

Film Feature: The 10 Best Films of 2018, By Patrick McDonald

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 2, 2019 - 11:33am

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CHICAGO – With 2018 in the rear view mirror (finally), it's time in this first week of 2019 to reflect on what was, with the 10 BEST FILMS of 2018... as selected by Patrick McDonald, the Über-Critic of HollywoodChicago.com. The list includes docs, animated films and even superheroes, along with the snooty film critic fare that's always ripe for the watching.

Last year (now switching to first person), I began breaking down the films ranked 25th through 11th, with the option to click on the highlighted titles for reviews or associated interviews... 25th - [SORRY TO BOTHER YOU](#) [22], 24th - [LEAVE NO TRACE](#) [23], 23rd - SHOPLIFTERS, 22nd - [BLACKKKKLANSMAN](#) [24], 21st - COLD WAR, 20th - [FIRST REFORMED](#) [25], 19th - WE THE ANIMALS, 18th - [YOU WERE NEVER REALLY HERE](#) [26], 17th - THE RIDER, 16th - [MARY POPPINS RETURNS](#) [27], 15th - [VOX LUX](#) [28], 14th - [EIGHTH GRADE](#) [29], 13th - [ISLE OF DOGS](#) [30], 12th - BALLAD OF BUSTER SCRUGGS, 11th - [ON THE BASIS OF SEX](#) [31].

HONORABLE MENTION: In a testament to the power of cinema to heal, the first film I took in for review after the passing of my brother was [GAME NIGHT](#) [32], a silly action comedy that simply made me laugh. There are many times in life we are put down, but there are always the movies to lift us up.

Below each film description in the 10 BEST will be a link to full reviews and/or interviews, when applicable. And away we go...



SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDERVERSE



Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse
Photo credit: Columbia Pictures

For movie joy, it may be difficult to beat this instant animated classic, which combines the nuttiness of our current superhero universe with a cartoon expressiveness and morality. The Spider-Man we know, Peter Parker, bites the dust, which leaves his job open for the reluctant Miles (voice of Shameik Moore). At the same time, the multi-universes have opened up, and a new web slinger also has to deal with other Spideys, including Gwen Stacy and Peter B. Parker, plus the hilarious anime Peni, 1930s Spider-Man Noir (“I like punching Nazis”) and the 2D animated Spider-Ham. This coterie of heroes have to figure out how to get everyone back to their own worlds, and save Miles’ universe. With mind-blowing visuals, a necessary swagger and comedy galore, this is both pure entertainment and a celebration of all things comic book.

HIGHLIGHT: The late Marvel Man Stan Lee (RIP) has his usual cameo, but this time there are no returns.

★ THE KING



The King
Photo credit: Oscilloscope

Elvis Presley was one of the most famous entertainers of the 20th Century, but died in 1977 when his dream faded, despite being an icon. Director Eugene Jarecki created an amazing documentary about Elvis called "The King," that uses his rise and decline as a symbol for the lost American Dream. The film is part bio picture, part fan film and all about America. Jarecki borrowed Elvis's actual Rolls Royce and put celeb admirers like Alec Baldwin, Ethan Hawke, Ashton Kutcher, Emily Lou Harris and John Hiatt inside the car to talk about the significance of the Elvis celebrity, bigger and brighter at its time than any other, and burnt out to the end. The film is simply a truth about who and what America is, through one of the biggest personalities it ever produced, for better or worse. Whether you love Elvis or this metaphor, it's a must see.

HIGHLIGHT: The final Elvis concert clip, expressing a longing and a passion that is soon to be extinguished... is this the fate for America?

[Click here](#) [33] for the full review of "The King," with a bonus Podtalk with director Eugene Jarecki.





Tully

Photo credit: Focus Features

The subject matter of a postpartum mental state for an after-baby-birth mother has never been explored in a film like this amazing bit of creativity from writer Diablo Cody and director Jason Reitman. Charlize Theron wistfully portrays the Mama, who takes extreme advantage of a “night nurse” named Tully (Mackenzie Davis), offered to provide some respite after she delivers her third child. There is nothing in the film that is expected (pun intended), yet at the same time it emphasizes the overwhelming elements of being a hormonal/biological multi-mother, and provides an ardent empathy for the toll it can take, on the mother, her family and her life.

HIGHLIGHT: The Theron character reliving her youth in Brooklyn.

★ **MADELINE'S MADELINE**



Madeline's Madeline
Photo credit: Oscilloscope

And then the baby grows to teenage proportions. The debut of actor Helena Howard as the title character is pure revelation, as she portrays a 17-year-old acting student with a tense relationship with her past, which includes her mother Regina (the great Miranda July). Her acting teacher Evangeline (Molly Parker) is part of the equation for pushing Madeline, without realizing she is playing with fire. This the third feature film for actor/director/writer Josephine Decker, who displays an expressive soul of cinema in her delicate treatment of that inner Madeline's Madeline, and the character spiral into the ultimate dance... as much a natural occurrence as a film.

HIGHLIGHT: The performance art of the freaky endgame for the teacher and her student.

★ **THE DEATH OF STALIN**



The Death of Stalin
Photo credit: IFC Films

There is nothing more pathetic than men who desire power, and the fantastic satire THE DEATH OF STALIN provides more fuel to burn the patriarchy. Set in Russia during the title event, the film is expressed in the King's English, with an impressive cast including Steve Buscemi, Jeffrey Tambor and Michael Palin. Based on a graphic novel, it was helmed by the director Armando Iannucci of HBO's VEEP and contains his signature epic swearing, which emphasizes the childish playground antics (with violence) that fascist rule eventually devolves into. The USA should take note, but it's mostly a laugh out loud comedy.

HIGHLIGHT: Russia banned the film.

[Click here](#) [34] for the full review of "The Death of Stalin."

 **HEREDITARY**



Hereditary

Photo credit: A24

The glory of this “horror” film, rooted in psychology, is in the image of the title... we can never escape the inherent influences of family. Toni Collette portrays Annie, the soul of “mother” who is tortured by the events after her mother’s death. The dead matriarch looms as a larger and most devastating figure as the story goes on, and it is Annie who takes the brunt of it. The disease in her family tree is beginning to rot her inner sense of self, and she becomes possessed and obsessed with the trappings of whatever she cannot explain. Pair that creepiness with Milly Shapiro’s daughter Charlie – who has a habit of clucking her tongue – along with Dad Steve (Gabriel Byrne), who in his low keyed “normalcy” could be the oddest character of the bunch, and you have a recipe of ongoing developments. The story has an atmosphere like THE EXORCIST, and son Peter (Alex Wolff) is trapped as the eerie harbinger of doom. Next!

HIGHLIGHT: Given its use in the film, the sound of a clucking tongue will chill you forever.

[Click here](#) [35] for the full review of “Hereditary.”

 **BLACK PANTHER**



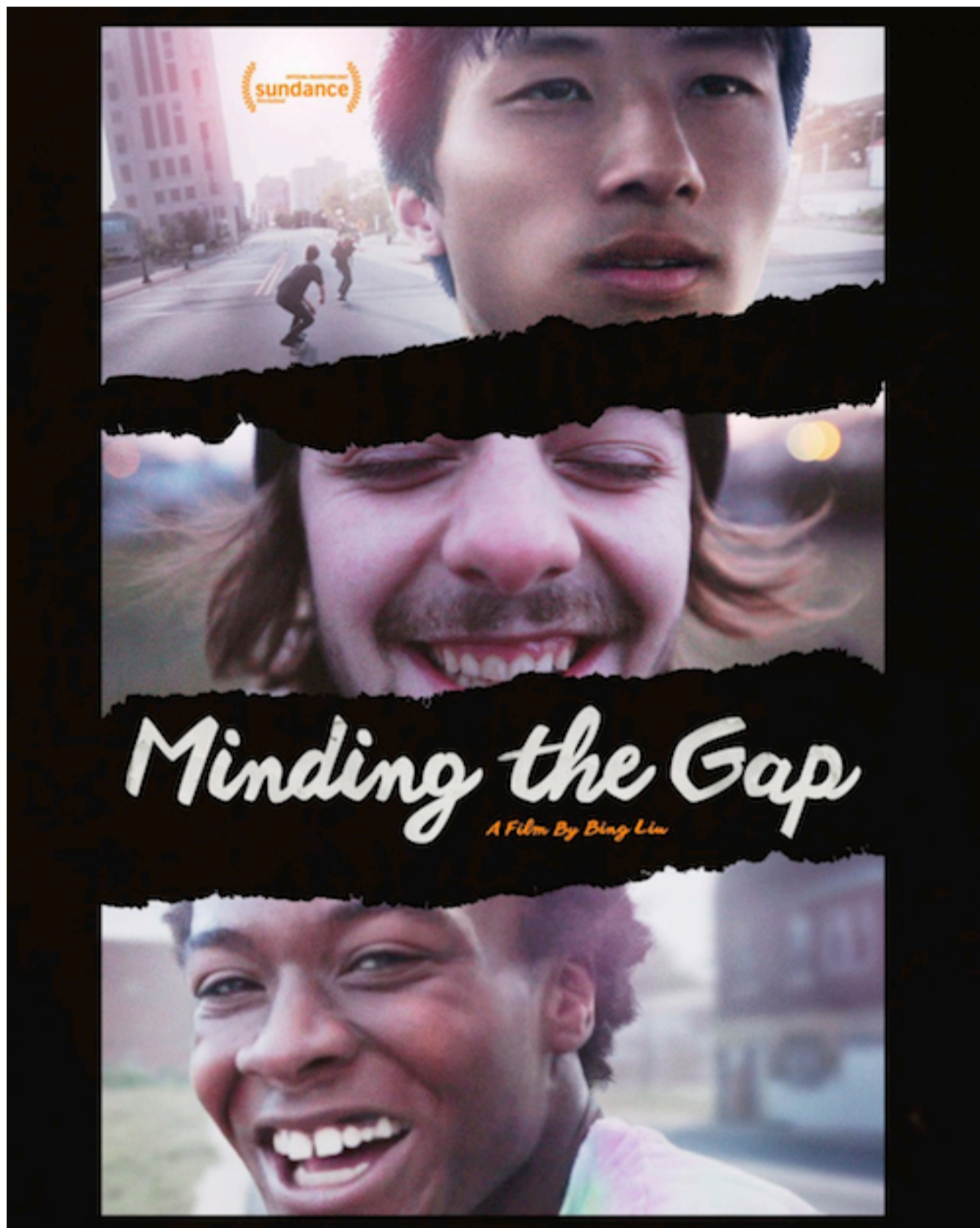
Black Panther
Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios

All forms of heroism are present in one of the best superhero movies ever made. BLACK PANTHER is a multi-layered redemption film about being born black in different circumstances, whether in a fantasy kingdom of Africa or in the mean streets of Oakland, USA. Chadwick Boseman portrays the title character, a superhero prince-who-would-be-king of the fictional utopia called Wakanda, an African nation who has hidden itself from the world and the colonization fate of its neighboring countries. The visionary director Ryan Coogler (CREED) laces the story with commentary on the slave origins of Africans in America and how those chains, literal and symbolic, buried human resources for years. In addition, all the special effects-laden action sequences are accounted for, in a story package that transcends and evolves the comic book genre.

HIGHLIGHT: The gender equality of Wakanda also allows for specific statements on women's roles in society.

[Click here](#) [36] for for the full review of "Black Panther."

 **MINDING THE GAP**



Minding the Gap
Photo credit: Hulu

An extraordinary accidental documentary, organic both in its subject and nature. Filmmaker Bing Liu initially sought to understand his skateboard past in Rockford, Illinois. When he began to explore both current and past skater bois, he found a common thread among their history... including his... which became the slowly revealed consequence of the film. GAP never blinks, and the subsequent lives of its featured individuals all suffer and survive through a biography that is based on the timing of birth, family and location. The risk-taking application of skateboarding – that the practitioners love – becomes an empathetic form of salvation.

HIGHLIGHT: Written on the board... “This device cures heartache.”

[Click here](#) [37] for a Podtalk with director Bing Liu of “Minding the Gap.”

★ CAPERNAUM



Capernaum ("Chaos")

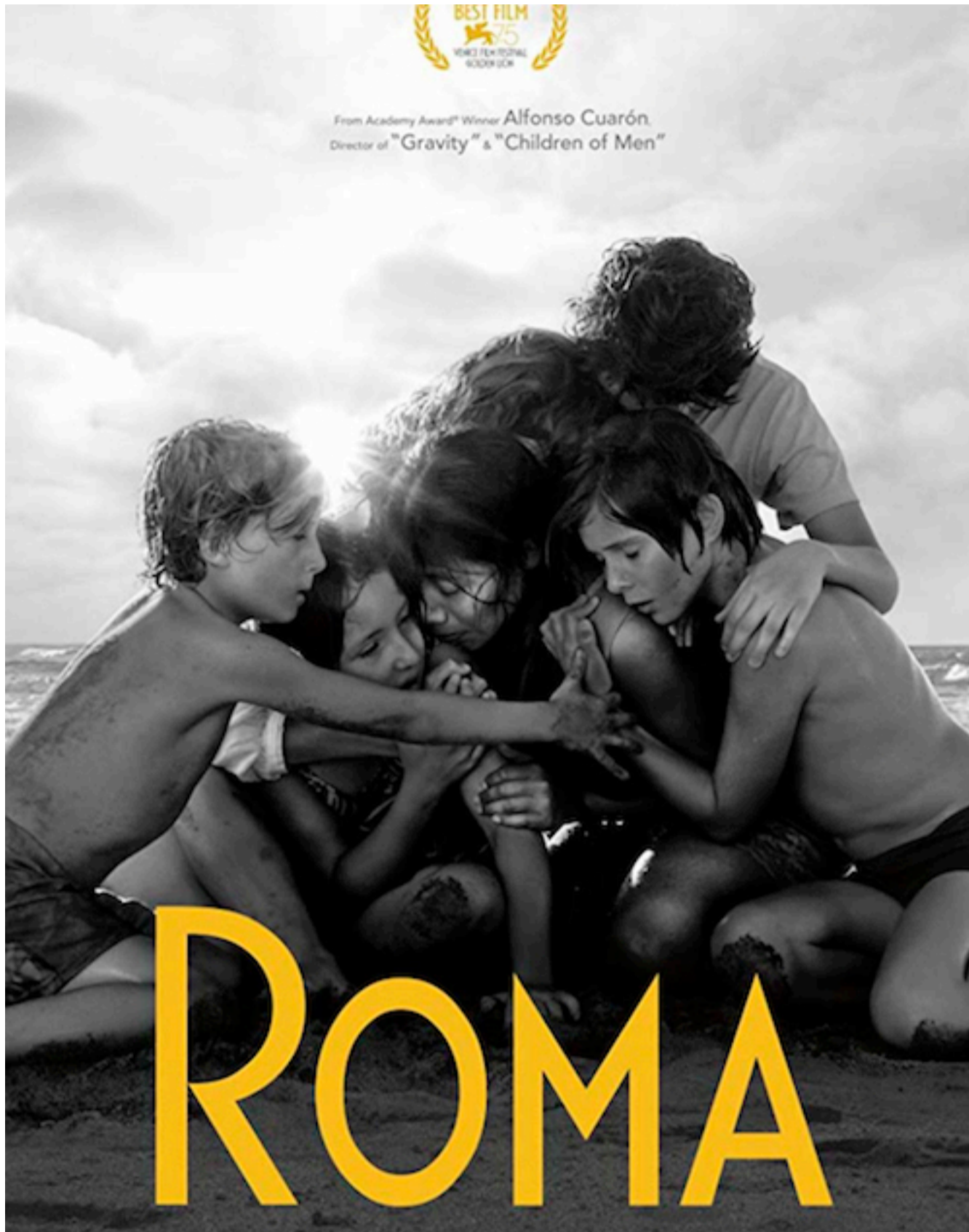
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classic

This a masterpiece of modernity, a story of survival that combines immigration, poverty and the audacious use of the legal system. Set in Lebanon, and focusing on 12-year-old Zain (Zain Al Rafeea, in a high-level performance that in any other universe would be Best Actor worthy), who is born into a poor, crass and undocumented family, and is triggered by the sale of his beloved 11-year-old sister Sahar to a pedophilic merchant. His escape from the family begins a bizarre adventure, which eventually involves his care of a baby named Yonas, and culminates in a lawsuit against his parents for "bringing him into the world." Indescribably audacious in its messaging, it progresses the cultural influence of writer/director Nadine Labaki (WHERE DO WE GO NOW?) within a profound tale of moral compassing. To add perspective, the title translates to "chaos."

HIGHLIGHT: Zain's motor-mouthed delivery of Labaki's script is epic, a literal explosion of vehement truth.

[Click here](#) [38] for a Podtalk with director Nadine Labaki of "Capernaum."





Roma
Photo credit: Netflix

There are times, if a filmmaker is lucky and talented enough, where the stars align and their magnum opus can be brought forth from their consciousness, transferred to the page and rendered to film... where that consciousness can be delivered into the soul of the audience. Writer/director Alfonso Cuarón (GRAVITY) got that lucky break and delivered ROMA, a personal story about his childhood and the nature of women to survive the harshness of a bitter world of men. Set in early 1970s Mexico City, ROMA is the neighborhood where an upper middle class family resides with the help of their domestic maid Cleo (Yalitza Aparico). When the father leaves that family, the mother Sofia (Mariana de Tavará) must find a way to protect her four children. At the same time Cleo becomes pregnant, and has to save herself. With echoes of Federico Fellini's 8-1/2, ROMA expresses itself with black&white brilliance, in scenarios that mainly communicate hope. An overwhelming (in a vital way) and soul satisfying experience.

HIGHLIGHT: What felt like drowning was the family coming up for air.

[Click here](#) [39] for the full review of "Roma."

[Click here](#) [40] for the red carpet interviews of Yalitza Aparico and Marina de Tavará of "Roma" at the 54th Chicago International Film Festival, by Jon Lennon Espino of HollywoodChicago.com.

To directly access the reviews, interviews and writings of Patrick McDonald, Editor and Film Writer HollywoodChicago.com, [click here](#). [13]



[41]

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