

Top 10 Films of 2017

The Nouse team pick their favourites from a year full of excellent films

By [Andrew Young](#), [James Wright](#), [Emily Taylor](#), [Jasmine Onstad](#), [Oscar Bentley](#) and [Ellie Waterhouse](#)
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For better or worse, 2017 is over. Like most years, there have been a fair amount of critically-despised films and box-office flops. It was a disastrous summer financially for the cinema and it's fair to say 2017 probably won't be remembered as a vintage year. However, as will always be the case, there are enough talented and ambitious voices in cinema to make us believe in film's power to move and inspire. 2017 has seen some of the most powerful and fascinating films on offer. So don't write the year off just yet; instead take a look back at these 10 examples of cinematic splendour.

***Jackie* - Emily Taylor**



Image: Fox Searchlight

A biopic about Jacqueline Kennedy sounds like nothing ground-breaking, another Oscar fodder biopic allowing that star to chew as much of the scenery as the budget allows and with enough historical revisionism to not leave the audience uncomfortable with complex truth of the pasts. Fortunately, Pablo Larraín's *Jackie* is nothing like *The King's Speeches* or *The Theory of Everything*s that often litter awards seasons, sanitised true stories to make the audience feel good. There is something deeply unsettling about this depiction of Jackie Kennedy in the week following the Kennedy assassination, it's a cold and often distant movie that for these reasons unfortunately struggled to find an audience.

Natalie Portman gives one of the best performances of her career as she switches between the many masks of Jackie Kennedy during the film's exploration of how subjective truth is. This film doesn't ignore the complexities of history but revels in them; it is neither sycophantic towards Jackie nor does it condemn her. The film plays more like a horror film than a drama, the camera twists and turns through the White House like it does in *The Shining's* Overlook Hotel and the fantastic Mica Levy's spine-tingling

score underlies the whole piece with a sense of dread. There is no other film out there quite like Jackie. A post-modern masterpiece.

***Moonlight* - Andrew Young**



Image: A24

Not all of the films on this list were universally beloved upon release, far from it in fact. Yet, sometimes a film comes along for which barely anyone has a bad word to say. One of the most critically-adored Best Picture winners of recent times, *Moonlight* is hardly a surprising inclusion on our list.

Barry Jenkins' film touched many hearts around the world with its raw emotion and poetic beauty. The film was split into three parts, each one zeroing in on a different snapshot of the life of young Chiron and each one accompanied by a natural and accomplished performance by Alex. R Hibbert, Ashton Sanders and Trevante Rhodes in turn.

Rightly praised for its unique focus on a gay black man growing up on the mean streets of Miami, *Moonlight* was, however, far more than an exercise in representation. On the one hand it followed in *The Wire's* footsteps by exploring the humanity and hardships behind the nasty veneer of the American drug trade. On the other, it was a coming-of-age story told with a rare naturalism and understatement. On an astonishing *third* hand, the film is a fleeting romance of quivering intensity. Much of this was bathed in the titular glow, adding to its natural gorgeousness.

***Get Out* - Jasmine Onstad**

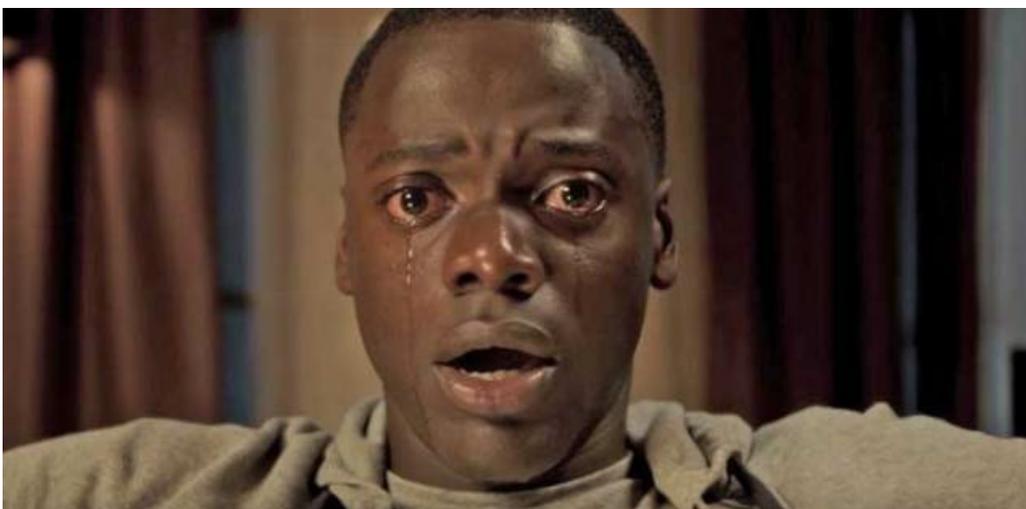


Image: Universal Pictures

Jordan Peele's directorial debut was a curveball that took everyone by surprise. Not only were the critics raving, but for audiences around the world, especially young black Americans, this standout film became a cultural landmark for 2017. Its great popularity is reflected in the numbers as it was named the year's highest-grossing debut film based on an original screenplay.

Starring Daniel Kaluuya, of *Black Mirror* fame, it's a truly terrifying and genre-bending horror story where the bad guys aren't the usual suspects (gun-slinging neo-Nazis) but the liberal Obama-voting elite. At its most simple level, *Get Out* follows Chris Washington (Kaluuya) as he finally meets his white girlfriend's (Allison Williams) parents. Everything about the encounter is off putting, from Rose's father's insistence on calling Chris 'my man' to the eerily vacant stares of the help. Yet as well as being decidedly a horror film, and a very successful one at that, *Get Out* is simultaneously a multitude of different things: a socially conscious comedy, a suspenseful thriller, and a chilling commentary about race relations in America today- "the movie is truth" as Peele himself put it in an interview. This honesty is at the core of *Get Out's* success. Though it is a 'genre film', the emotions it evokes are scarily real and recognizable, an unfortunate reflection of life for many.

***The Red Turtle* - James Wright**

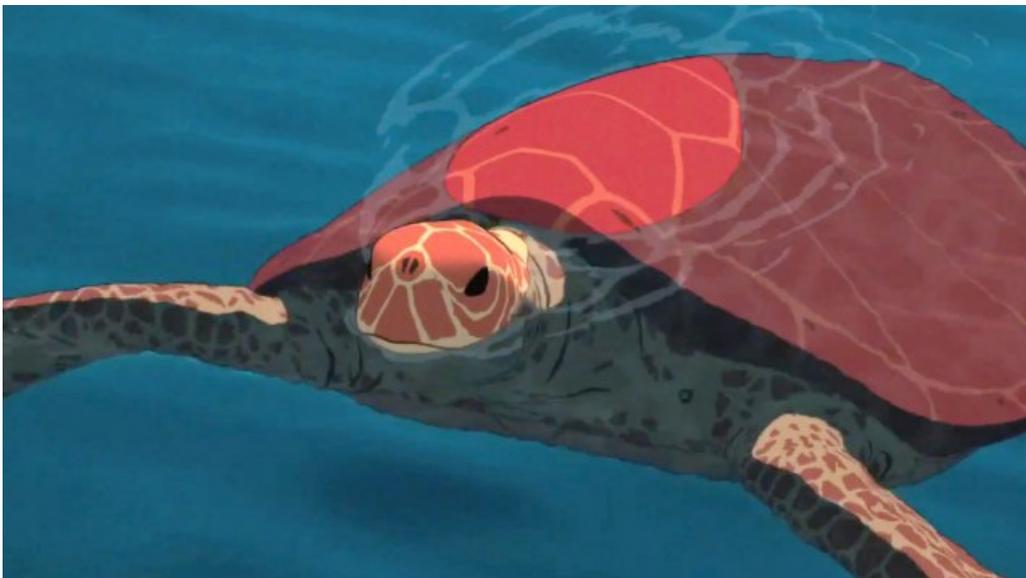


Image: Wild Bunch

All year round the animated film space is clogged-up with a profusion of major studio releases, providing consistent box office success but poor to average quality. When a film bucks the trend and manages to peep above the parapet of animated chaff, it is always refreshing and demands shouting about. *The Red Turtle* is one of said sources of refreshment and consider these words my contribution to shouting about it.

The story follows a man shipwrecked on an island and deals with themes of isolation, nature and survival. Plot-wise that's all you need to know going in. The hand-drawn style is beautifully simple, the colours are vivid, the sound design is rich - at times overwhelming - all levels of craft on show are of the highest quality and this grants the themes room to breathe. Not only that, it is also an absolute antidote to the spoon-fed switch-your-brain-off plot mechanics that plague much of cinema today. If you are willing to watch a film that will challenge you to think about the visual feast before your eyes, then step right up and enjoy. Additional fun fact to whet your appetite: there are no lines of dialogue.

***mother!* - Oscar Bentley**



Image: Paramount Pictures

mother! (with a small m, I'm still not exactly sure why), Darren Aronofsky's latest offering, is a difficult film to nail down. It was marketed as a more or less traditional horror film, but the finished product is anything but. Polarising critics and audiences, it's a film that was steeped in controversy upon release.

Despite this reputation, it's hard to explain just how good *mother!* is without spoiling it, and you certainly don't want to watch it for the first time knowing what it's about – solving the mystery of its meaning is part of its intrigue. On the surface, it's a drama starring Jennifer Lawrence and Javier Bardem, whose solitary life begins to fall apart when a stranger turns up on their doorstep. Underneath however, it's so much more, and while it may be a strange film until you get it, by God when you do it's fantastic.

mother! is an intellectual wonder that swaps from semi-boring to mouth agape WTF-ness. By the third act, even if you've not quite realised what the film is trying to say yet, it's still clearly done a 180 degree swivel from the relationship drama of the first act. Aronofsky's ever-moving camera sticks close to Lawrence for almost the entire runtime, with beautiful staging accompanying the engrossing thematics. Quite simply, *mother!* is a thinking-person's marvel.

***Blade Runner 2049* - Ellie Waterhouse**



Image: Warner Bros.

The highly anticipated sequel to Ridley Scott's classic sci-fi film, which some feared would succumb to the curse of the sequel, is truly magnificent, succeeding in delighting fans of the original and gripping a new generation. Set thirty years later in (you guessed it) the year 2049, the replicants are now integrated into society as slaves and servants, with replicant K (Ryan Gosling) serviced to hunt down rogue members of his own kind.

The film is faithful to the original, with Harrison Ford's reprising his role of Deckard and references to the original satisfactorily woven into the storyline. Denis Villeneuve's direction successfully delves deeper into our existential anxieties and the question of what makes us human that made the first film so fascinating. His film is slow paced, but visually stunning. Roger Deakins' incredible landscape shots showcase the very best of cinematography, which coupled with Zimmer's atmospheric score, creates a truly spectacular

cinematic experience. The film is satisfyingly thought-provoking, and the intriguing questions it raises concerning human relations with technology are even more relevant now than they were thirty years ago. It is ambitious, but its rejuvenating and expanding of the original themes undeniably places *Blade Runner 2049* as one of the best sequels in a long time, as well as an outstanding film in its own right.

***Dunkirk* - Emily Taylor**



Image: Warner Bros.

This may win the award for most obvious choice, and chances are if you're reading this then you have seen it and then you'll understand why its on this list. It's just that good. Christopher Nolan is one of the greatest filmmakers working today and has the talent to marry the sensibilities of both the arthouse and mainstream crowd. With *Dunkirk*, Nolan leans more into his artistic sensibility with a barebones script and instead relying on purely visual storytelling - and despite this it was a box office sensation as well as a critical darling.

Unlike most war films it never strays into over-sentimentalism or heroics, not trying to glamorise the tragedy of war but rather maintains a documentary-style distance which means when it does hit home emotionally it doesn't feel like the audience have been manipulated. Christopher Nolan, as well as being a great director, has found some of the best people in the business to collaborate with: Hans Zimmer returns once again to provide a the ticking time-bomb of a score; cinematographer Hote Van Hoytema returns after working with Nolan on *Interstellar* (the cinematography being the greatest strength of that film); Lee Smith returns again to edit, having worked with Nolan since *Batman Begins*, and arguably does his best job with an incredibly slickly edited and perfectly paced film. As well as this its his 3rd collaboration with Tom Hardy (once again mostly hidden behind a mask), 5th with ever-fantastic Cillian Murphy and 7th with the irreplaceable Michael Caine. If you're the one person reading this who hasn't seen this film, then go watch it. It is that good.

***La La Land* - Andrew Young**



Image: Summit Entertainment

Sometimes, when extraordinary amounts of gushing praise are heaped upon a film, there is a backlash. Alejandro G. Iñárritu's recent efforts *Birdman* and *The Revenant* may come to mind, but no film in recent times has experienced this phenomenon quite like *La La Land*. Its near-miss of Oscars domination and the huge support for the admittedly excellent *Moonlight* have taken the edge off the love for Damien Chazelle's second feature. So perhaps it is worth remembering why people fell in love with *La La Land* in the first place.

In a time when the monotony of blockbuster action and earnest biopics receive instant groans from cinephiles the world over, *La La Land* was a genuinely unique experience. It was that-film-they-don't-make-anymore and wore its nostalgia for big, colourful musicals with pride. Yet it had the sense to question it too, centring the narrative arc around the conflict between artistic integrity and success. Add to this its gorgeously romantic central relationship and the ups and downs it endures and you had a film with enough heart to place it on many a top 10 list.

Let us not forget how technically dazzling *La La Land* was too. The set design, the costumes, the choreography, the music – Damien Chazelle threw so many elements together and they worked together in eye-popping harmony. Oh, and Gosling and Stone were utterly splendid.

***The Handmaiden* - Jasmine Onstad**



Image: CJ E&M Film Division

A thrill-ride thick with sexual tension and suspense, *The Handmaiden* was one of the boldest films of 2017. This is to be expected from Park Chan-wook, the South Korean director of the impressive Vengeance trilogy famed for its hyper-violence. In the case of *The Handmaiden*, violence is replaced by eroticism and transgressive female sexuality.

Based on Sarah Water's novel *Fingersmith*, a Victorian romp featuring a young thief, instructed to pose as a handmaid to an heiress in order to swindle her out of her fortune. Things get complicated when an unexpected love story flourishes between the two women and the dizzying twists and turns in the plot and narration spin the audience into bewildered awe by the time the conclusion is reached. After discovering that the BBC had already committed this story to screen in the form of a short series, Park took the opportunity to explore a fascinating part of South Korea's history: the 1930s and 40s when it was under Japanese rule. The vivid historical backdrop coupled with the bold sensuality of the two protagonists together give the film an opulent texture which breaks the mould, especially in South Korea where homosexuality is still a very taboo topic. As intimate as it is repellent, Park has certainly retained his title as South Korea's most acclaimed cinematic export.

Lady Macbeth - Emily Taylor



Image: Altitude Film Distribution

Hitchcock, the Master of Suspense, once said 'I enjoy playing the audience like a piano'. His legacy is strongly felt in William Oldroyd's debut feature, where the audience's reactions are controlled to near-perfection - who the audience believes, the twisted morality of the whole piece and most importantly the raising crescendo of dread throughout the whole film. It's a film that uses suspense to create nothing short of horror.

The plot, surprisingly, has nothing to do with Shakespeare's play Macbeth but rather it is based on the Russian novel Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, but transposed to nineteenth century England, and tells the tale of a young bride who, after being forced to marry, enters an illicit affair. It's a simple narrative and the beauty in this film is in its simplicity; it clocks in at just under ninety minutes and the action almost never leaves one location - not a moment is wasted and is used just to create nail-biting tension. It is masterly constructed with great performances all round and a star-making turn by leading lady Florence Pugh. It's also one of the few period pieces that is willing to accept that nineteenth century England wasn't 100% white, it leads to the film also being a fascinating study between the interplay of class, race and gender. There is something terrifically nasty beneath the polished exterior - it may not be a fun watch but Oldroyd makes it impossible to draw your eyes away from the screen.

Honourable Mentions



Image: A24

Danny Boyle and co. defied expectations with a strong sequel to their iconic 90s masterpiece with T2: *Trainspotting*, whilst Olivier Assayas and David Lowery took differing approaches to the dead in *Personal Shopper* and *A Ghost Story* respectively. The humanity and beauty of our world was on show once again in Mike Mills' splendid *20th Century Women* and the year ended very strongly indeed with Sean Baker's powerful second feature *The Florida Project*.



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