

BEST OF CANNES 2025

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the 2025 Festival**

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Best of Cannes: Critics Pick 17 Must-See Movies From the 2025 Festival

By Peter Debruge, Owen Gleiberman, Siddhant Adlakha, Murtada Elfadl, Jessica Kiang, Tomris Laffly, Guy Lodge

The last day of the 2025 Cannes Film Festival saw a region-wide power outage — reportedly an act of sabotage — and a handful of other surprises at the closing ceremony. “Something unexpected always happens whenever I’m in Cannes,” said American star John C. Reilly, in town with the Italian-made Western “Heads or Tails?” Hardly anyone could have foreseen the near-unanimous disappointment in Julia Ducournau’s “Alpha,” for example, as the Palme d’Or winner’s follow-up to “Titane” curdled on the red carpet. Or which Josh O’Connor movie had the better chance: gay love story “The History of Sound” or feminist art heist “The Mastermind”? One thing’s for sure: No one will be taking acting classes with Shia LaBeouf anytime soon. According to the nine critics covering Cannes for Variety this year, here are the best films from the world’s most prestigious — and least predictable — film festival.



Amrum

Fatih Akin’s poetic and elegantly spare World War II drama asks us to take interest in a 12-year-old member of the Hitler youth, and maybe even to sympathize with him. What makes “Amrum” soul-stirring is the early realization that had the boy been brought up under different circumstances, he would have been an ordinary child, doing good instead of brewing in hateful thoughts. And that’s the kind of thing that only a certain kind of observant art could make one consider: There is a human at the root of any evil and the only way to disable it is knowing that origin. (Read the full review by Tomris Laffly.)

Bono: Stories of Surrender

In the handsomely shot film that Andrew Dominik has made of the U2 frontman’s 2022 solo stage show, we watch as Bono tells the story of his life, taking us inside his ambition, his passion, his celebrity, his charity, his hypocrisy, and his demons (he’s got one of those fathers you wrestle with for your entire life). Bono is every inch a poetic showman, and he infuses the saga of U2, and their rise in the world, with an electricity that’s cathartic. (Read the full review by Owen Gleiberman.)



The Chronology of Water

Kristen Stewart’s directorial debut is based on the memoir by Lidia Yuknavitch, who told of how she grew up in a sexually abusive household, and how she squirmed away from the legacy of it — through competitive swimming, through drugs and sex and other escape hatches, and ultimately through becoming a writer. Stewart presents the story as a pinpoint series of impressionistic moments that sear themselves into you. And Imogen Poots’ stunning performance captures Lidia’s hunger, and also the shattered space inside her. (Read the full review by Owen Gleiberman.)

Eddington

Ari Aster's audacious sociological Western thriller tosses liberal art-house orthodoxy to the winds. It's set in the desert city of Eddington, New Mexico, during the COVID summer of 2020, and the first sign that it will tweak conventional wisdom is that the local sheriff, Joe Cross (Joaquin Phoenix), refuses to wear a mask. But COVID is just the trigger. "Eddington" presents the big picture of an angry, cult-and-conspiracy-addicted, maybe crazy new America slipping through the looking glass, a kind of Great Crack-Up that the film views with a poker-faced trepidatious glee. (Read the full review by Owen Gleiberman.)

Highest 2 Lowest

Spike Lee has taken Akira Kurosawa's "High and Low" to new highs, delivering a soul-searching genre movie that entertains while sounding the alarm about where the culture could be headed. After a kidnapping forces hip-hop mogul David King (Denzel Washington) to put his priorities into perspective, he throws down in the remake's all-new climax. As David reclaims what he loves, we can hear Lee's own passions: as a teacher of film, a speaker of truths and an elder statesman to the community. (Read the full review by Peter Debruge.)

Homebound

The first time in ages that a mainstream Hindi-language production has felt vital, Neeraj Ghaywan's tale of impoverished young men trying to escape their circumstances proves to be both a moving character piece, as well as a searing indictment of modern India. "Homebound" is built in the vein of a traditional Bollywood social drama, which is to say it contains broad political statements delivered practically down the lens, but its leads inject this otherwise obvious cinematic form with moving, naturalistic nuance. (Read the full review by Siddhant Adlakha.)

It Was Just an Accident

Like Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, the five lead characters in the dissident director's Palme d'Or-winning film served time in prison, emerging fired up and ready to fight back. Each of these survivors swears he'd recognize the self-righteous one-legged prosecutor who tortured them, even though none of them saw the man with his own eyes. When he limps into the auto garage where Vahid (Vahid Mobasseri) works, however, it sets into motion a kind of reckoning: Vahid kidnaps the man, then rounds up other survivors to confirm his identity and dispense justice. Strange as it may sound for a slow-burn scripted drama with endless driving scenes, their mordantly funny task crosses the absurdism of Samuel Beckett with one of Tarantino's more furious revenge pictures. The characters' backstories were directly inspired by things Panahi heard while incarcerated, suggesting that he couldn't have written this movie without meeting like-minded people in prison. (Read the full review by Peter Debruge.)



The Love That Remains

Spiraling into surrealism as ordered lives and minds unravel, Icelandic director Hlynur Pálmason's "The Love That Remains" is an album of achingly felt, morbidly funny and increasingly haywire scenes from a marriage. While artist Anna (Saga Gardarsdottir) is ready to be separate rather than separated from her seafaring husband Magnus (Sverrir Gudnason), he doggedly maintains a presence in the house she shares with their three children, and occasionally her bed too — clinging to a semblance of domestic stability that she finds ever less stabilizing. (Review to come from Guy Lodge.)



The Mastermind

Bringing offbeat wit and bluesy wisdom to what might be described as an anti-heist movie, Kelly Reichardt delivers a canny rejoinder to the glamorous high drama of the traditional robbery-gone-wrong plot, in which an extraordinary act gradually comes undone when exposed to nothing more malign than the everyday forces of ordinary life, and the fatal flaws of an ordinary man. The quietly fantastic film is hardly moralistic, but it is a gentle, cautionary hand-on-the-arm for those who feel so entitled: The world doesn't owe you anything, so steal from it and it will steal from you. (Read the full review by Jessica Kiang.)

My Father's Shadow

"My Father's Shadow" pulls off a miraculous, double-edged feat with a rather simple structure. The film, written by brothers Akinola and Wale Davies and directed by the former, spans one day in the life of two young boys traveling with their father from a small village in rural Nigeria to the bustling capital city Lagos. However, as the audience is taken in by this intimate and well-observed drama, the rug gets pulled from beneath them by revealing the violence and strife that was simmering underneath. It's a trick so devastating that it completely upends the movie, elevating it into a deeply humanist narrative. (Read the full review by Murtada Elfadl.)

Nouvelle Vague

In Richard Linklater's ingenious and enchanting docudrama about the making of "Breathless," it's as if Jean-Luc Godard (Guillaume Marbeck), in the sunglasses he never takes off, had sprung to life before us in a nearly magical way. And that uncanny quality extends to the whole movie, which plunks us down in Paris in 1959, in many of the same streets and cafés and hotel rooms where "Breathless" was shot. Godard has decided that he's basically going to make up his movie as he goes along. And this is elating to experience because of what's holding it all together — that Godard is out to capture the lightning of reality in a bottle, revolutionizing what cinema can be. It's a savory pleasure to be able to step into this time machine, watching Linklater mirror the formal incandescence of "Breathless" in the spontaneous bravura with which he re-creates it. (Read the full review by Owen Gleiberman.)



Resurrection

Seven years after “Long Day’s Journey Into Night,” Bi Gan returns to Cannes with a marvelously maximalist movie of opulent ambition that is actually five or six movies, each at once playful and peculiar and part of an overarchingly melancholy elegy for the dream of 20th-century cinema. With all its extraordinarily intricate ambition, “Resurrection” will undoubtedly challenge viewers who have been trained to expect simpler structures. But for those who miss the way the movies used to act on us, it is a dazzlingly cineliterate lesson in the lost art of letting go. (Read the full review by Jessica Kiang.)



The Secret Agent

Carnaval provides a convenient cover story for nearly 100 deaths and disappearances in Kleber Mendonça Filho’s robust sense-memory immersion into the sights, sounds and suffocating climate the Brazilian director associates with 1977 Recife. It was a period of great “mischief,” although that’s too light a word to describe the everyday corruption that permeates practically every aspect of this meaty 160-minute period piece. Mendonça remembers it well, demonstrating how even the worst of times can inspire a perverse sort of nostalgia. (Read the full review of Peter Debruge.)

Sentimental Value

While not as stylistically radical as “The Worst Person in the World,” Trier’s layered family drama shares its ability to find fresh angles on sentiments you’d think that cinema would have exhausted by now.

It also shares the great Renate Reinsve, unpredictable as an actor reluctant to make a film with her estranged father (Stellan Skarsgård). Gustav wrote the lead role with Nora in mind, and we sense that accepting could save their relationship, if not both of their lives. (Read the full review by Peter Debruge.)

Sirât

We are all merely the playthings of a callous God. For the characters on Oliver Laxe’s extraordinarily strange and nerve-wracking journey from the middle of nowhere to the back end of beyond, that God is the unseen force that gradually thins their number, saps their spirits and forces them to consider the idea of life after hope. For the viewer, it might very well be Laxe himself, as he pummels us in ways we can’t predict, and have done little to deserve. (Read the full review by Jessica Kiang.)

Sound of Falling

Intricately braiding the lives of four generations of girls, living (if they’re not dying) through different eras on the same forbidding farmstead in northern Germany, Mascha Schilinski has constructed a haunted-house story of unique and devastating proportions. Formally rigorous but not austere, the novelistic film comprises four narrative strands, each already rife with its own enigmas, ambiguities and floating shifts in perspective; woven together in largely impressionistic order, they begin to reflect and resemble each other in complex, telling ways. (Read the full review by Guy Lodge.)

Urchin

Harris Dickinson's actorly preference for unusual independent and art-house assignments shows through in his directorial debut, a jagged, perceptive slice of life from London's grimmer sidewalks, addressing a nationwide homelessness crisis with unassuming care and candor. Centered on a single young man (Frank Dillane) ricocheting between prison, hostels and the streets, the film makes no claims to represent an entire disenfranchised demographic, but there's resonant human texture and political feeling in its close-up individual portrait. (Read the full review by Guy Lodge.)



'They've become extinct, and are we next?': How Jurassic Park made dinosaurs into film stars

By Francis Agustin

In June 1993, Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Michael Crichton's novel brought prehistoric monsters to life. That year, Crichton spoke to the BBC about why dinosaurs continue to fascinate us.

One of the most celebrated moments in Steven Spielberg's Jurassic Park has two scientists, played by Sam Neill and Laura Dern, staring agasp at a Brachiosaurus towering above them – it's the first time these characters and the audience have glimpsed the colossus in all its onscreen glory. As John Williams's iconic overture swells, a wave of childlike wonder washes over their faces. And ever since the film premiered 32 years ago, on 9 June 1993, audiences have felt a similar awe. The franchise now includes animated television series, comics, video games, and seven major films, including the latest instalment, Jurassic World Rebirth, which is released in July. But it all started with Michael Crichton's bestselling novel, published in 1990.



While writing the novel, Crichton visited a museum in the UK which featured a video exhibit on dinosaurs. "Little boys and girls of three [years old] would scream 'Stegosaurus!' and 'Tyrannosaurus!' when they would appear," Crichton told the BBC's The Late Show in 1993. "You wouldn't think they'd know how to pronounce these words, but they do."

Since the discovery of the first dinosaur fossils two centuries ago, and the first official

scientific naming of a dinosaur – the Megalosaurus – in 1824, our fascination with these titans of the natural world has never really waned. But it has evolved. “We have in every period some [new] aspect of interest, not so much in our own reinterpretation of the dinosaurs from a scientific standpoint, but from a cultural standpoint,” said Crichton.

In 1854, a number of supposedly life-sized model dinosaurs, sculpted by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins and cast in cement, were displayed in Crystal Palace Park in south London. At this point, Crichton believed, “the underlying issue soon became whether these were evidence that ought to be employed for or against Darwinian evolution, so after the initial interest in dinosaurs as simply large extinct animals, they came to be viewed from the standpoint of their religious significance.”

By the time Crichton wrote Jurassic Park, however, our view of dinosaurs had moved on, both scientifically and philosophically. The podgy beasts sculpted by Hawkins had been replaced in the imagination by fast, agile, birdlike creatures – and the issue of the dinosaurs' extinction was considered of greater philosophical interest than their creation. “The question that we have when we look at dinosaurs is, ‘They’ve become extinct, and are we next,’” Crichton said.



Steven Spielberg used computer-generated imagery and practical animatronics to make onscreen dinosaurs more believable than ever before (Credit: Getty Images)

In between these two periods, dinosaurs stomped through cinema history. The first onscreen dinosaur starred in an animated film, *Gertie the Dinosaur*, in 1914. A classic silent film, *The Lost World* (1925), boasted stop-motion dinosaurs created by Willis O'Brien, who went on to animate the prehistoric monsters who fought King Kong in 1933. The dinosaurs in *King Kong* then inspired legendary animator Ray Harryhausen to create his own unique dinosaur hybrid for the film *20,000 Fathoms* (1953), a *Tyrannosaurus-Brontosaurus* mix that rampaged through the streets of New York City. Harryhausen would go on to direct his own prehistoric monster film, *One Million Years B.C.* (1966), in which Raquel Welch and other fur-clad cave-people came face-to-face with dinosaurs. “We were criticised many times that human beings, particularly cavemen... never lived anywhere near the time of the dinosaur,” Harryhausen said on *The Late Show*. “But that’s a licence one has to take for the cinema because you have no drama unless you have people in with the dinosaurs.”

Breaking box-office records

The film of *Jurassic Park*, with a screenplay co-written by Crichton, brought together people and dinosaurs more believably than ever before. Spielberg used a groundbreaking and earth-shaking combination of computer-generated imagery and practical animatronics for his cautionary tale of a corporation miraculously resurrecting long-extinct species. The corporation’s CEO, John Hammond (Richard Attenborough), intends to use the creatures to populate a wildlife amusement park on an island off the coast of Costa Rica. But when the dinosaurs escape their enclosures, a group of scientists learn the hard way that Hammond’s plan may have its drawbacks.

The film was a blockbuster hit in the summer of 1993, grossing \$357 million domestically and \$914 million worldwide in its original theatrical run. It shattered box office records, becoming the highest grossing film ever at the time of its release. *Jurassic Park* “delivers where it counts, in excitement, suspense and the stupendous realization of giant prehistoric reptiles”, said *Variety*’s 1993 review. In 2018, it was added to the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry for being “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant”.

‘From the World of John Wick: Ballerina’ Review: Ana de Armas Fights ‘Like a Girl’ — That Is, Like Jane Wick — in an Entertaining Ultraviolent Spin-Off

It’s a worthy entry in the “John Wick” canon, with a revenge plot that’s pure trash and an actor who gamely picks up Keanu Reeves’ mantel of mayhem

By Owen Gleiberman

In “From the World of John Wick: Ballerina,” an unabashedly pulpy, ultraviolent, and entertaining spin-off of the “John Wick” franchise, Eve Macarro (Ana de Armas), a ballerina who is being trained in the assassin traditions of the Ruska Roma, gets a piece of advice that sounds like it’s going to be iconic. Her trainer, Nogi (Sharon Duncan-Brewster), shoots her a gaze of fury and says, “Fight like a girl.” She means that men possess a brute strength that Eve can’t necessarily match; instead, she should evolve a combat style out of her feminine essence. That tends to be how a lot of female action fantasies have gone, stretching back to the “Batman” TV series, where Batman and Robin were all Pow! and Bam! while Yvonne De Carlo’s Batgirl employed elegant karate kicks. In movies from “La Femme Nikita” to “Wonder Woman,” “Fight like a girl” has not been a sexist insult — it’s been a cool way of equalizing things. When the end credits roll on “Ballerina,” the soundtrack anthem, by Evanescence and K.Flay, is called “Fight Like a Girl.”

But here’s why this is all a bit ironic. In “Ballerina,” the events of which are set in between “John Wick: Chapter 3 — Parabellum” and “John Wick: Chapter 4,” the Eve we see does not fight like a girl. She fights by summoning the same existential viciousness, the whatever-weapon-is-at-hand in-your-face brutality (and I do mean in-your-face) that John Wick does. She fires pistols and machine guns. She breaks limbs and smashes throats and gouges eyeballs. She attacks enemies with kitchen utensils and slashes them with a samurai sword. She detonates them with multiple grenades. She uses a pair of ice skates as nunchucks and, in the film’s climax, gets into the first duel I’ve ever seen fought with flame-throwers, one inferno-spouting monster gas cannon versus another. The message: This is how girls now fight.

Though she’s at the center of all this mayhem, Ana de Armas exudes a calm, an inner placidity that echoes that of the series’ standard-bearer. Back in 2014, part of the counterintuitive élan of casting Keanu Reeves as John Wick is that from the “Bill and Ted” films to “Little Buddha” to “The Matrix,” Reeves had always acted with a slightly spacey deadpan that was maybe sort of Zen. In the “Wick” films, his very tranquility became homicidal. And so it is with de Armas, an expressive actor who in “Ballerina” never loses her rose-lipped repose. Call her Jane Wick.

The plot, in case you were wondering, is pure trash, and that’s OK. In the opening sequence, the young Eve (played by Victoria Comte) watches her father get slaughtered by fighters who’ve been dispatched by the Chancellor (Gabriel Byrne), the leader of the dark warrior cult they all belong to. Eve is rescued by Winston Scott (Ian McShane), who returns once again as the mentor of John Wick — and now the savior of Eve. He places her under the care of the Director (Anjelica Huston, acting very Tim Burton meets Madame Tussauds), who runs the Ruska Roma with an iron hand, turning ballet class into a form of violence (and staging fight training like ballet). But the Ruska Roma and the Chancellor’s cult have a centuries-long pact to steer clear of each other. When Eve is sent out into the world, where she kills a henchman with a tell-tale X branded into his wrist, she upsets the apple cart of that accord by deciding to get revenge on those who killed her father.



The film's entire second half is set in a wintry Middle European mountain village where the Chancellor's cult lives in secret. It's Eve vs. all of them, with one complicating factor, that being the arrival of a stone-cold killer whose identity I won't reveal. He has been dispatched to stop Eve, though his sympathies might waver. "Ballerina" is a worthy entry in the "John Wick" canon, though I say that as someone who doesn't think the "John Wick" canon is all that. By the end, Ana de Armas has proved that fighting like a girl and fighting like a guy need not be appreciably different, especially if they're all fighting like a video game.



‘The epitome of what the horror film should be’: How 1950s French horror *Les Diaboliques* inspired *Psycho*

By Adam Scovell

Seventy years old this year, Henri-Georges Clouzot's film about two women plotting murder is a masterclass in macabre dread – and inspired Hitchcock's classic among others.

Famous for writing the novel *Psycho* (1959), the basis for the influential 1960 Alfred Hitchcock film of the same name, author Robert Bloch understood the horror genre more than most. So when you read that he called a film his "favourite horror of all time", as he did in an interview with French magazine *L'Ecran Fantastique*, you have to take that appraisal seriously.

The film referred to by Bloch wasn't the adaptation of his own story, nor a Hollywood classic, but instead a quietly influential French feature, 70 years old this year, that packs as much of a macabre punch as his own morbid masterpiece: Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955).

Adapted from the novel *She Who Was No More* (1952) by French crime-writing partnership Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac (also known as Boileau-Narcejac), Clouzot's film was a revolution in chilling cinema. It mixed techniques from film noir and horror to great effect, creating a hybrid that was deeply influential with its heart-stopping atmosphere of suspense.

Les Diaboliques concerns the tumultuous relationships of several teachers in a private boarding school situated in outer Paris. The weak heart of Christina – played by Clouzot's own wife Véra – is continually strained by the actions of her abusive husband Michel (Paul Meurisse), the school's headmaster, especially since fellow teacher Nicole (Simone Signoret) became his mistress. However, Michel's volatile behaviour is now hurting both women, so they hatch a plan. Though reluctant, Christina is convinced by Nicole to help murder Michel and make it appear accidental. Luring him to Nicole's out-of-town flat, they drown him in a bath and dump the body in the school's swimming pool, ready to be found as if the result of a drunken accident. However, when the body disappears the following day, the women are terrified as to what has happened. Did Michel survive? Or are his haunted remains wandering the school in search of revenge?

A DARKER SHADE OF THRILLER

Clouzot's work was often laced with cynicism and pessimism. As Susan Hayward suggests in her 2005 book exploring the film, "the thriller is the genre we most readily associate with him. But not just any thriller. His take on the genre is dark, relentless, stifling, cruel". Beginning his career as a screenwriter before switching to directing in the 1940s, Clouzot was a divisive figure in France. His work for the Nazi-controlled and funded Continental Films, run by Goebbels-appointed party member Alfred Greven, during the occupation played a role in his being barred from directing for two years following the end of the war. At this time, his drama *Le Corbeau* (1943), about a small town whose citizens are beset by poison pen letters, was read as anti-French and collaborationist, which was ironic considering that the Vichy Government had previously pulled the film from cinemas because of its own negative reading of it. Clouzot's pessimism made him adept at making enemies.

"The twist is so well plotted through cinematographic 'sleight of hand' that I would defy uninitiated viewers to discover it before the ending – Claire Gorrara

Surviving this furore, Clouzot went on to make some of France's most celebrated films, often indebted to the work of Hitchcock, but still uniquely Gallic. Unlike Hitchcock, however, the French critics of the period, many of whom would form the Nouvelle Vague – a radical and inventive group of French film-makers, who sought new ways of film-making while exhibiting a deep knowledge of cinema history – had little time for him or his work due to the somewhat traditional nature of his film-making. He seemed to embody what was known as *la tradition de qualité*, the pre-Nouvelle Vague style of French cinema which prioritised story over formal innovation. As Hayward writes, "the Nouvelle Vague consigned him thus to the purgatorial ranks of the cinema de papa [dad's cinema], and Clouzot was an auteur no more".



The story sees two women team up to kill the abusive man at the centre of both of their lives – but all is not as it seems (Credit: Alamy)

In hindsight, though, films such as *Quai des Orfèvres* (1947), *The Wages of Fear* (1953), and, of course, *Les Diaboliques*, were ahead of their time, representing a new pessimistic variety of thriller that became more commonplace from the 1960s onwards, both in France and internationally. Many thrillers up to this point had rigidly defined concepts of good and evil, while certainly never daring to end on an unhappy note. But Clouzot was at the forefront of a breed of thrillers which refused simplistic notions of morality, and resisted the need for happy, comforting endings. They became less about heroes walking off into the sunset and more about who could escape the least scathed from their scenarios.

Robert Bloch didn't limit his praise of *Les Diaboliques* to mere hyperbole. In *L'Ecran Fantastique*, he noted the fact "there is very little bloodshed" as a reason for its success. Though possessing a few moments of disturbing violence, *Les Diaboliques* avoids showing much in the way of blood and guts. What it possesses instead is a grim foreboding that builds to an unforgettable climax.

Professor Claire Gorrara of the University of Cardiff, an academic specialising in French cultural memory, attributes the film's effectiveness to the "incredible atmosphere of rising paranoia and suspense surrounding the main female protagonist [Christina]", she tells BBC

Culture. “And [also] the twist at the end, which, in the original film reel, viewers were asked not to reveal outside the cinema to future spectators.” While Clouzot certainly had film-making forebears in Hollywood like Jacques Tourneur and Robert Wise, when it came to film-making in Europe, no director had created such levels of tension.

Clouzot works a kind of push-pull psychology throughout *Les Diaboliques*, teasing a possible solution to the mystery one minute, only to utterly subvert it the next; all the while putting his characters through the emotional mixer and taking the audience along with them. In particular, he inserts supernatural insinuations to keep the characters (and the viewer) on the back foot. A young boy swears that he was punished by the supposedly-now-dead Michel. The suit Michel was murdered in somehow reappears newly pressed from a Parisian drycleaners. And then, most alarmingly, his ghostly face appears at the window in a school photo.

THE SHOCKING DENOUEMENT

It would be remiss not to discuss the film’s famous finale and its aforementioned twist. It sees Christina come upon Michel submerged in a bath, only for him to suddenly rise out of it as if waking from the dead, at which point Christina’s heart finally gives way – a demise that was bizarrely echoed five years later when Véra herself would die of a heart attack aged just 46, leading Clouzot into a depressive spiral that haunted the rest of his life. As it transpires, Nicole and Michel have been in cahoots all along, the real plot being to eliminate Christina so they can sell off the school and live happily ever after.

Gorrara believes the twist “is so well plotted through cinematographic ‘sleight of hand’ that I would defy uninitiated viewers to discover it before the ending”. Said sleight of hand arises once again from Clouzot’s skilful blending of genre – he films the finale exactly as if it was a supernatural ghost story, right until the death of Christina. Even then, the film has one last twist, this time with a real supernatural insinuation, when a boy claims to have seen the now-deceased Christina, just as he had seen Michel earlier when he was supposedly dead.



Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) shares many characteristics with *Les Diaboliques* – including a scene of bathroom-set terror (Credit: Alamy)

“It committed to sheer terror of an intensity not previously encountered in the cinema at the time – Ramsey Campbell

In an interview with *Time* magazine, even Stephen King, modern horror’s most celebrated author, declared that the finale in the bath was the “single scariest moment I have ever had in entertainment”. King is also a great admirer of British horror writer Ramsey Campbell, himself a fan of *Les Diaboliques*. When asked if he agrees with Bloch’s original assessment of *Les Diaboliques* as the ultimate psychological horror, Campbell tells the BBC: “It may well have been at the time, certainly in terms of commitment to sheer terror of an intensity

not previously encountered in the cinema (just as *Psycho* would up the ante several years later)... and I’ve seen *Les Diaboliques* disquiet a recent audience as much as I imagine it did in its day.”

In her mixed 1955 review of *Les Diaboliques* for *The Observer*, critic CA Lejeune described

a trend in cinema of the period that the film exemplified. “Since there seems to be a vogue at the moment for the horrid in entertainment,” she opined, “Henri-Georges Clouzot’s *Les Diaboliques* is likely to do well.” Undoubtedly this trend was in part down to Hitchcock and his skill in making artful, popular thrillers that increasingly toyed in nastiness, such as *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Rope* (1948) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951). Yet Clouzot’s contribution was just as impactful, not simply on the thrillers that came after but also upon Hitchcock himself, with a sense of competitiveness growing between the two in the 1950s. As King suggested in a 2007 interview with the British Film Institute about his favourite films, Clouzot “out-Hitchcocked Hitchcock”. *Les Diaboliques* clearly raised the stakes for Hitch.

in a 2007 interview with the British Film Institute about his favourite films, Clouzot “out-Hitchcocked Hitchcock”. *Les Diaboliques* clearly raised the stakes for Hitch. In fact, Hitchcock himself had wanted to adapt Boileau-Narcejac’s original novel. According to Hayward, Véra introduced Clouzot to it, and he secured the screen rights just before Hitchcock. “He... blocked those rights for a year,” she wrote, “thus effectively preventing Alfred Hitchcock getting his hands on the story.” Cinematic folklore suggests that Clouzot’s insomnia meant he was up early enough to secure the rights mere hours before Hitchcock – though there is scant evidence to suggest it was such a close call.



Roman Polanski’s *Repulsion* (1965) was among the other psychological thriller-horror hybrids that followed in *Les Diaboliques*’ wake (Credit: Alamy)

Once they were secured, Clouzot would play fast and loose with the original work. In particular, he moved the action to the closed environment of a school, something Gorrara believes is one of Clouzot’s improvements. “From my point of view,” she says, “the key improvement is setting the film in a boys’ boarding school which provides the ‘hermetically sealed’ community so beloved of the whodunit/ locked-room mystery, but also provides a fascinating socio-cultural context for the trio’s passion, corruption and horror.”

Clouzot also shifted the relationships around, changing the plot from it being the husband and mistress seemingly ganging up to kill the wife, whose body then disappears, to making the two women the apparent plotters and the husband the ostensible victim. “Making the husband the ‘victim’ and a sadist to boot allows Clouzot to entice us into complicity with the crime, which may well add to our dread when things go Gothically wrong,” suggests Campbell of the change. In the book, the final twist is that the two women are the actual co-conspirators, as they are lovers; in changing the set-up, Clouzot removes the novel’s more overt lesbian overtones but retains an implication of intimacy between the women, which seemingly helps to foster Christina’s misplaced trust in Nicole.

ITS INFLUENCE, ON HITCHCOCK AND BEYOND

Hitchcock would be quicker off the mark in securing Boileau-Narcejac’s third novel, *The Living and the Dead* (1954), though perhaps the director wouldn’t have been so determined if Clouzot hadn’t snatched the previous work and made such a fine film from it. The resulting Hitchcock adaptation was *Vertigo* (1957), regularly considered one of cinema’s greatest achievements. While *Vertigo* feels thematically connected to *Les Diaboliques* because of their shared authorship, many other films also took aspects from Clouzot’s film without having such an overt connection.

France wasn't particularly known for horror in the post-war period, but it's difficult to imagine the country's other great shocker, Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960), existing without Clouzot's film, if only because French film as a whole still veered away from too much cinematic darkness back then. Indeed, Clouzot opened the door for French cinema's return to horror and all things morbid, while the outbreak of psychologically tense, Gothic thrillers in Western cinema more generally seems spurred on by *Les Diaboliques* as much as by Hitchcock. It's difficult, without *Les Diaboliques*, to imagine the cinematic landscape later dominated by psychological thriller/horror hybrids such as Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963) and Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965), to name but a few. In Italy especially, its imprint can be felt in the Giallo genre, with films by the likes of Mario Bava and Dario Argento taking the atmospheres and domestic tensions of Clouzot's film and often adding a dose of bloody violence, as well as visuals more obviously cribbed from *Psycho*.

Which brings us back to Robert Bloch, *Les Diaboliques*' great fan. Clouzot's film undoubtedly had a profound effect on both the writing of *Psycho* and Hitchcock's subsequent film, as evidenced by their shared mixture of the psychological and the insinuated supernatural, grim atmospherics, and a quintessential moment of terror unfolding in that most ordinary of spaces, the bathroom. As Campbell notes, despite being beaten to the rights of *She Who Was No More*, Hitchcock admired Clouzot's version and reportedly "played it to the film crew while making *Psycho* – very possibly also emulating Clouzot's plea to the audience not to give away the ending". In Hitchcock's case, he wove an anti-spoiler message throughout the film's advertising with one of the taglines being, "If you can't keep a secret, please stay away from people after you see *Psycho*."



Hollywood remade *Les Diaboliques* with Sharon Stone and Isabelle Adjani in the 1990s – though it was poorly received (Credit: Alamy)

Considering *Psycho*'s vast influence on cinema, *Les Diaboliques*' macabre DNA has undeniably been spread far and wide. "I think that is the epitome of what the horror film should be," Bloch concluded of *Les Diaboliques* in the interview in *L'Ecran Fantastique*. With its wealth of scares, its chilling precision and undeniable lasting impact on Bloch and others, it certainly remains an essential benchmark the horror genre should aspire to.

OBITUARY

David Lynch, Visionary Director of 'Twin Peaks' and 'Blue Velvet,' Dies at 78

Director-writer David Lynch, who radicalized American film with with a dark, surrealistic artistic vision in films like “Blue Velvet” and “Mulholland Drive” and network television with “Twin Peaks,” died Jan. 15. He was 78.

Lynch revealed in 2024 that he had been diagnosed with emphysema after a lifetime of smoking, and would likely not be able to leave his house to direct any longer. His family announced his death in a Facebook post, writing, “There’s a big hole in the world now that he’s no longer with us. But, as he would say, ‘Keep your eye on the donut and not on the hole.’”



Michelle Trachtenberg, 'Gossip Girl' and 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' Actor, Dies at 39

Michelle Trachtenberg, the actor best known for film and television roles including “Gossip Girl” and “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” has died. She was 39.

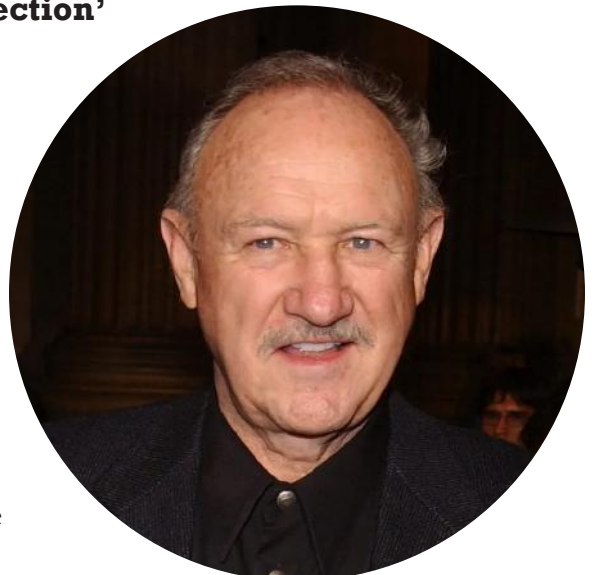
She was found unconscious and unresponsive Wednesday in her Manhattan apartment, according to the New York City police department. According to the New York Post, which first reported the news, she had recently undergone a liver transplant. Trachtenberg’s cause of death has not been confirmed, but the NYPD said criminality was not suspected



Gene Hackman and Wife Betsy Arakawa Found Dead in Santa Fe Home; Oscar-Winning Star of 'French Connection' and 'Unforgiven' Was 95

Gene Hackman, a two-time Oscar winner for “The French Connection” and “Unforgiven,” and his wife, classical pianist Betsy Arakawa, were found dead Wednesday afternoon in their Santa Fe, N.M. home. The office of Santa Fe County Sheriff Adan Mendoza confirmed their deaths to Variety after midnight Thursday. There is no immediate indication of foul play, per authorities, though the Sheriff’s office did not immediately provide a cause of death. Hackman was 95. Arakawa was 65.

On Wednesday, Sheriff’s deputies visited the home of Hackman and Arakawa, who married in 1991. The couple was found dead, alongside their dog.



NEW RELEASES



The Phoenician Scheme

Directed By: Wes Anderson

Starring: Benicio Del Toro, Mia Threapleton, Michael Cera

Wealthy businessman, Zsa-zsa Korda appoints his only daughter, a nun, as sole heir to his estate. As Korda embarks on a new enterprise, they soon become the target of scheming tycoons, foreign terrorists, and determined assassins.

Release Date: May 30th

Superman

Directed By: James Gunn

Starring: David Corenswet, Rachel Brosnahan, Nicholas Hoult

When Superman gets drawn into conflicts at home and abroad, his actions are questioned, giving tech billionaire Lex Luthor the opportunity to get the Man of Steel out of the way for good. Will intrepid reporter Lois Lane and Superman's four-legged companion, Krypto, be able to help him before it's too late?

Release Date: July 8th

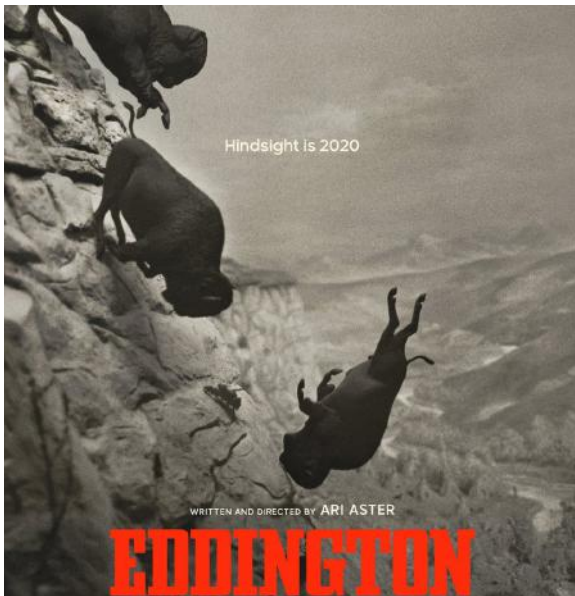
Eddington

Directed By: Ari Aster

Starring: Pedro Pascal, Joaquin Phoenix, Emma Stone

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a standoff between a small-town sheriff and mayor sparks a powder keg as neighbour is pitted against neighbour in Eddington, N.M.

Release Date: July 18th



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