



BOX OFFICE REVIEW

FOURTH QUARTER 2025

Film Weeks 40 – 52 | 03-OCT-2025 – 01-JAN-2026

Fourth Quarter Falls Short of Expectations

By Dick Walsh

When the 4th Quarter of 2025 began, many box office prognosticators expected robust ticket sales over in the final 13 weeks of the year, which would drive the overall annual domestic box office to \$9B. In reality, the final tally for the year wound up at \$8.6B.

During the first six weeks of Q4, movie after movie opened to lower-than-projected grosses. It was as if theatres were running a race while with 20 pounds of weight strapped to their legs. Fortunes improved in the second half of the quarter, which produced a higher box office total than the matching end-of-year periods in 2024 and 2023. In our Q4 review, we will point to some of the reasons why the quarter came up short, and whether any of them warrant reason for concern going forward.

Here are the five of the noteworthy factors that influenced Q4's results.

1. Overly Optimistic Top 10 Projections
2. October Got the Quarter Off to a Slow Start
3. Where Have You Gone Joe DiMaggio, a.k.a. Warner Bros.?
4. How Did the Thanksgiving and Christmas Periods Perform?
5. Some Momentum Going into 2026

1. OVERLY OPTIMISTIC TOP 10 PROJECTIONS

When looking for the culprit for the \$400M gap between hoped-for and actual results, we see \$370M coming out of lower performances from the top 10 movies of the quarter. All of the top-earning movies of the quarter, from #1 to #9, finished below our pre-quarter projections. We were correct in our ranking of the top four finishers; we had the right movies, but in the wrong order for films #5 to #7. The three movies from #8 to #10 were somewhat unexpected and pleasant surprises, with Lionsgate’s NOW YOU SEE ME: NOW YOU DON’T and THE HOUSEMAID finishing #8 and #10 respectively, while Angel Studios’ DAVID nabbed #9. We were much too optimistic about Disney and 20th Century’s AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH, expecting it to earn \$475M in the final two weeks of the year, whereas it only mustered \$270M. We started by comparing the new release to AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER, which earned \$425M in the last two weeks of 2022. We expected FIRE AND ASH to open 10% higher than its predecessor, and that was clearly not how it played out. We then also expected AVATAR 3 to fall faster than AVATAR 2, and that also was correct, with this year’s AVATAR holding up worse compared to the second film in the series.

This year’s top 10 movies from the 4th quarter accounted for 69% of its total gross, and was \$370M lower than we had expected. All other pictures in the quarter combined were also \$30M below our projections, which, taken together with the top 10, accounted for the \$400M shortfall.

Here is a look at our Estimated Top 10 and the Actual Top 10 for the quarter.

2025 TOP 10 Q4 MOVIES – ESTIMATED vs. ACTUAL

Estimated			Actual		
Rank & Title	Release Date	Quarter Total	Rank & Title	Release Date	Quarter Total
1. AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH (DIS)	12/19/25	\$475M	1. ZOOTOPIA 2 (DIS)	11/26/25	\$371M
2. WICKED: FOR GOOD (UNI)	11/21/25	\$400M	2. WICKED FOR GOOD (UNI)	11/21/25	\$337M
3. ZOOTOPIA 2 (DIS)	11/26/25	\$350M	3. AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH (DIS)	12/19/25	\$270M
4. FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S 2 (UNI)	12/6/25	\$140M	4. FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S 2 (UNI)	12/6/25	\$123M
5. TRON: ARES (DIS)	10/10/25	\$115M	5. PREDATOR: BADLANDS	11/7/25	\$91M
6. THE RUNNING MAN (PARA)	11/14/25	\$100M	6. BLACK PHONE 2 (UNI)	10/17/25	\$77M
7. THE SPONGEBOB MOVIE: SEARCH (PAR)	12/19/25	\$90M	7. TRON: ARES (DIS)	10/10/25	\$73M
8. PREDATOR: BADLANDS (DIS)	11/7/25	\$85M	8. NOW YOU SEE ME: NOW YOU... (LGF)	11/14/25	\$62M
9. BLACK PHONE 2 (UNI)	10/17/25	\$80M	9. DAVID (ANGEL)	12/19/25	\$61M
10. ANACONDA (SON)	12/25/25	\$60M	10. THE HOUSEMAID (LGF)	12/19/25	\$60M
Total		\$1.895B	Total		\$1.525B
Difference		-\$370M			

2. OCTOBER GOT THE QUARTER OFF TO A SLOW START

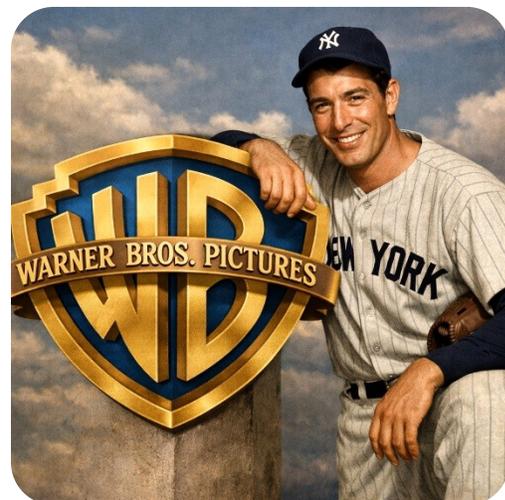
The box office was disappointing for the entirety of October.

Week	2025 Box Office	2024 Box Office
40	\$102M	\$113M
41	\$98M	\$107M
42	\$92M	\$94M
43	\$109M	\$127M
Total	\$401M	\$441M
Difference	-\$40M	
% Change	-9%	

We had projected the fourth quarter to be 9% higher, when in fact it began 9% lower after the first four weeks. This early deficit made it much more difficult to make up the difference, compared to 2024.

3. WHERE HAVE YOU GONE, JOE DIMAGGIO, A.K.A. WARNER BROS.?

The famous musical duo Simon & Garfunkel provided the soundtrack for the classic 1967 movie THE GRADUATE, including the single *Mrs. Robinson* with a lyric about the baseball player Joe DiMaggio. His most durable achievement came in 1941, when he hit safely in 56 consecutive games, a record that still stands today. The Yankees won 9 World Championships during his career, during which DiMaggio was an all-star 13 times and the American League’s Most Valuable Player three times. The Yankee Clipper, as he was known, was renowned for coming through in the clutch.



In many ways, Warner Bros. has been the Joe DiMaggio of movie studios over its 102-year history. As one of Hollywood’s top movie studios, they have been a reliable source of hit movies, averaging 15 to 20 new films every year. WB is perennially in contention to be the top-grossing movie studio of the year, with this past year no exception. In 2025, they had the highest share of the domestic box office through the first three quarters, after an impressive string of nine movies opening as the #1 movie in the nation. Ultimately, WB finished in second place for 2025, after not releasing any new movie in the fourth quarter while Disney surged ahead on the strength of a popular late-year slate of titles.

Warner Bros. is not known for standing down during the holiday period. As one recent example, in 2023, they released three very high-profile movies within 11 days leading up to Christmas. WONKA hit theatres on 12/15/2023, grossing \$133M in the two weeks remaining in the quarter. Starting on 12/22/2023, AQUAMAN: AND THE LOST KINGDOM opened in theatres and sold \$76M through the end of the year. On Christmas Day, THE COLOR PURPLE opened, adding \$44M in the following week. Taken together, the three films earned \$253M in a very short period of time and contributed greatly to the final tally for the quarter and for the year.

This year, WB did originally have the movie MORTAL KOMBAT II scheduled for a 10/24 release, but instead decided to push it back to a May 2026 release. It may be that the company’s potential sale presented a lot of internal distractions. However, exhibitors were left without any movies from one of their mainstay providers during a critical time of the year. Even one Warner Bros. film with a \$100M box office would have helped move the needle.

4. HOW DID THE THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS PERIODS PERFORM?

The three weeks leading up to and after Thanksgiving and the two weeks before and after Christmas are usually among the top-grossing weeks of the year, and key to the performance of the 4th quarter and the year. This year was no exception. Let’s compare earnings for these two periods over the last two years.

THANKSGIVING PERIOD – 2025

Week	2025 Actual Box Office	2025 Estimated Box Office
46	\$99M	\$156M
47	\$325M	\$324M
48	\$228M	\$312M
Total	\$652M	\$792M
Difference	-\$140M	
% Change	-18%	

We can see that the results in 2025 for the three weeks surrounding Thanksgiving were 18% lower than the results from the same period in 2024. While we had projected the three weeks this year to produce \$792M, in fact, they wound up 18% below that at \$652M. After this shortfall, it was no longer realistic to expect the Christmas box office could save the day. While the Christmas period was closer in shortfall, it was not enough to bring actuals for the quarter up to the level that we had projected.

CHRISTMAS PERIOD – 2025

Week	2025 Actual Box Office	2025 Estimated Box Office
51	\$339M	\$386M
52	\$329M	\$356M
Total	\$668M	\$742M
Difference	-\$74M	
% Change	-10%	

We had predicted a \$742M gross in the final two weeks of 2025, but actual results came in at \$668M, or 10% off our forecasted pace.

5. SOME MOMENTUM GOING INTO EARLY 2026

Despite the 4th quarter falling short of our expectations, the top holiday movies from 2025 have done well in the first weekend of January. Week 1 of 2026 was up 28% on the same weekend in 2025, and was the highest Week 1 result since January 2020, before the pandemic moved in to spoil everyone’s party. While appreciated, ticket sales for these holdovers will dissipate quickly as January proceeds, with the real action coming from the new films released in 2026. That said, it’s better to be up rather than down.

CONCLUSION

On paper, the lineup of new movies scheduled for release in the 4th quarter seemed to us to be strong enough to produce \$2.6B in domestic box office, pushing the annual gross to \$9.0B for the first time in 5 years. The annual box office in 2023 finished at \$8.9B, while 2024 came in with \$8.5B. The pandemic and Hollywood labor strikes were both far back in the rear-view mirror, and the volume of studios’ releases seemed to have recovered.

As it turned out, Q4’s actual domestic box office results were \$2.2B, leading to a total annual box office of \$8.6B. Looking at results from the last three years, some are concluding that the new normal for domestic box office may be between \$8.5B and \$9B. Over the past five years, streaming services have taken on a more prominent role in consumer movie watching, making it increasingly difficult to get moviegoing back to its pre-pandemic level of \$11.3B in 2019.

While we now realize that we were a bit too optimistic about the 4th quarter of 2025, we are still bullish on the future of moviegoing heading in an upward direction. We are still projecting that 2026 will wind up crossing the \$9B level of box office, which would be a positive sign and emotional boost to exhibitors. Still, 2019’s \$11.3B feels unattainable, at least in the next year or two. That said, the first week of 2026 was up 28% compared with the same week in 2025, which is a good start to the new campaign.

WHERE WE STAND AT THE END OF 4th QUARTER 2025

4th QUARTER 2025 PROJECTED vs. ACTUAL	4th QUARTER 2025 vs. 2024
Projected 2025: \$2,601,000,000 Actual 2025: \$2,218,553,000 85%	2025: \$2,218,553,000 2024: \$2,390,234,000 93%
ANNUAL 2025 vs. 2024	ANNUAL 2025 vs. 2019
2025: \$8,620,671,000 2024: \$8,544,354,000 101%	2025: \$8,620,671,000 2019: \$11,291,316,000 76%