

Top 5 Polarising Films of This Century

People just can't make up their minds about these controversial pictures

By [Michael Maitland-Jones](#)

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Creating a truly polarising a film is a challenge that few directors seem willing to rise to; either because of the inevitable critical mauling that usually ensues, or simply because most filmmakers are simply incapable of creating something that truly splits an audience down the middle. The films that do manage this must therefore receive some credit for at least causing a bit of a stir, regardless of what you may think about them. Over the past decade we've seen a few films a bit like this and what follows is a list of the films that achieved the rare effect of having audiences both overjoyed and hopping mad in equal measure. They're the marmite of cinema and worth watching just to see what all the fuss is about.

Only God Forgives -

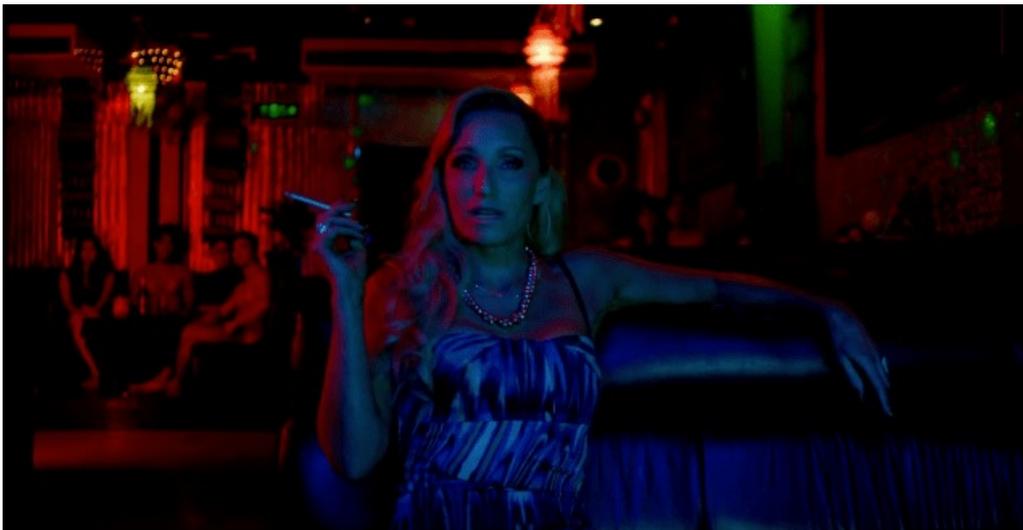


Image: RADiUS-TWC

It's fitting that the one of the most important entries in this list is the creation of the ethically dubious, self-proclaimed pornographer Nicolas Winding Refn. Although Refn's most recent offering *The Neon Demon* is a fair call for this list (being quite possibly one of the only films ever made to feature cannibalism, necrophilia, and the Gucci logo) it's *Only God Forgives* that claims the top spot as Refn's most polarising film and earns its place on this list. Booed at Cannes, *Only God Forgives* was dubbed as a crime against cinema and divided critics and audience members alike. It's undeniably a masterclass in how to shoot a film; every crimson drenched frame seems to have been meticulously planned to make it a feast for the eyes. Cliff Martinez's score is likewise mesmerizing, and it's a picture with great strengths. It also contains some of the most shocking violence you'll see in a major release picture, and don't expect Ryan Gosling's leading performance to add much levity (think *La La Land*'s Sebastian with a much more limited vocabulary and the occasional penchant for ultraviolence). In the wake of the success of *Drive*, Refn was given complete creative freedom with the project; meaning you'll see his decision making process at its best (heart-hammering chase sequences in the street of Bangkok) and worst (scenes of

karaoke-singing cops). It'll leave you either fuming or awestruck, and you wouldn't be alone in either category.

Sunshine -



Image: Fox Searchlight Pictures

Although regularly cited as being one of the great underrated films of this century, *Sunshine* still attracts heavy criticism for its utterly barmy third act (not to be spoiled here); that'll either make or break the film for you (Quentin Tarantino describing it as a 'betrayal'). Penned by Alex Garland (*Ex Machina*, *28 Days Later*) the film wrestles with some brilliantly complex themes in a way that would make Kubrick proud and stands apart from the glut of Star Wars influenced sci-fi that is commonplace today. A creatively buzzing Danny Boyle throws everything he can at the film with the visceral horror of *Alien*, the serenity of *Silent Running* and the sheer craziness of *2001: A Space Odyssey* all present in the film; whether this weird clash of genres and tone works for you is another matter. The film was a flop at the box office but has found something of a cult following in recent years. Although already dubbed a classic by some, *Sunshine* is a bizarre cocktail of serious ideas, stunning visuals and blatantly flawed execution; be prepared to love it or loathe it.

A Field in England -



Image: Film4 Productions

Before Ben Wheatley entered more mainstream filmmaking with 2016's *High-Rise* and this year's *Free Fire*, he made the psychedelic civil war horror film *A Field in England*; a film that might have given even John Waters pause. Although ostensibly a horror, the film defies description and has to be seen to be understood (and even then you'll be wondering what the hell you just sat through). The film was able to win a healthy critical following but left the majority of audiences baffled (featuring no less than 10

walkouts in the screening I was in). With epilepsy-inducing editing, scenes of satanic possession, magic mushrooms and deformed prosthetic penises aplenty perhaps it's understandable why some found this one a bit too hot to handle; however it's also daringly original, vividly memorable, and quite unlike anything else you've ever seen.

Prometheus -



Image: 20th Century Fox

A surprisingly mainstream entry to this list and unlike the previous three films, one you've almost certainly seen. *Prometheus* promised to be the film that would breathe life back into the Alien franchise, with Ridley Scott back as helmsman and a great-looking trailer this looked set to be a sure-fire hit, despite the apparent absence of the titular alien. It's perhaps somewhat surprising then that *Prometheus* met with such a mixed reaction; some adoring it, whilst some proclaiming it to be the biggest disappointment since *The Phantom Menace*. *Prometheus* had some fairly glaring problems (most notably a script that at times felt as though it had been written by a 20th Century Fox intern) but it was also ambitious and entertaining. The film's connection to the Alien franchise, as well as Scott's involvement, meant that opinions on it were much more polarising than perhaps was necessary; without this baggage the film would likely have been seen as nothing more than a passably fun sci-fi epic. If you haven't already, see it for Michael Fassbender's uncanny T.E Lawrence impersonation.

Nocturnal Animals -



Image: Focus Features

Always one to cause a bit of controversy, fashion provocateur Tom Ford (best described as Nicolas Winding Refn's slightly better behaved American counterpart) gave us his second directorial effort in

2016 with *Nocturnal Animals*, and probably couldn't have hoped for a better response. The film was described by many as misogynistic, tasteless, and deliberately OTT (hard to argue with given the film's title sequence alone) but it also found its share of critical plaudits (our own Andrew Young giving it four stars) and garnered Ford several Bafta nods. The film features brilliant work from its ensemble cast (Amy Adams making the most of a role that essentially requires her to read a manuscript and gasp every now and then) and it's beautifully shot and edited even in its most lurid moments. It's a film that is undeniably flawed and some will be left unsatisfied by its close, however it's an unusual beast that should be celebrated for its risks.

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