

# Films of 2018



Rules: 1) Almost always be (primarily) English language, 2) Must be a non-documentary feature. Sorry, otherwise this list gets another 20+ films added and I do not have that much time. 3) US Theatrical(-ish) release in 2018 (some of these films might have IMDb years for earlier due to film festival releases, or a 2017 Australian release before a 2018 US release).

Within a tier, I believe the films are roughly the same quality. Between tiers, I believe there is enough distinction to say a film is better than those in the lower tier. Although, that distinction is blurrier for films at the bottom of a tier and the films at the top of the previous tier.

Selection Criteria: 1) Oscar Nominated, 2) Golden Globe Nominated, 3) Independent Spirit Awards, 4) BAFTA, 5) GLAAD Awards, 6) NAACP Image, 7) AACTA Awards (Australian Oscars) 8) Sundance, 9) SAG Awards, 10) AFI Top 10, 11) National Board of Review, 12) Critic's Choice Awards, 13) British Independent Film Awards, 14) My own idiosyncratic preferences, 15) Some heterogeneous-minimum Rotten Tomatoes score regardless if nominated. Note: These are not necessarily the ranking of a criterion's importance.

[A selection criterion is in brackets to give an idea of why the film was on my list; award nominations are given preference my own idiosyncratic reasons for watching, when applicable. Films were on the list before awards seasons, but the nominations/awards reflect that these did end up being good films.]

As of 4/21/2019, I've included any streaming availability; Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu.

## Tier 12: "I've made a huge mistake"

134. **Solo: A Star Wars Story:** In my defense I was bored one night and wanted to watch something on Netflix from 2018 but I didn't want to care. Even then this movie was bad. [It was popular and I was bored] Netflix.

## Tier 11: Your Cast Can't Save You (and a Bad Horror Film)

133. **Hot Summer Nights:** You'd think a Timothée Chalamet and Maika Monroe (*It Follows*, *The Guest*) film would have a higher floor, but no. Although both try their best to save the film, a

generic script and slow pacing makes for a boring (and almost completely avoidable film). [Watch every Chalamet does until you are given a reason not to] Amazon Prime.

132. **Before I Wake:** Mike Flanagan directed *Oculus*, *Hush*, *Ouija: Origin of Evil*, *Gerald's Game*, and the Netflix series *The Haunting of Hill House*; yet, this film (which was made in 2016, but finally released on Netflix in 2018) was an uninspired flop. [See Flanagan's other films and my love of horror] Netflix.
131. **Woman Walks Ahead:** You'd think a Jessica Chastain film would have a higher floor, but no. Although she tried her best to save the film, a generic and historically inaccurate script makes for a boring, uninspiring film that feels like a let down to the woman it was supposed to portray. [Jessica Chastain deserves the benefit of the doubt; watch everything she is in] Amazon Prime.
130. **Mary Queen of Scots:** You'd think a Saoirse Ronan and Margot Robbie film would have a higher floor, but no. Although they try their best to save the film a historically inaccurate script combined with slow pacing make for a boring film. (Although some parts of the script were decent, they couldn't make up for the pacing and the scatter-shot plot) [BAFTA Best Supporting Actress Nominee]
129. **A Kid Like Jake:** The result of trying to make a gender-fluid film for cis people. The film has a decent cast (Jim Parsons, Claire Danes, Octavia Spencer), but the film feels the need to explain every detail and constantly hammer home the obvious. Worst of all, it rarely attempts to understand Jake's character, rather everything exists through the view and feelings of the parents. [GLAAD Outstanding Film - Limited Release]
128. **The Front Runner:** You'd think a film with Hugh Jackman, Vera Farmiga, JK Simmons, Alfred Molina, Sara Paxton, etc would have a higher floor. It was even directed by Jason Reitman (*Up in the Air*, *Young Adult*). Reitman does have some nice camera work and uses the cast well, but at the end of the day the film doesn't know what it wants to be or what it wants to say. The entire two hours feels like a slow build up to the inevitable conclusion. [NPR sold me on it given the cast]
127. **Vice:** You'd think a film with Christian Bale, Amy Adams, Sam Rockwell, Steve Carrell, Tyler Perry, etc would have a higher floor, but no. It was even directed by Adam McKay (*The Big Short*). The cast, especially Bale was great. The makeup was great. Except, McKay took everything bad about *The Big Short* and made it worse, or took the good parts and butchered them. The cutaways to explanations fail, the voice overs fail. Just about everything failed. [Best Picture Nominee]

#### **Tier 10: Movies Made for Popular Audiences and the one that starts off with a PG Blowjob (and that is not the oddest thing about the movie)**

126. **Sierra Burgess Is a Loser:** An attempt to cash-in on the popularity of Shannon Purser (*Stranger Things*), though Purser isn't great (not bad, but not good enough to carry a poorly-written film). Kristine Froseth was enjoyable as the bully/rival-turned-friend. Noah Centineo is in it because of course he is in a Netflix teen comedy. It is standard, and a modern adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* (yet it doesn't exactly do the source material much justice). [Netflix Late-Night Watch]
125. **Flower:** Zoey Deutch is the lead (Kathryn Hahn is decent in a supporting role as well as Adam Scott; Dylan Gelula (*Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*) is also in it). The movie is really all over the place Zoe Deutch tries to carry the movie but the plot is too outlandish; if you can't tell this is the movie that starts with the PG blowjob. Except it is semi-fun, although bad. [Zoey Deutch is good] Hulu.
124. **Operation Finale:** Oscar Issac and Ben Kingsley star and do a rather good job (Haley Lu Richardson is also in it, briefly). But the plot takes some historical liberties in attempt to drum up suspense

that never actually occurs. Unlike other Holocaust film, this one doesn't exactly know which point it wants to make. The best part of the film is probably the score; composed by Alexandre Desplat. [Watch Oscar Issac]

123. **Ocean's Eight:** A great cast (too many to list, roughly eight in total) but few people are given a chance to shine. Awkwafina and Anne Hathaway are probably the best two. Except the plot is a little too explained; and other than the feminism (which is heavy-handed at times) the movie doesn't have much to offer. [Easy watch with a great cast]
122. **Halloween:** The reboot (?) had a great concept; ignore all the sequels and make this the one true sequel to the classic film. Yet, this film isn't that scary; nor does it have innovating cinematography. It was a decent and well-made horror film; but it offers very little. The Halloween costumes were probably the best part. [Have you seen the original?!?]
121. **Blockers:** Somehow this movie ended up be kinda funny (if at times outlandish), while offering some new takes on the protective parents trope. If the outlandish-ness was dialed back, maybe it improves; but at the same time, watching John Cena butt-chug a beer is part of the magic. Unlike a lot of the films in this tier it has new things to say; it just doesn't try too hard. [GLAAD Outstanding Film - Wide Release]
120. **Love, Simon:** A great idea for a film; a rom-com produced by a major studio where the lead is gay. Except when just about every single rom-com trope is rerun (and not very well) but with the only change of the lead being gay, it doesn't make for that good of a film. The movie had nothing new to say; other than the history of its production. To show that high-quality LGBT films are being made, I'll point out the better ones on this list; you should watch them. [GLAAD Outstanding Film - Wide Release]

#### **Tier 9: Simultaneously the Best Movies of 2018 and the Worst Movies of 2018**

119. **Venom:** In many ways, it is the second major-studio-released film about gay romance. This movie is objectively bad; script, the action sequences, etc. Yet, Tom Hardy doing Tom Hardy things and just how outlandish the film is at times works heavily in its favor. Ask me if I'd rather watch *Venom* or a film a couple spots higher; honestly there is a good chance I'd pick *Venom*. [Watch anything Tom Hardy does]
118. **Life Itself:** A movie with Oscar Issac and Olivia Wilde should be better. The script is objectively awful; it can be slow and if you missed the point of the film it will remind you ten more times. Except, it stumbled into the right level of so bad it is good. A character gets hit by a bus and is supposed to be a meaningful impactful scene? Nope. Instead it is kinda funny. Actually there are multiple deaths in the film, and somehow I found each one hilarious. [See *Operation Finale*] Amazon Prime.

#### **Tier 8: Too Slow and Needing More, but Solid Acting**

117. **The Kindergarten Teacher:** Maggie Gyllenhaal is rather good in this. She carries the movie and makes it worthwhile. The side plot involving her family life is there to fill time, and semi-connected with the main plot but it feels both forced and not needed. The rest of the film then follows a predictable path that the viewer can see coming. Gyllenhaal is rather good, and unlike Tier 11; good enough to save the film from being a disaster. [Sundance Directing Award] Netflix.

116. **Lizzie:** Chloe Sevigny plays Lizzie Borden (the accused ax murderer) and Kristen Stewart is in a supporting role. The film takes some historical liberties, but the main issue is the pacing; in part that everyone knows how the film will roughly end (Lizzie's parents are ax murdered and Lizzie is accused). The film attempts to dive into why Lizzie would (allegedly) commit the crimes, but many of the plot points seem unnecessary. Kristen Stewart is easily the best part of the film; as can be said of just about anything she is in; she is an amazing actress. A better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*. [Watch anything Kristen Stewart does, she is amazing]
115. **Beautiful Boy:** After crushing last year Chalamet was in some duds (although he was good to great in each). Steve Carrell was also in it, and does a good job as well (Carrell might finally be getting to the proper level of regard as a serious actor). At two hours the film is too long (and often repetitive; it follows a consistent plot of addiction, recovery, relapse; multiple times). Although the repetitive sequence of addiction is realistic a few sequences could be cut. At the end it tries a tad too hard to provide extra commentary on the opioid epidemic, forgetting the entire film is commentary. [Golden Globe Best Supporting Actor] Amazon Prime.
114. **The Seagull:** The cast is amazing (Annette Benning, Saoirse Ronan, Corey Stoll, Elisabeth Moss, etc) and based on an Anton Chekov play. Except the acting gets wasted on an overly explained plot. Also it does not help that the script was in no ways modernized. [The cast was great]
113. **I Think We're Alone Now:** Starring Peter Dinklage and Elle Fanning as the last two people, the film tries to provide some social commentary on loneliness and companionship. However, it falls short of really providing the level of insight it could have. Like the rest of the films in the tier the acting is good enough to carry the film to respectability, but still nothing special. [Sundance Excellence in Filmmaking]

#### Tier 7: Movies that Needed More

112. **Every Day:** Starring Angourie Rice, this is the lead contender for movie that needs to be remade in fifteen years. There is a rather good underlying sci-fi concept; this entity (who goes by A) wakes up each day in a new body of someone roughly their age. And A falls in love with Angourie Rice's character. By making this element more ambiguous, while playing up more of gender identity/fluidity, as well as sexual preference (if you love A does their gender matter) could have landed this as a top 25 film. There is a subplot with the parents that never comes together. A decent YA romance combined with Angourie Rice is the reason to watch. [I sorta added Angourie Rice to my watch everything list; which includes Carey Mulligan, Jessica Chastain, Viola Davis, Michael Fassbender (and his Fassbender), Tom Hardy, Timothee Chalamet, sorta Brie Larson, sorta Nicole Kidman, sorta Oscar Issac, sorta Saoirse Ronan, sorta Elisabeth Moss (women are better actors if you haven't realized this)] Amazon Prime.
111. **Avengers: Infinity War:** At this point you have a good idea of what to expect with an MCU film; good cast, well-made, excellent VFX. Infinity War delivered exactly that; but unlike the best of the bunch (*Spider-Man: Homecoming*, *Black Panther*) it didn't have anything to say. [I want to eliminate large chunks of the population as well] Netflix.
110. **At Eternity's Gate:** For the second straight year we have a van Gogh film (*Loving Vincent*) and outside of a rather good, but not great (and somehow Oscar Nominated) performance by Willem Defoe the film offers very little. It is slow at times and never really gets into van Gogh's character. [Best Actor Nominee]
109. **Chappaquiddick:** The second political scandal film on the list. Jason Clarke (*First Man*, *Mud-bound*) puts in another very good performance. As an actor he should be getting some more attention.

The production quality was rather good, which you'd expect given a 34(!) million dollar budget, nor does the film ever seem to drag. Yet it never really gets the underlying privilege (as well as stress) of being a Kennedy in a deep way. [On Netflix and served as a good comparison to *The Front Runner*] *Netflix*.

108. **Hotel Mumbai:** Not sure what the point of the movie was. That the Indian government responded poorly to a terrorist attack in 2008? Armie Hammer has a supporting role, but his character has little to offer. Actually, none of the characters really have much to offer. Even by standards of survival films the characters are lacking in back story.
107. **Cam:** The film had an interesting premise; a cam girl who's identity is stolen. Except, the film never does the outline of the plot justice. It attempts to bring up some issues related to working in the profession, some of which it does well. [I like horror films] *Netflix*.
106. **Mirai:** The frequent annoying temper tantrums of the older (kid) brother during the first hour of the film ruin the movie for me. Maybe my dislike of children plays a heavier role here. Although the final thirty minutes is touching, the film was already practically ruined for me. Those that like kids and are parents, will probably enjoy *Mirai* more and rank it higher. [Best Animated Feature Nominee] *Netflix*
105. **JT LeRoy:** The film takes a good premise – the real-life story of a woman who pretends to be the male author of a famous novel, as the real female author does not wish to take on the persona – and does almost nothing with it. There could be a lot of great ideas on identity (including gender and sexuality) and yet the film is more interested in the day-to-day aspects instead of character building (perhaps a non-linear or flashback plot would have been better). Kristen Stewart and Laura Dern simply are not enough to carry the film.
104. **The Guernsey Literary & Potato Peel Pie Society:** In many ways the film heavily relies on the skill and charm of Lily James (*Baby Driver*, *Darkest Hour*) to carry the historical romance. Outside of the nice romance plot the film attempts some social commentary about World War II and semi-achieves the goal. However, the plot is rather boiler plate and not very inventive (especially to say *Their Finest* (2017) which is a very similar film). [NPR said it was a good love story, also on *Netflix*] *Netflix*.
103. **The Equalizer 2:** It lacked as much innovated action sequences. It lacked Chloe Grace Morte. It lacked a great plot. It still had Denzel. It still had good action sequences. [NAACP Image Award Outstanding Actor]
102. **Game Night:** A great example of a film knowing what it was. Unlike the previous films in the list this film was not trying to be serious. Instead it wanted to be a very good, albeit outlandish, comedy. And it nailed it. It also helps that the film had Rachel McAdams, Jason Bateman, and Kyle Chandler, and a lot more great comedic actors. It was too outlandish at times and could have used a little more heft to be a great film. But for what it was and wanted to be, it was essentially spot on. [Critic's Choice Awards Best Comedy]
101. **Deadpool 2:** See everything about *Game Night* but make a few edits to apply to this film. The *Deadpool* films are pure fun. They also aren't trying to make any statements, other than most superhero movies are formulaic. A better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*. [Critic's Choice Awards Best Comedy]
100. **Bohemian Rhapsody:** How bad can a movie that is essentially a Queen Great Hits record be? This bad. This is the floor. Honestly, the only reason it is ranked this high is because listening to Queen songs for two hours is a good use of two hours. Also for a movie about a gay man, the amount of gay romance is almost zero (hurray for a mass audience appeal!). Rami Malek was good in this, but

not deserving of an Oscar (or a nomination?). This was just a bad movie with a great soundtrack. (Actually a worse LGBT film than *Love, Simon*; it just happened to have a Queen soundtrack) [Best Picture Nominee]

### Tier 6: Mainly Indies with a Major Flaw

99. **Gemini:** A decent LA-set noir. The plot is good enough, but at times appears too good on unneeded tangents (especially for a 90 minute movie). And given that run time, although it helps for pacing, it never really allows for more character development or intrigue. Fun fact: a scene is set in an LA hotel, which I wondered how I had never seen; it is on the other side of the street when I turn to go get KBBQ, so I am more concerned with making a right turn than a well-designed hotel; I've driven past it multiple times. [LA-set noir] Hulu.
98. **Final Portrait:** The film is held together by the good (not great) performances of Armie Hammer and Geoffrey Rush. *Portrait* is a decent biopic about the later stages of Giacometti's life. The film's strength is in the analysis of creativity/genius; the ebb and flow of inspiration, the constant doubt, and never knowing when to stop. Yet, for a 90-minute film it seems longer, and it never quite makes its point as well as it wants. [Armie Hammer is good, I like art]
97. **Stan & Ollie:** John C Reilly and Steve Coogan (*The Trip* series of films) are great at what they do. Neither actor gets the respect they deserve (Reilly is getting there, although *Holmes & Watson...*). The film seems to rely too much on nostalgia for Laurel & Hardy (admittedly I have not watched their films) when more character development could have been used. It is the character development (which did a good job of scratching at the surface) that needed to go farther to make this film more complete. [Golden Globe Best Actor - Musical or Comedy Nominee]
96. **Nappily Ever After:** The film has toooooo many clichés to rank much higher. Not quite a rom-com, but a lot of the plot is too predictable. Yet the film manages to still be unique (especially to white people and men) in many ways. At the end of the day, it ends up being a feel good (and empowering) film, which gives it the ranking it has. The pool scene is the second best pool scene of the year; and at least here the pool scene is a happy one. [NAACP Image Outstanding Actress] Netflix.
95. **After Everything:** Starring Maika Monroe and Jeremy Allen White the film deals with their relationship before, during, and after White's character is diagnosed with cancer (hence the title of the film). The film has some innovative segments (sperm donation, the bucket list; in particular the bucket list item of 'take a cruise' is rather funny). Yet part of the reason the film fails is the oddity that Monroe's character would fall for White's in the first place; she is career-driven and attractive; he is a dead-beat and mildly offensive. It had a good concept (and is still a good easy and fun watch) but it could have said more if White's character was better. [Maika Monroe, although she is running out of good will] Amazon Prime.
94. **Tully:** Charlize Theron has been slowly racking up good (and under the radar) performances, this is another example. Mark Duplass is also good in a bit part. At 95 minutes it offers a brisk and insightful view of motherhood and aging. Yet, like most films that are under 100 minutes it is difficult to get at more in that time; there could have been more character development. [Golden Globe Best Actress - Musical or Comedy Nominee]
93. **We the Animals:** The first major flaw of this film; purposely making it look grainy. I don't care if you want to give the film a 'feeling of intimacy' instead you make it look cheap and ugly and bad. This isn't stuff meant to look like archival footage. This was a major flaw; it makes the film look like a fourth grader made it. The other issue was that for a 90 minute film it was slow. And this is sad. The underlying plot was amazing; touching on domestic violence, sexual identity, masculinity, among

other topics. And it covered those topics rather well. Yet a slow and grainy film ruined all of that. A better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*. [Independent Spirit Awards Best First Feature Nominee] Netflix.

92. **The Sisters Brothers:** John C Reilly and Joaquin Phoenix star as the titular brothers. The film is a beautifully shot western. The pacing was good, but not great. The real issue is that the film wanted to make comments about wealth, masculinity, etc but never really achieved them; nor did it have the suspense/action you'd expect from a man-hunt western. [John C Reilly is underrated]
91. **Sweet Country:** Another man-hunt western with rather good social commentary (the film is an Australian western). The visuals are rather good. Except the film is rather slow for its almost two-hour run time. There are some cliches that hurt as well. Lastly the acting is good, but could have been better to really move up in the rankings). The film won many awards at the Australian Oscars. [AACTA Best Film Nominee] Amazon Prime.
90. **The Ritual:** What starts as a good concept; four friends hiking in Scandinavia a year after the death of a fellow friend and dealing with the aftermath while getting lost in the (haunted) woods, never goes anywhere. The film tries to build up some characterization but it never gets to where it could with the dynamics of the group. Then the final payoff of the haunting isn't as good as it could be; it feels almost like a letdown. [Netflix horror] Netflix
89. **What They Had:** With Hillary Swank and Michael Shannon as the lead sister and brother who are dealing with their mother's (Blythe Danner; who is amazing) Alzheimer's the movie is on solid footing. The film does rely on the quality of their performances a little too much; the plot tries to get at family dynamics and dealing with impending loss, but never quite achieves the success it should have. [Michael Shannon is amazing] Amazon Prime.
88. **The Little Stranger:** Domhnall Gleeson is rather good and helps carry the film. The mystery (horror?) is very much a slow burn which never fully pays off. The visuals are good. However the lack of suspense (and frights) is the main issue. More could be said, but that would risk spoiling the film. [I like horror]
87. **Thoroughbreds:** Like *The Little Stranger* there needed to be more suspense/intrigue/horror. Like *The Little Stranger*, it is difficult to describe what is really good without spoiling anything. Anya Taylor-Joy (*The Witch, Split*) is rather good, as well as Olivia Clarke (*Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*). Costume design and lighting were good as well. [Independent Spirit Awards Best First Screenplay]
86. **The Mule:** Like it or not Clint Eastwood is a rather good director and he almost always makes a good-ish movie. Like it or not Clint Eastwood is a rather charismatic actor and he can use the charm to carry the film. The Mule is a little peak Boomer; Eastwood makes social faux pas but hey he meant well when he said negro. The film also is complete with multiple complaints about young people and the internet, as well as Prius owners not knowing how to change a tire. And even though Eastwood plays a drug mule, almost everything is done to portray him in a sympathetic and honorable life (he starts mulling to pay for his estranged grand-daughter's wedding; see he is a good person!). Also the film never really develops any suspense/action. The easiest way to see why this film ranks where it does is it watch it back to back with *The Old Man and the Gun* which will be ranked ahead of this. ["Like it or not Clint Eastwood is a rather good director" —me a few sentences ago]

## Tier 5: Wider Release Films with Some Flaws and Decent Indies

85. **Mary Poppins Returns:** Emily Blunt is the main reason this film even ranks this high. The production design certainly helps. Lin-Manuel Miranda was good, but was hoping for more out of him. The plot is rather simplistic (and in many way a straight up remaking of the original; except now banks are bad) and the songs are not that memorable. [Golden Globes Best Musical or Comedy]
84. **Hearts Beat Loud:** An indie with a sneaky good cast; Kiersey Clemons (*Dope*), Nick Offerman, Ted Danson (as a bartender!), Sasha Lane (*American Honey*, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*), Blythe Danner, and Toni Collette. The film offers a music-based look at a father-daughter dynamic and does a nice job of it. Except it doesn't offer much new; the film aims low but absolutely hits the bulls-eye. A better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*. [GLAAD Outstanding Film - Limited Release] Hulu.
83. **Cargo:** A novel take on the zombie film. Set in the Australian Outback and starring Martin Freeman, the film really relies on the novel take on the genre to carry the film (along with Freeman's performance. At times a little slow, and it doesn't land the themes it is trying to discuss. [AACTA Best Film Nominee] Netflix.
82. **You Were Never Really Here:** One of the films that I think others will have ranked higher. I thought the film was too slow for what it was trying to be (think *The Equalizer* but with Joaquin Phoenix). The film tried to develop Phoenix's character but it felt as if the development could have been done in a faster-paced manner. [Independent Spirit Awards Best Feature Nominee] Amazon.
81. **The Other Side of the Wind:** The famed unfinished Orson Wells film finally received the funding from Netflix for completion. Except the film, which was in many ways a satire of 1970s Hollywood is extremely dated by time it was finally released. Also the plot is rather slow and too convoluted. At least the film was finally finished. [*Citizen Kane* is my favorite film of all time, you think I was gonna skip this?!?] Netflix.
80. **Blaze:** Directed and co-written by Ethan Hawke, *Blaze* is about country singer Blaze Foley. The film is slow at times, but does eventually tell a touching story about a troubled musician. [Ethan Hawke Directing]
79. **Destroyer:** With Nicole Kidman as the lead, the film follows her in the aftermath of her going undercover and the recent murder of the person she was supposed to find while undercover. Very much a slow burn film, that does have a solid pay off. Except, outside of Kidman the film doesn't offer up enough meaning. [Golden Globe Best Actress - Drama Nominee]
78. **Bad Times at the El Royale:** A great cast, whose talents (outside of Jon Hamm) are wasted. The production design was rather good, but the plot the too convoluted and never really decided what it wanted to be about or say. [Great cast, seemed fun]
77. **Overlord:** A fun body-horror film that unfortunately wastes a lot of its action in the first ten minutes. The rest of the film does try to catch up and end up being a decent action movie. However, like most indies in this category the movie never ends up standing for all the things it wanted to be about. Yet, it still was a fun (and great late-night) watch, with a lot of body horror. [I love horror]
76. **1985:** See everything I wrote about *We the Animals* and put it here. Except make the film more focused and better paced. And once more, to reiterate; Do. Not. Purposely. Make. Films. Grainy. With quality cinematography this could have ranked much higher as it offered a great look at being HIV+ in 1985; a much better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*. [GLAAD Outstanding Film - Limited Release] Amazon Prime.
75. **Okko's Inn:** A nice anime, with good-enough animation. The plot is too heavy-handed and in-your-face at times. Yet, those moments are almost always forgiven as the film offers a great loop at dealing with grief and loss. [Japanese Animation Prize Nominee]



74. **Incredibles 2:** It speaks to the quality of animated films that this film is here. Outside of some comments on parenting the film doesn't tackle as many topics as the other animated films of the year (or has worse animation). The film was fun, if rather predictable. [Best Animated Feature Nominee] Netflix.
73. **Blame:** Written, directed, produced, edited, and starring Quinn Shephard, she really shines in all aspects. Although the script is essentially a modern *Crucible*, it is well paced, with good characters; about two students who compete for a male teacher's (Tate Donovan) attention (and affection). Nadia Alexander is rather good as the rival of Shephard's character. Another example of a film that didn't try to do too much but what it tried to do, it did it well; and was a good look at teenage life. The costume design was also rather good. Hopefully Quinn Shephard directs more films. [Independent Spirit Awards Best First Screenplay Nominee] Amazon Prime.
72. **A Quiet Place:** Probably one of the films that I dislike relative to most people. In part because any movie that uses kids to build emotions, is a movie that I personally cannot get into. Emily Blunt was rather good, the idea of the film was very innovative; and I do love silent films. Except, the family drama (which was the real plot line; not the horror plot) never did it for me. [AFI Top 10 Film] Amazon Prime.
71. **Unsane:** Films shot on iPhones still do not look as good as they could. However unlike my rant regarding purposely grainy films, I cannot hate on the iPhone; as it essentially allows anyone to make a film if they buy a few apps. Claire Foy was decent, but not sure I buy her as a breakout actress. Jay Pharoah is also rather good in a dramatic role. The plot was a little too convoluted at times. However the (albeit exaggerated) look at the US mental health system was rather good. [Steven Soderbergh is a good director] Amazon Prime.
70. **The Wife:** Later on I'll have a write up of the film *Colette*. When you get to that review, read it, take out much of the good stuff, all of the LGBT stuff, and replace Keira Knightley with Glenn Close giving a worse performance. Seriously, Glenn Close almost winning an Oscar for giving an inferior Keira Knightley performance was a testament to campaigning. [Best Actress Nominee]
69. **Isle of Dogs:** Wes Anderson's Wes Anderson-isms have to pull almost all of the weight in this film. The voice cast is rather good, as well as the stop motion. The plot wants to get at important themes, but it never really does and the film essentially comes up empty in regards to meaning. [Best Animated Feature Nominee]
68. **Can You Ever Forgive Me?:** Melissa McCarthy was rather good as well as Richard E Grant. Except the script seemed a little too straight forward; and missed out diving into McCarthy and Grant's characters. Instead the plot focused too much on the crime being committed. Had the film been more character driven it would have been greatly improved. Barely a better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*. [Best Actress Nominee]
67. **Green Book:** Yes. Everything bad about the plot is true. Every single one of those criticisms is spot on. Except Mahershala Ali and Viggo Mortensen are that good. They are the two reasons this film ranks where it does. Even going from A+ talent to A- talent would drop this at least two tiers, more like three or four. [Best Picture Nominee]
66. **Galveston:** Led by Elle Fanning and Ben Foster, the film is a standard shot-at-redemption-while-dying-after-living-a-shady-life film. The reason it ranks higher is that Fanning and Foster are both rather good. [Elle Fanning is good]

#### Tier 4: Very Good Comedies and Good Dramas

65. **A Bread Factory:** Broken up into two parts, which together make a 4 hour movie, the length is an issue. It could have been edited down to closer to three hours and fifteen minutes. The second half also starts to go off the rails a little bit. However it is held together by rather good performances, simple camera work, and knowing what it wanted to say. [Independent Spirit John Cassavetes Nominee]
64. **The Death of Stalin:** A rather funny satire of authoritarianism. Part of a very good year for Steve Buscemi (who will be in a few more films on this list). Jon Hamm was also good in a supporting role. A film where the historical liberties are fine for the sake of comedy. My main issue is that Jeffery Tambor essentially plays George Bluth (which I think was done on purpose); and I cannot see him in that role and think that I'd rather be watching Seasons 1–3 of Arrested Development. [National Board of Review Top Ten Independent Film]
63. **Wreck It Ralph 2: Ralph Breaks the Internet:** The first film was much better. The Disney (and Pixar; seriously *Brave* is a Pixar film you people) The princess scene was one of the best of the year. Also the comments the film makes about internet culture help to make this film better than it should be; on most levels *Incredibles 2* is better. [Best Animated Feature Nominee]
62. **Bumblebee:** An honest-to-goodness good *Transformers* movie. *Bumblebee* keeps things relatively simple, but tells a story that is more human than it is robot fighting (though there is the requisite robot fighting). It can't rank any higher due to the simplistic plot. [Well-reviewed Easy Watch]
61. **Apostasy:** First off, Jehovah's Witnesses are cray cray. Legit cray cray. Like I didn't fully understand the level of cray cray until watching this movie. Molly Wright could end up being an actress to watch. For a 95 minute film, it slightly drags at times; although it does hit at some great family and religious dynamics. The ending needed to be more grounded in reality. Had the film been a little longer (while picking up the pace slightly) it could have been rather good. Cinematography (especially the color palate) was rather good. [BAFTA Outstanding British Debut] Amazon Prime.
60. **To All the Boys I've Loved Before:** Netflix has expanded their horror model (churn out tens of lower budget films in hopes that some hit) to rom-coms and it has paid off. It brought enough new stuff to the genre, especially a teen rom-com to rank this high. [Netflix made some good rom-coms] Netflix.
59. **Never Goin' Back:** With solid performances by Maia Mitchell (a small part in *Hot Summer Nights*) and Camila Morrone, it offers a female-led coming-of-age film with a fair bit of new and fresh perspectives. In 85 minutes you can't accomplish much depth, but you can make a face-paced film that was a fun watch. [A24 releases good films] Amazon Prime.
58. **Prospect:** This is an interesting low-budget sci-fi film. The strength of the film is the performances of Pedro Pascal and newcomer Sophie Thatcher. Replacing either could easily result in the film raking lower, as the lack of character development is made up by their talents and performances. The film also excels at crafting this Wild West-esque 'gold rush' in space. That this film could easily have been a 1970s Western, but instead these prospectors are ragged and struggling to strike it rich on a foreign planet.
57. **Set It Up:** See everything about *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, except replace teenage with young professional and instead of making the good parts about originality, make them about Zoey Deutch. Hopefully Zoey Deutch starts making more serious films; she is immensely talented. [Netflix made some good rom-coms] Netflix.
56. **Cold War:** One of two foreign language films that made the list. Along with Best Director, it was also nominated for Best Cinematography. Except I did not find the Black and White cinematography especially beautiful. The shots of the hands reflecting off the piano while playing were good, as was the steam coming off the coffee. At under 90 minutes the movie really cut all the fat; left a lot implied

and didn't spell anything out. I think this film could easily rank higher if I was more accustomed to watching foreign language films; I never fell in love the characters and their love story; it might be that *Roma* was in Spanish so I had some understanding of the language, which made following along easier. If you like foreign films, this is probably a must watch. [Best Director Nominee] Amazon Prime.

55. **The Old Man and the Gun:** Robert Redford is amazing, he knows he is amazing, and he makes sure you know he is amazing. Redford sells you on loving this bank robber; who is for most accounts a bad person; he loves robbing banks. Pair with Sissy Spacek as a love interest; their chemistry is electric; he also ends up loving Spacek's character. It is a charming and brisk 90 minute film that has some nice costumes. It is most likely Redford's last role and it is rather fitting given his breakthrough in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. [Golden Globe Best Actor - Musical or Comedy Nominee]
54. **A Simple Favor:** Anna Kendrick is rather good. Blake Lively (*The Shallows*) is still underrated. Henry Golding (who we'll see later in *Crazy Rich Asians*) puts in a solid performance. This is potential the most horny film of the year (Flower was up there). There is a decent mystery to the plot, with solid set and costume design. Another film in this category that is just a fun (and quality) watch. [I like Anna Kendrick, also, once again, shout out Film Week with Larry Mantle]
53. **Life and Nothing More:** An intimate film about a single working mother and her troubled son. The film was made on a shoestring budget, makes use of a lot of long takes, and first-time actors. The film does a good job of touching on weighty topics: race, criminal justice, abortion. At almost two hours, the film does get slow; some scenes could easily have been cut. In spite of these flaws, the underlying film is a moving portrait of a family. [Independent Spirit John Cassavetes Award] Amazon Prime.
52. **A Prayer Before Dawn:** An extremely gritty boxing film about an addict doing time in a Thailand prison. The visuals are rather good and Joe Cole (Green Room) gives a good and subtle performance. The film comes close to dragging; cutting about ten minutes from its two hour run-time would have helped. Yet, it gives great insights to addiction and prisons. Also a better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*. [British Independent Film Best Actor] Amazon Prime.
51. **The House That Jack Built:** You know what you are getting with a Lars von Trier (*Nymphomaniac*, *Melancholia*); a well-shot film, that often will make your cringe, and a film that aims to discuss a lot of weighty topics but doesn't quite land. This one was more accessible, although it does have some graphic violence. The two and a half hour runtime breezes by; with the film being broken down in various 'incidents' (murders). Matt Dillon was good as the titular Jack. [Lars von Trier is a good director]
50. **Suspiria:** Directed by Luca Guadagnino (*A Bigger Splash*, *Call Me By Your Name*). More body horror than psychological horror. The slow burn keeps the two and a half hour run time palatable; even though the final payoff could have been better. The film would have been better if Dakota Johnson was replaced with someone else. Chloe Grace Morteaux is rather good in a brief role. Tilda Swinton is amazing (as she is in everything); honestly I'd watch a movie where she plays every single part. The cinematography is good; but some of the homages to 70s horror fall flat. The film does aim high, which helps as it misses many of its targets. [Independent Spirit Awards Best Cinematography]
49. **Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot:** Joaquin Phoenix was rather good as recovering alcoholic and wheelchair-bound artist John Callahan. Rooney Mara is decent, but not given much screen time or character to explore. Jonah Hill liked his own performance than I did. Gus Van Sant's directing choices were mediocre; at times it had too much of a documentary feel with the slow zooms and very-out-of-focus backgrounds. Though the editing and non-linear plot was a nice touch. *Don't Worry* avoids a lot of biopic clichés and ends up being a decent film.

48. **Breath:** Written, directed, and starring (in a supporting role) Simon Baker, it is rather good coming-of-age film that using surfing to drive the plot. The film does a nice job of discussing the role bravery, fear, safety, and masculinity play in growing up and eventually becoming comfortable with one's self. Elizabeth Debicki (*Widows*) was rather good in a supporting role; this was a great year for her; she was better in *Widows* which we'll see later on this list. Another example of the solid films coming out (and set in) Australia. [AACTA Best Film Nominee] Netflix.
47. **A Private War:** Rosamund Pike does a good job of helping to carry the film. At times the film drags and worst off all tells the viewer too much. Pike's character develops PTSD and a drinking problem as a coping mechanism. We can be shown this, but the film makes sure you really understood that this is what was happening to the character. Likewise, the film shows the horrors and realities of war. Yet, it spells it out a little too much. A more subtle approach would have made for a better film. [Golden Globe Best Actress - Drama Nominee]
46. **Monsters and Men:** One of many films about (or involving) cops killing an African-American and easily the worst of them; yet it had a lot of promise. At around 95 minutes, the film could have been extended by 15 or 20 minutes (and used that time to focus on some of the women involved in the plot). The film follows three different people semi-involved in the shooting, but it looks at each one individually; cross cutting between their stories would have been better. John David Washington and Anthony Ramos were rather good. [Sundance First Feature] Hulu.
45. **Nancy:** The first of the Steve Buscemi-alluded-to films. Although under 90 minutes the film is able to pack a lot of meaning into the the short run time. Every performance is rather good, although some will find the understatedness as a sign of poor acting. The films does a great job of informing the viewer of changes via subtle changes in language; rather than smacking the viewer over the head. Andrea Riseborough (*Mandy*, *The Death of Stalin*, *Mindhorn*, *Nocturnal Animals*, *Birdman*) plays the lead and she did a great job in a leading role; which hopefully leads to more leading roles. Yet it is everything that it has to say about loneliness, loss, attention, family, and other topics that make it worthwhile. The payoff is worth the watch. [Independent Spirit Awards Best First Screenplay Nominee] Amazon Prime.
44. **Lean on Pete:** The second of the Steve-Buscemi-alluded-to films. A visually impressive coming-of-age film. Directed by Andrew Haigh (*45 Years*) the two-hour run time does drag at times, which is really the only major complaint. The cast does a great job; Charlie Plummer (*All the Money in the World*) cements himself as one to watch, and Chloe Sevigny (*Lizzie*, *Love & Friendship*) puts in a good supporting performance. The film is filled with impactful moments (often aided by great camera work). The comments on family, fatherhood, beauty, self-worth, friendship, and so much more were delightful. This could potential rank higher had I found the film to be better paced. [National Board of Review Top Ten Independent Film] Amazon Prime.
43. **Outside In:** Directed by Lynn Shelton (*Your Sister's Sister*, *Laggies*), she gets an amazing performance from Edie Falco. Falco should have been nominated for Best Actress, the performance she gives as a conflicted mother, wife, and activist(-ish) was amazing (I'd also feel fine if she won the award). Watching her work through her character and her struggles was amazing. Falco's performance is part of the reason this film in in this tier. Kaitlyn Dever was in other films this year (*The Front Runner*, *Beautiful Boy*) but this one gave her time to shine in a large supporting role as Falco's daughter. Jay Duplass is also rather good. On top of the dynamics within Falco's family the comments on the criminal justice system make for a rather good movie. [Edie Falco was interviewed by Terry Gross on Fresh Air; seriously shout out NPR] Netflix.
42. **Private Life:** Kathryn Hahn has been slowly racking up great performances (*Flower*, *Captain Fantastic*, *The Visit*, *Afternoon Delight*) and put with Paul Giamatti, the two combine for a great lead couple. The supporting cast is rather good as well, including the under-appreciated Molly

Shannon. The film focuses on Hahn and Giamatti's attempt at having children and does so in a great way. Even when dealing with meatier topics, the film is able to provide a few laughs along the way. [Independent Spirit Awards Best Director Nominee] Netflix.

41. **Madeline's Madeline:** An absolute coming out party for Helena Howard (her first film role) as the titular Madeline. She is absolutely amazing. The film itself was rather experimental, which in many ways was a drawback as it does not always come together. The mother-daughter dynamic is rather good. But in 90 minutes the film can only say so much. [Independent Spirit Awards Best Female Lead] Amazon Prime.
40. **Beast:** The directorial debut of Michael Pearce, whom I'll look forward to making more movies in the near future. It is also the film debut of Jessie Buckley as the female lead Moll; who is rather good and should have gotten more buzz for her performance. The film should have also gotten more buzz for its costume design. The acting of Buckley isn't needed to carry the film and the underlying plot is great; Moll falls in love with Pascal who is a prime suspect in a string of murders on a small island. Moll's character is wonderfully written and watching her change and grapple with her own identity over the course of the film was great. Like many in the higher end of this tier, we are getting to some rather good (not great) films that I'd strongly suggest watching. [BAFTA Outstanding British Film Nominee]
39. **Juliet, Naked:** I might have ranked this a little too high, but a romantic comedy starring Ethan Hawke and Rose Byrne is exactly my cup of tea. Throw in Chris O'Dowd in a supporting role the movie is plain fun that takes advantage of the quality of its cast. All while providing well-rounded characters and some meaning throughout; all while being a subtly very feminist film. [Ethan Hawke is good]
38. **Ladies in Black:** Rather good cinematography; crisp and bright. Absolutely wonderful costume design (Wendy Cork); this should have been nominated and won. The dresses were impeccable. Sadly the plot was a little too basic and predictable; even if the message was immigrants are people and great people at that. Angourie Rice (*The Nice Guys*, *Jasper Jones*, *The Beguiled*) is amazing, and as I said she will win an Oscar in the coming years. She is that talented. The only knock is the simplistic plot; but it is an enjoyable, well-made film. [AACTA Best Picture Nominee]
37. **The Tale:** Technically released through HBO, but it was nominated at the Independent Spirit Awards and is therefore included. Laura Dern gives a good performance as documentarian coming to terms with being sexually assaulted while a young teenager. She handles the subject excellently, although some of the narrative choices could have been different. The film shows Laura Dern questioning, talking with, and confronting the people from her past; including thirteen year old her. At times this structure lands, but other times it falls flat; more could have been left to the imagination. [Independent Spirit Awards Best First Feature Nominee]

### Tier 3: Better Indies and Higher-End Bigger Budget Films

36. **On the Basis of Sex:** Felicity Jones is good (though maybe not so much regarding trying to pull off the accent) in this inspirational-yet-underwhelming film. Jones and Armie Hammer as the Ginsburgs really make this film come alive (along with the costumes, it could have easily garnered a best costume design nomination). Though the film is a rather blunt with its message, and doesn't have faith in its audience to follow along without beating them over the head with the plot, it works because of Ruth Bader Ginsburg being awesome. [Well-reviewed Biopic]
35. **BlacKkKlansman:** Like, many of the films in this tier it helped by having a larger budget ( $\approx 15$  million) and production value can go a long way. John David Washington, Denzel's son, who we saw

earlier in *Monsters and Men* had an absolute coming out party. Adam Driver keeps on cementing himself as one of the best actors on the planet (here is why budget helps; if those two are replaced the film just would not be anywhere near as good). Topher Grace is also good as Trump's best friend David Duke. The historic liberties are fine as the help with suspense and prevent the plot from dragging. Except, Spike Lee over does the point of the film and uses a little too much hype at the end. Also, Spike should have come nowhere near winning Best Adapted Screenplay on pure merit. BUT, Spike should have cleaned up in 1989 with *Do the Right Thing*, so as a make-up Oscar it is fully deserved. [Best Picture Nominee]

34. **The Hate U Give:** Amandla Stenberg (*Everything, Everything*) is showing why she is one of the best young actresses out there. In many ways she carries the film; although the ensemble cast does a good job; including Regina Hall who followed up *Girl's Trip* with another great year of roles. Sabrina Carpenter (*Girl Meets World*) is also in it, and I couldn't make this entire list without making at least one Disney Channel reference (and I could have made some earlier, but didn't). The film leans into melodrama at times, but it needs to; the raw emotion of a police shooting to too much not to play on emotions. *Monsters and Men* could have better, but the  $\approx 23$  million dollar budget made for a better overall film. [NAACP Image Best Picture Nominee] Hulu.
33. **The Miseducation of Cameron Post:** One of two gay conversion films of 2018, both of which embody this tier. Post had a budget of 900,000 dollars. Yes it was able to get Chloe Grace Moretz as the lead, and it is a great dive into her character as well as the other characters in the film. However, the low budget makes in the inferior of the two conversion films overall. But, it handles the topic of conversion better; just isn't as good as a film. If it had an 11 million dollar budget it would have ranked higher. Easily a better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*. [GLAAD Outstanding Film - Limited Release]
32. **Searching:** Easily one of the most innovative films of 2018. Since it is a mystery, I do not want to spoil much. Except that the last ten minutes over explain everything that the viewer might have missed which is the only reason it ranks here. A better ending moves this film up a tier, maybe even two. John Cho (*Gemini, Columbus*) continues to show that he is a good actor and has come a long way from Harold and Kumar. [National Board of Review Top 10 Independent Films]
31. **Support the Girls:** Obama named this as one his of favorite films of 2018 (he named Basketball (and Other Things) as one of his favorite books of 2017, so you know he has good taste) and for good reason. At its core the film the a scathing critique of America, and on so many levels; race, sex, gender, relationships, etc. And yet, the film never seems to make these statements obvious. I thought it was a little slow, otherwise it would be ranked much higher (which given the 90 minute run time shouldn't happen). The cast is absolutely phenomenal; Regina King, Haley Lu Richardson (*Columbus, Split, The Edge of Seventeen*; she is approaching watch everything territory), AJ Michalka, Jana Kramer, Brooklyn Decker, Dylan Gelula. [Independent Spirit Awards Best Female Lead] Hulu.
30. **Boy Erased:** The other gay conversion film. Nicole Kidman (who is practically in watch anything she is in territory) and Russell Crowe play the parents; which when you have an 11 million dollar budget you can get. This makes a difference in the quality of the overall film. Joel Edgerton (*The Gift*) is coming into his own as a director and with the budget he made a rather good film. But ranking *Boy Erased* and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* is a difficult endeavor; *Post* handles its subject matter better and has a better portrayal of the main character. Yet, is the inferior overall film, mainly due to budgeting and experience. [Golden Globe Best Actor - Drama Nominee]
29. **The Ballad of Buster Scruggs:** The Coen Brothers know how to make a good film and it is filled with the usual genre subversion; especially The Gal Who Got Rattled Segment. The visuals were amazing (and Netflix deserves credit for streaming 4K content). All Gold Canyon was the best of the segments, with an argument to made that Tom Waits deserved a Best Supporting Actor nomination.

Except, an anthology film is a bit of a cop out; make short films or make a coherent feature. [Best Adapted Screenplay Nominee] Netflix.

28. **The Rider:** A visually impressive, and modern western set in the Dakotas. Director Chloe Zhao (*Songs My Brother Taught Me*) expands on the good elements of her debut feature; set on reservations in the Dakotas. She is especially adept at getting great performances out of amateur actors. This film at times blurs the line between real life and fiction; many actors are playing fictionalized versions of themselves. The under lying family drama is good, if slow at times. [National Board of Review Top Ten Independent Film]
27. **Mandy:** What if I told you there was a film starring Nic Cage, whose character goes on an LSD-revenge killing spree than involves a chainsaw duel? *Mandy* is this film. The film has some of the best cinematography of the year; the colors used were great. The action sequences were well done, and Nic Cage provides the proper level of Nic Cage. Although the film is essentially a revenge thriller, the approach is rather original (and rather violent). (6 million dollar budget) [Independent Spirit Awards Best Cinematography]
26. **Upgrade:** Another revenge thriller. Whereas *Mandy* had better visuals, *Upgrade* benefits from having more meaning; as the film deals with police surveillance, driver-less cars, and the prevalence/over reliance on technology. The action sequences are probably a little better, with rather good editing. The film also benefits from some funny lines. Had Tom Hardy played the lead, the film would probably have been ranked higher; as it seemed like they cast a Hardy knock off. *Upgrade* and *Mandy* represent two of the more fun late-night films on the list. (3-5 million dollar budget) [AACTA Best Editing Nominee]
25. **Wildlife:** Paul Dano's directorial debut, and a rather good debut at that. The strength of the film lies in Carey Mulligan's (*An Education*, *Drive*, *Shame*, *Inside Llewyn Davis*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Mudbound*). Mulligan is most likely the best actress not to have won an Oscar (she has a BAFTA and an Independent Spirit Award). Jake Gyllenhaal is good, continuing a string solid performances. However, Gyllenhaal's character needed more background; at times his motivation is unclear or simply confusing. Whereas Carey Mulligan's character has a lot of implied background. Ed Oxenbould (*The Visit*) plays their son dealing with the crumbling marriage and being half forced to take sides. A better teenager could have elevated the film more, but a worse one could have sunk the film; as the film is told through his point of view. [Independent Spirit Best Female Lead]
24. **Black Panther:** The best comic book movie ever made (for all of ten months). Michael B Jordan is great, and finally developed a great non-Loki villain; especially since in many ways Killmonger (Jordan's character) is in the right. Ryan Coogler is a great director. If he directs a more serious film before *Black Panther 2*, I'd be willing to say that sight unseen it would be the instant front runner for Best Director. Coogler has established himself as one of the best directors in the business. I could say more, but *Black Panther* is probably one you have seen and do not need convincing to see. (200 million dollar budget) [Best Picture Nominee] Netflix.
23. **Thunder Road:** A masterclass on how to make a film on a shoestring budget: 200,000 dollars. The frequent long takes let Jim Cummings (writer, director, and star) shine in what is the perfect balance of comedy and drama. The lengthy opening scene (which itself is essentially a remake of the short film of the same made by Cummings a few years earlier) is a near-perfect portrait of grief. The film essentially rest on Cummings dealing with grief, while trying to be a good father, a good ex-husband, and generally a good person. The film is filled with many tiny little moments that perfectly get at the struggle the film is attempting to portray. Had this been near two hours with some supporting characters getting more development this would easily have ranked higher. (200 thousand dollar budget) [Independent Spirit John Cassavetes Award Nominee] Amazon Prime.

22. **Mid90s:** Jonah Hill might be a good director; this was his directorial debut. A top-three coming-of-age film for the year; and a nice ode to the 90s skateboarding culture (in LA). Although the film is a little cliché at times, Hill means well and develops enough characters to make the film and its themes work; masculinity, personal acceptance, race, class etc. Lucas Hedges (*Lady Bird*, *Manchester By the Sea*, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, *Boy Erased*) is in a supporting role and between *Mid90s* and *Boy Erased* has established himself as the best non-Chalamet young actor in Hollywood. (No reported budget) [National Board of Review Top Ten Independent Film] Amazon Prime.
21. **Eighth Grade:** Bo Burnam might be a good director; this was his directorial debut. A top-three coming-of-age film for the year; and a great look at current internet culture. *Eighth Grade* might not hit on as many themes as *Mid90s* but it handles its subject matter better, with more developed supporting characters (including the parent). The film is also more innovative; its portrayal of the internet was rather gucci. The pool party (from hell) was one of the best scenes of the year. Elsie Fisher was great and hopefully will be in more roles and continue to shine. (2 million dollar budget) [Independent Spirit Awards Best Feature Nominee] Amazon Prime.
20. **Crazy Rich Asians:** Shout out economists! Crazy Rich Asians is a well-made rom-com; that also happened to make history. Henry Golding was good, and showed up earlier on the list in *A Simple Favor*. Awkwafina was amazing (previously mentioned in *Ocean's Eight*). The production design; costumes, sets, colors, was great. The only knock is that the general outline of the plot was not that original; as it followed many well tried rom-com themes. (30 million dollar budget). [Golden Globes Best Musical or Comedy]
19. **Sorry to Bother You:** Boots Riley wrote and directed what is possibly the most original film of 2018. The film boasts an excellent cast; Lakeith Stanfield (*Short Term 12*, *Selma*, *Dope*, *Straight Outta Compton*, *Miles Ahead*, *Snowden*, *Crown Heights*, *War Machine*, *Get Out*; I told you *Short Term 12* was amazing; Stanfield, Larson, Dever, Rami Malek; I could go on, but if you haven't seen *Short Term 12* yet, go do it.) ... where was I? Oh yes; Tessa Thompson, Armie Hammer, among others. The major knock on the film is that it hits the view over the head with messaging, when a subtler approach could have been used. The visuals/color palate were rather good as well. (3.2 million dollar budget) [Independent Spirit Awards Best First Feature] Hulu.
18. **If Beale Street Could Talk:** Speaking of great visuals/color palate, *Beale Street* hits the mark; in particular the lengthy close up of faces gives a feeling on intimacy. In Barry Jenkins follow up to *Moonlight*, he shows he is still a great filmmaker. Although, like *Sorry to Bother You*, the film goes a little far in explaining the meaning to the audience. The film also deals with weighty topics, such as race, systemic racism, policing, criminal justice, sexual assault and others. The characters are great. Outside the being too heavy handed, the only other complaint is the film seems too slow at times. (12 million dollar budget) [Best Adapted Screenplay Nominee]
17. **First Man:** Like in 2016, I have Damien Chazelle's (*La La Land*, *Whiplash*) film above Jenkins' (although this time they are in the same tier). In many ways, *First Man* ranks this high because the film is technically perfect; the effects, the sound, the production design, the score (which is possible with a budget near 60 million dollars). As I said earlier, I didn't think Claire Foy was great (this isn't too say she was bad; but I didn't not see this as a breakthrough for her). Ryan Gosling was also just good not great. If anything the better performances were from Jason Clarke, Ryan Chandler, and Corey Stoll. The plot could have better, and I didn't find the characters that compelling (which once again does not mean bad). But this film embodies one half of the category; a well-made big budget film, that in many ways is very good thanks to its budget. [Critic's Choice Best Picture Nominee]

## Tier 2: Very Good Films



16. **A Star is Born:** Bradley Cooper wrote and directed a very good film. The first forty minutes to an hour might be the best of the year. Unfortunately, the second half of the film cannot come near the quality of the first half. Add in a stereotypical cartoon villain manager; and the film ends up in this tier. Another mild annoyance; for a film that is obviously set in LA, it in no way takes advantage of the setting. Lady Gaga has also established herself as a great actress. (A better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*) [Best Picture Nominee]
15. **Disobedience:** Starring Rachel Weisz and Rachel McAdams; and both were amazing. Although the underlying plot of the film was good (Weisz comes back to her hometown after the death of estranged Orthodox Jewish father) it is the female leads that really elevate the film to this tier. The treatment of the characters sexuality, their domestic life, and their relation with religion is great. These are great characters with great themes. (A much much better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*) [GLAAD Outstanding Film - Limited Release] Amazon Prime.
14. **American Animals:** It serves as an entertaining crime-thriller, which on its own would be enough to get a decent ranking on the list. The narrative structure of the film is what gets the film in this tier; originality is rewarded. The film has a mild non-linear plot, although it is the frequent inclusion of interviews with the current real life people the film is portraying. It helps that the four would-be robbers are themselves interesting people. *American Animals* is a fun and original film. [Independent Spirit Awards Best Editing Nominee]
13. **The Endless:** More of mystery or sci-fi film than horror (as some descriptions say). At its core the film is about two brothers and their relationship. On its own that would have made for a decent film. The science-fiction elements add intrigue and originality; and since the film is ranked highly the elements help establish and change the dynamics between the brothers. [Netflix Horror] Netflix.
12. **Blindspotting:** Probably the best cop-shooting film of year, as well as one of the best criminal justice system critiques in a few years. In many ways, the film gets at the same themes as *Sorry to Bother You* but *Blindspotting* does so in a more grounded manner. There are other themes that are aptly handled. Daveed Diggs is rather good in what really is his first post-Hamilton leading film role. Had the ending of the film been better; the last 10 or so minutes slightly go off the rails, this would rank higher. Coming in at 95 minutes (with a fair bit of filler shots of Oakland), the film could also have benefited from expanding on a few minor characters for a slightly longer run time. [Independent Spirit Awards Best Male Lead]
11. **Saturday Church:** The film packs a lot into its 82 minute run time. Had it expanded by about 20 minutes; either by adding a few more musical-fantasy scenes, diving into the lives of the mother, or some of the other 'church' goers, this could have been the best film of the year. Halfway through, I was even willing to say it was a better *Moonlight*. The role of the religious aunt could have been toned down. The film is an excellent exploration of a young teenager coming to terms with their gender and sexual identity that is wonderfully executed. (A much much better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*). [GLAAD Outstanding Film – Limited Release] Amazon Prime.
10. **Leave No Trace:** Directed by Debra Granik (*Winter's Bone*) in what seems to be a low-key film, but it ends up being a deeply moving film, filled with depth about a father-daughter relationship. The film is full of these perfect little moments that convey such meaning, and the meaning often extends beyond the father-daughter relationship; hitting on living with PTSD as well as the role of social services. *Leave No Trace* is a well-made film that nails what it tried to say. [Independent Spirit Awards Best Feature Nominee] Amazon Prime.
9. **Burning:** An amazing Korean mystery/thriller. *Burning* is very much a slow burn, that only offers some sense of finalization when the end credits start to roll. The visuals are amazing.

8. **Hereditary:** In what was a down year for the horror genre, *Hereditary* was here to show that horror is still capable of making some of the best films of the year. Unlike other horror films from previous years, *Hereditary* is rather scary; one of the scariest films in years. The set design (especially with the models) was amazing; it should have been nominated for Best Production Design (and probably even won). Toni Collette should have been nominated for Best Actress, she was that good. It was another film that should have gotten more consideration for cinematography (and obviously Best Picture). The plot rather original, but at times was a little out there/scattered. For a first feature, Ari Aster established himself as a force. Hopefully he can keep it up. [Independent Spirit Awards Best First Feature Nominee] Amazon Prime.
7. **The Favourite:** Yorgos Lanthimos (*The Lobster*, *The Killing of the Sacred Deer*) was not at his best with this film (he did not write it), but it still have the feel of one of his films. The three leads (I don't care that some were nominated under Supporting Actress) were all great and they were given ample opportunities to shine. The cinematography was good as well. Unlike other films that have been derided for historical liberties, *The Favourite's* were rather welcomed. Also the film possibly had the best end-credit design of the year. (A much better LGBT film than *Love, Simon*). [Best Picture Nominee]
6. **Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse:** Earlier when I said that Black Panther was the best comic book film, but its reign only lasted a few months; this animated Spider-Man is the reason why. A top-five film of the year when it comes to visuals. The supporting voice cast is perfect (Mahershala Ali, John Mulaney, Jake Johnson, Haliee Steinfeld, Nic Cage, etc). Probably the single-most-fun movie of 2018. The quality was amazing, not enough good things can be said. Also it contains my favorite joke of the year. [Best Animated Feature]
5. **Colette:** As alluded to earlier, Colette is a leaps and bounds better *The Wife*. In part, because *The Wife* was a kinda boring fictional tale that couldn't really develop much in the way of characters, while *Colette* is based on only a small part of life of the extremely bad ass title character. Keira Knightley (*Anna Karenina*, *A Dangerous Method*) is without a doubt the period actress alive. Dominic West is perfect for the role. Eleanor Tomlinson has a brief supporting role, and will hopefully be in more films soon. Great costumes, good cinematography, good editing, great plot, great characters. (The best LGBT film of the year). [Independent Spirit Awards Best Screenplay Nominee] Amazon Prime.

### Tier 1: These Would All be High Tier 3 in Any Year 2013–2017

4. **Widows:** It baffles me how this film did not get more nominations. Directed by Steve McQueen (*Hunger*, *Shame*, *12 Years a Slave*) and starring Viola Davis (*Fences*, *The Help*, *Doubt*, *The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby*) along with others in a stacked cast. My only guess is that since McQueen and Davis recent won their Oscars (2013 and 2016 respectively) that there wasn't much push to nominate? The writing was great (co-written by Gillian Flynn), with great editing (Joe Walker; two-time Oscar Nominee, four-time ACE nominee), great cinematography. The cast is absolutely stacked, go check it out for yourself; I'll briefly shutout Elizabeth Debicki (*Breath*, *The Tale*) one more time. It handles corruption, feminism, race, criminal justice, politics all rather well. The film does at times try to dangle a few too many ideas and the plot doesn't fully pull everything together, but this is a darn good film that did not get the credit it deserved. [BAFTA Best Actress]
3. **Roma:** Let's get out the only knock against this film right away; it is super slow. Now, maybe, it is because I am not use to watching foreign language films, but I don't think that can account for how slow this film really is. The acting was rather good; Marina de Tavira was nominated for Best Supporting Actress, and I fully agreed with the nomination. The film itself is beautiful. Cuarón shot a perfect film. The lengthy opening scene with mopping the driveway was beautiful. The continuous final parallel shot of the beach was exquisite. The delivery room scene was the best scene in 2018.

*Roma* is beautiful. Given the nominees, it should have won Best Picture. More films should be made in black and white. [Best Picture Nominee] Netflix.

2. **First Reformed:** Let's get out the only knock against this film right away; the ending needs work. The film is impeccably shot; everything in this top tier could have been nominated for cinematography and I would probably have been fine with it (with *Hereditary* taking the fifth slot). Written and directed by Paul Schrader (writer of *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*). Amanda Seyfried is good in a supporting role. The real crime is that Ethan Hawke (takes breath) (*Before Sunrise Trilogy*, *Boyhood*, *Predestination*, *Maggie's Plan*, and *Juliet, Naked*) gave the performance of a lifetime was not even nominated for Best Actor. He should have won the award going away. This was one of the best non-Daniel Day-Lewis in recent memory. Hawke was amazing. [Independent Spirit Award Best Picture Nominee] Amazon Prime.
1. **Annihilation:** *First Reformed* had an Oscar Nomination (Best Original Screenplay) and was well regarded on the indie circuit. *Roma* won multiple Oscars. *Widows* was well-nominated, but the main winners have recently won major awards. It baffles me that *Annihilation* was not better received. Natalie Portman plays the lead and is rather good (the role isn't super meaty, but a lesser actress would not have elevated the film to number one). Oscar Issac is rather good in a supporting role (seriously, watch everything he is in). The rest of the supporting cast is great as well; Jennifer Jason Leigh, Gina Rodriguez, Tessa Thompson. The VFX are possibly the best of the year, the cinematography is also amazing. Written and directed by Alex Garland (*Ex Machina*), he has established himself, as bar none, the. best. active. science. fiction. director. He also deserves to be ranked among the best active filmmakers. Except, sadly, the film needed about ten minutes cut. Unlike previous (and much lesser) films on this list the reason for cutting isn't a slow pace. Rather, these minutes were extra exposition for people that couldn't follow along the (even with extra minutes) difficult plot. The best analogy would be someone telling Kubrick *2001* needed ten minutes of explanation; and to an astute viewer these moments are not needed and ruin the wonder. **IF** a director's cut is out there without these moments, *Annihilation* could become the second best science-fiction film of all time behind *2001*, and one of the greatest films of all time. The underlying premise is that good. *Annihilation* is very good, and it could have been amazing. [Barack Obama's Favorite Movies of 2018, seriously this film was overlooked and under-appreciated] Amazon Prime.