

Films of 2014



Rules: 1) Must be English language, 2) Must be a non-documentary feature. Sorry, otherwise this list gets much longer, and I do not have that much time. 3) US Theatrical release in 2014 (some of these films might have imdb years for earlier due to film festival releases).

I did not have a set selection criteria back in 2014, but here is the current criteria I use. Selection Criteria: 1) Oscar Nominated (Picture, Director, Acting, Writing, Editing, Cinematography) 2) Golden Globe Nominated (Picture, Directing, Lead Acting (for drama), Writing) 3) BAFTA (Film, Directing, Lead Acting) 4) Independent Spirit Awards (Film, Director, Lead Acting, Screenplay, First Screenplay, Cinematography, Editing, etc) 5) GLAAD Awards (Picture) 6) NAACP Image 7) AACTA Awards 8) Sundance, 9) SAG Awards, 10) AFI top 10, 11) National Board of Review 12) My own idiosyncratic preferences 13) Some heterogenous-minimum Rotten Tomatoes score regardless if nominated.

Within a Tier, you can convince me my ordering is wrong. Between tiers I feel there is a distinct difference in quality.

Tier 12: So You are Desperate to Watch a Movie?

99. **If I Stay...**: Chloe Grace Morte is amazing, however she can not save this overly cliché film. Yet for all of the awfulness you will wind up crying like a baby during a 'pivotal' scene. Yet the catharsis of that scene does not overcome the slow, dull and cliché plot. And yes that scene is fishing for tears, deliberately. I fell for it though.
98. **Unbroken**: Dull, cliché, drawn out. Except here the film benefits from great production values and good (not great) cinematography. Watching Unbroken will not make you wish you were in a prison camp instead of watching it, but you'll at least consider it.
97. **Le Week-End**: Boring. The characters do not mesh. Even Jeff Goldblum could not save the film. There are interesting plot points, especially about looking back on one's career and that even after thirty/forty years marriages are not perfect. However the film is unable to pull what it desires and what is left is a boring film.

96. **Cheap Thrills:** A movie about a wealthy couple that dares two down-on-their-luck friends to engage in increasingly dangerous and morally reprehensible dares for cash. The film attempts to be dark but is really just sloppy gore at times. It attempts to make a larger statement on the lives of wealthy and poor people but does not succeed.
95. **The Double:** One of two films that adapted the same Portuguese short story. Overly stylistic with the sets, costumes etc. Eisenberg is good in the film and deserves some credit. Yet the plot is all over the place and lacks coherency.
94. **Listen Up Phillip:** Boring. Jason Schwartzman plays Phillip, a writer more concerned about succeeding as a writer than any human interaction. Then, shockingly he succeeds as a writer at the expense of friends and relationships. The voice over narration does not mesh. It is a film that tried to hit all the 'indie film boxes', in a way it does so, but the film never comes together. The characters are not that good, nor are the themes.
93. **The Interview:** James Franco overacts. Seth Rogan is okay. Randall Park is the redeeming quality. For a comedy, you'd expect more comedic elements. A lot of the themes could have a little more subtle.

Tier 11: These are Not Awful and Have a Redeeming Quality

92. **It Felt Like Love:** A great premise, a young girl on summer vacation takes increasingly dangerous actions with regards to sexual discovery. The girl does so both out of curiosity and a desire to be cool. However the plot is too slow and a tad cliché. The general idea is worthwhile, it did not pull it off though.
91. **Into the Woods:** Great cast. Although the plot is jumbled and it is only made worse by more singing than there needed to be. The movie has a good message, but spends too much time getting there, that the viewer has lost interest.
90. **Enemy:** The second film to adapt the Portuguese short story. This one is set in modern times, a plus, and stars Jake Gyllenhaal, another plus. *Enemy* does a much better job of Gyllenhaal's character's decent into insanity. The film still lacks some coherency and is only slightly less vague. Jake's performance is noteworthy though.
89. **Love is Strange:** A film about a gay couple that have fell on tough times after one of them loses their job as a music teacher in a catholic school, due to his marriage to another man. The film does well at dissecting the various relationships; the effect on a family when a relative moves in temporarily, the strain of not living with a loved one, etc. Yet the film is dull at times nor does it fully come together, even though it attempts to have a unifying theme (the title) at the end.
88. **White Bird in a Blizzard:** Reasons to watch *White Bird in a Blizzard*: Shailene Woodley. Not much else. The idea of the film; Woodley's mother disappeared one day, when she was child, with no explanation, was never heard from again and she is raised by her now single father. The film attempts to provide an interesting take on the coming-of-age film. However the dream sequences detract from the film, while the supporting characters do not provide much.
87. **13 Sins:** Very similar to *Cheap Thrills*, except rather than a couple daring a down-on-their-luck person, it is a secret organization. Once again a tad needlessly gory. However the dark humor works better in *13 Sins*, especially displayed in a rehearsal dinner speech. The devolution of the main character works better as throughout the film he is able to interact with family members.

86. **Grand Piano:** A film about Elijah Wood playing a piano concert, while being threatened to be shot by John Cusack if Wood does not play properly. That premise is interesting enough to carry the film, which is rather suspenseful, given the circumstances. However the characters are weak and the film falls apart near the end.
85. **Calvary:** The film is about a catholic priest who is told he will be killed in retribution for the catholic church's treatment of altar boys, by a man during his confessional. The priest then comes to terms with his life. The acting is good, the plot is good, the secondary characters are good. Yet there is nothing special about the film, nothing particularly groundbreaking. I'd rather a film not be as well put together but take more daring or interesting plots.
84. **Dear White People:** A much more boring film than *Calvary*, a film that is less coherent than *Calvary*, a film with worse acting than *Calvary*. However the film examines college life from an African-American perspective, that the challenges are not the same. Crisis of identity differ are not the same. With the uptick in racial tensions on campuses, *Dear White People* is worth watching. It is just not as good as it could have been.
83. **Muppets Most Wanted:** No where near as good as the 2011 film. The plot is worse. Tiny Fey and Ricky Gervais are not as good as Amy Adams and Jason Segal.
82. **Neighbors:** The film never decided what it wanted to be; there was a good basis for a film here. It wasn't a modern *Animal House* nor was it quite a coming-of-'adulthood' movie; though at times it tried to be both. Rose Byrne could have been used more, as she is amazing.
81. **Godzilla:** A good take on the classic character. The human characters needed work. Bryan Cranston is especially good, while the actor playing his son, is not. The cinematography is rather good at times.
80. **Life After Beth:** Too slow, not that funny. Aubrey Plaza does the best she can, but the film does not deliver the laughs or the entertainment expected from a decent premise.
79. **They Came Together:** The film has an absolute star cast (with *SNL* alums) and the cast is great. Yet the sloppy writing, and poor parodies of rom-coms means this film can not rank any higher.
78. **The Trip to Italy:** A sequel to *The Trip*. The film is essentially Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon playing fictionalized versions of themselves as they tell jokes on their trip to Italy. The film does offer up more than funny people, by providing glimpses into their personal lives. The film is lighthearted and accomplishes its task well. But there are no key takeaways. As the film centers around eating food I suggest you eat before watching as you will become very hungry otherwise. And if you hate impersonations you might want to stay away.
77. **I Origins:** The film is about a scientist who studies the eye and his various relationships. The science-fiction aspect is that people's past experiences stay with them, after they die and are reborn, and this can be detected based on the composition of someone's eye. The film does a good job of the scientific or gut based decision making question. However the film is divided into two (or three parts) which can feel choppy and at times dragged out. The film is also likely to be an origin story to an upcoming science fiction sequel. Worthwhile watch if you enjoy science fiction.
76. **Lilting:** *Lilting* is slow at times and the characters do not fully come together. Yet this is a film with an interesting plot; an old women's son has died and the son's "friend" still attempts to take care of her. What the mother does not know includes the English language or that the son's friend was his partner. These two difficulties provide the basis for the film. It was interesting enough to compensate for a slow film

75. **Him/Her:** This is actually a pair of films that falls under the umbrella of *The Disappearance of Elinor Rigby*. These two films show the relationship from each character's point of view. *Him* is the film from the husband's view. Then *Her* retells the story from the wife's view. Jessica Chastain stars as the title character and excels, duh (If she is not in your watch-if-in-it list put her on it). *Him* can be boring and jumps around. However *Her* pulls the film together, she is the more interesting character and the secondary characters in her half are also better. It might be suggested to watch the film twice, as although the same scene is in both sections, there are slight differences. The differences point to people's sloppy memory of events. The film is unique in its structure, but it is at times too slow and dull to be great. A must watch for those that appreciate art house.
74. **The Fault in Our Stars:** Ok hear me out. Take *If I Stay...*, drop the cliches, add a much better leading man, provide depth to supporting characters. Make an even swap of Morteza for Woodley. Have the film actually confront death instead of skirt around it. Lastly make the film more mature in general. This gives you *The Fault in Our Stars*. If you haven't discovered by now, I love Woodley, she is an amazing actress. Always bet on her winning an Oscar as she will one sooner rather than later. Oh, yeah, and I cried like a baby, again.
73. **The Town That Dreaded Sundown:** A horror film that is not a sequel of the 1976 horror film of the same name. This version instead pretends that the murders portrayed in the 1976 happened, but now the town has forgotten about the murders and the 1976 film makes a mockery of the deaths. It is a tad better than standard horror fare as there is mystery as to who the killer is (and was). The ending is a tad cliché though.
72. **Cake:** Jennifer Aniston deserved the attention she received for *Cake*. Her acting carries the film. There should have been more of Anna Kendrick, but that can be said about every film. But outside of Aniston the characters are not that good and the plot can be slow.
71. **Mr. Turner:** Amazing art direction. Amazing sets. Even better cinematography. Good acting by the lead. That is about it as far as good comments to make go. The film is rather slow with characters that are not interesting. The savior is the visuals, which carry the film.

Tier 11: Oh I Saw These Already, I Liked Them, Why They So Low?

70. **Dawn of the Planet of the Apes:** The visuals carry the film. Like most of the films in this category, there is enough plot and meaning to earn a decent rating.
69. **Captain America: The Winter Soldier:** The relationship between Captain America and Bucky provides enough serious drama to rank the film this high. The plot of 'Hydra' infiltrating the US government was a head of its time.
68. **Guardians of the Galaxy:** For a large budget superhero film, it was well put together, decent characters and acting. It avoided cliches. It was a decent film. But it was nothing special so it does not rank higher.
67. **The Tales of Princess Kaguya:** I was not as fond of the animation as most people; the watercolor backgrounds did not do it for me. Likewise, the plot was rather predictable and I expected better from Studio Ghibli. That said, the film is still decent with the expected nature and feminist themes often present in Ghibli films.
66. **Big Hero 6:** Great animation, a tad cliché and predictable ending. But no songs. It continues the Disney renaissance but is worse than both *Frozen* and *Tangled*.
65. **Song of the Sea:** The 2-D animation looks lovely. At first it might seem simplistic but it grows on you. The plot is rather nice as well.

Tier 10: Watch This And You'll Reach Your Yearly Penis Seeing Quota

64. **Nymphomaniac Directors Cut Vol 1 and 2:** A story a woman's life of sex addiction. A daring (and risqué by definition) film. Vol 1 is the better part. The director's cut ends up clocking in at around 5 hours, which bogs down heavily in the second half. The film at times gets side tracked. The leading women is played by two women, one while younger, the other while older. The film is very graphic, to say the least, hence the name of this Tier. Hell, some scenes are just tactful porn. The film hits on interesting topics, especially gender roles, however at the same time tries to be too philosophical hurting the themes of the film. The inclusion of a film score composed of heavy metal music is an interesting, but oddly enjoyable choice. The cast is stellar, Uma Thurman, Shia LeBouf and Williem Defoe appear. (One can only imagine LeBouf having to watch this during his recent watching of his own films, if he needed to take care of business during the movie marathon this would have most likely been the time). It is directed by Lars van Trier if you are into his films (as one should be if they like art house). This is a hard film to approach and should be re-watched as over five hours of film is hard to digest.

Tier 9: Indie Films You Should Try to Watch and Some Bigger Budget

63. **The Equalizer:** The film stars Denzel Washington as a former CIA(?) agent that is "out of the game", who now works at the local hardware store and is a good person to his coworkers. Chloe Grace Morteza has a supporting role and does well in it. The film is suspenseful, fits in the genre of BAMF-goes-on-spree-to-save-someone however there are characters in the film, which get developed. If more mainstream films had this level of character development movies would be much better.
62. **St. Vincent:** When you have Bill Murray and Melissa McCarthy it is hard to make a bad movie. The film hits a few too many cliches to be ranked higher, but Bill Murray. Really this review could be "Bill Murray" copied and pasted fifty times. Bill Murray plays the title character, of an aging widowed alcoholic who befriends the neighbor's son. Bill Murray enjoys gambling and paying for sex (Naomi Watts). The cliches are starting to abound. Yet the ending will make you cry and Bill Murray carries the film. Watch if you like feel good films or Bill Murray. Chris O'Dowd has a nice bit role as well (also in the previously mentioned *Calvary*).
61. **The Congress:** In a future where actors are no longer needed, instead actors are uploaded to a digital file and used to make film Robin Wright become a huge film star. However the world also offers drugs that let people live in a virtual reality. The virtual world is plagued by classicism. The virtual world is animated, allowing for a go between from live action and animation, a novel approach, which is rewarded here. Sadly the film is at times too far out and not pieced together. There is a strong science-fiction aspect. There is also social commentary on those that live in a virtual world.
60. **Interstellar:** Probably the most polarizing choice. The film is technically great, the visuals are outstanding. However the plot is not good. Anne Hathaway's spiel on doing it for love, believing in something greater than facts. Or McConaughey explaining word for word what he is going at the end; rather than let the view figure out what was occurring, it is told to them explicitly. This bad writing was too much of a detraction for me to rank higher. The film could have been much better.
59. **Fury:** A film that bites of more than it can chew. The film attempts to use a WWII tank crew to make grand statements about war, and falls short. The cinematography was good, great production values and Brad Pitt. There is a scene in with Brad Pitt and a young soldier who Pitt has taken under his wing after joining the tank crew, entering the home of a "liberated" apartment. The interactions between the two soldiers, the mother and daughter are amazing. Later the rest of the tank crew drunkenly enter the apartment and disrespect the two women. It is an amazing scene, that everyone should watch.

58. **Rosewater:** John Stewart's film that he took time off from *The Daily Show* to direct, or as many know it Those-Weeks-John-Oliver-Hosted. The film is good, but it falls into the common trap of focusing too much on the main character and ignoring the supporting cast. The supporting cast have the makings of interesting characters, but are not given the time. The film ends with grand pleas about freedom and those that are still oppressed but it is almost to be expected.
57. **The Boxtrolls:** Laika is the best animation studio in the game. Their stop motion film are absolutely beautiful. This particular film isn't their best, but is still good. A tad predictable at times. The film is rather meta at times, perhaps too meta.
56. **The Rover:** Starring Robert Pattinson (who is great) and Guy Pierce as two unlikely companions in a post-apocalyptic/social collapse world. The direction is rather good, though the chemistry of Pattinson and Pierce carry the film.
55. **Only Lovers Left Alive:** An interesting take on the vampire film. It is set in the present day with vampires struggling to find clean blood to drink. Directed by indie legend Jim Jarmusch. Tom Hiddleston and Tilda Swinton are great. Mia Wasikowska (also in *The Double* and previously in *Albert Nobbs* and *The Kids Are All Right*) is excellent as well. It is a great take on the vampire film, with great characters. The plot can be slow at times but the film as a whole is good.
54. **Predestination:** An interesting film starring Ethan Hawke trying to find a mysterious city bomber, who possesses the ability to travel back in time. The main purpose of this travels is to prevent crimes before they happen. The plot is intricate, but is pulled off nicely, all twists included. A worthwhile watch for science-fiction fans.
53. **Joe:** Do not freak out; Nicholas Cage is great as the title character. Cage's character hits a bunch of clichés; drinking and paying for sex. Joe befriends a young boy who has an alcohol and abusing father. The film centers on their relationship. It is well made and acted. It is not great but there are no major flaws. The film also stars Tye Sheridan, who recently starred in *Mud*, certifying him as one of the best child actors.
52. **Noah:** It probably offended some Christians for its telling of the ark tale, which it took many liberties. However the themes were well put together, along with top notch special effects. However the film is too long and drags along at times. It is better than many people said, but their expectations, it is an Aronofsky film, were probably too high.
51. **The Skeleton Twins:** Bill Hader and Kristen Wiig carry the film. The film is about a pair of equally dysfunctional (in their own way) twins that reconnect after Hader's recent suicide attempt. Their characters are good and their acting is on par. Ty Burrell (*Modern Family*) and Luke Wilson have supporting roles. The film is humorous at times and focuses on how the twins were affected by their parents. Like many films in this section, it is good but lacks the ability to stand out from the crowd.
50. **Magic in the Moonlight:** It is impossible for Woody Allen to make a bad film. It helps that Emma Stone and Colin Firth star as well. It is nowhere near as good as *Midnight in Paris* or *Blue Jasmine* but it is still a good film. The characters are decent, the top notch actors help make up a weaker plot from Allen. The film does benefit from higher production values. A drawback is an unrealistic nature of the romantic connection between Firth and Stone.

Tier 8: Indie Films That You Should Watch aka Perfect Netflix Material

49. **Starred Up:** This is a film that could be ranked in a higher tier. The film is about a young prisoner who has recently been starred up (moved to a prison from a juvenile facility). The young prisoner

must adjust to life in the same prison that holds his own father, who was not around for his childhood. He must navigate prison politics, which is father holds some, but not large amounts of, sway. At the same there is an attempt at a rehabilitation group he joins, while the guards and those that run the prison could be corrupt. The films was slow at times, but is one that could be ranked higher.

48. **Frank:** A great film about the music making process and one's desire to famous. It also stars Michael Fassbender as a musician who always wears a large paper mache mask at all times. A dark comedy, not in the sense of *13 Sins* or *Cheap Thrills* but instead about mental health. Fassbender is amazing, the characters are good but the film drags. The pace is the main detraction. A must watch if you enjoy Fassbender or if you like music.
47. **Time Lapse:** Friends find that a large camera next door takes pictures of them in their living room, but the pictures are from the the next day. A lot of the tried knowing-the-future plots are used, primarily gambling to make money. However the film uses the science-fiction aspect to delve into the characters and their interactions with one another. The focus on good characters drives the film. The film does not have lofty goals but it achieves its goal well enough.
46. **The Guest:** The film stars Maika Monroe (*It Follows*) in yet another example of her ability as an actor. It is about an ex-soldier with a shaky past that essentially moves in with the family of a deceased platoon-mate in an attempt to help the family out during their time of grieving. Maika slowly starts to discover the soldier's past, which is the driving force of the plot. The soldier is a great character that is well done. The sound was amazing, as bullets do fly. The film is thrilling and has Daniels from *The Wire* in a supporting role. Like most of the films in this group, it is a good film that does not aim high but accomplishes its goals in a nice manner. Recommended if you enjoy action films or films with a BAMF.
45. **John Wick:** I could defer the analysis of this to Bill Simmons' twitter account, or that they are making a sequel. It stars Keanu Reeves as a former assassin who left the business. However after thugs rob him and kill his puppy, he is back in the game, and the thugs happened to be related to the kingpin of the city's underground. After than general badassary takes places. Yet once again the film develops characters. These characters are not the greatest or deepest, but they are good. Recommended if you enjoy action films or films with a BAMF. It also stars Lester from *The Wire*.
44. **Cold in July:** Led by a great cast; Michael C. Hall (*Dexter*), Sam Shepard (*Mud* and *August: Osage County*) and Don Johnson (*Django Unchained*). The film takes a great, and novel, stance on what it means to be a man. The problem with the film is that it is jumpy. The film tries to be a revenge film, a thriller, a police corruption film and an action film and a mystery film. Each time it jumps from from one to another the plot does not stay coherent. The lack of coherence is not a major drawback does keep the film from being ranked higher.
43. **Hellion:** Time to switch from actors in *The Wire* to actors in the second greatest drama, *Breaking Bad*. Aaron Paul stars as an alcoholic single father who has never gotten over losing his wife. The film centers around Paul and his two sons as they go through life. Paul is great in the film. The father-son relationship is well done. Once again the film is not great, but it aimed small and made a good film without any major flaws, which is the theme of this tier.
42. **The Two Faces of January:** If Oscar Issac is not in if-he's-in-it-I'm-watching-it territory for you yet, he should be. He'll appear later on in this list, for good reason. The film is carried by Issac, Kirsten Dunst and Viggo Mortensen. The plot is interesting enough, but the acting of the three main characters is what makes for a great film. There are no major flaws, nothing that stands out but is just a good film.
41. **Kelly & Cal:** Another film that is led by the acting of the leads. Juliette Lewis plays a new mother that does not want to be a housewife, she'd rather smoke pot. She still wants to have fun, even

though pressure from the traditional in-laws would prefer if she was a housewife. Combine that wife a husband working too many hours her life in suburbia is not as imagined. She befriends a wheelchair bound high school student who shares her disdain for orthodoxy. At times it is a tad cliché but Lewis' acting trumps it.

40. **Lucky Them:** The film stars Toni Collette (*Sixth Sense*) as a journalist for a fledgling music magazine. She is given the task of writing a piece on her former boyfriend, and former music wunderkind that disappeared (and died?) a few years ago. The film requires Collette confront her current relationships, along with her relationship with Matthew Smith, the famed musician. Add is a great comedic performance by Thomas Haden Church, the film is enjoyable without any flaws.

Tier 7: Mishmash of Slightly Better Films

39. **The Grand Budapest Hotel:** This movie is overrated. Yes, it does benefit of great production design, yes the writing is great. Yes Wes Anderson is amazing. Yet the film is choppy. The attempt at a more serious film is commendable, but when all is said and done the film does not come together like previous works of his. Instead it relies on the last few minutes to deliver this power message, that after two hours one just does not care that much about anymore.
38. **The Lego Movie:** How did I forget to include *The Lego Movie*? The best animated film of the year. *Big Hero 6*, had better animation, but *The Lego Movie* had better messages (the message inside the lego world and outside). Voice casts often do not get enough respect, however this was a top notch voice cast. "Everything is Awesome" is fully enjoyable, and addicting. Will Arnett might have put in the best Batman performance ever, which speaks volumes. And lastly, Shaq.
37. **The Drop:** Tom Hardy is amazing. I'll add more but that is all one really one needs to know. The film is also known for being James Gandolfini final feature film role. It hits on the mafia clichés at times, but the acting is so stellar one can overlook them. If you have not added Tom Hardy to the if-he's-in-it-I'm-watching-it category, something is wrong with you.
36. **Pride:** The film is about the true and unlikely relationship between British coal miners and gays. Watching the town slowly accept the support the lesbians and the gays is a great example of dynamic characters, and is contrasted to the homophobic town members. Similarly the convincing within the gay community to help the miner, and the different factions within the gay and lesbian community are touched on nicely. *Pride* aimed higher with its social message and for the most part succeed. Adding in Dominic West (*The Wire*) as an HIV positive dancing machine only improves the film. The only drawback is the creation of a new character that acts as a story teller.
35. **Edge of Tomorrow:** Emily Blunt is amazing, but if you saw *My Sister's Sister*, you already knew that. Tom Cruise is also good in *Edge of Tomorrow*. The film does benefit from a bigger budget (that is part of what differentiates these films from the previous tier). Yet it is the novel take on the *Groundhog Day* idea. that makes the film succeed. There are comical moments along with political/social commentary (another one that differentiates these films and those going forward).
34. **Laggies:** Ok, combine Chloe Grace Morte (almost reached the watch-if-in-it criteria) and Kiera Knightly?!? Yes. I very well could be rating *Laggies* too highly, but I love both of them and they are great. Kiera has a great character who captures the current unknowns of a someone in the mid to late twenties that hasn't figured out their life, and still longs for their youth. *Laggies* could belong in the previous tier but the combination of Morte and Knightly bumps it up.
33. **Obvious Child:** An amazing, modern take on relationships, dating and one night stands. Jenny Slate is great. The opening stand up bit is hilarious and the film pokes fun of society. The best joke/bit/scene in the film contains spoilers so it will be avoided. Jenny Slate and the writing carry the film. It is a new take on the romantic comedy, very much worth watching

32. **The One I Love:** Speaking of must-watch territory, Mark Duplass could be approaching it. The film has some science fiction elements, but at the end of the day focuses on the relationship between Duplass and his wife (Elizabeth Moss). The interaction and the dynamics of the relationship is well done. The ambiguous ending is the only real detraction to a film that combines science fiction, comedy and marriage issues into a good film.
31. **A Most Wanted Man:** Phillip Seymour Hoffman was amazing in his last released film. As always Rachel McAdams is great, and is an actor that seems to always fly under the radar. Previous mentions Williem Dafoe and Robin Wright are in the film. The film offers a great commentary on the War on Terror, which does give the film a boost. However the acting certainly does help, especially Hoffman's role. The film keeps a decent pace as well.
30. **Honeymoon:** Time for a quick run on horror films. The plot is simple; a couple go to a remote cabin on a lake for their Honeymoon then the wife is found alone and naked in the woods. I am partial to films with small casts; *Honeymoon* has a cast of four. The acting by the two leads is great. The film is simple, but accomplishes its task. The ending is ambiguous but pulls it off. The interaction of the leads really carries the film.
29. **Oculus:** Finally an excuse to talk about pro wrestling; the film is produced in part by WWE Studios. The film does a great job of psychological horror. The film does a great job of bending reality, what actually is occurring, versus what the characters believe is happening. The best part of the film is how it deals with time, there are two parallel plots, one with the leads as they are older, the other while they are young. However it is not clear if they are imagining the flashbacks or that the flashbacks are accurate. The plots at times converge, only confusing the matter. The film does a great job of managing the multiple plot lines. The film also addresses the common horror film flaw, of Why-is-no-one-documenting-this?!?. Fans of horror films should watch this and *Honeymoon*.

Tier 6: Oscar Nominees and Upper Level Indie Films

28. **Big Eyes:** The film is directed by Tim Burton, but lacks his typical visual style. Instead the film is lead by the performances by Amy Adams and Christoph Waltz. The film follows the two painters as Waltz claims credit for Adams' paintings so they will be able to see in a male dominated world. When you have elite actors it makes for a better film. Part of what separates this tier from the previous is solely quality of inputs (directors, actors and cash). These films need not discuss more important topics, or have better characters but the film had a bigger budget and was made by people at the top of their fields. The only downfall of the film is the change in Waltz's character throughout the film is not subtle enough, but instead he changes too quickly. Showing the change in his character would have made for a better film.
27. **Still Alice:** You have Julianne Moore and Alec Baldwin. You get a good movie. Throwing in a surprisingly good Kristen Stewart makes the film better. Moore stars as the title character who suffers from Alzheimer's. Moore is great, particularly while giving a speech to a group of fellow patients. Stewart is the secret ingredient that makes *Still Alice* better than it should be, she is a rising star (she'll make at least an appearance in the 2015 list). However outside the acting (Moore won Best Actress) and the characters there is not much else that pushes it into the next tier.
26. **Wild:** Reese Witherspoon was great and deserved the best actress nomination. Her character was well written. The film goes into her troubled past, jumping around to various points in time. However outside of Witherspoon there is not much else to the film. Some of the characters in her past have some development, but *Wild* is a star vehicle for Witherspoon.

25. **Inherent Vice:** The film benefits from good performances by Phoenix, Brolin, Wilson, Witherspoon and others. The cast that was put together was great. The film can be slow at times, although it benefits from great source material. It deserved the best adapted screenplay nomination. However the film can be summarized as, a poor man's Chinatown.
24. **American Sniper:** Amazing cinematography, an amazing source character, and a great performance by Cooper. The sandstorm scene was amazingly shot; one of the best scenes of the year from a visual lens. However the film puts action and patriotism above delving deeper into the lead character. The issues that Chris Kyle faced when home, as much more interesting than watching him shoot people and save his friends in Iraq. Had the film spent some more time on the home front, the film would have been greatly improved. The film deserved the sound related Oscar, yet that is in part due to the larger budget.
23. **Selma:** A commanding performance by David Oyelowo as MLK. Yet the movie focuses in on him giving speeches (which he delivers with force) rather than his personal life. The film attempts to dive into his personal life. Yet at the end of the day the film is more about the movement as whole. *The Wire* veteran Wendell Pierce has a supporting role. What the film lacks in character development it makes up for in have wonderful source material and a great message. At the end of the day, the lack of characterization prevent the film from being ranked higher.
22. **How to Train Your Dragon 2:** Amazing animation, especially seen in the skin of the dragons, (facial) hair, and clothing. The film is beautiful. As a sequel it absolutely works, and is better than the original. The characters are older, their problems are bigger. The same childish ideas of convincing people to be better no longer work; sometimes war is needed. It is a rather good film, I regret waiting to see.
21. **Whiplash:** Myles Teller is great, even if he is a giant grade A douche as a person. JK Simmons (*Gravity Falls*) deserved his Oscar. However outside of these two performances (and the sound) the film does not have much to say. The film boils down to great acting and great interaction between Teller and Simmons.
20. **The Imitation Game:** Ohh how *The Imitation Game* could have been better. Kiera Knightly (*Laggies* and one more on the list) had an amazing character; an intelligent women in a conservative 1940s world. Her character was full of potential, some of which was hinted at but never fully developed. Shifting some focus to her, would have improved the film. The other drawback is too much faux-Hollywood tension. Help comes just in time, results are found just in time. This faux-tension is not needed, the film stands on its own merits. Oh and Benidict Cumberbatch plays Alan Turing.
19. **Land Ho!:** Our first indie spoiler. The film is small in scale, but is near perfect. The film is about two recent retirees going on a vacation to Iceland. The film benefits from the gorgeous Icelandic landscape. The characters of the two leads, a bombastic ex-surgeon and his more reserved ex-brother-in-law are well done. The film captures the realities of being old. The leads bicker, grow together, run into some females (including one's young relatives). The film is small but near perfect. *Land Ho!* is probably an unknown for most, but it is worth watching.
18. **The Immigrant:** Marion Cotillard plays an immigrant taken in by Joaquin Phoenix. Except Phoenix runs a brothel. Along the way Phoenix's cousin, and general nuisance shows up, played by Jeremy Renner (to remind everyone that he can act when he wants). Amidst prostituting Cotillard, Phoenix begins to fall for her, and meanwhile so does Renner. The cinematography is good, and adds depth to the film. The film boils down to the good characters for the leads and even better acting.
17. **Blue Ruin:** This is what a revenge film should strive for. The film revolves around a homeless man discovering that the man who was convicted for killing his parents is being released from prison. The

film is thrilling, yet realistic. The twists are turns of them film add to the characterization. Like *Land Ho!*, *Blue Ruin* aims small, but nails its. A well made indie film.

16. **The Theory of Everything:** The combination of Eddie Redmayne and Felicity Jones made for a touching love story. The first part of the film where the two fall in love is truly charming. Characterization is at times lacking. The second half of the film jumps around too much and focuses on Redmayne too much, whereas Jones' had the more interesting character. However two scenes, both during dinner show the subtle changes in the relationship. Outside of the two falling in love, it is the best part of the film. I also contend the charm of the beginning of the film could cause me to rank *The Theory of Everything* higher than it deserves.
15. **Gone Girl:** *Gone Girl* should have been nominated (and won) for best score. After the film ends the score over the credits is very industrial and adds to the loathing in the film. However like most of the big budget films in this tier, it suffers from focusing on the wrong action. The whole my-wife-is-missing-but-I-totally-did-not-kill-her wears thin. Instead the final few minutes of the film, should have been focused on more. This would have allowed for better character development, and involves more interesting relationship dynamics.
14. **Nightcrawler:** Back to Jake Gyllenhaal. He absolutely carries the film; playing a cold-blooded calculating, uhh, "person" He captures the twisted character he plays, perfectly. Rene Russo does a nice job in a supporting role, which details the pressures of business and the need to be morally flexible to get a head in a cutthroat world. With a film that attempts to capture someone filming crime scenes, the cinematography does a great job at making those shots seem like amateur shootings. This is topped off with excellent editing.

Tier 5: Perfect Light-Hearted Films

13. **Begin Again:** See everything I said previously about Kiera Knightly being awesome, except let her sing. Add in Adam Levine in a a good role plus Mark Ruffalo as the co-lead, you have a great cast. The film at times comes close to cliches but delicately avoids them, especially concerning the friendship between Knightley and James Corden's character. Haliee Steinfeld (*True Grit*) plays a small roll as Ruffalo's daughter. The film is a "musical" in the sense the characters sing song during the film, however the characters are singers, so it is natural. The songs are well done and rather enjoyable. The progression of the characters is well done and the ending avoids typical cliches. It also helps that featured in the film is "As Time Goes By"
12. **Paddington:** Perfectly fun. The film is heart-warming and uplifting without ever being cheesy or face palming. The cast is a delight, Sally Hawkins is especially deserving of a shout out. Nicole Kidman is fun as well. The visuals are also rather good. The plot is great, with multiple simple callbacks helping making for a tight story.
11. **Chef:** An indie with a great cast (Jon Favereu, Sofia Vergera, Scarlett Johansson, Robert Downey Jr. among others). At the end of the day the film is a light-hearted father-son bonding film. It does not attempt to be much of anything more, and it absolutely nails this theme. The added novelty of how the film incorporates the use of Twitter and other social media puts the film in this tier, instead of a lower one.

Tier 4: Odd Assortment of Good Films

10. **Housebound:** Comedy-Horror. These are two genres that rarely go together well, at least on purpose. There are plenty of horror films that are hilarious, but the laughs are a function of the

movie's lack of quality. The film is a haunted house story, with the twist of being under house arrest. The lead who is under house arrest, is so in her mother's house, her childhood home. This allows for a deeper relationship that most horror films sport. The final twenty minutes is full of twists and turns, which I will not spoil, yet somehow excellently balances humor and thrills. This is a must watch, not just for horror fans. The film is well done and lacks any real flaws.

9. **Foxcatcher:** Steve Carell is amazing, in what was the best performance of the year. Ignore that Redmayne won the Oscar, Carell was better. Throw in an always sneaky good Channing Tatum and the under appreciated Mark Ruffalo you have an amazing cast (Mark Ruffalo is trying to reach must-watch-if-in status). With the larger budget the cinematography is great. The film comes down to the amazing character of John du Pont (Carell), his interactions with his mother, his motivations, his annoyances, his desire to be loved. All of it is well done, but Carell and his character drive the film. It does not carry the film, because Tatum and Ruffalo, along with their characters could make this a decent film on their own. Carell puts the film over the top.
8. **A Most Violent Year:** See what I previously said about Oscar Issac and Jessica Chastain. Throw in great cinematography (including many chase scenes), add in a great plot that is never slow and rather thrilling, then a pinch of political corruption you have a great film. But I could have stopped the review after the first sentence.
7. **Locke:** Speaking of actors that are amazing and must watch; Tom Hardy, but I've already let you know that. Hardy carries the film as the title character, Locke. The film takes place almost entirely in Locke's car on one fateful night; the night before the biggest project begins for his job, along with one other pressing issue. The film is Locke placing phone calls over the course of a car ride. The interactions (and acting) are amazing. The risk that was having an entire film take in a car, paid off handsomely. This is one of the best films of the year; the combination of a great character, amazing acting and a wonderfully executed way of film making.

Tier 3: Elite Films, One of Which You'll Probably Hate

6. **Under the Skin:** This is the film you might hate. This is an art house, experimental film. There is a good chance you'll hate it. If you like art house and experimental *Under the Skin* is top notch. Scarlett Johansson is at her best, she followed up where she left off last year in *Her*. The acting is also great; Johansson and non-actors. The non-actors and ad-libbed scenes, and at times the non-actors did not know they were being filmed. The film was daring, and pulled it off.
5. **Coherence:** This is the best science-fiction film of recent memory. The plot of the film is a dinner party, that takes place the night a comet flies overhead. It turns out that this comet effects reality. The film is most entirely ad-libbed, with the actors given a general outline of what to say. There are clues strung, expertly throughout the film. One the first watch these clues are undetected or appear as continuity errors. This is a ground-breaking film in terms of plot, script and location (the film essentially takes place in a home). *Coherence* is the film that is under the radar, but phenomenal and a must watch.
4. **Snowpiercer:** Thematically, specifically in regards to classism, inequality and climate change, the best film of the year. The plot, all of humanity being on a train during an eternal winter, is about as novel as one can get. Add in Octavia Spencer, Tilda Swinton and Chris Evans the film only gets better. *Snowpiercer* should have been nominated for best cinematography, not win but be nominated, the colors used, the lighting, including a scene that is completely in the dark, are phenomenal. At the end of the day *Snowpiercer* hits on what it means to be part of society, what is required, the tradeoffs of costs and benefits. *Snowpiercer* was great, another must watch.

3. **Birdman:** If Oscar voters knew that they were doing this would have been Emmanuel Lubezki's fourth Oscar (wins for *Birdman* and *Gravity*), as he should have also won for *Tree of Life* and *Children of Men*. A lot of work has been done praising actors, but Lubezki's work as a cinematographer is amazing. He is an artist. If he is doing the cinematography, you should watch the film. The acting was good (not great), the characters were good (not great) the plot was good (not great). Lubezki's cinematography carries the film, covers any flaws and is truly revolutionary.

Tier 2: A Normal Year, This Film is the Best

2. **The Babadook:** The best horror film in a long time, if not ever, not solely because of the tension. The film does not rely on jump scares or cheap tricks to be scary, instead the fright is genuine. To keep the suspense, the details of the monster and the frights will not be discussed. All I will say is the monster is extremely innovative. Instead I'll focus on another aspect of the film that is amazing; the relationship between the mother (Essie Davis) and her son (Noah Wiseman) evolves throughout the film. The son, is great, even if that means being an annoying pain in the ass. The novel monster and horror alone would have been enough to rank in the top ten, the characters pushed *The Babadook* up to the second best film of the year.

Tier 1: Possibly One of the Ten Best Films, Ever

1. **Boyhood:** Before the Oscars telecast ended, everyone knew there were two major fuck ups. Both of these fuck ups were *Boyhood* not winning. It deserved to win Best Director and Best Picture. Like *Citizen Kane*, *Boyhood* will go down as one of the best films that failed to win Best Picture. The sheer scope of the film would have ranked it highly (see *Birdman*) as it follows the same actors over the course of twelve years. There are countless scenes that transcend film, and instead only a few will be focused on. The first is after moving it is asked "Are we ever gonna see them again?" and they never do. It just goes to show how fleeting friendships are, people you knew for years, are never seen again. It is tragic, but just how life goes. Think back on how many people you were once friends with, and will most likely never see again. Another scene is a lengthy tracking shot of the boy, Mason, as a young teenager, walking back from school with a girl. It is obvious the girl is attracted to him, but he is oblivious and never realizes it. It was a short scene, but captured the awkwardness that is young romance. A third the the developed of Ethan Hawke's character (the dad), who pops in and out of his children's lives. Watching him grow and interacts with his kids is amazing. Patricia Arquette as the mother was excellent and was a better character than the dad, but you can read about her elsewhere. A final point is how the film aims not to necessarily capture the all most important moments growing up, but the regular moments. The viewer is able to fit the puzzle together of the character's lives based on the little moments shown on screen. It is these everyday, at times inconsequential, when looking back, are the moments that seized us.