

# ALL 13 DANNY BOYLE MOVIES RANKED!

SINCE MAKING HIS BIG SCREEN DEBUT WITH 1994'S *SHALLOW GRAVE*, DANNY BOYLE HAS GIVEN US SOME OF THE MOST VIBRANT AND INNOVATIVE MOVIES OF THE PAST 30 YEARS. HERE, STEVE O'BRIEN LOOKS BACK OVER THE DIRECTOR'S CLASSICS-PACKED FILMOGRAPHY...

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## YESTERDAY (2019)

This Beatles-themed romcom was an unlikely buddy-up between Danny Boyle and that master of chocolate box sentimentalism, Richard Curtis. At the time this unpredicted collab was announced, the question was, would it be similar to the way that, in *The Beatles*, John Lennon gave a bit of bite to Paul McCartney's more slushy efforts, and Macca in turn softened some of Lennon's wilder excesses? Sadly, *Yesterday* is more *Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Do* than *A Day In The Life*, which sets up a seductively thrilling premise – what would happen if you woke up in a world where the Fab Four had never existed – and then seems uncertain of what to do with it. For once, Danny Boyle's voice is the quieter one in the mix.



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## MILLIONS (2004)

That Boyle followed up the brutal *28 Days Later* with this sweet-natured family flick only went to show quite how whiplash-inducingly versatile he is as a director. Telling the story of some children who discover a duffel bag of bank notes, it certainly looks and feels like a Danny Boyle film, with its supersaturated aesthetic and frequent flights of fancy, but a mawkish final act lacks the director's customary edge. "If the Children's Film Foundation put together a version of *Shallow Grave*," wrote *The Guardian*, "it might look weirdly like this."



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## A LIFE LESS ORDINARY (1997)

Though Boyle's third feature is generally regarded as his first stumble, there's still much to cherish here. A fantasy-flecked black comedy about a hapless kidnapper (Ewan McGregor in this third and final Boyle collaboration until 2017) who abducts his boss' daughter (Cameron Diaz) in return for a huge ransom, it was the director's first Hollywood movie. Many indie filmmakers who make the move to la-la-land tend to lose some of their individuality, but while not all of *A Life Less Ordinary* works, there's little sign of commercial compromise here. There are enough quirky touches (such as the stop-motion epilogue) to remind audiences they're watching a film from the same team as *Trainspotting*, and there's some red-hot chemistry between McGregor and Diaz.





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## STEVE JOBS (2015)

On paper, it doesn't look like much – a narrowed-down biopic of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, told through three press conferences, in 1984, 1988 and 1998. But with a scorching script from *West Wing* man Aaron Sorkin and Boyle's bold decision to shoot each press conference differently – 16mm film for 1984, 35mm for 1988 and digital for 1998 – it's more cinematic than it at first appears. Michael Fassbender makes for a charismatic Jobs, and there's solid backup from Kate Winslet, Seth Rogen and Jeff Daniels. A flop at the box office in 2015, it deserved better.

## 127 HOURS (2010)

In 2003, mountaineer Aron Ralston became trapped by a boulder in an isolated area of Bluejohn Canyon in Utah. With no hope of escape, the 28-year-old decided to – look away now if you're squeamish – break his forearm and amputate it with a pocket knife in order to break free. A pre-cancellation James Franco plays the cocky Ralston in what's effectively a single-hander for the *Spider-Man* actor. But what could have been an agonisingly static movie in any other director's hands is pepped up by Boyle, who salts the film with a slew of flashbacks and trippy dream sequences.

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## TRANCE (2013)

Boyle's 10th movie has a tricky history. Screenwriter Joe Ahearne originally sent his script to the director after *Shallow Grave*, but when Boyle decided to make *Trainspotting* Ahearne went ahead and directed his own version for the BBC. Boyle clearly loved the story though and nearly 20 years later decided to bring in regular collaborator John Hodge to retool Ahearne's screenplay. A twisty, hallucinatory thriller, it stars James McAvoy as an art auctioneer who finds himself mixed up with a gang of criminals. Wrote *Empire*: "This exercise in sexy suspense and brain-scrambling mystery is a dazzling, absorbing entertainment which shows off Danny Boyle's mastery of complex storytelling and black, black humour."



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## T2 TRAINSPOTTING (2017)

Boyle was risking a lot making his first sequel, especially given how feted the original *Trainspotting* is. Following a now drug-free Renton as he reconnects with Spud, Sick Boy and a still mental-as-anything Begbie 20 years after he absconded with £16k, it shares many of the same stylistic ties as the original.

Its frequent lurches into the realm of magical realism and cannily curated soundtrack (which revisits some of the original's most iconic numbers, while also including newer artists like Wolf Alice and High Contrast) are equal to anything the first film threw up, and while it doesn't have surprise on its side this time round, it's a worthy add-on to one of the defining movies of the '90s.

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## THE BEACH (2000)

Boyle's third feature was his first link-up with screenwriter Alex Garland, being based on the novelist's celebrated 1996 book about a young backpacker's search for an isolated beach untouched by tourism. It was assumed that Ewan McGregor would headline this one (the lead in Garland's novel is British), but the part went to a fresh-off-*Titanic* Leonardo DiCaprio, resulting in a two decades-long rift between McGregor and Boyle. DiCaprio, though, proves pitch-perfect as the paradise-chasing Richard, and the movie boasts some eyeball-wowing visuals.

## SUNSHINE (2007)

Hopes were high for this one. Boyle had had a scrape with all-out sci-fi when he signed on for the fourth *Alien* film, only to drop out due to creative differences. Nearly 10 years later, he teamed up with Alex Garland once more for this fiercely intelligent and uncompromising (the last act will *freak you out*) SF horror, starring Chris Evans, Cillian Murphy, Rose Byrne, Michelle Yeoh and Mark Strong as a group of astronauts who, in the year 2057, find themselves sent on a dangerous mission to revive the dying Sun. Wrote *Rotten Tomatoes*: "Danny Boyle continues his descent into mind-twisting sci-fi madness, taking us along for the ride. *Sunshine* fulfills the dual requisite necessary to become classic sci-fi: dazzling visuals with intelligent action."



## SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE (2008)

AKA the movie that won Danny Boyle his only – to date – Oscar. Starring Dev Patel in his feature debut, it tells the story of a teenager from the slums of Mumbai who becomes a contestant on the Indian version of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*. It's a masterfully constructed movie, as we're shown, through flashbacks to his early life, exactly how and why the 18-year-old knows the answers to so many of the questions. Via a feisty script courtesy of *Full Monty* scribe Simon Beaufoy, Boyle's film is full of ravishing imagery and is, as always, impeccably soundtracked. One of the director's most people-pleasing movies, it was nominated for an impressive 10 Academy Awards, winning eight, including Best Picture.







### SHALLOW GRAVE (1994)

Though it's now over three decades old, there's little that dates Danny Boyle's big screen debut. A ferocious thriller, with notes of black comedy, it still boasts more fizz and fire than most modern day Brit flicks. Ewan McGregor, Kerry Fox and Christopher Eccleston headline as a trio of flatmates who find themselves in possession of a suitcase full of cash after their newest tenant (Keith Allen) dies suddenly. "Led by Ewan McGregor's abrasive journalist," *The Times* wrote on the movie's 30th anniversary re-release in 2024, "the film's amoral central characters are the perfect protagonists to explore the smug materialism of the '90s."

### TRAINSPOTTING (1996)

Bolstered by a blisteringly hip advertising campaign, Boyle's zeitgeist-riding adaptation of Irvine Welsh's cult novel came to epitomise the era of Cool Britannia. Boyle's distinctively kinetic style proved the perfect accompaniment to Welsh's uncompromising portrait of the heroin epidemic in '90s Edinburgh. Boasting a cool, Britpop-fuelled (Blur! Sleeper! Pulp! Primal Scream!) soundtrack, it's as funny as it is tragic, as bleak as it is exhilarating. At the time, *Trainspotting* was seen as the saviour of the British film industry, giving it a shot in the arm more powerful than anything Renton was injecting. "If we Brits can make movies this good about subjects this horrific," wrote a clearly-wowed *Empire* in 1996, "what chance does Tinseltown have?"



### 28 DAYS LATER (2002)

That scene at the beginning of *28 Days Later*, of a bollock-naked Cillian Murphy waking up in a deserted London, echoed the first chapter of John Wyndham's *The Day Of The Triffids*. But unlike that Brit literary classic, this wasn't to be a polite home counties apocalypse, but a savage, frenzied, blood-soaked armageddon, more urgent and nihilistic than any of its antecedents. Shot on digital video, its rough, DIY aesthetic was blasted by some as not being sufficiently cinematic, but that was missing the point. That coarse digital sheen makes the whole film appear like a home video record of the outbreak, giving it an immediacy and an intimacy that 35mm film would have struggled with. Full of arresting imagery (the overturned London bus is one of the most recognisable shots of modern cinema) and indelible moments (the "zombified" soldier chained up at the army base), it's not just Danny Boyle's greatest film, but a game-changing classic that has, over the years, been much-imitated but never bettered.

