

DANIEL'S BEST:



BURNING

An oblong mystery about a South Korean slacker who becomes obsessed with a beautiful but flighty ex-classmate and her wealthy, westernized boyfriend, Lee Chang-dong's strangely chilly film is powerfully enigmatic and immaculately constructed.

COLD WAR

Much like the folk songs heard throughout the film, Polish director Pawel Pawlikowski's romantic tragedy takes a story of heartbreak and horror and transforms it into something beautiful and timeless.

THE DEATH OF STALIN

Already the premier political satirist of his era, *In the Loop* director and *Veep* creator Armando Iannucci pulls off his

most impressive feat yet, turning the corpse-strewn power struggle that followed Joseph Stalin's sudden death into a lacerating and disturbingly relevant farce.

THE FAVOURITE

Director Yorgos Lanthimos takes a lean, witty script by Deborah Davis and Tony McNamara about conniving women and weak men and imbues it with a pitiless absurdism that is peculiarly Lanthimos-ian. The result feels like a ridiculously opulent cross between *Dangerous Liaisons* and *All About Eve*.

FIRST REFORMED

Ethan Hawke gives the performance of the year as a tormented priest confronting oblivion in this story of environmental and existential anguish. Writer-director Paul Schrader blends the raw intimacy of Bresson and the scathing despair of Bergman with his own sensual and spiritual obsessions.

ISLE OF DOGS

Wes Anderson's stop-motion animated celebration of Japanese culture and cinema is another elaborately embossed masterwork of careful world-building, impeccable craftsmanship and messy emotional payoffs.

MADELINE'S MADELINE

Led by a ferocious performance from newcomer Helena Howard, Josephine Decker's film forces us to determine from moment to moment whether we're watching a fantasy or a documentary, an acting exercise or an exhibition of mental illness.

MANDY

In a far superior alternate universe, Panos Cosmatos' psychedelic revenge fantasy would play on the most gigantic IMAX screens imaginable, while the latest Marvel releases would get dumped to video-on-demand.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - FALLOUT

Human special-effect Tom Cruise plays super-spy Ethan Hunt for the sixth time, and while nothing in Christopher McQuarrie's *Fallout* should feel unfamiliar to anyone remotely aware of the *Mission: Impossible* bag of tropes, it's still the freshest action movie of 2018.

YOU WERE NEVER REALLY HERE

We have become so spoiled by the greatness of Joaquin Phoenix that barely anyone batted an eye when he gave three excellent lead performances in 2018. The best of the bunch came in Lynne Ramsay's scarred and fractured story of a violent, demon-plagued veteran who rescues stolen girls.

DANIEL'S WORST:

DEADPOOL 2

More snot-nosed nihilism and fangless meta-commentary from Marvel's "merc with a mouth," once again played by Ryan Reynolds as a homicidal rape-joke comedian.



FIFTY SHADES FREED

Putrid even by the subterranean standard set by the first two entries in the *Fifty Shades* franchise, this trilogy-ender had the temerity to end with a "heartwarming" montage of its abusive protagonists.

GOTTI

Klutzy filmmaking usually provides some level of schadenfreude fun, but never has ineptitude been less entertaining than in Kevin Connolly's hopelessly muddled biopic.

GREEN BOOK

The most malodorous awards bait of 2018, Peter Farrelly's rancid road movie is MAGA for white liberals. Mahershala Ali survives with a shred of dignity intact, but Viggo Mortensen may never recover.

A WRINKLE IN TIME

Publicist turned director Ava DuVernay had the entire universe rooting for her big-budget adaptation of the Madeleine L'Engle novel, but the result was garish and empty. □

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