaid. He plays the advertising manager of a sports magazine who is displaced by a young hotshot (Topher Grace) after a buy-out. Not only is he trying to deal with that blow to his ego (his replacement is clueless, so Quaid has to teach him); he’s also just learned that his wife (Marg Helgenburger) is pregnant. Making the financial and emotional strain worse is having his daughter (Scarlett Johansson) starting college and also starting to date Topher. Director Paul Weitz did well in not making anyone a stereotype, allowing all the characters to be three dimensional and sympathetic, and in having an ending that is appropriate and satisfying, without being predictable or condescending.

Bend It Like Beckham (2002). May be a bit slow for some, but a charming tale of an second generation Indian girl (Parmindar Nagra, from “ER”) living in London, the cultural clashes she has with her parents regarding boys and her love of playing soccer (she is good enough to attract the interest of college recruiters…and since she’s from Europe, maybe Jim O’Brien will float her a “loan”). The film also focuses on her friendship with a tomboy soccer star teammate (Keira Knightley in her first prominent movie role…and playing a gangly, non-glamorous teenager as well…something you’ll never, ever see again). If your wife/girlfriend is pushing you to get “My Big, Fat, Greek

Wedding", offer this instead. Trust me; you'll both be grateful.

Big Fish (2003). A recommendation with an asterisk, if you will. I'm not a huge Tim Burton fan…in fact, I still think "Mars Attacks" is one of the worst movies ever made, but I still enjoyed this strange story of a tall-tale telling salesman, his "adventures", and his relationship with his wife and son. Billy Crudup plays the son, with Albert Finney and Jessica Lange playing the parents in the present time, and Ewan McGregor and Alison Lohman portraying them in their youth. Kind of slow starting out, and very weird in many ways with the fantasies woven by the old man, but if you can hang with it, it really pays off at the end.

Drama/Action Movies

25th Hour (2002). Excellent Spike Lee film about the last 24 hours of freedom for a petty drug dealer (Edward Norton) in New York City. If you enjoy dramatic character studies, this is a film for you. On the last night before checking in to start a seven year sentence, Norton's character reevaluates his life and his relationships with his father, his friends, and his girlfriend. Solid supporting performances from Philip Seymour Hoffman and Barry Pepper as his friends, and Brian Cox as his father. Having Tony Saragusa (Fatagusa) from the Baltimore Ratbirds in it almost ruined it for me…but he sucks in it; so it's not so bad.

The Cooler (2003). William H. Macy stars as a sad sack whose luck is perceived to be so bad that he works at an

old-school Las Vegas casino as a ‘cooler’, a person who is believed to be able to change the luck of a hot gambler just by being near him. Alec Baldwin is at his charismatic/creepy best as the casino manager and Maria Bello smolders as the cocktail waitress who inexplicably falls for Macy (who should have received an Oscar nomination for this performance). Once again, a character study that isn’t high on action (although there are isolated, sudden bursts of action that will shock you)…so if those type of movies normally don’t appeal to you, skip to the next recommendation.

Layer Cake (2004). British caper film with Daniel Craig, the new James Bond, as a middle level drug dealer in London. He’s wanting to retire, but his ‘boss’ demands one more dangerous task from him; finding a buyer for a million ecstasy tablets stolen from a very pissed off Serbian mobster. Like many of this genre, it’s sometimes tough to get past the thick lower class British accents, but if you liked “Snatch” and “Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels”, check this out. Not as many laughs as those two films, but intriguing nonetheless.

Bringing Out the Dead (1999). Nicolas Cage stars in Martin Scorsese’s dark comedy/action/drama centered around three nights in the life of a burnt out New York ambulance driver (Cage). Scorsese has a way of painting New York unlike any other filmmaker, and in this portrait the brush is one of surrealism as Cage navigates the mean streets of Hells Kitchen

as a modern day Charon on the River Styx. Just like the drummers in Spinal Tap (or CTU heads on '24'), he has a different (and weird) partner each night, with John Goodman, Ving Rhames, and Tom Sizemore adding to the stress and strangeness. (And I deserve some major literary points for throwing in an analogy to Greek Mythology, an absurd 'rockumentary', and a weekly TV show in just two sentences).

We Were Soldiers (2002). I love Mel Gibson bashing as well as anyone…and I avoided this one in the theatres due to the fact that I totally, completely hated "The Patriot" (when needing extra drama…let's just kill another one of his kids!). But I was wrong. This is an engaging look at the first major battle of the Vietnam War as seen from both sides, with Gibson outstanding as Lt. Col. Hal Moore. If you enjoyed "Black Hawk Down", you will want to see this as well.

Other titles to consider:

The Upside of Anger (2005) – Drama with comic bits. Chick flick that most guys could get into.

Finding Neverland (2004) – Drama. Also more for women than the guys (but no "First Wives Club"). Give them an entire box of

Kleenex prior to starting (and keep a few for yourself).

Phone Booth (2003) – Excellent tense drama with Colin Farrell, Forest Whitaker, and the voice of Jack Bauer…er…Kiefer Sutherland at his velvet, maniacal best.

Open Range (2003) – Kevin Costner and Robert Duval on horses…so it falls within the exception part of the rule that states “All Kevin Costner movies that don’t have him on a horse or playing a sport sucks”.

Finding Forrester (2000) – Urban version of “Good Will Hunting” with Sean Connery as a J.D. Salinger type recluse.

Chocolat (2000) - Major chick-flick, but another great Johnny Depp performance.

Wonder Boys (2000) – Strange black

comedy/drama/caper flick with Michael Douglas and Toby McGuire (pre Spider-Man)

Galaxy Quest (1999) – Tim Allen and Sigourney Weaver in a hilarious send-up on William Shatner and StarTrek fans in general.

Pleasantville (1998) – Toby McGuire and Reece Witherspoon get literally sucked into a “Father Knows Best” type black and white TV show

Lone Star (1996) – Slow paced character study/drama/murder mystery with Chris Cooper as a convincing leading man.

That Thing You Do! (1996) – Guilty pleasure for me, as I love this saccharine coated tale of a one-hit wonder’s rise and fall.