

American politics and British palace intrigue

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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This week South African cinemas welcome two 2019 Best Picture Oscar nominees: *Vice*, which looks at the role of Dick Cheney in the American political landscape; and *The Favourite*, which explores 18th Century British royal Queen Anne's relationship with two cunning and aspirational women.

Other films entering the circuit include *The Upside*, which tells of the unlikely friendship between an ex-convict and a paralysed billionaire; *How To Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World* – a surprising tale about growing up and finding the courage to face the unknown; and a ruthless demonic force comes to life in *The Possession of Hannah Grace*.

Vice

Spanning a half-century Bruce 'Dick' Cheney's (Christian Bale) complex journey from rural Wyoming electrical worker to de facto President of the United States is a darkly comic and often unsettling inside look at the use and misuse of institutional power. In Adam McKay's capable hands, the dichotomy between the dedicated family man and political puppet master is related with intimacy, wit and narrative daring. Guided by his formidable and unfailingly loyal wife Lynne (Amy Adams) and mentored by the brusque and blustery Donald Rumsfeld (Steve Carell), Cheney insinuated himself into the Washington DC fabric beginning with the Nixon administration, becoming White House chief of staff under Gerald Ford, and after five terms in Congress, secretary of defense for George HW Bush. In 2000, he left his position as CEO of Halliburton to run as vice president to George W Bush (Sam Rockwell) with the implicit understanding that he would exercise almost unchecked control; a co-president in all but name.

Cheney's cunning and furtive political manoeuvring have altered the American political landscape in ways that will continue to reverberate for decades to come. But it is clear there is more than one Dick Cheney, a man whose reputation in the public Spector belies his private life and obvious devotion to his family.

Written and directed by McKay.

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The Favourite

From the veiled world of Queen Anne (Olivia Colman) – the last (and historically most ignored) of the Stuart line of Britain's rulers – who though infamously gouty, shy and disregarded, nevertheless reigned as Great Britain became a global power. It is through Anne's intricate relations with two other women of cunning and aspiration – her lifelong intimate friend and political advisor Lady Sarah (Rachel Weisz) and Sarah's penniless cousin turned social-climbing chambermaid Abigail (Emma Stone) – that the film dives into a whirlpool of manipulations and emotions that define the phrase "palace intrigue".

The Favourite has been plucked from real history set against the outrageously aristocratic tableau of 18th Century royals. It marks the first period film of acclaimed Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos from a screenplay crafted by Deborah Davis with rewrites by Lanthimos and Tony McNamara, one of Australia's most respected and revered film and television creatives and celebrated playwrights.

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The Upside

A heartfelt comedy about a recently paroled ex-convict (Kevin Hart) who strikes up an unusual and unlikely friendship with a paralysed billionaire (Bryan Cranston). A remake of the French 2011 film *The Intouchables*, which was itself inspired by the life of Philippe Pozzo di Borgo.

Directed by Neil Burger with a screenplay by Jon Hartmere, it chronicles the unexpected friendship between Phillip Lacasse (Cranston), a Park Avenue billionaire left paralysed after a paragliding accident, and ex-con Dell Scott (Kevin Hart) who is in need of a fresh start. Newly paroled and in desperate need of a job, Dell is frustrated by the menial

opportunities available to an ex-con. After finding himself at the wrong job interview, Dell uses his irreverent charisma to charm Phillip who, despite protests from his chief-of-staff Yvonne (Nicole Kidman), offers him the home aid position.

Despite a rocky start, the two quickly realise how much they can learn from each other's experiences. Though worlds apart, Phillip and Dell form an unlikely bond, bridging their differences and gaining invaluable wisdom in the process, giving each man a renewed sense of passion for all of life's possibilities.

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How To Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World

A surprising tale about growing up, finding the courage to face the unknown and how nothing can ever train you to let go. What began as an unlikely friendship between an adolescent Viking and a fearsome Night Fury dragon has become an epic adventure spanning their lives. Now chief and ruler of Berk alongside Astrid, Hiccup has created a gloriously chaotic dragon utopia.

When the sudden appearance of a female Light Fury coincides with the darkest threat their village has ever faced, Hiccup and Toothless must leave the only home they've known and journey to a hidden world thought only to exist in myth. As their true destinies are revealed, dragon and rider will fight together – to the very ends of the Earth – to protect everything

they've grown to treasure.

Written and directed by Dean DeBlois.

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The Possession of Hannah Grace

A shocking exorcism spirals out of control claiming the life of a teenage girl. Months later when ex-cop Megan Reed (Shay Mitchell) takes delivery of a horribly disfigured body things begin to change. Locked alone inside the basement corridors of the morgue with the mutilated cadaver, Megan begins to experience horrifying visions. Questioning her own sanity, she fears that the cadaver is possessed by a ruthless demonic force and is ready to spring back to life – to kill.

Diederik van Rooijen directs from a script by Brian Sieve.

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