

Screen, Screen Features

# The Best Films of the 2010s: #50-26

An ensemble of Screen writers pitch in with their favourite films of the 2010s.

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**B**limey. Before you know it, another entire decade of cinema has fleetingly passed before our eyes, and here we are inevitably tasked with sorting out the cream of the crop (in a neat numerical order no less). The 2010s saw trends die and thrive – 3D quickly dropped off once 2009’s *Avatar* ceased its supremacy yet comic-book films reached marvellous new

heights with *Avengers: Endgame* stealing the top spot from Cameron's eco-adventure earlier this year. We saw the rise of several promising new filmmakers: Jordan Peele, Greta Gerwig, Ari Aster, Bo Burnham, Ava DuVernay and Marielle Heller to name but a few. The important conclusion to all this is that the 2010s were an utterly fantastic decade for cinema; there truly was something for everyone. Now, onto the stars of the show, the first batch of our favourite films from this decade past...

Should you search for Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma*, the internet is littered with five-star reviews and a cacophony of reasons why it should have won 'Best Picture' over Farrelly's *Green Book* at the Oscars. The film by all rights should be brilliant; a gripping story and one that is beautifully shot, that makes you feel every moment. So why did I leave the screening underwhelmed? I would argue that this is not a film for the consumer, but one for the critic. That this film is a piece of art but somehow watching this with friends felt wrong, that I was not appreciating the modern masterpiece I had been constantly told that *Roma* was and instead was very aware of a public attention span for slow cinema and long takes waning. I can understand why it is so acclaimed, but I also empathize with its position on this list – *Jake Bradshaw*

Remember the way *Inception* captured the public at the beginning of the decade with the vividness of a train ploughing through a congested metropolitan street? Remember the unresolved conversations about that bloomin' spinning top that would haunt you like *Citizen Kane*'s 'Rosebud'? It's become banal to wax lyrical about Christopher Nolan, but the story he crafted like it was some five-dimensional tapestry dug its way into our collective consciousness.

Spiraling dream sequences, tightrope action, and plot twists buried within plot twists were nothing necessarily new to cinema; but Nolan managed to combine them into a commercially accessible cinematic sensation. By the end of the decade the 'arthouse blockbuster' has become less and less of a niche, and as far as I can point, *Inception* might be the most instrumental reason this is the case – *Johnny Chern, Print Screen Editor*

*Room* is not a film, it is an experience. Through fear of spoiling it for anyone who hasn't had the pleasure of seeing it for the first time, I won't say much more than go and watch it right now. For an entirely moving and encapsulating two hours, look no further. Abrahamson's direction resulted in a film that shows you Jack's world as if through his eyes, while enabling you to wholly understand Ma's motives and emotions. There are two sides

to this story and both are conveyed with equal conviction. While Larson and Tremblay convey the intensity of their relationship in a gripping way I have never before experienced, it is no surprise that this film made our top 50 – *Abi Taphouse, Online Screen Editor*

Denis Villeneuve's 2015 followup to *Enemy* centres on Mexican drug cartels, the American agencies working to thwart them, and the blurred lines between the two. With utterly convincing performances from Emily Blunt and Benicio del Toro, *Sicario* is a grisly, brooding film, but always exceedingly watchable – a nihilistic thriller that eats you up and spits you out in a state of shock and existential disorientation. The soundtrack groans with unease and Roger Deakins's gripping cinematography is colour graded to a dead-eyed, washed out palette, sucking out all joy and vibrancy until only the bare bones are left. There isn't a shred of frivolity in sight and every act of violence feels sickeningly, gutwrenchingly real. It may not be a cheerful watch, but the sheer artistry of this cold, calculated film that delivers a sucker punch to the conscience makes it truly essential viewing – *Max Ingleby*

There are few remakes that have successfully surpassed or reinvented their source; Luca Guadagnino's phantasmagoric rendition of Dario Argento's giallo horror *Suspria* is an exception. Refusing to fall into the trappings of futile repetition that so many failed remakes suffer from, *Suspria* (2018) is a completely different take on the premise. The film is violently grounded into historical reality – the Berlin Wall, the crumbling divisions in the heart of 1970s Germany and the somber lingering post-war guilt are all as prominent as any witchcraft on display. The ensemble is also exemplary: Dakota Johnson is a magnificent and magnetising lead, Tilda Swinton is quietly revolutionary in her multiple roles and that's not even mentioning the haunting turns from Mia Goth or Chloe Grace Moretz. There's also the tiny fact of Thom Yorke's beautiful score, peppered with a mix of graceful ballads and garish staccato synths. Horror has rarely been better or bloodier than this – *Jacob Heayes, Online Screen Editor*

*Sci-fi has had an especially fertile decade but even still, there was nothing else quite like Arrival.*

I have never had a cinematic experience like I did with *Arrival*. Knowing nothing about it (other than the prestige of director Denis Villeneuve), I

walked in on opening day and was promptly blown away. Sure, *Arrival* is technically a sci-fi film and while it's damn good at doing that, it's also so much more than that. This is a film about films, about the way we tell stories and it broke my brain. Even three years after release, I dare not spoil this film because if you haven't seen it, you deserve to experience the trajectory cold. Importantly though, this film is also exceptionally well made. Amy Adams gives probably her best performance, Jóhann Jóhannsson creates a truly alien sounding score and Bradford Young's cinematography manages the rare feat of looking stunning while also carrying much deeper meaning. Sci-fi has had an especially fertile decade but even still, there was nothing else quite like *Arrival* – Henry Jordan

11 years after the sequel and 15 years after the original, *Toy Story 3* did not disappoint fans, both old and new. Its timeless nature is something that can be accredited to the plot, in which Andy, now 17, is heading to college. The parallel between watching *Toy Story* as a child, and then heading towards later teen years, as Andy is in *Toy Story 3*, is what makes this film such a success. It toes the line between being a film for children, keeping them engaged but not afraid, while entertaining adults time and time again. Fans find Woody's world just as familiar as the first time round, but this is thrown into disarray when they are accidentally donated to a day care centre in an adventure sufficiently scary to make you genuinely wonder how they will escape. The third instalment of a trilogy that will entertain audiences for years to come fully deserves a place on the top 50 – Abi Taphouse, Online Screen Editor

*The Tree of Life* is not just a movie, but an experience. It explores the themes of family relationships, loss, neglect, self-discovery, love and lust in a tasteful and artistic manner. A fair warning is needed before you watch this film. It is not your typical blockbuster that can be watched as a way of passing time. For this one, your undivided attention is required. Otherwise, you will struggle to pick up on some aspects of the storyline. However, don't let this divert you from dedicating an evening to this experience. Use it as a source of your own self-discovery: a retrospective look into your own journey through childhood and adolescence into adulthood. The artistic level of *The Tree of Life*, and its focus upon the themes, rather than the dramatic performances themselves, all make it stand out from the crowd of some of the best movies of the decade – Anna Romanovska, Print Lifestyle Editor

The unexpected sub-genre of man-fights-his-way-out-of-tower-block has taken many incarnations since 1974's *The Towering Inferno*. In *The Raid*, the action hits Jakarta when Rama (Iko Uwais) and several other members of an elite police squad are tasked with taking out a crime lord who owns the film's ideal high-rise.

Director Gareth Evans' dedicated attention to Silat (the Indonesian martial art used in the film) calls to the China's Wuxia films, and *The Raid* plays out like a feature-length dance sequence. Each punch and kick is both painful and mesmerizing. The film's simple plot was what worked so well, since it allowed the editing and action to tell far more of the story – *Johnny Chern, Print Screen Editor*

Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos has helmed some of my personal favourites of the 2010s with *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* perhaps being the crown jewel amongst his other treasures. A domestic drama laced with his stylistic acerbic wit, *Sacred Deer* is an unsettling tragedy with the gravitas of classical theatre and the meticulous craft of (dare I say?) Kubrick's work. Barry Keough puts forward a star-making performance as detached teenager Martin; he is as calculating and cruel as any classic screen villain yet distinctly disquieting in his unusual performance. Riotous and relentless, *Sacred Deer* is a singular experience much like Lanthimos' other works, but its masterful tonal hybridity and striking direction make this individually special – *Jacob Heayes, Online Screen Editor*

*Not only is it [Inside Out] a solidly entertaining film but it is symbolic of this decade's moves towards open discussion of mental health.*

There is much to be said for the influence of children's films and *Inside Out* is a prime example of this. Not only is it a solidly entertaining film but it is symbolic of this decade's moves towards open discussion of mental health. Having been used as a tool for children going through counselling, this is a film that may not have been made in previous decades but came to our screens and made a bigger impact on the face of cinema than any children's film before – in my eyes, at least. For this, *Inside Out* sits comfortably at number 40, for this and the feel good factor of an entirely heartwarming children's film – *Abi Taphouse, Online Screen Editor*

Paul Schrader wrote *Taxi Driver*. If you know anything about *First Reformed*, you'll know this. They're both *important* movies, after all, each making a bold investigation into how *good men go bad*. I'm being

facetious, of course. Cast a glance over so many of the wunderkinds of new Hollywood, and you'll find a blandly bubbling cauldron of male violence, societal resentment and anti-heroism. However, amidst these tropes of masculinist posturing, grandiose intellectual angst and Schrader's (self-invested) place amongst a canon of Truly American Auteurs, imagine my surprise in finding that *First Reformed...* is actually very good.

Reverend Toller (Ethan Hawke) is a man who cannot breathe, his dogs collar somehow tighter with each passing scene – a moody, self-flagellating kind of guy. However, entering into his meagre existence is an all-too-sudden consciousness of modernity: the climate crisis, late capitalism, atheism. How does such a priestly sort cope upon discovering their God has deserted them?

What follows is a decidedly brutal interrogation of the male ego, a series of conversations that negotiate the frayed edges of faith and conscience. It's an oppressively sombre experience, one that wallows amidst its portrait of the feckless and small-minded. This world is a collection of broken parts and broken men, an austere 4:3 frame and hauntingly mute cinematography locking the characters, locking into their spiral. If there is a God, He's out of shot. There's an uncanny centrality of purpose. Breathing space is afforded only if that formal grip loosens – and it hardly does. Why is this one of the best movies of the decade? It *gripped* me. It deserves your passing attention, if only for how it won't let it go – *Harry Caton, Online Editor*

One of the things that I loved about this film is Disney's ability to bring Mexican culture to life, from the colourful Day of the Dead celebration, to the mariachi music that is played throughout. Another thing separating *Coco* from other Disney films is that there's no princess that needs saving. It is the story of a small boy, Miguel, who is forbidden to play mariachi music in his family home due to his great-grandfather leaving to pursue fame and fortune. Miguel becomes trapped in the underworld during the Day of the Dead celebrations and as the story begins to unravel, family secrets are revealed, ultimately bringing the family closer together. The final factor that makes this film so impressive is the use of colour, wholly in keeping with traditional Mexican culture, completely making the film stand out. It is all these factors that elevate *Coco* into the top 50 films of the decade – *Sally Denning*

There are fewer adaptations this decade that have been as wildly esoteric as Alex Garland's *Annihilation*. Mutating more than translating Jeff VanderMeer's science-fiction novel of the same name, Garland's film crafts an utterly beguiling narrative of ecological crisis and redemption that distinctly stands alone as its own entity. Accompanied by a hypnotic soundtrack and beautifully nightmarish visuals, *Annihilation* succeeds as a collage of unforgettable sequences that builds to perhaps the most unsettling climax of recent genre film. Furthermore, it's led by an ensemble of compelling female characters and a criminally underlooked performance from Natalie Portman. Despite being shoved away on Netflix for international audiences, *Annihilation* is as richly cinematic and imaginative as cinema has ever been. Ever since planting its roots in my mind, it's been difficult to shake – *Jacob Heayes, Online Screen Editor*

In 2013, Steve McQueen's *12 Years A Slave* unveiled one of the most uncompromising, but historically astute representations of American slavery that's ever found such a platform in Hollywood. With powerhouse performances from Chiwetel Ejiofor and Lupita Nyong'o at its helm, the story follows Solomon Northup's experience of American slavery – the script is partly based on Northup's memoir. The film forces us through unflinching depictions of the masters' brutality, and lays bare the solemn, resilient solidarity of those slaves who were subject to it. At the end of its 134 minutes, we're left exhausted – but we deserve to be drained. A faithful retelling of such a history should not settle for anything less. It is absolutely vital viewing, and one of the finest works of the decade – *Ben Faulkner*

This decade saw cinema embrace more LGBTQ+ storylines than ever before. The portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters also strayed from the tragic coming-of-age trope where filmmakers depict the queer existence as one that intimately and only engages with tragedy. A film that showed the joy and unity amongst adversity was Matthew Warchus's *Pride*, released in 2014. The film told the true story of Gay's the Word bookshop (still open to customers to this day in London) in Thatcher's Britain during the Miners' strikes. Lesbians and Gays Support Miners (LGSM) raised money for miners during the 1984-5 strike, including through staging the legendary Pits and Perverts concert. Fantastic performances from a stellar British cast (Andrew Scott, Bill Nighy, Dominic West, Imelda Staunton are just a handful) achieve celebrating LGBTQ+ and trade union history where

hardship intertwines with solidarity and pride – pun intended – *Charlotte Forrester*, Copy Editor

*2015's Spotlight...not only highlights the stalwart dedication of the journalistic endeavour at the heart of the story, but also handles the heart-breaking experiences of the victims with a tender nuance.*

2015's *Spotlight* serves as an expertly poignant drama that follows *The Boston Globe's* eponymous investigative team's efforts in uncovering the systemic sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests. The Tom McCarthy-directed film not only highlights the stalwart dedication of the journalistic endeavour at the heart of the story, but also handles the heart-breaking experiences of the victims with a tender nuance. Mark Ruffalo's performance as Michael Rezendes is a joy to behold in particular, as his righteous anger drives the team to expose the crimes. Having won both Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay at the 88<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards, *Spotlight* is a timeless work of art which deserves recognition as one of the best of the 2010s – *Pete Syme*, *Online News Editor*

The crime-ridden underworld of L.A. has never looked so aesthetically cool than in this neon-lit Nicolas Winding Refn masterpiece, and it is precisely for this reason that I consider *Drive* to be one of the absolute best pieces of cinema of the last decade. The film is overflowing with style: from the beautifully dark and brooding cinematography, to the iconic synth-laden soundtrack. Every aspect of *Drive* contributes to creating an incredibly atmospheric and poignant cinematic experience; combine this with a slow-moving yet incredibly well-paced narrative (and a career-defining performance from Ryan Gosling) and you have a near-flawless film. And not to forget THAT elevator scene, which has been in my mind ever since I first saw *Drive*, and still remains one of the best-directed and best-performed movie scenes ever filmed – *William Thornton*

Meet Oliver Tate. A precocious (and some might say pretentious) 15-year-old who has two main goals – to lose his virginity to his pyromaniac girlfriend before his next birthday, and to save his parents' marriage (which he aims to do so by monitoring their bedroom dimmer switch). What follows is a wholly unique coming of age film. Richard Ayoade creates the perfect balance between comedy and drama. Witty at times, but sentimental and melancholy at others. Featuring original music from Alex Turner, *Submarine* embodies what it means to be a teenager.



Everything hurts more the first time around. The film feels quiet and humble. Nothing spectacular happens, but it is completely and utterly heart-warming. Think *Amélie*... but Welsh.

*“Submarine is an important film. Watch it with respect. Fond regards from your protagonist, Oliver Tate.” – Francesca Sylph*

*Pushed, staggering, forward by an electrifying soundtrack, Raw emulates a dazed state of mind somewhere between obsession, repulsion and nausea.*

There's French movies... And then there's FRENCH movies you know? *Raw* is one of the latter. A disgustingly beautiful, beautifully disgusting film, *Raw* tells the story of Justine's first year in vet school. Organ-eating hazing rituals and dog dissections, this film bears it all. Pushed, staggering, forward by an electrifying soundtrack, *Raw* emulates a dazed state of mind somewhere between obsession, repulsion and nausea. It truly is one for peeking between your fingers, mouth hanging open, truly to push yourself through the back of the sofa, hopefully ending up somewhere more comfortable than this. Take this film how you will, make sure to absorb as much as you can, because I promise it will be sticking with you for a while. Beautifully paced and endlessly enthralling, I would recommend *Raw* to anyone looking for definitive proof that women are the future of the horror genre. – *Samuel Thomson, Print Screen Editor*

“What the hell is it about? Are you a special agent sent here to ruin my evening and possibly my entire life?”

Reynolds Woodcock is a perfect 1950s gentleman, and a boorish arse. Daniel Day-Lewis' final role is the couturier, exactly the charismatic, brilliant, yet tragically lost character that lends itself to Day-Lewis' vibrantly intense acting. Opposite, the naturalistic foil to the bombast of Day-Lewis, is Vicky Kreips as Alma, a quiet and seemingly submissive waitress, whom Woodcock falls for on a countryside sabbatical. Kreips displays an unassuming tenderness that cloaks deep and complex emotions, shown through Kreips' subtle expressiveness. *Phantom Thread* is a story about love, and the unconventional ways in which we find ourselves expressing it. Paul Thomas Anderson presents not an easy romance between Reynolds and Alma in this film, but a challenging one, and similarly, this film is not an easy romance; expectations of a conventional romantic drama will not yield satisfaction. A triumph of

thespian and directorial achievement, *Phantom Thread* is one of the greats of the 2010s – *Euan Bolscher*

*Inside Llewyn Davis* is such a melodious and tragic character study of a film. I'd go as far to say it's one of the most wretched and depressing magnifications of a singular character in the last 10 years. Not only is the life of the titular character bleak and uncertain – having to hitch on the sofas of those who either pity him or resent him – it also probes into the lives of those Llewyn has changed in some capacity, for the worst or the better. Mainly for the worst. The perfect folk soundtrack, featuring real songs that have been reconstructed with musicians and actors such as Justin Timberlake and Carey Mulligan features as an escape from the harshness of trying to make it big as a musician in New York during the early 60s. Oscar Isaac gives one the most underrated performance I have ever seen for a fictional musician; this is a real passion project by the Coen Brothers, whose love for country and folk beams through this masterpiece of a film – *Taylor-William Hill*

Bo Burnham is loved as a stand-up comedian and entertainer. For me, the very fact that his first film *Eighth Grade* has been rated one of the top 50 films of 2019 says a lot about him as a creative and a filmmaker. The film follows a girl, Kayla, finding her place in the world that doesn't seem to have room for her. She struggles to identify with her generation and her exploration of who she is, leads her to push herself outside her comfort zone. In my opinion, Burnham distils the anxieties and hurdles every young adult goes through growing up and it feels like it is from a very genuine place. This is not a cinematic spectacle or a great thriller, instead, it is a helping hand for those who feel lost; a promise that not only will you get through this, but that it gets better – *Jake Bradshaw*

*Richard Linklater's childhood chronicle is distinctively ambitious filmmaking at its apex – a 12-year odyssey that defies both narrative and logistical precedents.*

Few films have touched me this decade – even over my lifetime – with as much emotional intelligence that *Boyhood* possesses. Richard Linklater's childhood chronicle is distinctively ambitious filmmaking at its apex – a 12-year odyssey that defies both narrative and logistical precedents. Following the life of Ellar Coltrane's Mason, *Boyhood* feels alive and wonderfully reactionary to its own environment. Written as each year

passed and largely inspired from Coltrane’s own experiences growing up, it’s a relatively plotless yet captivating experience that draws upon the potency of nostalgia and the difficult brevity with which all life appears to pass. Linklater toys with the notion of a life flashing before our eyes, through condensing Mason’s formative years into 150 minutes of screentime. Once the credits appear, a genuine coming-of-age has materialised before your eyes and it’s almost impossible not to feel as longing and baffled as Patricia Arquette’s maternal figure. Where did all that time go? – *Jacob Heayes, Online Screen Editor*

Edgar Wright’s *Baby Driver* is constantly talked about for its phenomenal soundtrack and innovative use of music to tell a story, and I will be no exception. Many of the songs from this film have found a firm place on my playlists. What is often forgotten, therefore, is that Wright is a master of quick-fire montage that not only quickens the films pacing but also moves on the plot smoothly and concisely. I found this film thrilling to watch had it not been for the last act. Without giving anything away for those who still have the pleasure of watching this modern classic, everything changes, and I’m still not completely sure why. Overall, I’m glad that

