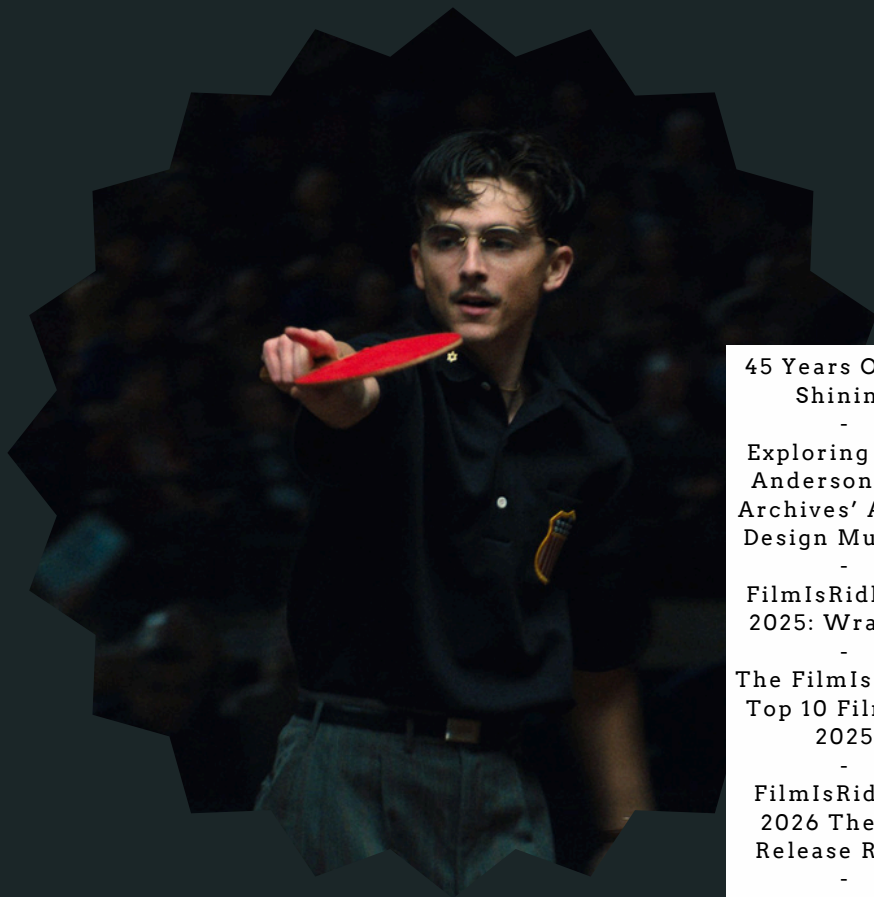


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45 Years Of The
Shining

-

Exploring 'Wes
Anderson: The
Archives' At The
Design Museum

-

FilmIsRidley In
2025: Wrapped

-

The FilmIsRidley
Top 10 Films Of
2025

-

FilmIsRidley's
2026 Theatre
Release Radar

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& Much More...

EDITORIAL

Well, first things first, I hope you all had a happy and peaceful holiday season - I know that time of year is a lot to handle mentally and emotionally for many, myself included. But, with the new year comes a new chance to explore the many opportunities that life throws our way. I hope we all have a 2026 full of positivity, love, and kindness. But now, onto more FIR-related business...

2025 was a year full of the good, the bad, and the ugly, of film and multimedia, and now that the year has come and gone, it is the perfect opportunity to reflect and assess some of the best and worst parts of the year. We saw some tremendous successes, such as the hugely popular 'Sinners', and we saw some discouraging news, thanks to Netflix's acquisition of Warner Bros - time will tell just how damaging that purchase will be for cinemas and the film industry in general, one can only hope it is not a fatal blow.

Regardless of all of these things, one thing remained constant; my love for the vast array of story and spectacle that cinema had to offer in 2025. I will talk more about my favourites from the year in one of the articles you shall soon read, as well as a lot more end-of-year content, including a few FilmIsRidley stats for the year, FIR End Of Year Honours, the much promised '45 Years Of The Shining' article, among many others! This really is an absolutely packed edition of the FIR Magazine, and I hope you'll agree that there's plenty of interesting content for you to enjoy within these pages.

The last thing I wanted to talk about before letting you move onto the next article or two in this magazine, is my hopes and aspirations for 2026, as it pertains to this magazine. I am under no illusion that, at these very early stages, my readership is not particularly expansive, but I think I would like to elevate that number by two-fold (optimistic? Maybe) by the year's end. Regardless of the exact numbers, I, more than anything, hope to have raised the number of readers by just about any amount, by the time we arrive at the January 2027 issue of the FIR Magazine.

For now though, I shall leave it at that, and wish you once more a happy and healthy new year.

With kindness and care,
Ridley Coote

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THE CINEMA SPOTLIGHT

This edition of The Cinema Spotlight highlights three of the best films I watched in December 2025, with two contemporary releases and one throwback, all three of which are worth watching on the big screen. When I was younger, I didn't understand why people bothered seeing old films at the cinema, but now, it's one of my favourite things to do - you can be sure that I'll be seeing even more in 2026.



The Shining (1980)

"A family heads to an isolated hotel for the winter, where a sinister presence influences the father into violence. At the same time, his psychic son sees horrifying forebodings from both the past and the future."

At this point, most of you will know how good this film is, but seeing on the big screen elevates both the adulation and overall experience one has for it ten-fold. It really does make one of the best films ever feel even better.



Marty Supreme (2025)

"Marty Mauser, a young man with a dream no one respects, goes to hell and back in pursuit of greatness."

Josh Saffdie delivered again with another anxiety-inducing, well-filmed, and truly wonderful cinema experience. This was without a doubt one of the best films of 2025, and I'm sure it will be very popular when the major award ceremonies come around.



Sentimental Value (2025)

"Sisters Nora and Agnes reunite with their estranged father, the charismatic Gustav, a once renowned director who offers stage actress Nora a role."

This is one of the more gentle films about family trauma and familial relationships, and it really, really, works. Joachim Trier is carving quite the legacy for himself in the realm of European cinema. I can't wait for his next project.

Dorohedoro - A Review

By Emily Hogg

Set across three post-apocalyptic realms Dorohedoro immerses viewers in a delightfully gory horror filled story based on Q Hayashida's manga.

Most notably the setting becomes a stand-out feature of the series. With intricate detail in each scene the world building delights with each episode. The setting further builds the absurd atmosphere and invites further rewatches. For me, this series is one I've rewatched the most.

The desire to rewatch and further appreciate the show is also complimented with the mystery aspect that makes the show interesting every time, particularly as there are so many unique twists.

Throughout the story's fast-moving plot, each character becomes even more intriguing. While showing interesting development each character also becomes immediately likeable. Many of the characters have nuance to them, like the seemingly scariest main character Kaimen - a lizard like creature is also a true sweetheart and crime boss En shows a deep care for the found family he's created and in particular his strange dog-like pet.

The comedic beats to the show increase the fun and fantastical nature of the series further while being well timed amongst the impressively animated ruthless violence. The ending of the show amps up the tension and left me wanting more. With an upcoming season two, the first season is certainly worth a watch.

JOURNEYS OF SELF-DISCOVERY: **HOT PICKS**

It being January, I got thinking about new beginnings, and striving to known one's self better. This led me to the subject of identity, and all that comes with it. To that end, I thought this edition of 'Hot Picks' would be all about films that explore the notion of self-discovery, and the paths we take towards it. It is, of course, something that can look so many different ways, which is what appealed to me so much about this topic as an idea for this article.

EMILY

1

RIDLEY



Pillion - Pillion not only explores sexual desire, but further the intense desire to be known. Where Colin, played brilliantly by Harry Melling, makes his self-discovery is in the small moments that allow him to understand his desires and how this emotionally impacts him. It is these small moments that make this film so impactful with Melling and Alexander Skarsgård taking viewers into subtle looks of the eye as the narrative also cleverly tells a huge amount in the silences of the film.

Into The Wild (2007) - maybe not the most happy film to start my list, but certainly a great example of what the list is all about. Based on the true story of Christopher McCandless, the film is rich in intimacy and emotion, as the audience follows Chris on his path to seeking a fully off-the-grid, free existence. The Eddie Vedder soundtrack adds so much to the emotional impact of it, as does the excellent performance of Emile Hirsch.



2



I Swear - Robert Aramayo as John Davidson tells the true story of John's journey of discovering a greater understanding of his Tourette's syndrome in the 1980's at a time when little was known about Tourettes. The film shows John's life, the importance of education, understanding, and acceptance. John's self-discovery and acceptance, further made possible by supporting figures in John's life, not only impacts himself as he became a campaigner for education and support for Tourrettes.

The Wild Robot (2024) - this film made me and my family all cry together in the cinema when we saw it, and it's found-family, forge-your-own-path, be-more-than-the-sum-of-your-parts story is a huge part of that. People always sleep on animated films far too much, especially those in charge of major award ceremonies. This is one of the best films of the decade, and has more heart than almost any film you'll ever watch.



3



Pretty Red Dress - Pretty Red Dress explores identity and self-discovery stemming from the moment Travis (Natey Jones) tries on a red dress and explores the joy he finds in doing so. The film is intimate, vulnerable, and importantly challenges the idea that certain clothes are only accessible to certain people. Beauty and fashion is for everyone, and there is a great power in discovering this; this is particularly shown further through tender character work and dynamics.

Treasure Planet (2002) - this has always been a criminally underrated and under-seen Disney animated adventure, which has been a firm favourite of mine since childhood. The themes in this one are so strong, and the protagonist's journey is so good! It always surprises me how few people have seen this, and I think the more people watch it, the better.



4



The Outrun - I felt immediately compelled to watch The Outrun when noticing it on Netflix, yet didn't know I'd enjoy it this much. From expansive countryside to the tiny, isolated rooms that occupy these landscapes, watching this movie felt like standing right there alongside Rona (Saoirse Ronan) as she experiences self-discovery in a beautiful, intense, and deeply moving way. The whole story is brought together really well by its ending. There's a beauty and catharsis to the final scene as it encompasses the screaming tears and silent hope that the film features.

Little Miss Sunshine (2006) - this modern cult classic is more than just a road-trip, it's more than just a journey of self-discovery, it's a masterpiece in emotional storytelling and vibrant, full-of-heart filmmaking, which will have you beaming, sobbing, and laughing in perpetuity as it plays. There's a reason so many film lovers adore this film so much. It gives so many characters a compelling journey, and I don't just mean in the literal sense.



The Running Man (2025) - A Review

By Ridley Coote

I went back and forth on going to see this Edgar Wright written and directed action comedy, which is, of course, based on the cult Stephen King novel, but ultimately I decided why not? It looked like a fun enough film, if not the most highly rated film of Wright's career. Regardless, the majority of people seemed to think it was, at the very least, mildly entertaining, which was good enough for me - as long as it was better than the mediocre original.

This didn't feel like an Edgar Wright film, for the most part. It had flashes of his style, but it was far more akin to the vast bulk of Hollywood productions of recent years, which I found a little disappointing. I liked how the film looked only intermittently - some of the dystopian world-building was good, but other aspects looked empty and shallow. I kept waiting for something really impressive to grab me visually, but nothing ever did, unfortunately.

The narrative was fine - it sure did entertain me pretty much the whole way through, but it had its problems. The majority of the characters felt paper-thin, and where Wright wanted urgency he instead left his story feeling rushed, particularly during the 'Running Man' portion of the film. There was very little depth to it beyond the extremely on-the-nose messaging. The film was fun, sure, but it had a lot of shortcomings, and it definitely was not an Edgar Wright film.

I like Glen Powell as an actor - I think he's got a charisma to him that appeals to a lot of people, and his comedic delivery is normally on point. He was once more good value for money in this film, but there was absolutely no way I could buy his character in any of the disguises he was in, mainly because of how recognisable his facial structure is. Regardless, Powell delivered another really solid performance, which I certainly couldn't complain about.

Josh Brolin's villainous performance was great, but he featured so little that it was hard to appreciate it as much as I wanted to. As it pertained to the supporting cast, the two clear standouts to me were the ever-charismatic Colman Domingo and the amusing Michael Cera. I would have loved to see more of both, and the writing of Cera's character was pretty odd, but the performances were highly enjoyable. The supporting performances of Lee Pace, Jayme Lawson, and Katy O'Brien were all respectable, as were those of William H. Macy and Emilia Jones.

Overall, I thought this was a relatively entertaining but hampered Stephen King adaptation, which seemed to be aimed more towards pleasing casual audiences than anybody else. I also think, having watched two versions of this story, it lends itself slightly better to being a limited series, rather than a feature film. Either way, I definitely preferred this version to the original adaptation, and I'd certainly watch it again, but not before a lot of other films I've seen this year.

45 YEARS OF THE SHINING

By Ridley Coote

Stanley Kubrick's 1980 cinematic adaptation of 'The Shining' is one of the most iconic horror films of all-time, and comfortably among the best retellings of any Stephen King story ever. It is absurd to think of this film being almost half a century old now. It has been so influential on so many media forms, and produced some of the most iconic, recreated, homaged, and referenced moments in the history of film. For me, it is most assuredly in the upper echelon of cinema's most elite films, but, until December 2025, I had never seen it on the big screen. There is a list of 'throwback' films I want to see at the cinema, and until this experience, you could have bet your mortgage that 'The Shining' was right near the tippy top. So, what makes Kubrick's magnificently malevolent hotel horror film so terrifying?

Stanley Kubrick made some fairly subtle but deliberate and noticeable changes from its original text - some for more practical reasons (the hedge monsters being replaced by the now-iconic maze, for example), and some purely to save time, such as the more detailed nature of Jack's mental decay, and the role that the hotel itself plays in it. Importantly, though, all of these changes work within the context of the film you're watching. Nothing in the story feels rushed, nor it doesn't feel like it's particularly missing anything. On the contrary, it's a focused build-up of suspense and horror, which keeps you racked with dread as things escalate and escalate, right up until the fateful chase through the maze.

There are so many small details that go into the film's aesthetic, it's feel, and it's overall execution, and that's without talking about the numerous references to the 'Apollo 11' moon landing, which Kubrick was obsessed with. The colours in the film are so vivid, particularly in the designs of costumes and the hotel itself. Can you imagine if this film had been made in the last ten-to-fifteen years? It would have been dreadfully grey and sapped of life, in favour of that oh-so-boring dullness that modern horror films insist makes a film scarier - 'The Shining' contradicts this and then some.

We can't talk about 'The Shining' without talking about the performances of both Jack Nicholson and Shelley Duvall, because this film does not have anywhere close to the impact that it has with those two exceptional actors. Nicholson's unhinged and unpredictable psychosis is terrifying to watch as his character's mind unravels, and is only matched by the very real and shocking terror shown by Shelley Duvall and Danny Lloyd, who played Danny Torrence. This does, unfortunately, bring me to the major negative feature of the film; the abusive on-set treatment of Duvall by Kubrick, which the actress never truly recovered from. It spoils things a little to know that Shelley was experiencing a horror of her own during filming, and there really is no way of looking at the film without taking her experience into account. Kubrick was notorious for his relentless shooting and perfectionism, but I think it's fairly clear that it went far too far during the production of this beloved classic.

Although the film may not scare modern audiences the way it did those in the Eighties, there is no denying the level of suspense that is expertly crafted and cultivated throughout the film. All you have to do is observe the increasingly distraught and horrified faces of the Mrs. Torrence and her son to feel the rolling barrage of dread that is bombarding them with increasing ferocity. The feeling of not knowing what's around the corner, what's at the end of that hallway, in that mysterious room - these are all familiar feelings we have felt at some point in our lives, and Kubrick feeds upon these fears as we see more and more of what lingers in the Overlook Hotel.

Even for those who perhaps aren't as keen on Kubrick's adaptation, there is no denying the incredible influence that the film has had on the film industry and pop culture as a whole. Be it the soundtrack, the set, the camerawork, the acting, or any of the other aspects of the film, this is a well-made and highly important piece of cinema, which has reshaped the fiction we consume and the way horror is shaped as a whole. There are very few films that can claim to be as loved, referenced, and historically important to the industry as Stanley Kubrick's 'The Shining', and even fewer that have the same degree of staying power or rewatchability.

Avatar: Fire & Ash (2025) - A Review

By Ridley Coote

James Cameron's science fiction trilogy, 'Avatar', may be the most profitable franchise of all-time at the box office, but, in my opinion, it may also be the most overly-hyped, style over substance franchise ever. I was hoping that this third film would finally impress me with more than just its audiovisual prowess, but I went into the cinema with expectations at a suitably middling level. I had waited a week to see it, if only to see reactions emerge, but I knew that this third film could really go either way for me.

The one thing I was fairly certain I would love about this film was its visuals. Unlike many, I hadn't been blown away by the graphics and special effects of the original, but I had enjoyed the cinematography of the second film a lot. It was no surprise, therefore, that I was impressed by the majority of the film's audiovisuals. The water sequences looked phenomenal, and the nature exquisite. The only aspect I wasn't keen on was the fire. It looked a little off - like it wasn't really there.

Unfortunately, this was where my positives ended. My reasons for this were twofold. It was extremely frustrating to see that the narrative of this film was essentially that of 'The Way Of Water' but bigger. Even worse, for an almost three and a half hour film, almost nothing of significance happened that hadn't already happened in one or both of the previous two films, which left me extremely bored, and more than a little disappointed. Cameron promised much, but delivered essentially the same thing for the third time in a row - not good enough.

Sam Worthington did slightly better than in the previous film, but I still found his performance frustrating. This was as much a writing issue as an acting one. His character has had very minimal character development over the course of three very long films, which is extremely irritating, when we as an audience have to watch his character make the same choices and mistakes over and over without much change - the same can be said of the majority of characters as well.

Zoe Saldña's performance was passionate, but the writing made her character feel like such a horrible person that I ended up not liking her very much at all. Her character did at least have layers, and some development, but it was hard not to spend most of the film disliking her. I will say, however, that Saldña's acting was, itself, very good. This kind of role suits her incredibly well, and you can see her athleticism, as well as her acting ability shining through.

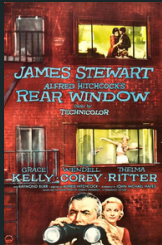
I had very mixed feelings about the rest of the supporting cast, something chiefly evident with the performance of Sigourney Weaver, which was oddly inconsistent and strangely uncanny, considering her character is a teenager, but sounds like a much older woman. Oona Chaplin's performance on the other hand was excellent. I thought she was the most intriguing aspect of the film, up until her character became just another villain, instead of a significant character.

I much preferred her acting to that of Stephen Lang's, whose performance was as the franchise's main antagonist showed signs of running out of steam. It feels like his character only has two ways to go, and James Cameron is resisting it as long as he can. I was more impressed by the acting of Britain Dalton, whose acting showed significant growth from that of the previous film, and meant that he was one of the better non-visual related aspects of the film. I know that Jack Champion has been criticised quite heavily for his portrayal as 'Spider' in this film, and whilst I agree with a fair amount of those criticisms - he was very wooden, at times - I also think they are a little bit harsh.

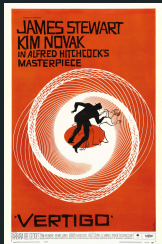
Overall, I once again find myself confused as to why so many people seem to enjoy these films so much. They're okay, but the story repeats over and over, and the issues remain the same. The white knight stays atop his horse, and James Cameron fails to provide anything new beyond some admittedly impressive CGI. It feels like there was one, maybe two, good films to be had from these films, but instead we have three bloated, overrated, and half-baked stories.

5 Films To Watch: Alfred Hitchcock

By Ridley Coote



Rear Window (1954) - my personal favourite Hitchcock film, and one of the smartest and most compelling small-setting mysteries of all-time. Jimmy Stewart and Grace Kelly make for two exquisite leads, and the steadily building suspense is special to behold, especially during the intense climax.



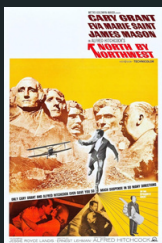
Vertigo (1958) - for many, this is the jewel in Hitchcock's cinematic crown. It is one of the finest thrillers of the Twentieth Century, and has some of the best, and most satisfying, uses of colour I've ever seen in a film. I first watched this film ten years ago, and I still think about it very often. It's a visual masterpiece and a thrilling mystery.



Psycho (1960) - I mean, we all knew this Hitchcock film would likely feature, but, in fairness, there's a good reason for that. It changed the game for horror films, and was one of the first true blockbusters in the United States. The way this film unfolds is so intriguing and effective, particularly with the shocking and iconic way it subverted audience expectations with **THAT** shower scene. It has to be watched at least once.



The Birds (1963) - a film that makes you look twice at the peaceful little pigeon is a film that deserves a lot of respect. Alfred Hitchcock's 'The Birds' terrified its audiences with its depiction of relentless, man-hunting, birds, and even though it looks a little bit cheesy by contemporary standards, it's still well worth watching at least once. Poor Tippi Hedren - if you know, you know.



North By Northwest (1959) - this is the most recent Hitchcock film I watched for the first time, and boy was it worth it. The rabbit hole of the film's mystery goes deeper and deeper and leads you on an intense and thrilling journey of lies, intrigue, and crime. This really was one of the finer crime thrillers of the Twentieth Century.

MARTY SUPREME (2025) - A REVIEW

BY RIDLEY COOTE

Directed by Josh Safdie, this A24 produced sports biopic sounded like it would be just another overly serious, like-for-like piece of Oscar-bait that inevitably come and go every year, swiftly forgotten after the awards season is over, but this one that looked like it might have the potential to be a little more fun than the vast majority of the other biopics churned out each year.

I loved the grainy look Safdie chose for the film - it gave it a sentimental, retro feel, which really worked for the story and the vibe that 'Marty Mauser' brought to the film. The same could also be said of the soundtrack, which balanced nostalgic hits with relevance to the story nicely, and was used very nicely, particularly in regards to the execution of the sound design, to make the ebbs and flows of the story feel more euphoric or dramatic, as required.

According to Esquire, a fair amount of the events, and indeed the characters, in the film were actually fictionalised, but they all served their purpose in adding to the character and the mystique of 'Marty Supreme'. I loved how the narrative subverted expectations - what starts as an artsy table tennis film, quickly becomes so much more, all under the umbrella of a tremendously interesting and impulsive protagonist, who kept the audience and the other characters on their toes from eclectic start to emotional finish.

Timothée Chalamet gave the performance of a lifetime as 'Marty Mauser' - one of the actor's best displays to-date, which is very impressive, considering the acclaimed body of work he has already produced. In press interviews for the film, Chalamet talked about the spirit of Mauser a great deal, and you could really feel the joy and the passion that he took into this role and then some. He was exceptional - charismatic, funny, cheeky, likable in spite of his character's outrageous behaviour - this really was the best of Chalamet.

The supporting performance of Gwyneth Paltrow was absolutely wonderful, and gave the film some of its most genuine and enjoyable moments. She was so charming, and had a quiet composure and elegance to her that made her role feel so believable and natural. Heaps of praise should also go the way of Odessa A'zion for her highly entertaining and endearing performance in the film's other key supporting role. I adored her - she was brilliant, and had instant, undeniable chemistry with Chalamet. This was undoubtedly a star-making performance for her.

I should also talk about Kevin O'Leary superbly rotten antagonistic figure, who was excellently portrayed, and provided a perfect foil for the cheeky underdog in Mauser. Additionally, performances from both musician Tyler The Creator and Abel Ferrara also deserve at least a mention for how memorable and positive their respective performances were too.

Overall, this was an absolute delight of a film, and one that subverted my expectations completely. I came into the film anticipating a fun but fairly standard sports biopic, but came out of it having had one of my best experiences in a cinema this year. It goes to show that biopics don't have to be boring, even if this one wasn't entirely truthful. Then again, how many other so-called biopics have played with what really happened for the sake of entertainment? For my money, this one was a rocking good time, and one of the few biopics I'd happily watch again.

Exploring 'Wes Anderson: The Archives' At The Design Museum

By Ridley Coote

In early December of 2025, I had the opportunity to visit The Design Museum in London, England, where a very special exhibition was being held; 'Wes Anderson: The Archives'. This limited time exhibition presented fans and museum-goers a unique opportunity to explore some of the many wonderful props, costumes, and special pieces created for the various Wes Anderson films. I could not wait to see what the museum had on display, though I wasn't sure what to expect.

To my pleasant surprise, the museum had pieces from every Anderson feature film, section by section, from his debut feature; 'Bottle Rocket' (1996), all the way up to his most recent release; 'The Phoenician Scheme' (2025). At the time of my visit, I had seen most, but not all, of these feature films - the exceptions being the aforementioned 'Bottle Rocket' (1996) and 'Rushmore' (1998); his first two feature films - I was however very keen on seeing them very soon after my visit to The Design Museum.

One of my favourite features of this exhibition was the numerous miniatures and animatronics that Anderson had used in his films, particularly in 2009's 'Fantastic Mr. Fox' and 2018's 'Isle Of Dogs'. I adore those films, the first one in particular, and seeing these very real and very detailed miniatures up-close - they looked fantastic and thought-through. I could see even clearer than in the films, the attention to detail that had gone into each and every one of them. It was incredible.

Speaking of miniatures, it was not just the miniature characters that I got to see, the museum also displayed miniature buildings and sets, including the exterior of the immaculate 'Grand Budapest Hotel', which was both bigger and smaller than you might expect. Either way, it was stunning, and once again reminded me of how much care and effort Anderson and his teams have put into these films over the years. It also reaffirmed my opinion that practical effects are always better than their CGI equivalents.

I think the other standout features of the exhibition were undoubtedly the hand-written notes, edits, and paperwork that Anderson had used over the course of his now-iconic career. Seeing the hard work in vivid, personal detail was rather surreal. It reminds me of all the work that went into editing even my, by comparison, rather basic, student screenplays. It really puts into perspective just how hard and how long filmmakers work to make these films real. To some extent, it was even a little inspiring, particularly in coalition with the short films on display.

For someone who hasn't had too many opportunities to experience special events and exhibitions like this - such is the way when you don't have a huge following and don't live in a major UK city like London or Manchester - this was an amazing occasion for me. I certainly didn't take it for granted, but instead spent the time absolutely thrilled to see all the incredible film-related memorabilia that I got to see, and there aren't many filmmakers with as many recognisable and interesting filmmaking artefacts as the one-and-only Wes Anderson.

Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery (2025) - A Review

By Ridley Coote

A return to the world of genius and eccentric detective Benoit Blanc was one of my more anticipated cinematic arrivals in 2025, and the promise of its trailer certainly compelled me to watch it. Rian Johnson had done a very commendable job with his 'Knives Out' films thus far, both of which I revisited prior to this third film's release, so I felt fairly comfortable with the thought that I would enjoy this one too.

The cinematography, being a Rian Johnson film, was typically solid, for the most part. I wouldn't say I was blown away, and I do personally think that both of the two prior films looked a little better all-in-all, but I still liked the general look of the film. The film suffered from a rather beige and brown disposition, which worked to an extent, but I would have liked a little more colour and vibrance to be inserted here and there.

The narrative had an interesting but admittedly slow build-up, which threatened to lose my attention at various points. I was hoping things would improve once the main portion of the mystery was underway, but it never quite did. I felt that the various secondary characters lacked depth, and ultimately weren't interesting, which meant that the story would really have to pull its weight to make up for it, and unfortunately, it did not.

My biggest gripe with the film, however, was just how predictable it was. The visual cues were far too obvious, and I found that the storyline threads were not all that challenging to sew together. I'm not annoyed that I guessed the ending, as much as I'm disappointed that the red herrings weren't all that convincing. I found the previous two films far more compelling from a mystery point of view, which really disappointed me about this one.

Daniel Craig's 'Benoit Blanc' didn't quite have the pep in his step that he had done previously, although he still managed to bring a good degree of his swagger, panache, and handsome, witty charisma. For once, the great actor was outdone in this franchise, and happily, it was the talented Josh O'Connor who did it, with what was a superb performance in the film's other main role. I thought his ability to feel genuine and endearing came through in spades, which was vital in allowing his character to feel like an important and likable figure in the film.

The supporting cast was as stacked as ever - no surprise - and the two standouts were the iconic Glenn Close, who delivered one of her best performances in a very long time, and the always value for money Josh Brolin, who I thought very nearly stole the whole film with his intense, fascinating portrayal of a wayward monsignor. The rest of the cast never quite achieved the quality that I thought they might, which was, in large part, due to their character's poor writing, but even so, I felt that the likes of Mila Kunis, Jeremy Renner, Kerry Washington, Andrew Scott, Cailee Spaeny, Daryl McCormack, and Jeffrey Wright, all deserved a name-drop at least.

Overall, I thought this was, unfortunately, the weakest 'Knives Out' mystery to-date. It lacked the cohesion, the degree of intrigue, and the characterisation of either of the previous two films, and ultimately struggled with pacing issues that slowed it down far too much in the early stages. I hope that the next film, assuming there will be one, returns to the formula that made the original mystery so strong - or at least get closer to it.

FILMISRIDLEY IN 2025 WRAPPED

TOTAL FILMS WATCHED: 344

2025 RELEASES WATCHED: 66

FIRST TIME VIEWINGS: 238

REVIEWS POSTED ON @FILMISRIDLEY: 297

FIR WEBSITE EXCLUSIVES POSTED: 56

WRESTLING REVIEWS POSTED: 34

OLDEST FILM WATCHED: FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE (1953)

FIR MAGAZINE ISSUES RELEASED: 3

Sentimental Value (2025) - A Review

By Ridley Coote

This 2025 Norwegian-set drama was directed by Joachim Trier, who had previously directed the highly acclaimed 'The Worst Person In The World', a film I had not yet seen, but had read and heard tremendously good things about. I was extremely eager to watch this film, particularly after it received some very encouraging reviews after its debut at Cannes Film Festival. Inevitably, I had to wait for the UK theatrical release to watch the film, but even so, my anticipation remained.

As one might imagine from the film's name, sentimental was the buzz word of the piece. The film was shot and lit to feel extremely sentimental, the score was made to sound extremely nostalgic - like memories, and the story itself was full of sentimentality, of memory, and of introspection. It was all very neatly tied together, in that sense. The choice of setting, with most of the action taking place in and around one family house, also suited itself to sentimentality, especially because it was dressed to feel well-loved and well lived-in.

If this film had one slight issue, it would be that it perhaps relies quite heavily on how much you as an audience member relate to the characters and their flaws, which is not necessarily a criticism in and of itself, but it certainly could impact one's enjoyment of it, in any case. Being a fairly sentimental person myself, this was definitely a film that was up my alley, and I became very attached to the two sister characters in particular, as the film progressed.

Renate Reinsve received a huge amount of praise for her performance in the aforementioned Trier film; 'The Worst Person In The World', and she once again produced a stellar performance in this lead role. Her ability to provide oodles of emotion without uttering a word was highly effective, especially in response to the dialogue of other characters. You could tell that she understood this role intrinsically, which allowed her to truly thrive as her character.

Stellan Skarsgård is always a class act to have in a film, and he was, once again, excellent. The man had an elegance to his performance, particularly in the first half of the film, which really stood out to me. I was also keenly aware of how well he conveyed his character's pain, especially during scenes with Reinsve's character, in which some of the on-screen chemistry was so strong.

Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas may have had a smaller role in terms of her screentime, but she and her character had a substantial impact upon the film. Lilleaas acted wonderfully well, and her tenderness was both full of heart and extremely important to the wider film. Her character provided an explicitly emotional, wholesome vision of what the other protagonists could be, and the success of the role was, in large part, due to Lilleaas' superb acting.

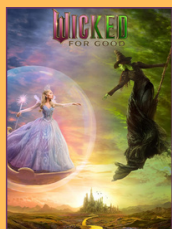
Elle Fanning had a little bit of an odd role to play in the film, but I thought she did so beautifully, for the most part. Occasionally, one of her acting didn't quite land as poignantly as she'd have hoped, but, on the whole, she did very well with a surprisingly challenging role. She made her character's care feel authentic and heartfelt, which really helped in making her feel more likable.

Overall, I thought this was a delightful and beautifully personal story, which was both nuanced and sincere in its presentation of familial love, relationships, and trauma. I absolutely adored the way the film was crafted from a visual perspective, and the thematic unity across all aspects of its filmmaking were excellent. Everything about the film was done nicely, and the care from those making it came through in abundance.

NOTABLE 2025 RELEASES I MISSED (AND WHY)

BY RIDLEY COOTE

Cinema had it's fair share of big budget and noteworthy films in 2025, but whilst I managed to see a lot of films last year, and in the cinema where possible, I couldn't see everything (obviously). For the most part, the films I missed or avoided were not particularly well thought of critically, but there were still a few big hitters from the year's release schedule that I did not venture to watch (at least, not yet).



WICKED: FOR GOOD

It didn't make a lot of sense for me to watch 'Wicked: For Good', considering that I hadn't watched the first film, and whilst I do enjoy 'The Wizard Of Oz' a lot, I've never been too fussed about the prospect of these films.



SUPERMAN

I toyed with seeing this James Gunn directed reboot of the 'Superman' franchise, but ultimately, it just didn't appeal to me enough to get me into the theatre for it. I do still plan on watching it soon, though. Just not yet.



BUGONIA

After the uncomfortable experience of watching 'Poor Things', I have been thoroughly put off Yorgos Lanthimos projects. Maybe I'll watch this when it streams on a service I already have.



ZOOTROPOLIS 2 / ZOOTOPIA 2

There is still time to catch this one at the theatre for me, considering it has only recently come out, but as of yet, I have not taken that opportunity. It just didn't feel like a necessary film, although, I must admit, the positive reviews do tempt me...

NOTABLE 2025 RELEASES I MISSED (AND WHY)

BY RIDLEY COOTE



A MINECRAFT MOVIE

Not even Jack Black could persuade me to watch this absurd live-action video game adaptation. I just couldn't do it. The trailers for this 'Minecraft' film looked like a weird A.I. parody, and even though kids seemed to enjoy it, I haven't had the heart to watch it yet, and I'm not sure when I will.



NE ZHA 2

This might seem like a strange one to feature for my Western readers, but the fact of the matter is this became the fifth highest grossing film of all-time this year. Any film that grosses over \$2 billion worldwide, has to be talked about. In my defence, I had not seen this sequel's predecessor either, so it made little sense to watch it yet.



LILO & STITCH

Considering Disney's reputation for soulless live-action remakes of beloved animated classics, I don't think I can be blamed too much for being hesitant to watch this one. Now that it's on Disney Plus, I'm more tempted, but there was no way I was watching this at the cinema.



NOW YOU SEE ME: NOW YOU DON'T

I liked the first 'Now You See Me' film, back when I was a teenager, but I must admit, my interest in the franchise has waned quite dramatically. The second film wasn't particularly well received, and I simply was not bothered by the trailers for this one.



THE NAKED GUN

In truth, much like with 'Wicked: For Good', it didn't make sense to me to watch this legacy sequel, considering I have never seen any of the other 'Naked Gun' films. Perhaps that will change in 2026, though.

Anaconda (2025) - A Review

By Ridley Coote

This horror comedy, directed by Tom Gormican, is kind of unusual, in that it's a very meta sequel, in which the original film exists canonically within the world of said-sequel. Reviews haven't exactly set the world ablaze, but then, I was already keeping expectations low to begin with, especially considering that the trailers revealed seemingly the whole plot step-by-step - one of my biggest pet peeves in the cinema industry.

There was something of the modern 'Jumanji' films about it, and I'm not just talking about Jack Black. I think part of it had to do with how the film looked and sounded. It very much felt like a modern Hollywood adventure comedy, and even though the CGI was slightly suspect at times, I thought most of it looked okay. I won't pretend like it had anything overly impressive, but it also wasn't that ugly either.

The story was utter nonsense, but so much fun. There was little to no logic or sense in any of the events that happened, but I couldn't help but find myself having a really good time. Meta comedy sometimes doesn't always work for me, but I thought the way the film used it here was both earnest and humorous. Sure, some of the comedy was extremely childish, but some of it was also genuinely very funny. The dramatic writing was terrible, but the comedic stuff was really solid, for the most part.

Paul Rudd can be a little hit or miss for me with his comedy, but I thought he did pretty well, for the most part. He was goofy, sure, but so was the majority of the film, so he got away with it. Jack Black is the ultimate get out of jail free card for mediocre comedies, because he can make just about anything funny and endearing. I love his work - and he was once again absolutely hilarious at times in his role here.

Thandiwe Newton isn't necessarily an actress I would associate with comedy, but I found her pretty funny at points in this one. Sure, she was never quite as funny as the comedy powerhouses of Rudd and Black, but I liked her acting anyways. Steve Zahn was also pretty fun, although I definitely found him to be the weakest of the four main characters - he was a little too weird for my liking. I really liked Selton Mello's brief and very silly performance as the supposed snake expert of the film - some of his little skits were hilarious. I'll give credit to Daniela Melchior for the little comedy bits she had too - she made them work fairly well.

Overall, whilst this film will never win any awards for being especially good in a critical sense, it absolutely won me over with its willingness to have fun with its IP and story. I won't pretend like this is a film for the hard-core film nerds, but then, if every film was like that, I think it would be extremely boring. If it were up to me, I'd honestly rather rewatch this than sit through any of the 'Avatar' films again any day. I'd be having a much better time, that's for certain.

The FilmsRidley Top 10 Films Of 2025

2025 has been a very mixed bag for cinema, as it almost always is, but I for one have enjoyed it quite plentifully. Whilst many people have complained about cinema, and sure, there has been plenty to complain about, there has also been a tonne of good and great films that have hit our screens, big and small (preferably the bigger ones - we do not stan the Netflix acquisition of Warner Bros.). I wanted to celebrate my favourites from this year, so I enjoy this little list, and see how yours compares (if you have one).

Notable Absences



There were some films that the masses absolutely LOVED in 2025, but, for me, they just didn't do it for me quite as much. The two most prime examples being Ryan Coogler's unique and creative 'Sinners', and Netflix's animated super sensation 'K-Pop Demon Hunters'. I must emphasise; I did like these films - I just liked at least ten others more, shocking though that might be. Other films that I wasn't so hot on include the 'FI' movie, and the live-action 'How To Train Your Dragon'.



Honourable Mentions

So, what *almost* made the cut, but didn't quite make it into my list of the ten best films of the year? There were A LOT of films I could have featured, but these were the films that threatened the final top ten list the most, but fell just short in the end.



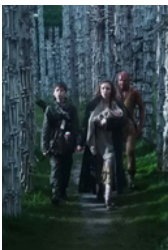
BRING HER BACK

For months, this Philippou brothers horror sat very comfortably within my Top 10, but in my final reckoning, it slipped below the cut line. It's a great film, but its heavy thematic material meant that I simply couldn't 'enjoy' watching its darker moments. Ultimately, I would rather watch films that I enjoy the actual experience of viewing more, but this film still deserves a mention.



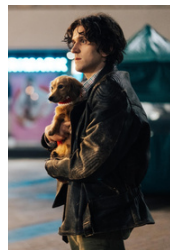
BLACK PHONE 2

'Black Phone 2' is not a film I expect to appear on many people's lists, but I really liked how well it built atmosphere, aesthetic, and suspense. These films feel like horror stories of old - the kind that give children nightmares - I loved it.



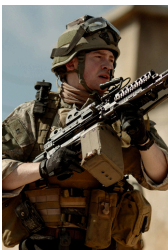
28 YEARS LATER

Danny Boyle's return to his hugely popular '28 Days Later' franchise was a welcome one, and reminded audiences why the filmmaker is so innovative, and creates such striking and visceral films.



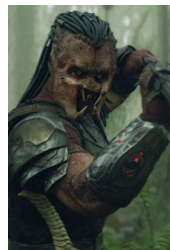
PILLION

Another film that almost made it into my Top 10, but just got edged out, excuse the pun. I adored this 'dom-com'; for all its silliness and cuteness, as well as its earnest emotion and portrayal of a young man exploring his identity.



WARFARE

A24's 'Warfare' felt like a visceral and intense sensory experience, especially at the cinema, but its very slow build-up and slightly one-note nature holds it back from climbing up higher in my personal estimations.



PREDATOR: BADLANDS

There were a few more films I could have named, but I thought I'd finish these honourable mentions by talking about 'Predator: Badlands'. Whilst it had issues, watching this at the cinema was one of the most fun experienced of the year. I can't wait to see the next Dan Trachtenberg 'Predator' project.



10. COMPANION

There were a lot of films in contention for this final spot inside my top ten, but when I really sat and thought about it, there were none that I had enjoyed watching quite so much as this wonderfully entertaining horror comedy. Sophie Thatcher and Jack Quaid deserve a lot of flowers for their part in this film's success - they were both great.



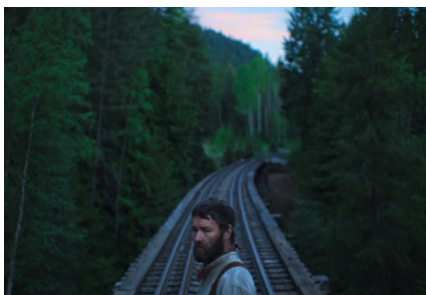
9. SENTIMENTAL VALUE

Family relationships can be a challenging topic to cover, but Joahim Trier did so with a tender hand, producing one of the most heartfelt and genuine depictions of generational trauma and familial relationships I've seen in a long time.



8. FRANKENSTEIN

Guillermo del Toro and monsters are a match made in heaven, and what better story for him to adapt than arguably the most iconic one of them all; Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein'. The tangible, physical, nature of everything, from the props, to the costumes and even the practical effects served this film very well. But for a few detractors, this could have been an all-time classic film.



7. TRAIN DREAMS

There were a few films that surprised me this year, and one of the most surprising was Clint Bentley's quiet, soulful depiction of a logger in the early Twentieth Century. I was not ready for the degree of emotion I felt as this film unfolded. I owe Joel Edgerton an apology, because I did not know he could act like this - he was absolutely sublime.



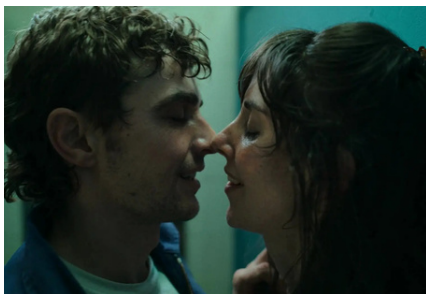
6. WEAPONS

Until December 2025, Zach Cregger's weird and unconventional horror film was in my top three films of the year. I absolutely loved it. It had an excellent cast, a very compelling mystery, and some wonderfully creepy moments. But for some very slight pacing issues, this would still have been 1 my top five, without a doubt.



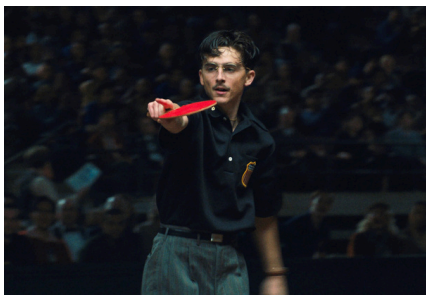
5. HAMNET

There was no way a film that made me cry like a baby could not end up in my top five films of the year. Chloé Zhao showed her pedigree and then some, with a beautiful, moving, and true heartbreaking film, which tore me apart emotionally. Jessie Buckley, you are a star.



4. TOGETHER

Perhaps my love of horror is showing a little too much here, but this was without a doubt one of the most fun films I watched this year. The mix of comedy, romance, and horror, really worked for me, and the performances of real-life couple Alison Brie and Dave Franco solidified it as one of the very best films in 2025.



3. MARTY SUPREME

Josh Saffdie's tongue-and-cheek biographical comedy gave me one of the best experiences I've ever had in the cinema. Timothée Chalamet is one of the great stars of this generation, and proved it again with one of his best performances to-date. I loved every second.



2. THE LONG WALK

Talk about unexpected gems. I truly did not believe this film would be as good as it was until I was sat down in the theatre watching it. I could not believe how intense, how dramatic, and how excellent, a film about a high stakes walk could be. I mean, seriously, Francis Lawrence, take a bow.



1. ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER

When I think of what a truly great thriller should be, I think about a film that gets my blood pumping, that engrosses me utterly, and that amazes me visually, and this did all three of those things in a way that very few films have ever come close to doing. I was so tense, so invested, and so enraptured by PTA's film, and there was just no way this couldn't be number one for me.

Hamnet (2025) - A Review

By Ridley Coote

Even if you have not read William Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', most of you will have at least heard of its existence. I have read a few Shakespeare plays, but, I must admit, I am one of those people who has not read the famous play. This drama, directed by the Oscar-winning Chloé Zhao, is not based on that play, but is in fact based on the 2020 novel by Maggie O'Farrell, which in turn is loosely based on the story that inspired Shakespeare's iconic play.

There is no better place to start than with the film's soundtrack. The use of 'On The Nature Of Daylight' was simply magical. It's a piece of music that captures the beauty, the tragedy, and the emotion of living with such complexity and nuance, and it was used phenomenally to illustrate that very notion. In fact, Max Richter's entire soundtrack was wondrously good. The music ebbed and flowed, gently guiding the emotional course of the film, and delicately informing the audience what was happening. The music of the film was bouncing around my head for hours after the film was over, as were the emotions they produced.

If her Oscar nod for 'Nomadland' had not done so already, this film provided all the evidence you could possibly need to understand the immense talents of Chloé Zhao. Her direction was tender and intimate, without ever becoming invasive, and her shot selection was not only shrewd, but produced some absolutely delightful images, which felt straight out of a romantic fairytale. I could almost smell the trees, such was the sense of immersion created by Zhao's filmmaking.

The narrative was eloquently told, but left plenty of its storytelling up to the actors involved in the piece, giving it a balanced and emotionally-driven feel. The personal and emotive nature of the story meant that I began to feel myself a companion in their journey, as all good stories do. I felt as though I were experiencing the love, the anguish, and the grief with the characters in the film, to the point that I quietly bawled my eyes out for about thirty minutes straight in the cinema. It was such a beautiful yet bitter-sweet tale, and its innate sense of humanity only made it more impactful.

Jessie Buckley put in a magnificent, deeply compelling, and highly emotional performance, and provided the film with some incredibly genuine moments. I was stunned by the degree of emotion and the level of investment Buckley induced in me as I watched, such was the nature and quality of her performance. I will be shocked if she does not at least receive an Academy Award nomination for her endeavours - not that awards are the be-all and end-all, but she certainly deserves it.

Paul Mescal did what Paul Mescal does, and provided a vulnerable, anguished and thought provoking performance in a very emotionally demanding role. His performance in the final third of the film was immaculate, and conveyed the best of his abilities. His passion, not only in the romantic sense, but for his character's work, was infectious. He had the poetic rhythm down, and it really felt like I was watching somebody who not only knew the lines, but understood them too.

The young Jacobi Jupe provided a beautiful and moving performance in his supporting role, one which will stay with me for some time. He was so tender and so emotive - it was wonderful to watch him perform, especially with the other young actors, played by Bodhi Rae Breathnach and Olivia Lynes, both of whom also deserve praise for their own acting too, by the way. All three young actors were tremendous, and showed an incredible degree of talent.

Emily Watson gave a very commendable account of her abilities in a very memorable supporting role, particularly during the most emotionally low point of the film. She was sublime. I also thought the performances of both Joe Alwyn and Noah Jupe were absolutely worth mentioning too, despite how minor their roles were, by contrast.

Overall, I thought this was a beautiful and powerful account of grief, love, poetry, and loss, bound together tightly by the incredible performances of its cast, especially the two leads. I was simultaneously enamoured and devastated by this excellent drama - it was a magnificent example of well-told and meaningful writing. Very few films have impacted me the way this one did, and it is, without a doubt, one of the best films of 2025.

FilmIsRidley's 2026 Theatre Release Radar

By Ridley Coote

Much like just about every year, there are a whole host of films to look forward to in 2026. I had a look at the current 2026 UK release schedule to see what's about in theatres, and I thought it would be a great idea to highlight some of the ones I will be keeping my eye on in the coming months.

January:

The first month of the year is not normally an interesting one for new releases, I've found, but the UK has several worth checking out. '28 Years Later: The Bone Temple' looks to continue Danny Boyle's dark and gripping '28 Days Later' saga, this time with Nia DaCosta in the director's chair, before Boyle takes back over the reigns for part 3 of the new trilogy. I am also hugely excited to finally see the already acclaimed 'Hamnet' adaptation, from Oscar-winning director Chloé Zhao, which has been receiving plenty of award season buzz since its debut at Telluride Film Festival last year. It certainly sounds to me like Paul Mescal has done it again, and co-star Jessie Buckley looks like a gem of a casting already. Other highlights for me include the wonderful looking 'Rental Family' with Brendan Fraser, 'The History Of Sound' with Josh O'Connor and the aforementioned Mescal, as well as a couple of fun and gory horrors, for something a little different, in Christophe Gans' long-awaited 'Return To Silent Hill', and the gruesome-looking 'Primate', from director Johannes Roberts.

February:

February is almost always inundated with romance-based films, thanks to the extremely 'marmite' public holiday that is Valentine's Day. And boy-oh-boy, we are certainly getting a doozy, as Emerald Fennell's already controversial 'Wuthering Heights' adaptation finally hits theatres - I for one am very nervous. We are also getting a whole host of, in my opinion, more hopeful releases here in the United Kingdom, with the likes of Mary Bronstein's 'If I Had Legs I'd Kick You', Michael Angelo Covino's 'Splitsville', and James Sweeney's 'Twinless' finally arriving in UK cinemas. We are also being treated to Sam Raimi's return to horror, with his latest film 'Send Help', which looks great fun, as well a film that I for one am very divided about seeing because of all the behind-the-scenes drama (leaning more towards not); 'Scream 7'. There's also the release of 'The Strangers: Chapter 3', but I'm pretty certain that will be absolutely ripped to shreds by most critics, to be honest.

March:

As we progress through the months, the number of announced and locked-in release dates begins to thin. With that said, March still brings the much-anticipated arrival of Maggie Gyllenhaal's 'The Bride!' - the trailers look terrific, as well as the latest Andy Weir adaptation; 'Project Hail Mary', from directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller. As someone who read the book last year, I can only hope and pray the film lives up to it. March also gives us Daniel Chong's wild-looking animated science fiction film 'Hoppers', which hopefully will be a thoroughly good Time for everyone.

April:

In April, we have three really fun-looking films hitting theatres, with by far the most major being the 'Super Mario Galaxy Movie', which I imagine will do very well at the box office, particularly after the success of its predecessor a couple of years ago. One of my more anticipated films of the year can be found in 'Ready Or Not 2: Here I Come' - the name wrote itself, and Samara Weaving is a star I have a lot of time for, especially in this role. Finally, there's a new adaptation of 'The Mummy', scheduled for an April release, with Lee Cronin directing - it could be really good, or really bad, but if Cronin can do what they did with 'Evil Dead Rise', it'll be great for us horror fans. I also think 'The Drama' could be quite good, so watch this space.

May:

It seems only right that in the month that has a whole day dedicated to celebrating the 'Star Wars' franchise, that we will be getting 'The Mandalorian & Grogu' film at last - albeit slightly random, I'm still very much looking forward to the most wholesome oddball duo in the galaxy going on one more adventure together. One of the more random sequels hitting cinemas this year is that of 'The Devil Wears Prada 2', which feels very unnecessary, but I'm sure will have its moments - I remain skeptical, either way. Curry Barker's 'Obsession' also hits UK cinemas this time of year, and I cannot wait for it.

June:

The mid-point of the year has Steven Spielberg's directorial return with the mysterious-looking 'Disclosure Day' - yes, it's about aliens - and yet another 'Buzz Lightyear' and 'Woody' story with 'Toy Story 5', yes, number 5. They will beat that toy dead horse until there is nothing left. We also get two more big-hitter studio films arriving, with DC's 'Supergirl', and Travis Knight's 'Masters Of The Universe' film - please let both be good, please!

July & August:

In July, we get two absolutely massive blockbusters, both, coincidentally starring Tom Holland; Christopher Nolan's 'The Odyssey' - colour me nervous - and Marvel's 'Spider-Man: Brand New Day' - colour me optimistic. I'm most excited for the surely-horrifying 'Evil Dead Burn' though - I have loved these twisted and more serious 'Evil Dead' films, and I'm hoping against hope that this next one delivers the goopy goods. August currently looks fairly empty, but a new 'Insidious' film, titled 'Insidious: Red Tale' should keep horror fans fairly entertained, I'm sure. There's also the latest Ridley Scott film; 'The Dog Stars' to look forward to.

September:

As we head into the final months of the year, we get an interesting selection of cinema releases, with DC's 'Clayface' finally hitting our screens, as well as a new 'Resident Evil' film, directed by Zach Cregger of 'Weapons' and 'Barbarian' fame - hell yes - as well as a Georgia Oakley directed adaptation of the classic novel; 'Sense And Sensibility' - I'm not sure how much better it can be done, but time will tell.

October & November:

So far, October and November are looking pretty sparse for film releases, but I'm sure that will change very soon. The most notable so far is the new live-action 'Street Fighter' film, which has a bonkers cast, and the next visit to 'The Hunger Games' universe, with 'Sunrise On The Reaping' - I can imagine this one doing well at the box office too, mind you. There is also 'Digger', which could end up being very good.

December:

Finally, December gives us A LOT of big releases, including the next 'Avengers' film - the first since 'Endgame'; 'Avengers: Domsday', once more directed by the Russo Brothers. I have mixed feelings about how this will turn out, but time will tell if it is a succeed or fail. The month is also scheduled to provide us with the third of the modern 'Jumanji' films, the fourth overall, which I'm actually not mad about. I actually enjoyed the other two remakes a fair bit. Adding to the December hype is the arrival of the next Robert Eggers creature feature; 'Werewolf' - which should be atmospherically immaculate. And all this without mentioning the third of Denis Villeneuve's 'Dune' films, which will almost certainly be a big hitter at the box office.

WWE Saturday Night's Main Event: John Cena's Last Match 2025 - A Review

By Ridley Coote

So, at last the day had come for the greatest wrestler of all-time to hang up the jorts and pump-up the trainers one last time. John Cena debuted all the way back in 2002, and went on to shape the next two decades of wrestling, defining eras and breaking into the mainstream. Seventeen world titles, and countless other accolades later, Cena now approached his final match. It was a surreal evening, and I was so glad that WWE chose to feature a number of NXT talents on the card.

Opening Cena's last night was the Undisputed Champion Cody Rhodes, who took on the NXT Champion Oba Femi in a special non-title match. I could not wait for this one - it had star-making performance written all over it, and I knew Cody would be very giving to his young opponent. It felt very appropriate that Oba mouthed "my time is now" to Cody as the bell rang. The idea behind this match was simple; the power of the young NXT Champion against the experience and resilience of the WWE Champion. Seeing Femi bloody the champion was a great visual for the NXT Champion, and while the match was cut short by shenanigans, which I found a bit frustrating, it still left the young champion looking like a million bucks.

Match number two of the night saw the forever underrated and talented Bayley take on one of NXT's brightest stars in Sol Ruca. Ruca is clearly seen as one of the next big stars in the WWE, so this match was a huge opportunity to show what she can do to a larger audience, and the veteran Bayley was the ideal opponent for her. Both women looked on it from the moment the bell rang, with Bayley's smooth style meshing very nicely with the easy high-flying of Sol Ruca. This was such a nicely flowing match, and the sweetly executed moves were matched only by the satisfying and creative finish.

Next up was a very exciting match, which saw the reigning World Tag Team Champions AJ Styles and Dragon Lee defend take on NXT's Je'Von Evans and TNA's X-Division Champion Leon Slater in non-title action. Seeing a TNA championship appear on WWE TV for only the second time ever (if memory serves) was surreal, but if anyone deserved it, the hugely talented Slater was that guy. These guys came out the gates like rent was due and the house was on fire - it was awesome. It felt like no time or movement was wasted, as three of the best young wrestlers in the world right now, as well as the legendary AJ Styles, looked to blow the roof off of the place. There was a very rare and unfortunate botch from the veteran Styles, but it was a very small blip on what was an excellent firefight.

Before the main event, there was a silly but amusing segment with The Miz, R-Truth, and Joe Hendry. It was a brief but entertaining tribute to the GOAT, and another chance to showcase a popular NXT talent in Hendry. To that end, it was nice to see wrestlers paying tribute to John Cena all evening - it really hammered home just how big an influence on the industry the man has been. He really is the greatest of all-time.

With all of that done and out the way, it was, at last, time for the last stand of the great John Cena. The atmosphere was paramount, and the boos that rang out around the arena for GUNTHER set the stage for a titanic battle of memorable proportions - the ideal send-off for one of the best entertainers ever. I had chills as Cena came out one last time. Surreal did not begin to cover it. I was emotional before the bell even rang to start the match. The crowd was the most partizan for one man than I've ever heard it - it was goosebump-inducing. GUNTHER did not come to play, and looked like the relentless monster that his character is. A lot of people did not want him to have Cena's last match, but for me, he was the perfect choice. One last seemingly unstoppable force for the immovable Cena to try and overcome. This was a great send-off for a great performer, and the ultimate super villain performance by his adversary. The only thing I didn't like was the way the crowd was behaving. Their negative reactions to some of the post-match moments was a really distracting and irritating way to end Cena's career. With that aside, everything else was really beautiful to see. The video package, the fellow performers, the backstage staff - it was all wonderfully touching.

Overall, I think it was fair to call this a moment larger than wrestling itself. The night we said goodbye to a man who entertained audiences around the world for over twenty years, and did so without complaint and with the utmost commitment each time he appeared. The matches were all decent, the various tributes were touching, and seeing the seventeen-time world champion go out one last time was a very emotional moment. The crowd spoiled the moment a little, but the emotions still hit home and then some, as we all watched John Cena leave the ring one last time. He rode off into the sunset, and left the WWE to the up-and-coming future stars of the business. His time is up, their time is now.

WWE: PREMIUM LIVE EVENTS RANKED

BY RIDLEY COOTE

2025 WAS A VERY UP AND DOWN YEAR FOR THE WORLD'S BIGGEST AND MOST FAMOUS WRESTLING PROMOTION; THE WWE. THERE WAS A LOT OF GOOD... AND A LOT OF BAD. SEEING AS I WATCHED EVERY PREMIUM LIVE EVENT, I FIGURED A FUN WAY TO WRAP UP THE YEAR WOULD BE TO SHOW MY PERSONAL RANKING OF EACH SPECIAL EVENT THIS YEAR THAT WWE HAD TO OFFER.

- 
1. EVOLUTION
 2. ELIMINATION CHAMBER
 3. CROWN JEWEL: PERTH
 4. BACKLASH
 5. WORLD'S COLLIDE: JUNE
 6. SNME: CENA'S LAST MATCH
 7. ROYAL RUMBLE
 8. SUMMERSLAM: NIGHT 1
 9. CLASH IN PARIS
 10. MONEY IN THE BANK
 11. SUMMERSLAM: NIGHT 2
 12. SURVIVOR SERIES: WAR GAMES
 13. WORLD'S COLLIDE: SEPTEMBER
 14. SNME: NOVEMBER
 15. WRESTLEMANIA 41: NIGHT 1
 16. NIGHT OF CHAMPIONS
 17. SNME: MAY
 18. SNME: JANUARY
 19. SNME: JULY
 20. WRESTLEMANIA 41: NIGHT 2
 21. WRESTLEPALOOZA

NXT: PREMIUM LIVE EVENTS RANKED

BY RIDLEY COOTE

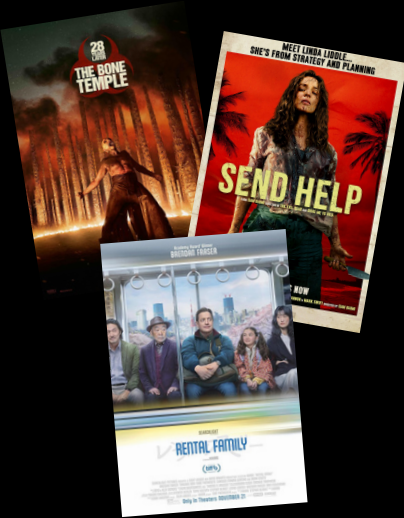
NXT MAY BE THE 'DEVELOPMENTAL' BRAND OF THE WWE, BUT THEY HAVE CONSISTENTLY SHOWN THAT THEY CAN PUT ON SHOWS THAT ARE JUST AS GOOD, IF NOT BETTER, THAN THE MAIN ROSTER'S PREMIUM LIVE EVENTS. I THOUGHT, SINCE THE YEAR IS NOW OFFICIALLY OVER, IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO SHARE MY RANKING OF NXT PREMIUM LIVE EVENTS, FROM BEST TO WORST!

- 
1. ROADBLOCK
 2. STAND & DELIVER
 3. VENGEANCE DAY
 4. NEW YEAR'S EVIL
 5. NO MERCY
 6. DEADLINE
 7. GOLD RUSH: WEEK 1
 8. GREAT AMERICAN BASH
 9. BATTLEGROUND
 10. HALLOWEEN HAVOC
 11. SHOWDOWN
 12. HEATWAVE
 13. GOLD RUSH: WEEK 2

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

In April, FIR 03 will arrive, ready to download, and it will once again be jam-packed with film and multimedia-related fun and informative articles for you delve into. I hope that issue will feature a few more guest-pieces, but we shall see. If you're someone who's creatively minded and interested in sharing what they have written or created, then do get in touch. Until April, though, thank you for reading, and I'll see you down the road.

NEW FILM REVIEWS!



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One Trilogy To Rule Them All:
The Lord Of The Rings At The Cinema

THE ALIEN FILMS: RANKED

EXPLORING THE
FRANKENSTEIN MUSEUM

WHAT WE WANT:

SHORT STORIES
REVIEWS
ESSAYS
ART
PASSION PIECES
ETC...

WANT TO SUPPORT FIR?

Want to support the FIR magazine? Well, whilst it is free, any donations to my KoFi would mean the world! Of course, there is no obligation to do so, and I am aware that there are far more important uses of your money, particularly these days. There are certainly other ways you can help FIR out, such as by sharing it with your friends and family! Socials for myself and the contributors for each issue will be shared below, so if you feel compelled to support us another way, a follow would more than do the trick! Thank you so much for taking the time to read this edition of the FIR magazine - it means more than I could ever put into words.

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Keep up with our release schedule:

FIR03: APRIL 2026

FIR04: JULY 2026

FIR05: OCTOBER 2026

FIR-X03 (Halloween): OCTOBER 2026

FIR-X04 (Christmas): DECEMBER 2026

FIR06: JANUARY 2027

FIR07: APRIL 2027

Have a request, suggestion or query?

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