

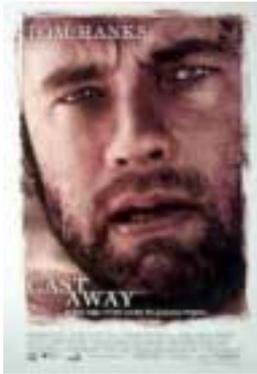


## Film Reviews

*Review date 3rd April 2001 ... This time we take a look at two films which cover the Robinson Crusoe theme **Cast Away** (2000) and **Castaway** (1985)*

### Cast Away (2000)

Starring Tom Hanks and Helen Hunt with direction by Robert Zemeckis



**REVIEWED BY  
DAVID  
WAINWRIGHT**

*Cast Away* is a modern take on Robinson Crusoe. Hanks is a busy manager of Fed Ex, the mail despatch company, in which he's an exacting systems engineer, counting the minutes and seconds. Hanks is helping to establish a new operation in Moscow, cajoling the Russians out of their traditional lethargy. Romantically attached to Helen Hunt and planning to marry her, Hanks dashes home to Memphis to be with her for Christmas, only to be urgently called away to a problem in Tahiti. He promises Hunt to be home for New Year, a promise that's destined to be dashed.

Whilst on the flight, the aircraft gets into difficulties over the Pacific in a tropical storm. Unable to maintain control, the pilot ditches into the ocean, a harrowing and startlingly realistic moment in which Hanks manages to extricate himself from the flooded fuselage, escaping from the sinking aircraft with an inflatable dinghy



into the storm-tossed seas. Exhausted and in a state of shock, Hanks is washed up on a small island where he finds himself alone, abandoned, and with few provisions.

Thus starts a four year odyssey of having to learn basic survival techniques in total isolation. The island has few foodstuffs - coconuts and a lagoon containing fish and shellfish - and no running water. Faced with a formidable job of survival, *Cast Away's* middle section becomes a one man show with Hanks managing to scratch out a basic existence using the island's few resources and some wreckage washed ashore from the aircraft. More challenging still is for Hanks to maintain his sanity and to preserve the hope that one day he will be rescued. To that end, he forms a friendship with a volleyball! Found amongst the washed-up Fed Ex packages, Hanks paints a face on the ball which becomes his sole companion during the long, lonely years.

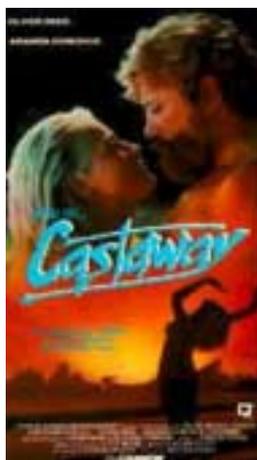
Four years on, after a violent tropical storm, some corrugated sheeting is washed ashore, the remains of a portable lavatory. Realising that he may be able to fashion a sail from the sheets and with

sufficient wood to build a raft lashed together with the stripped out remains of video cassettes, Hanks decides on a do or die effort to escape the island, fearing that he may end his days there, alone and forgotten. But he has to negotiate a dangerous reef offshore. The Pacific belies its name and sends waves crashing onto the reef, an obstacle which caused Hanks to come to grief on a previous escape attempt in which his leg was gashed open. Finally, Hanks escapes to the open sea, but the island is very remote and passing ships are few and far between. Floating on his gradually disintegrating raft for some days, he's finally rescued by a giant tanker ship.

He returns home to a hero's welcome, but it's a bittersweet fate that befalls him. The memory of Hunt and a fading photograph of her helped sustain him through the loneliness, but her life has since moved on and she's no longer free to be his. Both struggle to come to terms with their renewed acquaintance, but they have to accommodate to their changed circumstances and accept that they cannot resume life from where they left it.

*Cast Away* works very well, particularly in what is mostly a one man film. Hanks is very strong through the highs and lows of his isolation. It was a very exacting part requiring the loss of 50lbs in weight to represent the passing of four years with very modest food supplies. It was brave on the part of director Zemeckis to turn over the large central section of *Cast Away* to Hanks. It would have been all too easy to alternate between isolation and civilisation and have a film about thwarted search and rescue. Instead it's a tale of an indomitable human spirit and a reduction of life to its bare essentials -- in stark contrast to the hectic lifestyle that preceded it in which time is measured in minutes and seconds, not years.

Hanks is a consummate actor and handles the changing moods of the part very well. Unfortunately, although the opening and closing sections in civilisation seem almost perfunctory, competent yet lightweight tales of romance and sadness, they are essential bookends to the core of *Cast Away*. Some might baulk too, at what appears at times to be an extended promotional film for Federal Express, the product placement being so prominent throughout. On balance *Cast Away* is a fine film, but it's the solo Hanks who'll linger long in the memory and he well merited his Oscar nomination for a touching, sad, yet uplifting performance.



## **Castaway 1985**

Starring Oliver Reed and Amanda Donohue with direction by Nicholas Roeg

REVIEWED BY  
**STEPHEN BERRY**

### **Castaway or the Rediscovery of the Market**

Ever want to get away from it all? Lucy Irvine (played by Amanda Donohue) does. It's London in the early 1980s. She is a lowly clerk in the Inland Revenue with the work boring and likely to remain so. Outside, the weather is typically English and when she turns on the TV, she is treated to news items from the modern world. There is an attempt on the life of the Pope, bomb explosions from the IRA and the latest exploits of the Yorkshire Ripper, all covered in loving detail.

Lucy reads an advertisement in the London *Time Out* magazine. Gerald Kingsland (played by Oliver Reed) wants a 'wife' to share a year with him on a deserted tropical island. Gerald has signed a contract with a publishing company to write a book about the

experience and, in return, the company will fund this little excursion to paradise.

Lucy and Gerald meet at a London hotel and it all seems to go swimmingly - at least from Gerald's point of view. Gerald is divorced and in his mid-forties. Lucy is 20 years younger and it's made pretty clear in the film that he chooses her because she is young and pretty. And perhaps the fact that Lucy decides to sleep with him to ensure that she can get to the island of her dreams also influences his decision. The rest of the film, excellently directed by Nicholas Roeg, develops the two themes of the story: the desperate and doomed attempt to escape from the modern world; the stormy and often comical relationship between Gerald and Lucy.

The intrepid duo set out to Tuin island off the north coast of Australia for their year in paradise and, once they have arrived, Lucy lays her cards on the table. There is to be no sex on Tuin, thank you very much. Poor Gerald! Lucy in turn discovers that Gerald is bone idle and behaves rather like the average bloke watching football in the pub who has found himself inexplicably and surprisingly transported to a desert island. Poor Lucy!

Life on the island is not easy. Gerald cuts his leg which won't heal properly and, with no modern world, there are no antibiotics. His favourite vegetable patch remains unresponsive to his attentions. Ditto Lucy. This must be particularly galling for Gerald as Lucy seems to have forgotten to pack enough clothes for the trip and consequently has to wander around the island in various stages of undress.

Their physical condition gradually deteriorates and it becomes clear that Tuin is turning into the desert island of their nightmares. Rescue comes in the nick of time. Some medically-trained nuns arrive, bringing with them items from a modern world which Gerald and Lucy sought to leave behind: antibiotics; vitamin pills and bandages.

But deliverance is not just of the medical variety. The nuns are accompanied by natives from a local island who have brought with them the possibility of the market, that ultimate source of the modern world. Gerald is a dab hand with engines and all things mechanical. The natives from a nearby island have lots of engines which don't work and they don't know how to fix. Gerald does know how and, in return, the natives give him food. The division of labour has arrived on paradise island.

Gerald's foray into the trading nexus may have ensured their future and made life tolerable, but it has destroyed Lucy's dream of solitude - and she resents it. The modern world can be quite ruthless with people's dreams, especially when these dreams take little heed of economics.

But Lucy had the last laugh. Although Gerald was contracted to write a book on the experience, it was Lucy's account *Castaway* which became a best seller and served as the inspiration for Roeg's excellent film.

