As is tradition for me here at TheClevelandFan.com, I use the last weekend of the year to look back on what we saw at the theaters in 2009.

An interesting year, overall. So far, it's not had as many "excellent" films as 2008, and probably a lot more pieces of crap than last year.

That said, 2009 was a very good year for original films, and even if the top of the box office charts are cluttered with sequels and remakes, there were quite a few gems to be found.

As always, my Top 10 list only includes the movies I've seen as of this point in 2009. But unlike most years, I doubt this list will change that much in January.

From what I'm hearing regarding movie buzz, the only other ones that might crack the Top 10 are "The Hurt Locker" (released to DVD on Jan. 12), "A Single Man", and "The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus".

You can compare that to last year when "Slumdog Millionaire", "Frost/Nixon", "Revolutionary Road", "Gran Torino", and "Milk" all made the Top 10 after the new year.

So with that disclaimer in mind...

Top Ten movies of 2009:

1. Up in the Air. Very much a movie for our current times. Jason Reitman hits all the right buttons with this comical drama about a corporate consultant hired to fire people at companies that are downsizing. George Clooney is at his best in giving this man a heart and a soul, as are Vera Farmiga and Anna Kendrick as the women who are connected to him.

Look for the full review next week.

2. Avatar . It was very hard to justify putting this up so high, given the rather pedestrian storyline...but the more I think of it, the more I LIKE the simple story, as it lets you focus on the marvels of discovering a new and exciting world. I'm not just talking about the moon planet "Pandora"; I'm also referring to the incredible imagery and mythology created by James Cameron. It's the most breathtaking movie, technology-wise, since "Jurassic Park".

3. Invictus . A sports movie like none other I've seen in a long, long time. Morgan Freeman may have been born to play Nelson Mandela, and his work will surely result in an Oscar nomination for Best Actor.

Matt Damon also surprises as the captain of the national rugby team charged with the responsibility of bringing the entire country together in support of them in the 1995 World Cup held in a South Africa still trying to recover from the wounds of years of Apartheid.

4. Star Trek . JJ Abrams did what I thought was impossible; re-invigorating the stale Star Trek franchise, updating it for the Star Wars crowd with more action than ever before.

The casting was spot-on in every instance, and he came up with a ploy that will allow him to go off in unknown directions for future movies without compromising the legacy of the original cast.

5. Inglorius Basterds . Other than knowing that Brad Pitt was leading a group of Jewish soldiers conducting terrorism against Nazis in occupied France, I knew nothing of the rest of the plot. That made this film such a treat as Quentin Tarantino introduced marvelous characters, and a revenge fantasy that may change the way "historical" events are treated in future films.

6. Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince . A difficult book to film, as this is the lead up to the finale of the entire series (the final book will be split into two films).

Even so, it stood alone well, as director David Yates and his young charges expertly set the stage in this episode, which was simultaneously dark, profound, funny, and touching as the young wizards grapple not only with Voldemort, but with something more insidious; puberty.

7. Up. Pixar does it again with this tale of an octogenarian and his efforts to fulfill the dreams held for so many years by his recently deceased wife. While I disagree with many

critics who call this Pixar's best film, it does contain the greatest montage ever.

If you aren't sniffling after the first 10 minutes of this movie; check yourself to see if you really have a heart.

8. State of Play . Excellent thriller with Russell Crowe as an investigative reporter looking into the murder of a Congressman's aide. Complexities arise as the Congressman is a close friend of Crowe's, (perfectly played by Ben Affleck at his slickest), who was having an affair with her.

9. Watchmen . A disappointment to the studio as this movie underperformed in that regard, but no matter. The tone of the "unfilmable" graphic novel was nearly perfect, the visuals incredible, and the story totally unexpected. Dark and complex, it's no wonder it didn't catch on with the mainstream.

10. The Road. The most depressing movie I've seen in years, but one I was riveted to from the first frame. Viggo Mortensen plays a father leading his 10 year old son across a dead planet a decade after untold events destroyed almost everything.

It's not a movie I'd want to see again, but it is one that I'm glad I had the courage to watch.

Just missed; "District 9", "The Blind Side", "The Hangover".

Bottom Five Movies of 2009.

5. Push. Awful take-off on the superhero genre. Generic, and constantly bouncing between completely boring and mind-numbingly confusing.

4. The Taking of Pelham 123 . I expected more out of Tony Scott and Denzel Washington than this lame remake of a 1970s classic. And John Travolta is quickly becoming a joke as an actor.

3. Transformers 2. Speaking of someone just going through the motions to get a paycheck...Michael Bay made the horrible, confusing "all effects; no story, no acting" film we first feared the original would be. And yet, it was the #1 film at the box office this year. Go figure.

2. The International. Clive Owen and Naomi Watts...I had such high expectations for this film.

What I got was a plot that wouldn't have worked for a 60 minute TV show.

Not only illogical, but also boring as hell.

1. 2012 . Roland Emmerich makes the end of the world into something that just wouldn't bother me that much, as he outdoes Michael Bay for making a film where the only thing that matters are the effects, combined with people that you not only don't care about...you also may actively dislike.

Just missed: "Surrogates", "Twilight Sage: New Moon", "Terminator Salvation".

Box Office Bombs of the Year

1. Astro Boy. $65 million budget for this attempt to take another old Saturday morning cartoon to box office riches. Didn't work out that way as it's made only $19 million domestically and less than $2 million overseas.

2. Land of the Lost. Will Ferrell's latest Ego Project cost over $100 million to make. Even with the clever way Hollywood tries to mask their actual profit/loss sheets, this one is looking to soak the studios for around $50 million.

Well worth it if we never see another Will Farrell movie (don't hold your breath).

3. Imagine That. What year would be complete without a horrible Eddie Murphy movie? May be this is the price the studios must pay to get Murphy to work on the only thing that ever makes money for them; Shrek movies?

4. Amelia. Several months ago, this Amelia Earhart biography was being pimped early for Oscar consideration. Then it was released, and everyone saw how bad it really was. No third Best Actress award this year for Hilary Swank.

5 (tie). Where the Wild Things Are and **The Fantastic Mr. Fox**. Both of these movies were critical successes that lost money at the box office.

Both were the "adult" adaptations of childhood stories made by well respected directors (Spike Jonze and Wes Anderson, respectively).

Lesson learned?

Don't make kiddie movies that are too mature for the little ones...as the adults won't see them either.

Winner of the Year: Sandra Bullock. Two unexpected films that made a ton of money, "The Proposal" and "The Blind Side", the later also resulting in a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress, and talks of Oscar. These two films more than made up for the stinker that was "What About Steve".

Runner-up: George Clooney

Loser of the Year: Seth Rogen. "The Next Big Thing" from 2008 crashed and burned in 2009 with "Observe and Report", a movie that was an unfunny copy of Kevin James' early surprise hit "Paul Blart: Mall Cop". Rogen later co-starred with Adam Sandler in Judd Apatow's dramedy "Funny People", which was a decent movie, but did not strike a chord with audiences. Runner-up: Will Ferrell.

Guilty Pleasure of the Year: ""Taken". Liam Neeson as a kick ass action hero? You better believe it, as revenge fantasies don't play out any better than this one.

Who wouldn't wish the carnage reeked upon Paris by Neeson's Bryan Mills in search of his kidnapped daughter?

Best Made-for-TV Movie: "Taking Chance". Incredibly touching little film on HBO with Kevin Bacon playing a Marine colonel serving as the escort of a fallen soldier back to his home.

Watch it, salute our military heroes, and then wipe the tears from your eyes.

Overrated Film of the Year: "Twilight Saga: New Moon". See my article of the Wussification of Vampires .

And this film has made almost $700 million world-wide?

Why????

Have a Happy New Year, and see ya' in the popcorn line next year!