



The sheer number of quality movies that have come out this year is overwhelming — with



Barry Jenkins' *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Vice*, sporting Christian Bale's surprising transformation into Dick Cheney, still on the horizon — and you'd be forgiven for missing a few key films along the way.

If you need a place to start when it comes to catching up, we've got you covered. Instead of waiting until the end of the year, when Oscar season is in full swing and your holiday schedule is overloaded, we're offering you a compendium of best movies of 2018 list right

international super spies. And have no fear, we'll keep updating this list until the year is through, so you won't miss a thing.

THE FAVOURITE

Though *The Favourite* is a historical drama set during the reign of Queen Anne (played here by the terrific Olivia Colman), the film is less interested in history and more in the shifting, twisting dynamics in the dynamic of a character triangle. Queen Anne shares a close relationship with the Duchess of Marlborough (Rachel Weisz), but the rapport's thrown into jeopardy with the arrival of the Duchess' cousin, Abigail Hill (Emma Stone), who soon catches the Queen's eye.

Under the direction of

anachronisms or his trademark coldness — Colman, Weisz, and Stone seem to be



having the time of their lives. Stone in particular delivers an impressive performance that both fits and defies the chipper roles she's been known for.

THE BALLAD OF BUSTER SCRUGGS

The Coens' fascination with the West reaches a fever pitch with *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, which traverses both the landscape and the genre through six distinct chapters that each addresses a different storytelling tradition. Though the styles and tones of the chapters vary, they form a coherent whole as a meditation on mortality, beginning with a singing cowboy (Tim Blake Nelson) shooting his way through a saloon, and ending with

a carriage transporting its passengers beyond the veil.

That final chapter's sense of wide-eyed mystery hints at how to process the way the Coens' chapters veer into the bleak and macabre. It's a lovingly crafted film, and for all that their characters may sometimes tear each other apart, the Coens love each and every one of them, too.

PADDINGTON 2

Though *Paddington 2* was released in the UK in 2017, it hit US cinemas in 2018,



qualifying it for this list and our love. As improbable as it might seem that a movie ostensibly targeted at kids — and a sequel, no



now, with everything from superhero movies to documentaries, from friendly bears to

Yorgos Lanthimos (*The Lobster*, *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*) — who doesn't shy away from



launch an arrow straight into your heart. The specifics of eighth grader Kayla's (Elsie Fisher) struggle to get through her last week of middle school might be specific to 2018 — she makes vlogs which she signs off with a cheery "Guccil!" and is constantly on social media — the awkwardness and social anxiety she deals with is familiar territory for anyone who braved middle school.

The ups and downs of Kayla's life are played unflinchingly — including a harrowing scene that touches upon consent — as is the idea that adapting and growing are continuous processes rather than tests to be aced or touchstones to be passed. Some scenes, as such, may make you

want to cover your eyes out of secondhand embarrassment, but stick with it — the film is full of compassion, too.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE — FALLOUT

Over the last several years, Tom Cruise has essentially fashioned himself into the man who cannot die, and nowhere is that more apparent than in the latest Mission: Impossible movie. Directed by Christopher McQuarrie (who also helmed Rogue Nation), Fallout is a thrill ride from top to bottom, which mostly comes down to just how much Cruise seems willing to put himself through for the sake of our entertainment.

Once again, Ethan Hunt (Cruise) is out to save

the world, though this time he's got a babysitting detail in the form of CIA agent August Walker (Henry Cavill) so the impossible mission doesn't go too haywire. Naturally, though, chaos ensues, flinging Cruise all over Berlin, Paris, London, and Kashmir. Do yourself a favor and set aside the time to watch it, if only for one of the greatest, most ridiculous opening sequences of



all time.

BLACKKKLANSMAN

Following its premiere at this year's Cannes Film Festival, BlackKkKlansman took home the Grand Prix. If that alone isn't enough to convince you to watch Spike Lee's latest work, how about the fact that its plot, in which Ron Stallworth

(John David Washington), the first black officer in the Colorado Springs police department, successfully infiltrates the KKK, is based on a true story?

Though the events of the film get a little wilder than the source material, BlackKkKlansman is still a powerful piece of work, not just for the precision of Lee's direction, but for

just how striking it is in addressing the current political climate. Addressing everything from D.W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation to the Charlottesville riots to personal cultural identity, it's — as overused as the label may be — a timely and necessary film.

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in that, if anything, he was even more remarkable in real life.

Watching Morgan Neville's documentary, it's difficult not to note just how different children's entertainment — and entertainment as a whole — generally is from what Rogers tried to convey. He tried to teach kids (heck, all of us) to love everyone the way they are, to practice acceptance and care. As is clear in the snippets of Rogers' personal life we see, they were tenets that he practiced personally, too.



SHOPLIFTERS

Shoplifters won the Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes Film Festival, and the prize was well deserved. The question at the center of the film — what defines a family — is the kind of theme that director Hirokazu Kore-eda (*Like Father, Like Son*) has been wrestling with throughout his filmography, and his answer here is an



affecting one.

The family in Shoplifters is living in poverty, and, as implied by the film's title, rely partially on shoplifting to get by.



Still, when they come across a young girl seemingly abandoned by her parents, they take her in. The events that follow range from the expected — the son starts experiencing jealousy at no longer being the only child in the family — to the less easily telegraphed, and more tragic. Part of Kore-eda's humanist streak means making the proceedings as real as possible, which precludes the possibility of an uncomplicatedly happy ending, but that's to Shoplifters' strength rather than its detriment.

INCREDIBLES 2

With *Incredibles 2*, Brad Bird reasserts his dominance as one of the best filmmakers around. Whatever you make out to be the central philosophy of his latest film, there's no denying the sheer kinetic energy in the action sequences he's whipped up, and the delight that comes from watching them (accompanied by Michael Giacchino's reliably snappy — no pun intended — score).

The film picks up exactly where *The Incredibles* left off, with the Parr family coming into their

own as a team. Of course, finding a balance between being a family and being superheroes isn't something they're going to accomplish overnight, especially as superheroes are still illegal. But their outlook changes when media mogul Winston Deavor (Bob Odenkirk) steps in, claiming that he's got just the ticket to put superheroes back into the public's good graces.

SORRY TO BOTHER YOU

In his debut film, Boots Riley has crafted a vision of contemporary America that will absolutely knock your block off. The film is incredibly dense — there are a million things happening in each scene — and yet clear in vision, and the less you know about it going in, the better.

For now, let this suffice: Lakeith Stanfield stars as Cassius "Cash" Green, whose job at a telemarketing company takes a turn when a coworker recommends that he use a "white voice" on his calls.

However, as he starts to do so — and sees the according uptick in sales — the company is

rocked by a strike by the workers demanding fair pay, which means that, as things progress, Cash is forced to take stock of where he stands, and pick a side.

ROMA

Roma has semi-autobiographical roots in the life of its director, Alfonso Cuarón (*Gravity*), and that intense personal connection is one that's tangible throughout the film. At the center of the



story is Cleo (Yalitza Aparicio, in one of the year's most stunning performances), a young domestic worker living with a family in flux.

Set in Mexico in the '70s and shot in black and white, the film builds almost imperceptibly towards the finale, giving all the more weight and impact as the emotional dam finally breaks. The initial sense of detachment that Cuarón's careful curation of images lends the film is a smokescreen for the flood that's to come.



EIGHTH GRADE

Whether you loved or hated your own eighth grade experience, Bo Burnham's film will

less — would make any “best of the year” list, *Paddington 2* is a must-see. The message of kindness and empathy feels particularly essential this year, and in the hands of director Paul King (*The Mighty Boosh*), the film never panders to its audience. The cutest, most colorful sequences are earned.

When *Paddington Bear* (sweetly voiced by Ben Whishaw) winds up in jail for a crime he didn’t commit, his cellmates



and his adoptive family come together in order to get him out and prove his innocence. Though the performances — including Brendan Gleeson as the gruff Knuckles McGinty — are uniformly great, Hugh Grant is the standout member of the cast. His turn as aging actor Phoenix Buchanan earned him a BAFTA nomination, and in a just world, would earn him an Oscar nomination, too.

BLACK PANTHER

Marvel movies have seen their ups and downs. In case it wasn’t clear from the reception it got upon its release, *Black Panther* falls triumphantly into the former category. Helmed by Ryan Coogler (*Creed*), the

film, which follows T’Challa (Chadwick Boseman) as he attempts to lead his home country of Wakanda in the wake of his father’s death, deserves praise for its cultural importance as a film starring — not just featuring — a black superhero, but also its direction. The movie moves.

On top of that, *Black Panther* is also one of the most explicitly political films to come out of the Marvel wheelhouse, working in commentary as to African and African-American history (past and present). With Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o, and Angela Bassett, among others, rounding out the cast, it’s an impressive film, and a must-see this year.

THE DEATH OF STALIN

Armando Iannucci has long been known for his acerbic wit — any *Veep* fans that haven’t seen *The Thick of It* are



missing out — and it’s in full force in the startlingly dark *The Death of Stalin*. The film, which is a take on the events following, yes, the death of Joseph Stalin, has its share of laughs, but it’s a little grimmer than, say, *In the Loop*.

The jockeying of Stalin’s



Central Committee — featuring Steve Buscemi as Nikita Khrushchev and Simon Russell Beale as Lavrentiy Beria — is outrageous, and Iannucci digs his heels in not only with regards to the lengths these figures went to in order to stay in power but with regards to the death toll that resulted. Bodies fall left and right, and after a while, whatever comedy there was in the proceeding wheeling-and-dealings becomes pitch-black.

FIRST REFORMED

First Reformed is one of the most remarkable artistic feats of the year. As the world seems headed towards natural disaster, director Paul Schrader has tapped into perhaps the only vein of thought that can provide any comfort. Though Schrader doesn’t try to posit that we can necessarily avert catastrophe, and doesn’t absolve us of our own hand in the ensuing



apocalypse, either, his work possesses a fundamental love for humanity, and a love for

love.

When Reverend Toller (Ethan Hawke) has his eyes opened as to the way the environment is gradually collapsing, he falls into an existential crisis. Love and faith, however, go hand in hand, no matter how abstractly, and bit-by-bit, they drive the film to its transcendent finale.



WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

There’s a strange kind of expectation that often comes along with documentaries about public figures — you think that they’ll reveal something startling about them inasmuch as making it clear that they weren’t exactly who they were purported to be, that there was some fundamental human flaw to them that wasn’t immediately visible in the limelight. *Won’t You Be My Neighbor?* is singular in that respect — the picture that it paints of Fred Rogers fills in what wasn’t seen in *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, but only