Films of Sundance 2024

I went to Sundance in 2024. Here are the films I watched.

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.

Tier :

7. **Freaky Tales:** Co-written and co-directed by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck (*Mississippi Grind*), the film is a love letter to the East Bay; particularly the late-80s East Bay. Yet it frequently feels as if they wanted to make a love letter, but never figured out how. The film is more of an anthology in four parts. Technically there is some slight overlap but it is minor. There is a sci-fi aspect but it doesn't not exactly work. Pedro Pascal is good, but Ben Mendelsohn (*Starred Up*) is the best. Few of the jokes land and stylistic choices are certainly choices. The best part of the film is a surprise appearance by [redacted].

6. **Love Lies Bleeding:** Co-written and directed by Rose Glass (*Saint Maud*), the film is a disappointment. The goodwill from an interesting first feature (albeit with flaws) should be gone after this film. The writing is unfocused and the film ends up as this odd mishmash of various drama genres. The hair and make-up is often not good (a few critic's will galaxy brain themselves into having the hair and make up be off-putting was the point and is therefore great). Kristen Stewart is good, but the character is not developed enough to allow her to shine. The same can be said about the other characters as well.

Tier :

5. **The Outrun:** Saoirse Ronan is great, as she always is. She absolutely carries the film. The film is technically well-made yet often feels like another entry in the recovering-alcoholic genre. The character's infatuation with Scottish lore reminds me of the stories present in Tomm Moore's Irish Folklore Trilogy of animated films (which are superior). And the love of the unnatural does not exactly fit with wanting to be a biologist. The final speech about wanting to study seaweed comes across as preachy. The supporting characters are not exactly developed, but rather exist to help explain Ronan's alcoholism and the pressures she faces in recovery (hint: it's the parents). Through it all, Ronan is still great.

4. **Love Me:** A great idea for a *short* film. Even at 95 minutes it has a few lulls. Yet the premise is amazing; a bouy and a satelite fall in love and 'become' human after the apocalypse. It has a strong feeling of *Wall-E* and *2001*. It is helped that the two leads are played/voiced by Kristen Stewart and Steven Yeun; both are able to pull the film through the lulls. The film has a fair bit to say about what it means to be human, evolution, (artificial) intelligence, and love. Yet because the premise is so simple, it becomes difficult to get 90 minutes of quality content.

Tier :

3. **Ghostlight:** The second film from the (married) team of Kelly O'Sullivan and Alex Thompson (*Saint Frances*). Like their first film (both written by O'Sullivan) it does a great job of combining comedy with serious drama; there a multiple laugh-out-loud moments, and a few subtle dark comedy bits.

Keith Kupferer (*Princess Cyd*) is rather good and is able to guide the film through some lulls (which there are a few; in particular the deposition scenes are a little long); the potentially convenient plot points and developments never bothered me and I thought worked but perhaps some might find them a little too convenient. Kupferer's real-life daughter Katherine Mallen Kupferer plays in in-film daughter and absolutely steals the show as the angry-and-agnsty theater kid. The entire ensemble is enjoyable and helps bring a lot of laughs. For O'Sullivan's second film she has established herself as a someone who can weave comedy into emotional dramas that although they get close to being sappy but never quite do as they are grounded in well-developed characters. Perhaps my only knock is that the film uses *Under Pressure* and after watching *Aftersun* the song only reminds me of *Aftersun* and although the song absolutely ruined me mid-movie it is because of a different movie.

2. **Presence:** Another low-budget film from Steven Soderbergh (*Kimi* and *High Flying Bird*) with him serving as both cinematographer and editor. Admittedly the editing was not much; every cut is a fade to black (which does make logical sense in the scope of the film). The cinematography is rather good as the film is told from the point-of-view of the titular Presence inside the home. The cinematography partially serves as the character development of the Presence. The cast is often rather good; Lucy Lui and Chris Sullivan are good as the parents. The teenagers are both essentially unknowns and held up their end. There are not exactly any scares, it feels more like *A Ghost Story*. The ending could have been improved slightly (but still rather good and easily elevates the film), but detailing that would mean a major spoiler.

Tier :

1. **Hit Man:** Directed by Richard Linklater (*Before* franchise) and co-written with Glen Powell, who serves as a co-lead. The film is a hilarious deconstruction of the hit man myth (they don't actually exist). The jokes are constant, I'd suggest this could be a Best Adapted Screenplay contender. Adria Arjona (*Good Omens*) shines in one of her first non-action movies. The rest of the cast is rounded out by solid actors such as Austin Amelio and Retta. It is not Linklater's best, nor any where near his most dramatic, but it is his most fun in a while.