

Film Feature: Best & Worst of 2018 So Far by HollywoodChicago.com

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 11, 2018 - 10:57am

- [2018](#) [2]
- [Annihilation](#) [3]
- [Black Panther](#) [4]
- [Early Man](#) [5]
- [Film News](#) [6]
- [First Half](#) [7]
- [Hereditary](#) [8]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [9]
- [Isle of Dogs](#) [10]
- [Jon Lennon Espino](#) [11]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [12]
- [Peter Rabbit](#) [13]
- [Spike Walters](#) [14]
- [The First Purge](#) [15]
- [Tomb Raider](#) [16]
- [Won't You Be My Neighbor](#) [17]

CHICAGO – The holiday hangover is fading with the heat and humility, so what better time to remind ourselves of the Best and Worst films of 2018 SO FAR! HollywoodChicago.com contributors – Patrick McDonald, Jon Espino and Spike Walters – offer the following reactions to those so-far cinema treats and threats.

The release strategy of studios and productions has changed profoundly. What was once the dead zone of the film year – January through Mid April – is now part of an opportunity to take some risks... “Black Panther,” for example, was released to honor February’s Black History Month. Each film writer will offer three films, as Patrick and Jon will assess their personal “Best,” and the magnanimous Spike Walters will take on the “Worst.”



BEST OF 2018 SO FAR by Jon Lennon Espino



Hereditary

Photo credit: A24

HEREDITARY: For the most part, I've been desensitized to horror films because I've been watching them since I was still in the single digits. I can see every cheap jump scare coming, and leave most of the films wondering how many times someone had to throw a cat into a shot until it was perfect. "Hereditary" doesn't mess around with cats since demons are twice as effective. This film is a relentless ride that will keep you tense and leave you unnerved long after the credits have rolled. With an award-winning performance from Toni Collette, this film is a must-see, but beware because none of it can be unseen. The film doesn't rely on cheap scares, but instead delivers intermittent shocks to the system that nearly knock your head off, especially early on. There are certain scenes that will haunt you, but the unforgettable finale will definitely stay with you and possess you.

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR: The title of this film is usually treated more as a quote than a question. Mr. Rogers would sing this line on his iconic television show, and we would sing along, but did we ever really understand it? "Won't You Be My Neighbor" is more than just a historical exploration of Fred Rogers' past, because it serves as a way translate all of his actions and motivations. As children, most nuances are lost on us, and the story behind something is rarely ever explored. This documentary explores the mission of one man to make the world a better place, and ends up leaving us with a bittersweet feeling of immense appreciation and inconsolable loss. This documentary, and this man's story, are both important now because it highlights the rarely seen epitome of Christianity... which is the love and support for their fellow man, with none of the judgement and condemnation. For example, when close friend and cast member François Clemmons recalls a conversation he had with Fred Rogers, where Rogers reveals he knew Clemmons was gay, Mr. R was not only accepting, but had been sending Clemmons a supportive message in the show the entire time. There weren't enough tissues available for this moment.

Fred Rogers exemplified what a true Christian could and should be, and most of us needed to be reminded of that, since all we see of Christians today is how they openly support a president who places value on the lives of straight, white, Christian American men.

ANNIHILATION: Writer and director Alex Garland has never shied away from high concept films. In fact, he successfully delivers every time... and that includes his previous, Oscar-winning film "Ex Machina." None of his previous films could have prepared us for the mind-bending

journey we were about to take in “Annihilation,” but you won’t regret a single minute of it. The film introduces so much commentary on humanity, society, and even biology, that it’s impossible for you not to go home and talking about it and debating with your friends. Garland pairs brains with beauty as he delivers gorgeous visuals that stimulate our senses, but also leave us feeling disturbed. The mostly female cast, consisting of Natalie Portman, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Gina Rodriguez, Tessa Thompson, Tuva Novotny and Oscar Isaac, keep this fantasy grounded in reality by humanizing it, making every revelation and interaction that much more powerful. And in possibly the most terrifying moment of the film, a bear-like creature shows up, but has the voice of their dead friend. It was almost un-bear-able.

BEST MOMENT OF THE BEST: It was a comedic scene in “Hereditary.” When Toni Collette and Ann Dowd’s character perform a séance, Collette reacts incredulously and hilariously... like any of us would in that situation.



BEST OF 2018 SO FAR by Patrick McDonald



Black Panther

Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment

BLACK PANTHER: When everything comes together perfectly, comic book movies can be cinema morality. “Black Panther” really has all the elements to explore our inherent truths... heroism, vulnerability, doing the right/wrong thing and wrestling with evil. This hero film puts it all together, PLUS meditates on the African American experience in the USA and the African colonialism experience back in the mother country. The cast, led by new superstar Chadwick Boseman as BP, is excellent top to bottom, and the film contains many tributes to other films, as director Ryan Coogler did previously in “Creed.” This also started the films-set-in-Oakland-California run, which also exists in “Blindspotting” and “Sorry to Bother You.” The roots of heroism are formulated, apparently, in the “Bright Side of the Bay.”

ISLE OF DOGS: This is the medium cool of director Wes Anderson, and could reach animated icon status. The style is enrapturing... the blank slate of a retro futuristic Japanese folk tale that is presented so dryly it could burst into dust at any moment. Anchored by the vocal talents of Bryan Cranston, “...Dogs” is a colorful combination of design, character and stop motion animation classicism, and its metaphorical story speaks volumes to the repressed. Greta Gerwig, as a Little Orphan Annie-type anarchist, was actually my favorite. Her ultra dry delivery

represented the whole feel-good emotion in the film, which is enriched by dogs, “humankind’s best friend.” To paraphrase her, “darn it, I have a crush on this film.”

EARLY MAN: From Wes Anderson to animationist Nick Park (“Wallace and Gromit,” “Chicken Run”) it’s been a good half year for cartoon buffs. “Early Man” is just damn funny, the kind of funny that keeps rolling throughout, and develops itself into even more hilarity. Making fun of the cave man days, and the transition to the more capitalistic “Bronze Age,” can only be accomplished through soccer (this should be the official film of the World Cup, but I’m sure FIFA would demand too much money). Featuring an voice cast of English talent – Eddie Redmayne, Tom Hiddleston and Timothy Spall – the film duplicates the “two layered” affect of the best cartoons... great for children and greater for adults. GOOOOOAAAAAAL!

BEST MOMENT OF THE BEST: It was actually when director Ryan Coogler used a long shot in “Black Panther” – as if we were peering at the scene from across the street – that put an exclamation point on a key (and symbolically significant) piece of dialogue towards the end. I couldn’t stop thinking about afterward, on a very difficult day.

Now that we’ve listed the BEST, it’s time for the Liver-Worst! Spike Walters takes on three of the WORST of 2018 so far... short and sweet. Go to **PAGE TWO!**



WORST OF 2018 SO FAR by Spike Walters



Peter Rabbit

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Entertainment

PETER RABBIT: The beloved subject of the timeless storybook from childhood is turned into another run-of-the-mill hyperactive hoodlum. When the character personality of Peter Rabbit is “making it rain,” you know something is seriously wrong.

THE FIRST PURGE: There’s nothing wrong with trash movies that aspire for bigger and better things than the debased amusement of the masses. But trash that takes itself and it’s simple minded social themes deadly seriously – without realizing it’s a forgettable installment of a

forgettable series – that’s too much to take. “The First Purge” is that kind of trash.

TOMB RAIDER: “Tomb Raider” fails on even a most basic level. It’s a film about a gamer’s wet dream of a character that never manages to capture the knockoff Indiana Jones-type thrills, which was the original game’s aspiration. It has no adventure, no hiss-worthy villain and simply no charisma.

WORST MOMENT OF THE WORST: The original author of the 1902 “Tale of Peter Rabbit” – Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) – never anticipated dialogue like this from a 2018 film version of her work (spoken by the character Thomas McGregor as he’s strangling Peter Rabbit), “I’m chilled out, man. I’m cool now.”

“Hereditary,” “Won’t You Be My Neighbor,” and “The First Purge” are still in theatrical release. See local listings for theaters and show times. “Annihilation,” “Black Panther,” “Isle of Dogs,” “Early Man,” “Peter Rabbit” and “Tomb Raider” are available on DVD or digital download.



[18]

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- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/2018>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/annihilation>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/black-panther>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/early-man>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/film-news>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/first-half>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hereditary>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/isle-of-dogs>
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- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/peter-rabbit>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/spike-walters>
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