Films of 2019

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 2019 (some of these films might have IMDb years for earlier due to film festival releases, or a 2018 Australian release before a 2019 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.]

Streaming service (Amazon Prime, Disney+, HBOGo, Hulu, and Netflix) up-to-date as of 4/15/20; afterwards who knows. So watch them now.

Tier 12: I Have Regerts

134. **Cats:** The CGI was often awful. The acting was often phoned in. The plot...there wasn't much of one. Taylor Swift was nice though.

133. **The Rise of Skywalker:** "The nicest thing I think can I say (outside of VFX; but if you spend[,] obvi[ously] they [will] look good) is that it didn't feel like two hours twenty minutes" (Me, in a

group chat). Otherwise this was one of the most poorly written movies of all time; overly obvious foreshadowing, forced relationship 'drama', forced nostalgia, forced homages to Nolan films.

132. **The Lion King (2019)**: How so many people saw this film in theaters is beyond me. It is nearly a shot-for-shot remake of the far superior original film. Even most of the 'new' stuff is from the Broadway play. Yes, the CGI was top notch. Except this might be the least original film of all time. Jon Favreau should feel bad. I like to imagine a world in 2024, where a Dem president is attempting to break up Disney, and prolific anti-Trump tweeter Jon Favreau is tweeting about how we need to elect the Republican to ensure economic prosperity. [Disney "Live Action"] *Disney+*

131. **Godzilla: King of the Monsters:** A cast is wasted as they are playing paper-thin characters. There isn't a really a plot beyond monsters fighting each other. It at least looks cool at times? [Popcorn Movie] *HBOMax*

130. **Her Smell**: Alex Ross Perry (*Listen Up Phillip*; 85th out of 90 in 2014, *Queen of Earth*; 97th out of 100 in 2015) is a bad director who makes bad films. [Spirit – Best Actress Nominee] *HBOGo*

129. **Tall Girl:** The flimsiest of characters, who are lucky to be one-dimensional characters. Even as a late-night-Netflix watch, this movie can't sustain itself or its completely predictable plot. The only semi-bright spot is former-Disney star Sabrina Carpenter (*Girl Meets World*) as the older (and shorter) sister. Carpenter was good here in a limited supporting role and good last year in *The Hate U Give*. Not sure, if she'll be able to carry a film; but she deserves a chance. Hopefully 2020 will deliver her the chance. [Netflix Rom-Com] *Netflix*

128. **The Laundromat:** A few years ago I wrote the following, "The separate stories never really come together as they should. It almost seems to be more of an anthology piece. I did not care for the breaking of the fourth wall, even if it was done in a creative way. The stellar cast [is] not given good enough characters to shine..." about *The Big Short*. And honestly, the same thing applies here; except the stories never come together. The breaking of the fourth wall is not creative, at all. The movie is extremely heavy handed and preachy. [Directed by Steven Soderbergh] *Netflix*

127. **Little Monsters:** A film that does not know what it wants to be. A rom-com set during a zombie outbreak, but also about a man-child learning to become responsible (also the film revolves around an kindergarten field trip). Lupita Nyong'o is good, and really the only thing that makes the film enjoyable. Josh Gadd starts of enjoyable (essentially playing an adult fed-up with playing Olaf), yet the joke gets old after the third F-bomb. And many more F-bombs still follow, it what is some shoddy writing. The film then ends the exact way you'd expect.

126. **Ma:** Not even Octavia Spencer (*The Help*, *Hidden Figures*, *The Shape of Water*, *Snowpiercer*) could save this movie. An overly formulaic plot, such that a few minutes in the audience knows exactly where the film is going, and in case the audience missed something, the film ensures that the audience did not miss it. [Not a Well-reviewed Horror, but I got bored]

125. **Five Feet Apart:** Not even Haley Lu Richardson (*Columbus*, *Support the Girls*, *The Edge of Seventeen*) can save this movie. It is based on a YA novel, so you can imagine why the film ranks here, and you'll be mostly right. I joking refer to this movie as *The Fault in Our Lungs*. Another plus was the film had an economics textbook, which was given a thank you in the credits. [Haley Lu Richardson]

Tier 11: Your Audience Isn't Stupid Or You Made Bad Directing Choices

124. **Rocketman:** The fundamental flaw of *Rocketman* is that it treats its audience like a group of children. In the first five minutes the entire plot is told to the audience by Elton (played by Taron

Egerton). The easiest comparison is to *Bohemian Rhapsody*. *Rocketman* does not take as much advantage of Elton's work, but does a better job of diving into his character. Most importantly the film attempted to have a gay sex scene, which seems like an obvious inclusion given that Rock n Roll is all about sex and drugs; both of which Elton partook in. [SAG Nomination – Best Male Actor]

123. **Glass:** The follow up to *Split* and the final film in M. Night Shyamalan's Unbreakable trilogy. The cast is rather good; James McAvoy, Bruce Willis, and Samuel L Jackson are rather good. Sarah Paulson does her best, but the fault lies more with the plot and her character; not her ability. The film is too straightforward and a semi-disappointing follow up to *Split*. [Sequel to *Split*] *HBOGo*

122. **The Souvenir:** 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 work by an 80s film student' 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 (not a film student in the 80s). It is because of that singular directorial decision that I could never get behind the film. The plot was slow as well, there was some good acting but I was out due to poor directing. [Sundance – World Cinema Winner] *Amazon Prime*

121. **Maleficent: Mistress of Evil:** Much worse than the first *Maleficent* film. The dialogue is worse (and often pointless), the cartoon villainy is ramped up to eleven (a waste of Michelle Pfeiffer), and the plot has even more holes. The effects and sound are still good. But the filmmakers forgot to have Angelina Jolie and Elle Fanning carry the film and instead attempted to make an *Avenger* knock-off.

120. **See You Yesterday:** Probably one of the films, I'll disagree with Rotten-Tomatoes-or-you-favorite-ranking's metric the most (that, or the previous film, The Souvenir). And, the time travel aspect wasn't my issue (as it is with most films involving time travel). It was the directorial decisions; Dutch angles, close-ups on objects for the sole purpose of lengthening the film. The film was a short film initially, that I assume was good; so they attempted to make the first feature based on it. Yet, the film did not work for me. Even though it attempted to make (and probably succeeded with its) social commentary, the directing got in the way of it. [Spirit Awards – Best First Feature Nominee] *Netflix*

119. **Richard Jewell:** Clint Eastwood (the director) leaned a little hard into the conservative politics on this one. The premise that Richard Jewell was a hero who saved lives, but the media and FBI quickly turned on and took away his chance to shine and his deserved fame. Except Richard Jewell the person, is not a sympathetic character. As the film starts out, he is exactly the type of person that should not become a cop. After the film implies women trade sex for stories; it becomes an implicit support group for angry white men (that use to be cops or military). Any good points the film tried to make about the media overreacting and poor policing get lost in trying to show that there are good white men who live with their parents. The film also tried to imply that Richard Jewell would still be alive today if it wasn't for the FBI investigation; Jewell died of heart failure in 2007. Kathy Bates was rather good, and deserved her Oscar Nomination. Sam Rockwell was good as well. Olivia Wilde should have turned this role down. [AFI Top 10 Movie]

Tier 10: Primarily Perfectly Enjoyable Studio Pictures

118. **Triple Frontier:** The film is held together by the cast: Oscar Isaac, Ben Affleck and Pedro Pascal. Outside of those three, there isn't much. The characters are never really developed. Although it is an action movie, there could have been more action (not something I anticipated typed). The issue is the film wanted to be a character-driven action film, but because teh characters weren't developed, it became a star-driven action movie. [Decently Reviewed Action Movie]

117. **Pokémon: Detective Pikachu:** This film was made for Pokémon lovers, and it is essentially all it has to offer. The Pokémon do look rather good and life like. Ryan Reynolds as the voice of Pikachu does a lot to hold the movie together. Kathryn Newton (*Blockers*, *Lady Bird*) is good. The combination of her and Ryan Reynolds run laps around Justice Smith (*Every Day*). The plot is rather bad, and it is written for five-year olds; not people who grew up playing Pokémon. [I was once a Pokémon Master] *HBOGo*

116. **Greta:** Similar to *Ma* this was a horror film with iffy reviews I decided watch. What makes *Greta* a better film, other than the cast (Chloë Grace Mortez and Isabelle Huppert as the leads), is that *Greta* in no way attempts to provide back story or explain much of anything. Characters act do dumb things (if kidnapped, and your kidnapper is maybe unconscious do not run away, kill them; a private investigator should not take their eyes of the person they are trailing, especially when in their home; how did this person get in a locked apartment? the audience doesn't need to know, roll with it). The craziness is helped by Maika Monroe in a supporting role, who starts the movie asking Mortez's character if she wants to get asparagus juice shot up her ass as it is the latest health craze; Monroe sets the mood of the film being out there and just rolling with it. Though the film makes two nice points about NYC chewing people up, and cops not believing women. Oh, and the scariest part of the movie, is when coffee is reheated in the microwave. [Not a Well-reviewed Horror, but I got bored] *HBOGo*

115. **Aladdin (2019):** This was a rough year for live-action Disney films. At least Aladdin was not a boring, almost shot-for-shot remake. However the character of Jafar was made worse, likewise Iago needed to be Gilbert Gottfried; both characters lost their sheer craziness. Will Smith as genie was solid, but paled in comparison to Robin Williams. There are good moments with Genie and Dalia (Jasmine's handmaiden). The real hero is was Jasmine, played by Naomi Scott. This year announced Naomi Scott as a force to be reckoned with going forward. I cannot wait for her future work. The costumes deserve a mild shout out. Regardless of having Scott and large improvements in the character of Jasmine, the film was nowhere near as good as the original; begging the question, why was it made. [Naomi Scott is good] *Disney+*

114. **Zombieland: Double Tap:** Rather inferior to the original film. Emma Stone is still rather good. Harrelson and Eisenberg are not as good compared to the original film. There are still funny moments, but it does not seem as fresh or innovative as the original. Zoey Deutch is rather enjoyable; hopefully rumors of a spin off based on her character come true. It is a fun watch, but it is nothing special. [Sequel to *Zombieland*]

113. **It Chapter 2:** An improvement over the first film, as it was not as heavy on the jump scares, also, seeing how the characters are now adults, it did a better job of portraying adult fears. Like the first, it was a tad too geared to a general audience and therefore made plot points super obvious (and therefore didn't take advantage of the cast's acting ability). The almost three-hour runtime does go by rather quickly, but given the length, it makes it hard to recommend for a late-night watch. [Sequel to *It*] *HBOGo*

112. **Yesterday:** The second of our movies based on famous music. Watching it, you almost start to wonder how Danny Boyle won an Oscar for Best Director. Yes, it makes sense why where there are constant Dutch-angle shots, but we know the universe off; The Beatles never existed! We don't need (poor) visual reminders. The film semi-wastes Lily James (*Cinderella*, *Baby Driver*, *Darkest Hour*) as the male lead's love interest. Lily James is amazing, but this film does not let her shine. Like many films near the bottom, it never decided what it wanted to be. It tried to be a comedy. It tried to be a love story. It tried to get serious. It never really succeeded at any of them. [The Beatles are cool] *HBOGo*

111. **Where'd You Go, Bernadette?:** Believe it or not, Richard Linklater (*Boyhood*, *Before Sunrise* trilogy, *Dazed and Confused*) can make a not-good film. The issue with *Bernadette* is that Linklater never decided what type of film he wanted to make. At times it is an absurdist comedy, while at others it is a serious family drama; those two never come together in this film. Another issue is that the film probably tries to stay a little too true to the novel (which I have not read), as there are frequent voice overs that over explain the plot the audience; Linklater should know better than to treat the viewer like an idiot. Cate Blanchett is rather good, as always. [I love Richard Linklater] *Hulu*

110. **The Perfect Date:** Another teenage rom-con on Netflix. Though the film is a tad cliché at times, it is a large improvement over *Tall Girl*; showing Netflix is capable of making enjoyable teenage rom-coms. Like with *Tall Girl*, the film is held together by a former Disney Channel star, Laura Marano (*Austin & Ally*). Noah Centineo, makes his Netlfix-obligatory male lead; and although he is decent; it appears his personality revolves around being tall. Society probably deserves it, after having decades of films where the female's character is being attractive. The film is what it is, but for an enjoyable rom-com it is easy to watch it. [Netflix Rom-Com] *Netflix*

109. **Blinded By the Light:** A rather formulaic film about a Pakistani immigrant growing up in 1980s England. It hits on the exact notes you'd expect; father-son relationship, finding a girlfriend, being an outsider in high school, etc. The film benefits from a Bruce Springsteen soundtrack, including a lovely marketplace scene set to a cover of Thunder Road (fun fact: Thunder Road is my most played song on iTunes). Actually, the marketplace scene probably ranks as one of the best feel-good scenes of the year. The general uplifting nature of the film makes up for the predictable and formulaic plot. [Bruce Springsteen is cool] *HBOGo*

108. **John Wick Chapter 3: Parabellum:** By now, you know what you get with the John Wick series; a well-made action film. Though, this one cannot live up to the previous films; mainly due to this installment serving as a world-building film to set up the franchise for many more installments (which I look forward to watching). There is an innovative, and lengthy, knife-fight scene which serves and an excellent change of pace from earlier films. [Critic's Choice – Best Action Nominee] *HBOGo*

107. **Captain Marvel:** The film had a lot of potential and instead wasted much of it. Sadly, *Captain Marvel*, never decided what type of film it wanted to be. Part of the time it wanted to be a buddy comedy in the vain of *Thor: Ragnorok*. Then, a few minutes later it wanted to be a feminist anthem like *Wonder Woman* (well, without the awful ending of *Wonder Woman*). Other times it tried to be pure 90s nostalgia. Had the film been more focused, it would have been greatly improved. Brie Larson is good in almost everything she does, and although *Captain Marvel* it doesn't waste her talent, it sure doesn't even try to maximize it. [Brie Larson is good] *Disney+*

106. **Doctor Sleep:** Any questions you had about what occurred in The Shining are essentially answered, in full. Even worse, is that the film is heavy-handed with the explanations. Worse yet, is the film is almost two-and-a-half hours long. The first fifty minutes could have been cut. Director Mike Flannigan has made great horror films (*Oculus*, *Hush*, *Ouija: Origin of Evil*, *Gerald's Game*) but *Sleep*, belongs with his other dud (*Before I Wake).* [Mike Flannigan and The Shining Sequel]

Tier 9: Great Leads or Great Effects, But Not Good Films

105. **Plus One:** One of the better reviewed rom-coms of the year, but it was much too cliché for me to get behind. Maya Erskine was good, whereas I thought Jack Quaid's qualification was being 6'1". There are a few funny lines; most delivered by Erskine. Except the film was too cliché to be a quality rom-com. [Well-reviewed Rom-Com] *Hulu*

104. **The Man Who Killed Don Quixote:** Famous for lingering in development hell for years, and it is nice that the film finally was made, but it never came together. Adam Driver is great, showing he should do more comedy. Jonathan Pryce is also rather good. Except, it is the plot that goes off the rails in the second half, which results in this ranking. [Adam Driver]

103. **Avengers: Endgame:** Most of this ranking is purely based on the ability to pull off a twenty-plus-film franchise in an essentially seamless way, while allowing for the cinematic universe to continue. You could convince me that Robert Downey Jr deserved a Best Supporting Actor nomination/win for his role in the MCU. [Best Visual Effects – Nominee] *Disney+*

102. **Joker:** Phoenix is as good as the reviews indicate. The cinematography is rather good. One of the best parts is that *Joker* is one of the first Batman films to embrace that Gotham is New York City. *Joker* has some great references to older films (*Ace in the Hole* and *Modern Times*, for example). Yet, like *Captain Marvel*, it never figured out what it wanted to say. It juggled a lot of important topics, but it never finalized them. As the criticism goes, just go watch *Taxi Driver* or *The King of Comedy.* [Best Picture Nominee]

101. **Harriet:** I am starting to think that biopics held together by the leading actors, but with around a 70% on Rotten Tomatoes are the actually some of the worst films made. Harriet currently has a 73%. Cynthia Erivo (*Widows*) is rather good, though I would not have nominated her for an Oscar. The score was heavy handed at times. There were many directing choices I disagreed with (such as the prayer(?) moments). The film was much more jesus heavy than I expected; and the amount of jesus was a turn off. There was, once again, uproar of the lack of minority and women nominees for directing at the Oscars. Harriet is not a film that was unjustly looked over. I didn't even mention Leslie Odom Jr (*Hamilton*) and Janelle Monae (*Hidden Figures*) and yet I almost didn't feel the need to mention them, as their characters were so poorly developed. [Best Actress Nominee]

100. **The Aeronauts:** See Harriet; this film currently has a 72% on Rotten Tomatoes. The film heavily relies on the chemistry and talent of its two leads; Eddie Redmayne and Felicity Jones. The visuals are rather good, except the plot it rather boring. Even though it is written well enough; there are no eye-roll moments, it just doesn't come across as interesting. The inability to ever get behind the action results in this ranking. [Critic's Choice – Best Visual Effects Nominee] *Amazon Prime*

99. **Alita: Battle Angel:** The film is what you'd expect from a James Cameron production (he did not direct the film). The visuals are amazing. It was a crowded field at the Oscars for Best Visual Effects, so it isn't too surprising it did not receive a nomination, though a strong case is to be made. The visuals in creating the titular Alita were rather good. Except, like any Cameron production, the plot was weak and predictable. Christoph Waltz was enjoyable in a supporting role, and although Mahersala Ali is also in a supporting role, he wasn't give much room to shine. [Decently Review Film with Great Visuals] *HBOGo*

Tier 8: Great Leads or Great Production, But Not Good Films; Just Slightly Better

98. **Greener Grass:** An absurdist take on suburbia, that was a tad too absurdist for me. Though, maybe if one goes in knowing the absurdity (or perhaps a little tipsy), maybe it will be funnier. Some of the bits are hilarious ('You let him watch Kids with Knives?'; among other crazy bits). Yet, the film doesn't really come together as a cohesive unit. The costume design, and set production should have received more attention; as possible even an Oscar nomination. [Spirit – Best First Screenplay Nominee] *Hulu*

97. **The Two Popes:** Being generous the reason I never got behind the film is that I was raised Catholic. Being, not generous, the reason I never got behind the film was that the cinematography was awful;

dutch angles, odd pans and zooms, close ups that were a tad too close up; almost like it was trying to be shot like a mediocre documentary. Jonathan Pryce was rather good, but not enough to carry the film. [Best Actor Nomination] *Netflix*

96. **Judy:** A biopic focusing on late-career Judy Garland. Renee Zellweger stars as Judy Garland, and does a great job. Her performance is the only redeeming part of this movie. Like Rocketman earlier on the list, the film treats its audience like children. Judy's abuse while a teenager at MGM is made extremely obvious to the audience, multiple times. The subplot of Judy being a gay icon, seemed more of fan service than anything that contributed much to the film. [Best Actress Winner]

95. **The Good Liar:** The film is held together by Hellen Mirren and Ian McKellen's performances. They are the reason you watch this film. The plot gives a little too much away at the beginning; it practically tells the audience that Betty (Mirren) also has something up her sleeve. The rest of the movie is then waiting to see what exactly the plot twist will be. Once the twist is revealed too much time has elapsed, and then it is needlessly told in flashbacks. [Hellen Mirren and Ian McKellen in a decently reviewed film]

94. **Give Me Liberty:** The film is very hectic, with a poor narrative structure. *Liberty* comes across as much too hectic to coherently make the points it is trying to make. At times, it feels like a new challenge presents itself as a way not advancing the 'plot,' rather than being a naturally occurring event. Maxim Stoyanov as Dima could be a promising actor, I would like to see he get more opportunities. Yet, whatever the film was trying to say about America as a mixing pot, never end up working. [Spirit – John Cassavetes Award Winner]

93. **Limbo:** One of multiple films entitled *Limbo* these last few years (this is the one about the 'trial' of murderer to determine is fate; heaven or hell). The premise is simple and the best part of the film. Almost a *Good Omens* in a 'courtroom'. The script is all over the place; at times hilarious dark comedy, and then others needless exposition and a finale you see coming miles away. The acting is not-good, except for veteran character actor Richard Riehle who steals the show. One can't help but think with a tighter script and a quirky indie-circuit all-star cast this film could have been rather enjoyable. Instead it is completely mediocre.

92. **The Gentlemen:** Directed by Guy Richtie with an all-star cast, Matthew McConaughey, Jeremy Strong, Colin Farrell, and Hugh Grant (among others). The film relies on Richtie's usual style, but then is almost limited by it. The film is an enjoyable gangster film with enough laughs and good actors (not giving award-winning performances, but they are stars for a reason). [Airplane Movie]

91. **Klaus:** Netflix's first (feature-length) animated film. The animation is hand-drawn, and looks amazing. The animation is what gets the film ranked here. The voice cast is good, and the plot is uplifting, but predictable and cliché at times. Also, as the title indicates, it is a Santa Klaus origin story, which, is never really my cup of tea. [Best Animated Film Nomination] *Netflix*

90. **Charlie's Angels:** This film could easily be ranked lower. Elizabeth Banks made a few poor directing choices (mainly in action scenes regarding pacing and editing), also Banks overacted a little at times. Yet, like with many films, Kristen Stewart (*Clouds of Sils Maria*, *Personal Shopper*, *Certain Women*, *Still Alice*, *Lizzie*) helps save the day. Stewart is so perfect in minuscule ways, "Hi, Bye. Hi, Bye." I hope they make a few more sequels, but given the poor domestic box office, that may not happen. Also Naomi Scott (*Lemonade Mouth*, *Aladdin (2019)*) is rather good, in what should be a breakout year for her. [Kristen Stewart is Amazing]

89. **Jumanji: The Next Level:** A surprisingly good sequel, which at times is held together by Danny DeVito and/or Dwayne Johnson. *Next Level* offers enough new material to be worth while, including nice tie-ins to the franchise as a whole. At times it suffers from too much fan service/running back

the better moments of the first (rebooted) film. All indications point to a third film being on the way, which hopefully is as good as this sequel. [Sequel to *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*]

Tier 7: Films I'd Recommend, Yet Each is Rather Flawed

88. **Stockholm:** A mildly amusing, mildly funny look at the bank robbery that provided the namesake for Stockholm Syndrome. A brisk 92 minutes, which is exactly how long the film needed to be. Sadly *Stockholm* never gets deep enough behind the psychological reasons for befriending one's captors; only scratching the surface in some too-obvious scenes. That being said the mild comedy and Ethan Hawke make it an enjoyable, albeit one that fails to reach its full potential, film. [Ethan Hawke is good]

87. **The Hole in the Ground:** A decent horror film that unfortunately takes a little too long to get going, which is saying something given it has a 90 minute runtime. Maybe it would benefit from multiple viewings, as you could pick up subtle changes in behavior (assuming they exist). The final 30ish minutes are good, but it is getting to them that is the difficult part. [Well-reviewed Horror] *Amazon Prime*

86. **The Farewell:** One of the films were my opinion diverges the most from the critical consensus. Similar to The Two Popes, it might be that I never got around to the premise: it is bad to tell someone they are dying of cancer. And probably because I never got that premise (and other issues surrounding death), I could never get behind the film. Akwafina was rather good. [Spirit – Best First Feature Winner] *Amazon Prime*

85. **Fast Color:** A science-fiction film that has more to say about family dynamics than making use of its science-fiction premise. At times it feels as if the added science fiction aspects are to ensure the film isn't just another family drama; and the film suffers because of it. Gugu Mbatha-Raw (*Motherless Brooklyn*) is someone to watch going forward. [Good Reviews] *Amazon Prime*

84. **Shazam!:** Thankfully *Shazam!* avoids being Spider-Man. Both films are about teenage boys getting super powers. The recent *Spider-Man* franchise has dealt with weighty topics, and the reboot has leaned into the implications of a high-schooler needing to save the world. *Shazam!* instead focuses on the comedic aspect of it, avoiding being a cheap imitation. In doing so, *Shazam!* is a fun film, in which Ryan Atwood moves in with Seth Cohen and instantly makes Seth Cohen's life fun and worthwhile (seriously, that is an apt description of the plot). [Good Reviews] *HBOGo*

83. **Terminator: Dark Fate:** Finally a respectable third *Terminator* film. *Dark Fate* ignores all films/tv series post-*Judgment Day*, and had James Cameron as a producer. The primary issue (beyond too many callbacks to previous installments; e.g., "I'll be back") is that the audience knows that Arnold will make an appearance. Therefore the first part of the film is essentially a countdown to seeing Arnold (with an excellent insult aimed at idiots that dislike immigration). Although, the beginning is held together by Linda Hamilton being awesome, which helps the wait (along with the aforementioned insult of anti-immigrant types). *Dark Fate* is good conclusion to the *Terminator* trilogy. [Sequel to *Terminator*]

82. **Wild Nights with Emily:** More of an overly long *Drunk History* episode – less than 90 minutes. And – due to the length – the Absurdity of the film can't keep up. There are funny moments, Molly Shannon is in the film, but is partially the main character. The film works best at correcting the Narrative around Emily Dickinson's life. Anyone interested in Dickinson should watch it. It paints a very different picture than *A Quiet Passion* (2017).

81. **Good Boys:** Starring Jacob Tremblay (*Room*) as a sixth grader, who over the course of the day, must deal with all that comes with becoming a sixth grader. The film his rather funny (and fowl,

and crude, and has lots of anal beads; if that is your kind of thing). The constant sex jokes (or, lack of sex jokes, "I've had sex plenty of times, but I've never kissed anyone"; and other examples of sixth graders attempting to be cool, but having no idea what they are talking about) are what makes the film hilarious. Though, the main point that friends at sixth grade will eventually drift apart is the only real meaning behind the film. The lack of (more) depth puts the film here as opposed to a few other semi-light-hearted comedies later in the list. [Well-reviewed Comedy] *HBOGo*

80. **The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind:** Written and directed by Chiwetel Ejiofor in his directorial debut. Ejiofor also plays a supporting role in the film, which needs to heavily rely on his acting ability to help carry the film. The film is a tad predictable (and at times too long), though uplifting. Ejiofor hopefully does better in the future. [British Independent Film Awards – Best Supporting Actor Nominee] *Netflix*

79. **Gloria Bell:** Julianne Moore is great, as you'd expect, she always is great, in everything. The film primarily succeeds because of her. John Turturro is good in a supporting role. Michael Cera and Brad Garrett both appear as well. Except, the film never comes together as much as it should; the plot is a tad disjointed. [English Language Remake of *Gloria*] *Amazon Prime*

78. **Motherless Brooklyn:** Written, starring, and directed by Edward Norton (in his directorial debut) the film falls flat. Norton is trying to grapple with a lot of weighty topics (politics, corruption, race, development, etc) yet he never makes the points one would hope, as the film never decides what exactly it is trying to say. The film is like a noir, but Norton did not lean into the noir aesthetic. Many of the characters are one dimensional, and in some instances the film suffers from poor acting. The film clocks in at 144 minutes, and it desperately needed to be cut down. How someone let Norton make a film that long, is absurd. Maybe in twenty years, someone will remake *Motherless* in a way that makes the points Norton failed to convey. [Good Enough Reviews]

77. **We Have Always Lived in the Castle:** The film clocks in at 95, which is about the right length. The sets are amazing; primarily in an old mansion on the hill. The costumes are great in their 1960s style. Taissa Farminga (*6 Years*, *What They Had*) and Alexandra Daddario (*True Detective Season One*) are both good. Yet the film is entirely plot-driven instead of character-driven. Events happen because they advance the plot, and there is never a feeling that what you are watching matters. Only that it looks good and the plot is good enough. [Good Enough Reviews] *Netflix*

76. **Braid:** Few times does a review perfectly capture my thoughts. I found a review that did just that. So read the first paragraphs and the last paragraphs instead. https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/braid-2019 [Well-reviewed Horror Film] *Amazon Prime*

75. **Under the Silver Lake:** One of the year's love-it-or-hate-it films. It is neo-noir set in (East) LA directed by David Robert Mitchell (*It Follows*). Yet, his sophomore feature is extremely hit or miss. Andrew Garfield is rather good, and the plot is all over the place; but for a noir that is usually a selling point. Except this film is not far enough out there (in a Lynchian sense) for the craziness to work. It does come together, but in a way that leaves the audience going, "ok." The film wanted to hit on a lot of topics, but because it tries to wrap most of them up, while forgetting about a few of them it makes of a sloppy ending. [Director of *It Follows* follow up] *Amazon Prime*

74. **Adam:** The premise of the film (based off the novel of the same) is the reason for such a low ranking, and such a high ranking. The basis of the coming of age story is a straight cis boy pretends to be trans as to date a lesbian. It creates a lot of cringe inducing moments. Except it allows for nice statements to be made regarding gender, and perhaps the best part of the film; his love interest's realization that they are not a lesbian, but rather bisexual. A few of the minor characters needed more development for the film to take off; Ethan and (girl) Casey are the only ones with an attempt at development.

Margaret Qualley (*Seberg* and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*) was decent enough, and is someone worth watching out for in the future. [GLAAD – Outstanding Limited Release Nominee] *Hulu*

73. **Crawl:** The stranded-while-trapped-by-a-dangerous-animal-intent-on-eating-you genre is just plain fun. Sharks had their go in *The Shallows* (2016, with Blake Lively), now with Crawl alligators get their chance to feast. Like with The Shallows the potential of being eaten or dying by being trapped fuels the plot, but more importantly acts as the catalyst for the characters to face lingering issues. It is the character development that makes these good films; the action is a nice bonus. We need a film with a late-40s mother and early-20s son stuck after an avalanche and surrounded by polar bears. This is a fun genre that should be milked. [Well-reviewed Horror Film]

72. **Girl on the Third Floor:** A nice take on the haunted-house genre; the home is haunted by dead former prostitutes (the house was once a brothel). These girls then tempt men. The film can be a tad heavy handed at times. However, the effects are rather good; fluids oozing out of outlets, black slime coming from the walls – all which look great and builds up a sense of horror. The film is rather gory, which might not be for everyone. It is a good analysis on toxic masculinity. [Well-reviewed Horror Film] *Netflix*

71. **In Fabric:** From the writer/director of *The Duke of Burgundy*, Peter Strickland, he continues to make some of the most interesting films out there. *Fabric* never quite comes together; it is an odd semi-funny horror film about a killer dress. The horror aspect is a tad weak at times, and the film is too bizarre at times. In the end, the film is mainly a critique of commerce, advertisement, and the like; and there are many more films with that same criticism (though not based on a dress that kills people). [Well-reviewed Horror Film]

70. **Burning Cane:** Written and directed by Phillip Youmans, in his directorial debut. At only 77 minutes, it still feels a tad long. Yet, the film touched on weighty topics: alcoholism, domestic abuse, masculinity, and religion. The film doesn't quite pull off everything it attempts to accomplish, but for a first feature, and by someone who was born in 2000, shows that Phillip Youmans is someone to watch. Wendell Pierce (*The Wire*) has a supporting role. [Spirit – John Cassavetes Award Nominee] *Netflix*

69. **Missing Link:** One of the hardest films to rank. *Missing Link* is easily in the running for the most beautiful film of the year. Produced by the animation studio Laika (*Kubo*, *Coraline*, etc) the stop-motion filming is amazing. The sets, the characters, the outfits, everything is amazing. However, the plot is rather generic, though not formulaic; especially when compared to *Kubo* and *Coraline*. It is so sad this film was a box office bomb (budget of around 100 million and revenue of about 25 million), as Laika should be making as many movies as possible; no animation studio is near their level of visual quality. [Best Animated Film Nominee] *Hulu*

68. **How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World:** The animation was amazing (this was a great year for technical quality in animated films). Particularly scenes involving sand were amazing. Though the plot could have been better. Compared to the second installment in the series the villain was a bit of a letdown; yet a good switch from brawn to brains. *Hidden World* did not take advantage of Cate Blanchett's character, while giving too much screen time to other support roles. Overall it was a nice conclusion to the series. [Best Animated Film Nominee] *Hulu*

67. **Toy Story 4:** Unlike *Missing Link*, the fourth Toy Story film is still able to find an original plot and continued character development. For a film, that on the surface, screamed Disney cash grab (see *The Lion King (2019)*), *Toy Story 4* managed to be worthwhile. Afterwards you don't leave thinking, "why was that made again" but rather, "not sure, I needed another, but that was enjoyable." For a fourth film in a franchise, can you ask for anything more? [Best Animated Film Winner] *Disney+*

66. **High Flying Bird:** The better of Steven Soderbergh's two films from the year (*The Laundromat*). Like his previous film, *Unsane*, this one was shot on an iPhone. It does look better a little better. With the new iPhone having three cameras, I look forward to more films being shot on the device. It is a solid (worker-empowerment) film whose 91 minute runtime is over before you know it. The one issue with a 90 minute film, is that High Flying Bird does not get as deep into its topics as it could have done. Kudos to Netflix for making this film; hopefully their work with Soderbergh and iPhone-produced films continues. [Spirit – Best Screenplay Nominee] *Netflix*

65. **Bliss:** Remember *Mandy* from last year? Well someone (Joe Begos) decided to make an entire movie that is essentially the LSD-portions of *Mandy*. The cinematography is great, from the camera movement, to angles, to the colors. The film is a dark look at art, inspiration, and the lengths people will go to create a masterpiece. The plot could have been a tad better, but the film is 80 minutes of non-stop drug-fueled chaos. [Well-reviewed Horror Film]

64. **The Dead Don't Die:** A comedy-zombie film by Jim Jarmusch (Paterson and Only Lovers Left Alive). One of the best ensemble casts assembled in a long time: Adam Driver, Bill Murray, Tilda Swinton, Selena Gomez, Tom Waits, Steve Buschemi, Danny Glover, Carol Kane, and more! While the cast is great, the film never comes together as it should. It has some of the funniest moments of the year (if you like dry humor), but the film is too heavy handed and it never wraps up as it should. A few changes and this film could have ranked a lot higher on the list. [Adam Driver and Jim Jarmusch]

63. **Frozen II:** Can an animated film be nominated for best costume design? The plot was a tad meh, the songs are not as catchy. The costumes (and the other parts of the animation) are amazing. I don't think I really need to gush over just how much I love the franchise, so I shall wrap up this write up—after the previous em dash. [BAFTA – Best Animated Film Nominee] *Disney+*

62. **Seberg:** Kristen Stewart is rather good, as always. One problem with the film is the heavily reliance for stand-in characters; the non-Vince Vaughn FBI character in particular makes the film about white men finding redemption than racism and sexism. There was a lot that could have been done, but *Seberg* didn't accomplish all that it could have. [Kristen Stewart] *Amazon Prime*

61. **Just Mercy:** Michael B Jordan and Jamie Foxx were not as good as some reviews and nominations indicated. The plot was too straight forward with a lot of exposition, *Just Mercy* treated its audience like a kid. *Just Mercy* is a formulaic historical legal drama that relies on its subject matter to garner emotion; there are four ways one can support the death penalty: 1) They do not value *any* human life, 2) They *really, really, really* enjoy actually guilty people dying, 3) They failed basic math, or 4) They have no desire for any sort of logical consistency. Seriously the math does not add up once you realize killing an innocent person is really [redacted] bad and that innocent people can die as long as there is a death penalty. [SAG – Best Supporting Actor Nominee]

60. **Bombshell:** The film is held together by the strength of its cast; Charlize Theron, Margot Robbie, Nicole Kidman, Kate McKinnon, etc. Except the film is written at such a surface level, that these amazing actors are not given room to give nuance and provide depth. Another issue is that the film treated the audience like a five year old. Compare *Bombshell* with, say, *Dark Waters*; another film about exposing bad behavior; *Bombshell* scratches the surface. Though, the argument for *Bombshell* being poorly written is that the film is about literal cartoon villains (Fox News leadership). Yet, just because most people at Fox News are cartoon villains, does not mean that the women being portrayed needed to be so one-dimensional. [Best Actress Nominee]

Tier 6: Almost Exclusively Good Indies, Yet Each is Missing Something

59. **Colewell:** Similar to a film a few spots further on the list, Diane. In the sense that both are about aging women dealing with aging. Diane is slightly better. The reason is *Colewell* does not give the lead character, Nora (Karen Allen), as much depth. Nora's character is based on having left her life of exploration to one of static repetition, as well as being needed in her community. The film does make these points well, but Nora needed more to allow *Colewell* to rank higher. [Spirit – John Cassavetes Award Nominee]

58. **The Public:** *The Public* is similar to *Motherless Brooklyn*. Actor turned director wanting to make sweeping statements about society. Except the films never come together like they wanted. The Public needed to stay focused on homelessness and the role of libraries in society. The added attempts to criticize politicians, the media, and include the opioid crisis do not really work. Gabrielle Union as the reporter is given an especially poorly written role. Jena Malone's (*The Neon Demon*) character is the best, as the character provides a great look into what each person is able and willing to do to help others. [Fresh Air Interview and Student Recommendation]

57. **Ford v Ferrari:** What separates Ford from previous racing films, is that the film is primarily focused on Miles (Bale) and Shelby's (Damon) lives. Bale, in particular, gives a great performance. The racing sequences are overrated; too much shifting in straightaways and too many cars being passed in one turn/lap – however these inaccuracies are semi-needed for cinematic action. The film is fun, and enjoyable; though how it managed a Best Picture nomination is beyond me; okay no; a 60s-based LA-centric car movie is meat for older Academy voters. [Best Picture Nominee]

56. **Diane:** A stereotypical indie character drama. Like many films that fit the stereotype, Diane is starts off rather slow (and only has a 97 minute run time). Sticking with the negatives, the drug-addicted-son-turns-heavily-to-Jesus trope does not work (nor is the son's acting that well). Now that the negatives are out of the way, the film is an excellent portrait of dealing with shame; the character of Diane is great. Mary Kay Place, who plays the titular Diane, is great and deserved her lead actress nomination at the Spirit Awards. [Spirit – Best First Feature Nominee] *Hulu*

55. **To Dust:** A film about a Hassidic Jew, who recently lost his wife. The widower then goes on a (darkly-comedic) journey in an effort to get closure. Joined by a community college professor (who is sans PhD), and played by Mathew Broderick. Broderick deserved more praise for his performance. The film needed the b-plot, the sons' journey with grief, to be better. The weakness of that plot prevents the film from ranking hiring. The film is probably not for everyone, especially if they have strong views regarding the dead. Except it is the taboo/dark humor which makes To Dust a serious-but-sometimes-hilarious-in-an-awful-way film. [Spirit – Best Screenplay Nominee] *Amazon Prime*

54. **Brothers' Nest**: A good example of what can be accomplished in a simple film with a small cast. Two brothers conspire to murder their step-father, so that they'll receive their mother's inheritance. What unfolds is a well-written family drama, that keeps the viewer on edge. The back story is slowly filled in, and provided in such as way as which brother is sympathetic is constantly changing (well, as sympathetic as someone who is about to murder a person can be). There are also plenty of funny lines, making for a mild comedy about murder. The film doesn't quite wrap up, like I hoped it would, but it is a fun watch. [AACTA – Best Screenplay Nominee] *Amazon Prime*

53. **Hustlers:** J-Lo was rather good; there were better supporting performances, but a strong argument can be made that she deserved an Oscar nomination. The plot was a tad heavy handed at times; though the ending avoided being overly cliché. Although the film, at first glance, is about the financial crisis and Wall Street greed/excess, the film is really about friendship. It could have cut about five minutes where their plans were detailed (see being overly heavy handed). Given that a big deal was raised about a lack of female directors being nominated, although *Hustlers* was directed by a woman

(Lorene Scafaria) it was not worthy of a Best Director nomination. [SAG – Best Supporting Actress Nominee]

52. **Freaks:** A disclaimer that others can, and probably will rank *Freaks* (not to be confused with Tod Browning's 1932 masterpiece) higher. One of my major complaints is, in part due to one of my own idiosyncrasies; finding children annoying/irrational/etc. The film needs the child character to be those things, yet I find each instance excruciating. Bruce Dern has a supporting role and is amazing, as you'd expect; cherish him. *Freaks* hits on a lot of important topics; immigration, drones, surveillance, police brutality, feminism, and others. Some of the ideas could be more developed, with a few being a little too overt. However, at the end of the day, the film is about family dynamics. The co-directors Zach Lipovsky and Adam Stein are ones to watch. [Well-reviewed Sci-fi] *Netflix*

51. **Daniel Isn't Real:** A psychological horror that isn't exactly scary. Yet, it works mainly due to the performance of Patrick Schwarzenegger, who plays the titular (and evil) Daniel. The film does a decent job of addressing mental health and does find a way to stand out in a crowded subgenre (is-the-evil-voice-in-my-head-real-or-not) even if other films have tackled premise in a more frightening way. [Well-reviewed Horror]

50. **Villains:** This dark comedy is one of the more fun films of the year, in part because of how off the walls the film can get. Somehow, an apt description is (*Don't Breathe* × *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*) + Comedy. The cast is stellar. Maika Monroe might be the go-to actor for needing a slightly bonkers female character (Zoey Deutch is probably the other one to consider). Bill Skarsgård (*It*) is hilarious. Jeffery Donovan (*Burn Notice*) needs to have his character investigated by Detective Benoit Blanc solely for the accent-off that would occur. Kyra Sedgwick is great as well. *Villains* is a fun 90 minutes. [Well-reviewed Comedy] *Hulu*

49. **Sweetheart:** Directed by J.D. Dillard and staring Kiersey Clemons (*Hearts Beat Loud, Austin & Ally*), Sweetheart is one of more enjoyable films of the year. The visuals are amazing, it helps that the film is set on a remote island. Yet the ocean, the beach, the sky, the "jungle" all look great. A survival-horror film; if *Castaway* had a sea monster. The silence is amazing, as the dialogue is minimal (unlike Tom Hanks, Clemons is not talking to a volleyball). In fact, it is the silence that allows Clemons to deliver a good performance. The only issue is that the character of Clemons had a weak background. For example, compared to *The Shallows* or *Crawl*, the main character was not as developed. [Well-reviewed Horror] *Netflix*

48. **Ready or Not:** One of the hardest films to rank. Not because it is controversial or absolutely excels in some areas while falling flat in others. It is because *Ready or Not* attempts to say the exact same things as *Knives Out*. Both are even set in these Gothic mansions that are almost a character themselves. It is the overlap in themes and meaning, with *Ready* being less serious (a comedy-horror(?) film) which results in not being able to rate this film higher. It is also a good reason to justify rating it lower. That being said *Ready* is rather fun, but it does have a few eye roll moments, which also results in a lower rating. Samara Weaving (*The Babysitter*) is good (not great) and worth keeping an eye on. [Well-reviewed Horror Film]

47. **The Perfection:** A psychological horror film starring Allison Williams (*Get Out*). The plot is semi-disjointed, yet it works in this film. The reason it works, is the film is about world class cellists and the practice needed to achieve perfection. Like a composition with different movements, the film has four part, each with their own title card. Frequently, at the end of movement, the film rewinds and adds in parts that were left out; were the audience was in the dark. Although this replaying, seems cheap (and for most films it would be a major hindrance) *The Perfection* gets away with it as it enhances the idea of a cello player needing to go back, redo a part they missed, and get it right. The body horror at times gets a little squeamish. Also, the film goes off the rails in the end, but in a good way (well good meaning film making, it is a horror film after all) yet the ending could be

improved. Some of the foreshadowing is heavy handed and could be toned down a bit; though the film is 90 minutes, so there isn't much material to cut. [Well-reviewed Horror Film] *Netflix*

46. **Only You:** Written and directed by Harry Wootliff, she is someone to watch. The film was a tad slow at times, but she wrote well-crafted and intimate film. I should get the disclaimer out that I am not a fan of the plot – people trying to have a baby. Laia Costa was rather good, hopefully she continues to be in English-language films. One moment that captures both Wootliff's and Costa's talents is a seemingly simple scene: Elena (Costa) is going to the bathroom, she wipes; pauses, then slowly reaches into her purse for a tampon. The scene is simplistic yet powerful; perfect film making. [BAFTA – Best British Debut Nominee]

45. **Adopt a Highway:** Ethan Hawke stars in a film with a simple aim, that hits its target. With a brief 78 minute run-time, *Adopt* does not try to do more than it should. It simply tells a story of redemption (while pointing out the disgrace that was California drug laws), with Ethan Hawke's face conveying much the meaning. [Ethan Hawke is good]

44. **Paddleton:** The joy of the film is in its darkly-sweet simplicity; written by Mark Duplass (who, you should probably give anything he is involved with a watch). Mark Dulpass' character has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The diagnosis throws a wrench into his life, and the life of his upstairs neighbor (and, more importantly his best (and only) friend; played by Ray Ramano). Watching the two leads cope and come to terms with the impending death, which will be by assisted suicide, more than holds the film together. Although tragic, the film is charming, sweet, and quite funny. [Mark Duplass is good] *Netflix*

43. **Clemency:** Written and Directed by Chinonye Chukwu, is very much someone to watch. She should be a good director; *Clemency* is only her second film. *Clemency* does a great job grappling with the realization that the death penalty is awful. Though the film bogs down in the middle and even though the scenes with Bernadine's husband (Wendell Pierce) add to Bernadine's character (Alfre Woodard), they slow the movie down and detract from the main points of the film. However *Clemency* is what *Just Mercy* could have been. Let p be the probably the person actually did it and deserves to die, bet A how much you value killing them. Then you can only support the death penalty if $pA > (1-p)$Value of Life, the math does not add up to support the death penalty as p is not within epsilon (a super small number) of 1, and Value of Life is usually 6–10 Million. [Spirit – Best Feature Nominee]

42. **The King:** My issue with this film, is more of an issue of the genre; Medieval and Pre-Industrial Revolution costume dramas. Almost every film uses dated language and is slow. *The King* keeps the dated language and could cut its two hour and twenty minute run-time down a bit; though the plot is rather good. However the film is carried by (another) amazing performance from Timothée Chalamet. He has reached the level where you watch everything he is in. Robert Pattinson plays a supporting role that I wished had more screen time; Pattinson is that good. The visuals are rather good, though probably not deserving of nominations. [AACTA – Best Film Nominee (and winner of many awards at AACTA)] *Netflix*

41. **Queen & Slim:** The film is almost a modern (and African-American) take on Bonnie & Clyde. Daniel Kaluuya (*Get Out*, *Black Panther*, *Widows*) is rather good as the titular Slim. There are many extremely touching moments in the film, particularly the scene set in a bar with live music. The reason this film cannot be ranked, is that too much of the film has the plot driven by external factors; each of which get more outlandish as the film progresses (outlandish is not the right word, as most of the time they are believable, just it seems like these external events exist to move the plot; rather than allowing the characters to move the plot). As far as films about police brutality, it isn't up with *Blindspotting* or *The Hate U Give*, but is still a worthy film. [National Board of Review – Best Directorial Debut]

40. **El Camino:** The film looks great. Aaron Paul is rather good, still. Jesse Plemons is still underrated. It features a song by Dr Hook and the Medicine Show! It serves has a nice conclusion to the Breaking Bad universe. Except, the film can't really answer one fundamental question, did we really need this move? Yes, Breaking Bad is wonderful. But this movie seems like a two-hour epilogue to the TV series, rather than a film. [*Breaking Bad* Sequel] *Netflix*

39. **Luce:** One of the harder films to evaluate this year. The film attempts to discuss a lot of current issues: race, gender, mental health, etc; and gets more than surface deep. Structured as a sorta mystery-thriller film in which a (successful) (black) (adopted) student is accused by his (black) (female) teacher of potentially wanting to incite violence. The film then frequently flips back-and-forth between who appears to be in the right, which helps the film come together. Except, because it is trying to hit on so many weighty topics, it never really wraps up as one would hope. [Spirit – Best Director Nominee] *Hulu*

Tier 5: Near-Perfect Movies that Aimed Small or Good Films that Needed a Little Bit More

38. **Dolemite is My Name:** (and fuckin' up muthafuckers is my game). Eddie Murphy, who plays titular character Dolemite, and Dolemite's real-life creator Rudy Ray Moore, is amazing. It is possibly a perfect role for him, and Murphy did not receive enough recognition (no SAG nomination). Not only is Dolemite a fun and enjoyable film, it has a fair bit of social commentary baked in. In particular, watching the growth of the white film students hired to help make the film-within-the-film is a nice minor subplot. [National Board of Review – Top 10 Film] *Netflix*

37. **Britney Runs a Marathon:** A lot of films in this tier are just well-made and fun movies. Britney is one of them. Desiring to lose weight, the titular Britney decides to take up running, and eventually to run a marathon. The film hits on the required body image themes, and does so rather well. It is the minor characters that propel this film into this tier. Britney forms a running group; a (gay) man who is trying to impress his child and a recovering drug addict who has taken up running to help stay clean. It is these supporting characters that help round out this uplifting and well-made film. [Sundance – Audience Award Winner] *Amazon Prime*

36. **Fighting with My Family:** A lot of films in this tier are just well-made and fun movies. Fighting is one of them. Like Dolemite and Britney, Fighting is a semi-autobiographical film about WWE wrestler Paige, and her ascent from a small-time wrestler in small-town England to the WWE. The film has a sneaky good cast: Florence Pugh (*Lady Macbeth*, *Midsommar*, and *Little Women*), Leana Headey (*Game of Thrones*), Nick Frost (*Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz*), Vince Vaughn, Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson (as himself), among others. Though it has a semi-simplistic plot, it is well done. [Florence Pugh] *Amazon Prime*

35. **Spider-Man: Far From Home:** The rebooted-reboot of Spider-Man has been plain old fun. Tom Holland and Zendaya do most of the work, though the rest of the cast does a great job as well (shout out Angourie Rice, Jon Faverau, Marissa Tomei, and, I guess, Jake Gyllenhaal). Once again, the plot is rather predictable, but the cast and enough emphasis on topical ideas regarding surveillance makes for a fun and enjoyable film. [Critic's Choice – Best Action Nominee]

34. **A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood:** Tom Hanks is as good as advertised in the role of Mr. Fred Rodgers. The issue, is that Tom Hanks (and by extension Mr. Rodger's personality) dominates the film. That all the scenes without Tom Hanks the viewer ends up wishing Tom Hanks was in them. Matthew Rhys is decent enough as the lead, but cannot compete. The production design was rather good, and I am surprised it didn't get more recognition; the miniature sets were a delight. The film does rely too much on nostalgia, Hanks, and Mr. Rodgers at times, and could have been a few minutes shorter. [Best Supporting Actor Nominee]

33. **Sword of Trust:** The final film directed by Lynn Shelton (*Your Sister's Sister*, *Laggies*, *Outside In*). It is a great encapsulation of Shelton's style: small casts, great acting, and modern social commentary. *Sword* is a great Trump-era film. A former drug addict, his Hispanic employee, and a lesbian couple attempt to sell a Lost Cause sword to a bunch of, well, Lost Cause-ers. The social commentary is great, the film is hilarious. It is such a loss that Shelton died in early 2020. [Directed by Lynn Shelton]

32. **Honey Boy:** Written and starring Shia LeBeouf, Honey Boy is a semi-autobiographical film about LeBouf's childhood and subsequent addiction issues. The film clocks in at 94 minutes, and it could have been longer. Unfortunately, the scenes with Lucas Hedges all fall flat (this is not an indictment of Hedges); I wanted to watch LeBeouf (playing the abusive and supportive father) with his child; in part because of how good LeBeouf is in the film. Eliminating the Hedges scenes would make for an even shorter film. LeBeouf needed to expand the film to cover more of the relationship, or different aspects of the child's life. There are two or three near-perfect scenes set in the motel room; which showcases LeBeouf's acting (and writing) as well as Alma Har'el's future as a director. Though, not worth a Best Directing nomination at the Oscars, but an example of a film, directed by a woman, that did not get the attention it deserved; thankfully the Spirit Awards nominated the film. [Spirit – Best Director Nominee] *Amazon Prime*

31. **I Lost My Body:** An extremely touching animated film. The film deal with grief, loss, and identity in a unique way; a young-man/teenager has lost his hand. Easily, one of the most original films of the year; showing why animation is so important in telling some stories; the hand is on a search to find its body. The film is rather short at 81 minutes, making it a must watch for people. [Best Animated Film Nominee] *Netflix*

30. **The Report:** One of the few films from the year I would call a must watch, but more for its content than its cinematic qualities. Three things you need to know: 1) Adam Driver is probably the best actor we currently have. 2) Annette Benning is rather good 3) Barack Obama had a very problematic presidency that people seem to have forgotten about/overlooked. [Golden Globes – Best Supporting Actress Nominee] *Amazon Prime*

29. **Little Woods:** This film could have been much better, as the film relies a little too much on the cliché of needing money but probation only has a few days left (*Blindspotting* did this last year, and did it much better). That being said, the film is not really about breaking back into the pill-dealing game, but a sister-sister relationship (with Tessa Thompson and Lily James playing the two sisters; both of whom are rather good, but not quite great). The film is well made, with the great set design; it really nailed the look of a drug deal, in a trailer, especially when children might be present. [Good Reviews] *Hulu*

28. **The Last Black Man in San Francisco:** A beautifully-shot film by newcomer Joe Talbot. The film offers a unique view of gentrification and race. The film can be a tad slow at times, and every so often loses its focus for a scene or two. I do not know what Joe Talbot's next project will be, but I am already on board to watch. [Spirit – Best First Feature Nominee] *Amazon Prime*

27. **Wild Rose:** Now, admittedly, I could be a tad biased; any film about a woman wanting to become a Country (definitely not "& Western") singer – even if they are from Glasgow, Scotland – will appeal to me. Jessie Buckley (*Beast*, *Chernobyl*) received a BAFTA nomination, which an argument can be made a nomination was deserved, though I wasn't as high on her performance; relative to the film as a whole. The film works; not because it is a-star-is-born story, but rather a family drama—across three generations. It is the family dynamics that give the film a heart. There are also themes of class, and criminal justice; but they are secondary to a wonderful family drama. [BAFTA – Best Actress Nominee] *Hulu*

26. **High Life:** I have been driving the Robert Pattinson train for a long time now, and High Life is further proof. High Life is technically a sci-fi film, but, at the end of the day the film is about a father and a daughter. The visuals are rather good, and the film makes a few important statements. It is a little slow at times, and doesn't quite pull off everything it set up; otherwise it would be ranked a little higher. However, the film is wonderful and worth watching; and should be used an example of how women directors are not getting the awards they deserve. [Robert Pattinson is good] *Amazon Prime*

25. **Always Be My Maybe:** Proof that rom-coms can still work. Let's get the obligatory Keanu Reeves sentence out of the way; he was amazing, and is part of the reason the film ranks this highly. Ali Wong and Randall Park wrote a hilarious film, and each was rather good in there acting roles. The freshness of the film comes from the fact that Ali Wong's character is the successful one; that the man will need to give up his 'career' (putting it nicely) to be with her. There is some commentary on class on Bay Area-tech culture, which is little too satirical at times. A delightful watch. [Netflix Rom-Com] *Netflix*

24. **The Peanut Butter Falcon:** Possibly the most heart-warming film on the list. Starring Shia LeBeouf (who is starting to put together a sneaky-good string of performances; *Honey Boy*, *American Honey*), Dakota Johnson, and introducing Zack Gottsagen (Bruce Dern has a small, and exactly-as-delightful-as-you'd-imagine supporting role). The plot is a basic Huckleberry Finn rip-off/homage. The star of the film is Gottsagen; who plays a guy in his early 20s with Downs Syndrome; and the real life Gottsagen has Downs Syndrome. In fact, the film was written with Gottsagen in mind; his performance is amazing. Together the cast makes a semi-predictable film, but all of its flaws can be forgiven due to how enjoyable and heart-warming the film is. [National Board of Review – Top 10 Independent Film]

23. **1917:** This is the best film of the year (from the cinematography and technical perspective). That is the only complement I can really pay the film. The tracking shots in the trenches seemed like lesser Paths of Glory (even ditto for a key scene later in the film). The script is almost non-existent, with dialogue written by someone enrolled in elementary school. The film is essentially a *Saving Private Ryan* on steroids; increasing the quality of visuals and sound, but absolutely devoid of any mean beyond – war is bad. [Best Picture Nominee]

22. **Waves:** From director Trey Edward Shults (*Krisha*, *It Comes at Night*) he has cemented himself as a good director, with *Waves* being his best work to date. Kelvin Harrison Jr (*Luce*, *Monsters and Men*, *It Comes at Night*) is a young actor to watch. I was not as impressed with Lucas Hedges' (*Manchester by the Sea*, *Boy Erased*) performance as others. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Taylor Russell as another young person to watch. There is some great camera work, especially scenes set in cars. The issue with *Waves* is that the film starts off at a six (in terms of intensity), quickly reaches a ten, tries to hold it there for a while, and then is at a three for the final hour. Cross-cutting between the three acts would have made for a better film. (Interjection: The previous description of *Waves* is why *Waves* should be in the top 10. The film deals with grief and loss. The change in intensity, matches the real-life stages). [National Board of Review Top 10 Film]

21. **The Lighthouse:** Co-written and directed by Robert Eggers (*The VVitch*). Shot in beautiful black and white with a 1.19:1 aspect ratio, the film is absolutely gorgeous. It was nominated for Best Cinematography at the Oscars and the nomination was more than earned. Williem Defoe, should have received more recognition for his work; he did win the Spirit Award for Best Supporting Actor. Robert Pattinson was good, but it felt as if his character was never given the legs for Pattinson to run with and give a great performance. The second half of the film falls flat, and never comes together as it should. The visuals and performances save this film from being (much) lower on this list. [Best Cinematography Nominee] *Amazon Prime*

20. **A Hidden Life:** Written and directed by Terrance Malick, A Hidden Life is possibly the hardest film to rank. I could easily put it down around *Queen & Slim*, while I could justify it being barely in the top ten. After three straight duds (*To the Wonder*, *Knight of Cups*, and *Song to Song*) Malick returned to some semblance of a narrative structure and made a good film, though still inferior to *Tree of Life*. The issue with ranking this film is the runtime. It is almost three hours and it suffers from it. Even in my write up of *Song to Song* I said that the two-hour build up to the payoff is almost not worth the watch. Here an extra hour is attached. Yet, there is not a single scene that needs to be cut. Each scene offers the needed foreshadowing or character growth. Perhaps the best example is early on the husband and wife are shown holding hands in the dirt, while planting potatoes. Later in a fit of rage, the wife is shown digging up the earth with her hands. There are tons of these subtle scenes that help create a beautiful film. The contrast of the narrow confinements of prison with the vast openness of the Austrian Alps is amazing and beautifully captured. For lovers of art house films or Malick, *A Hidden Life* is a much watch. [Spirit – Best Feature Nominee]

Tier 4: Extremely Good Films

19. **Long Shot:** The comparable film is *Always Be My Maybe*, as both make use of the woman being the more successful one in the (potential) relationship. *Long Shot* is better for a few reasons: 1) The best scene in *Maybe* is Keanu Reeves; if the best part of the film is a small supporting role stealing the show, it does hurt the overall ranking, 2) Charlize Theron is a much better actor than Ali Wong (which is a statement on the skill of Theron), and because of that Theron is able to carry more of *Long Shot*. The best scene of *Long Shot* is Theron conducting a late-night hostage negotiation, 3) each film tries to make some social statements, and the nature of being about politicians allows for more important statements to be made (compared to tech industry culture). Though *Long Shot* is a lot cruder. [Well-reviewed Rom-Com] *HBOGo*

18. **Dark Waters:** Mark Ruffalo expose films are a genre unto themselves. Instead of the Catholic Church, Ruffalo is now up against the DuPont Chemical Company. Most of the ranking comes from the story; DuPont's cover up of chemical dumping, and the anger it gives the viewer. Anne Hathaway is sneaky good, but her character could have had a tad bit more development. [Well-Reviewed Film]

17. **The Nightingale:** Written and directed by Jennifer Kent (*The Babadook*). 12-Year-a-Slave-but-for-Australia is probably the best description for the film. Set in 1820s Australia the film follows a female convict and an indigenous person on her quest for revenge. The film is a tad long, and packs a lot of punches, and is very raw; it is not a fun watch. Yet, it is packed with meaning, with excellent shots, and an interesting follow-up to *The Babadook*. Jennifer Kent has cemented herself as a director who's every film you should watch. [AACTA – Best Picture] *Hulu*

16. **The Mustang:** Absolutely beautifully shot; taking full advantage of the Nevada wilderness. The cinematography might be the reason the film is ranked this high. Connie Britton is briefly in the film; it is always a delight to see her in a surprise role. Bruce Dern has an exactly-as-delightful-as-you'd-imagine large supporting role. Matthias Schoenaerts (*A Hidden Life*, *The Laundromat*) is great in the leading role of a jailed convict enrolled in a horse-training program while in prison. The film tells a rather standard story, but manages to avoids cliches and instead (like many of the 'simpler' films rated highly) adds a lot of emotional depth across few key dimensions. Like *The Nightingale* and *High Life*, an example of great films directed by women. [Spirit – Best First Feature]

15. **I am Mother:** A perfect example of the type of complex film that can be made with an extremely small cast. It also serves as an example of the quality cinema that has been coming out of Australia these last few years. It is an intelligent science-fiction film, with a lot to say about automation and humanity. [AACTA – Best Supporting Actress Nominee] *Netflix*

14. **Jojo Rabbit:** The criticism that the film could have been a little more serious/deep is valid; a few changes to the second half would have made for a much better film. Scarlett Johansson was good, but not sure she deserved the nominations she got. More importantly is that Thomasin McKenzie (*Leave No Trace*, *The King*) is in the film. Last year I had *Leave No Trace* in my Top 10, and used the write up to shout out its director (Debra Granik), and sadly did not shout out Thomasin McKenzie. So, I will take the time now to tell you that McKenzie will win an Oscar in a few years. [Best Picture Nominee]

13. **Once Upon a Time in Hollywood:** My first reaction wondered why Tarantino would even bother trying to make an obviously worse *Mulholland Drive*. Continuing with the negative reviews, the film relies a little too much on LA nostalgia (and the implicit end of the studio system as Hollywood transitioned into New Hollywood). Leo is good, but not great. Brad Pitt is rather good, but not great. Pitt's string of awards seems to be of lifetime achievement recognition; Joe Pesci in *The Irishman* was superior. Margot Robbie is rather good, and I am still waiting for a film to tap into her full potential; *I, Tonya* didn't, and *Mary Queen of Scots* was not a very good film. Her role in *Bombshell* suffered from poor writing. Yet, like all Tarantino films it was well made; excellent cinematography, amazing set design/recreation. The script is good enough, but the entire film felt lacking that little bit extra to have it rank higher. [Best Picture Nominee]

Tier 3: Film that with One Small Change Would be Great

12. **Giant Little Ones:** A near-perfect film that aims small and nails what it is going for exactly. Though the film can be a tad cliché at times, especially when it comes to being the "cool" parent (after a divorce); yet these clichés never hinder the film. Where the film excels is the growth of the characters as they become more aware of their sexuality. Everyone in it was rather good. It is one of the better LGBTQ films of the year. [Well-reviewed LGBT Film]

11. **The Irishman:** At this point we know what we are getting with a Martin Scorsese film, and The Irishman is just that. The visuals are amazing (the de-aging technology was good, but not great). The acting was great (Joe Pesci probably deserved Best Supporting Actor, but it seemed like everyone agreed Brad Pitt needed a lifetime achievement award; also Pesci has an Oscar for *GoodFellas*). The "modern" spin on the gangster film was a nice touch, and does serve as a nice career summary for Scorsese. Yet, his best days have long been behind him (*Taxi Driver* in 1976 and *Raging Bull* in 1980, are his best; and two of the greatest films ever). Also, yes; the film was much too long and needed to be cut down. Also, the choice of basing the film around an obviously-false biography seemed like an iffy choice. [Best Picture Nominee] *Netflix*

10. **Ad Astra:** One of the more overlooked films of the year. The visuals were amazing, it might have deserved a Best Cinematography nomination, or Best Visual Effects (it did receive a nomination in one of the sound categories). Brad Pitt was rather good (and probably better than he was in *Once Upon a Time*). The main issue with the film is that in the last 15–20 minutes, the narrative and themes fell apart. The film had a lot to say about humanity, space exploration, god/religion, as well as father-son dynamic. It came oh so close to pulling them off (and if it did, the film would rank even higher). *Ad Astra* was a rather good sci-fi film that could have been great. [Well-reviewed Sci-fi Film]

9. **Us:** Jordan Peele's follow up to *Get Out*, shows that Peele is one of the best directors and writers currently working. Lupita Nyong'o, got some recognition for her performance, but probably deserved more than she received; she had a strong case for a Best Actress nomination (though, not a victory). About halfway or three-quarters thru the film, the ending became a tad predictable. The film is trying to make statements regarding inequality, but the film can't quite stick them (especially when there was *Parasite* this year, or even *Knives Out*; and also compared to *Get Out*). It is the failure

to pin down the themes that makes it so *Us* cannot be ranked any higher. [SAG – Best Actress Nominee] *HBOGo*

8. **Uncut Gems:** Adam Sandler gave the best acting performance of the year by a man. Not only should he have been nominated for Best Actor, he should have won. Sandler's character, Howie, is by all measures a horrible human being. Howie most likely peddles blood diamonds, he has a gambling addiction, and he is rude to almost everyone; however the audience can't help but want to see him win. Sandler pulls this off (a great comparison is to Richard Jewell, where Jewell should elicit sympathy, but does not). The writing is also rather good, as Howie's life is slowly unraveled to the audience. The Safdie Brothers hold information from the audience until the exact perfect time. There have been many films dealing with addiction, Gems is probably the best film about gambling addiction. Also, there are great visuals, many inspired by *2001*. The only reason Gems cannot rank higher, is that it lacked much in the way of deeper meaning. [Spirit – Best Director]

7. **Midsommar:** Ari Aster's follow up to *Hereditary* cements him as one of the best directors in the industry. *Midsommar* should have been nominated for Best Cinematography, Best Production Design, and possibly Best Costume Design. How this film was so overlooked baffles me (then again Hereditary was overlooked). The lighting and wide shots are amazing. The sets; cabins with such intricate art work, are amazing. The costumes are simplistic (relative to the usual Victorian-era gowns designed by the usual Oscar winner), but amazing. I have not even gotten to Florence Pugh, who was great. The Director's Cut is slightly better than the theatrical release, I would recommend seeking it (the Director's Cut) out. [National Board of Review – Top Ten Independent Films] *Amazon Prime*

6. **Booksmart:** One of the best films of the year. Somehow my only issue with the film is that it didn't try to say more. *Booksmart* is one of the best coming-of-age films in recent memory (*Lady Bird* and *Columbus* are the only two I can think of that best it). Kaitlyn Dever continues her streak of great performances; *Short Term 12, The Spectacular Now* (seriously go back and watch both of those if you haven't already) among others. Beanie Feldstein (*Lady Bird*) is great as well. *Booksmart* deserved a Best Picture nomination. Olivia Wilde deserved a Best Director nomination. My favorite potentially-missed part of the film is that the door says "A Room of One's Own" which is a reference to Virginia Woolf's essay. You should go watch *Booksmart* and then read A Room of One's Own. [Spirit – Best First Feature] *Hulu*

Tier 2: *Knives Out* is its Own Tier

5. **Knives Out:** Possibly the greatest critique of current American culture. The scathing critique is what makes Knives Out receive such a high ranking. It is not the good-not-great mystery element. If your friend focused on the mystery aspect, instead of the social commentary; reconsider their ranking in your MySpace-flashback-inducing friend ranking. I assume the film is filled with Easter eggs that I missed regarding the mystery; yet reread the previous sentence. The set was rather good, although few of the shots were awe inspiring. Chris Evans deserves a fair bit of recognition for his supporting role. Ana de Armas is officially someone to more than keep an eye on (deserved a supporting actress nomination in *Blade Runner 2049*). *Knives Out* can't rank much higher, as many of the characters are stand-ins for cultural stereotypes; thus lacking in much depth. A few characters (especially the Nazi son) exist solely to fill a stereotype and provide the minimum level needed to advance the plot. [Best Original Screenplay]

Tier 1: The Best Films of the Year

4. **Little Women:** Go back to the write up of *Midsommar*. Replace Ari Aster with Greta Gerwig. Replace *Hereditary* with *Lady Bird*. Replace him with her. Greta Gerwig followed up *Lady Bird*

with *Little Women*. Like come on; she is amazing. She deserved to be nominated for Best Director. I am not sure Gerwig deserved to win adapted screenplay (yes, she wrote and directed this film; get you someone who can do it all) over *Jojo Rabbit*. Though her non-linear plot was a great touch (as well as other liberties I won't reveal due to spoilers). The warm and cold colors of the lighting are a nice touch, but at a times too over the top; yet they help keep track of the sequence of events. Florence Pugh absolutely crushed this role. She should have been the winner of Best Supporting Actress. There are so many moments where Pugh is perfect; seeing Chalamet's character in Paris, chasing after Chalamet and Ronan on the pond, every single interaction with Streep's character; I could continue but then I'd just tell you every scene Pugh is in during the film. Chalamet and Ronan and Streep are also very good. I was hoping for more out of Laura Dern; which is not to say she was bad, just out shined. Eliza Scanlen plays the youngest daughter, who is in *Babyteeth*; which due to my classification of films is listed as a 2020 release, and I could be praising her in the near future. If Pugh wasn't perfect, this film is probably down with *Booksmart*. [Best Picture Nominee]

3. **Parasite:** What is there new to say about the Best Picture Winner? *Parasite* should have gotten some acting nominations. Cho Yeo-jeong (mother of the Park family) should have been nominated for Best Supporting Actress. And because if someone is a snub, a nominee needs to be dropped; I'd drop anyone not named Florence Pugh. In a year that was filled with films focused on inequality (*Ready or Not*, *Knives Out*, *Always Be My Maybe*, *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*, *Hustlers*, *Under the Silver Lake*, *Joker*; inequality so hot right now) *Parasite* had the most nuanced view. The wealthy Parks can be rude, a tad out of touch, yet they are not bad people. They are by most measures good people. The Kims are by most measures bad people; yet their poverty explains their actions. *Parasite* is at its core about lower classes fight with each other, making things harder for each other, rather than confronting the systemic issues. The systemic issues mean that most wealthy people are not evil, but privileged in ways which they are unaware. It is this nuance which is fundamental to the message of *Parasite*. [Best Picture] *Hulu*

2. **Portrait of a Lady on Fire:** One of the few films that gives *1917* a run for best cinematography. *Portrait* is absolutely beautiful; the waves, the beach, the faces, the (dark) interiors. Most of the budget was spent on lighting, and it shows. The film is visually impeccable; throw in frequent shots of the characters in profile; the visuals are perfect. There are multiple long takes (helping to showcase the visuals) with amazing acting. Much of the early parts of the film are building of sexual tension; possibly the best film ever at the build up of the tension. There are too many of these sexual-tension scenes to discuss them individually, other than they are excellent. *Portrait* does a great job of calling back to previous parts of dialogue ('drawing in the margins' possibly being the best example); even seemingly inconsequential lines come back to play a major role later in the film. *Portrait* is simply amazing. [Spirit – Best International Film Nominee] *Hulu*

1. **Marriage Story:** Written and directed by Noah Baumbach (*Frances Ha*, *While We're Young*, *Mistress America*, *The Meyerowitz Stories*) with Adam Driver and Scarlett Johansson as the leads. *Marriage Story* only won one Oscar, Best Supporting Actress, and yet Laura Dern was the worst part of the movie; she played a version of her (awful) character from *Big Little Lies*. Alan Alda (*MASH* (tv series)) was a better supporting actor in the movie. Adam Driver gave the best leading man performance of the year (three of the acting Oscars were more of career achievement awards). Enough has been said about the climatic fight scene, which is the best scene of the year. Instead, a simple scene (reminiscent of the spider scene in *Annie Hall*) is worth highlighting. Charlie (Driver) comes over to help get the gate to close. This one scene is the movie. That Charlie and Nicole (Johansson) still care for each other, but can't be married anymore; while also exemplifying the NYC–LA divide. At the end of the day, these are two relatively-decent people, each with flaws, neither in the absolute right, but just wanting to get on with their lives. [Best Picture Nominee] *Netflix*