DORCHESTER FILM SOCIETY
2026/27 SEASON

TWINLESS

(Language: English)

Director:	James Sweeney
UK Release:	6 February 2026 (first seen in UK at the BFI London Film Festival, 9 October 2025)
Running time:	100 minutes
Presented by:	Dorchester Film Society, 4 November 2026

"This is going to be a tricky one: How to tell you about how great *Twinless* is without giving away what makes it great?

Just trust me when I say that it's extremely clever and full of surprises, and reinforces that writer, director, and co-star James Sweeney is a bold and refreshing filmmaker to watch. I'm not quite sure how he pulled this off, because it could have gone so very wrong in so many ways.

This is Sweeney's second feature, following the 2019 rom-com *Straight Up*, which earned him a Spirit Award nomination for Best First Screenplay. But while that film had a lively repartee and overanalytical characters who often said too much, *Twinless* is about what people withhold, what they're afraid to say, and the suspense that arises from that silence.

Sweeney and Dylan O'Brien co-star as Dennis and Roman, two strangers who meet at a support group for twins who've lost a sibling. That alone provides a compelling premise. Such grief is so unusual and specific, the only people who could understand it are those who've suffered through it themselves. These two extremely different young men quickly form an unlikely bond: They go grocery shopping, share sandwiches, wear matching Halloween costumes, and generally fill the hole in each other's lives that's been left by their brothers' demise.

Long before Roman asks whether they'd be friends under ordinary circumstances—and Dennis lets the weight of that question hang in the air a little too long—we know what the answer is. Roman is a simple, stoic guy with a muscular physique, which makes his fits of rage even scarier. Dennis is reedy and queer, with a quick, self-deprecating sense of humor. Tragedy brought them together and is the force that binds them.

Twinless initially features the gentle beats of a sweetly melancholy indie comedy. But Sweeney has darker and more complicated instincts on his mind, both behind and in front of the camera. He's getting at something deeper here

about the all-consuming nature of loneliness, and the extent to which people will go in their desperate need for companionship.

The film calls on O'Brien in particular to dig deep and show unexpected range. He's reticent and tormented as Roman, but in a flashback, he also plays Roman's twin brother, Rocky, who's the complete opposite: flirty, charismatic, and comfortable in his own skin as an openly gay man. If you only know O'Brien from *The Maze Runner* movies and the odd Taylor Swift music video, you're in for not one but two distinct and thrilling performances.

Meanwhile, Sweeney, as a co-star, has a delightful way with an understated one-liner. Dennis seems to be in constant conflict with himself over whether to say what he's thinking out loud, which results in some hilariously awkward moments as well as genuine tension. The insecurity that lurks underneath, though, is the source of the film's increasing drama.

Sweeney, as screenwriter, gives us enough credit as an audience to create characters who do mean and messy things – to make likable people unlikable, and hope that we'll stick with them. This is especially true when Roman starts dating Marcie (Aisling Franciosi), the perky receptionist at Dennis' office, which changes the dynamic between all three people. Marcie is another great example of Sweeney's ability to craft characters who are more complex than they initially seem; she comes off as sunny and accommodating but eventually gets the chance to show some unexpected spine. And in a brief role as Roman and Rocky's mother, Lauren Graham provides warmth and grounding.

Sweeney, as director, favors stylistic flourishes that enhance the storytelling rather than distract from it. These include long tracking shots, thoughtful use of split screen, and the inspired choice of the colorful Hopscotch immersive art experience in Portland for a moment of high drama. The costume design from Erin Aldridge Orr emphasizes the duality of these characters. And the score, composed by frequent Bong Joon-ho collaborator Jung Jae-il (*Parasite*, *Squid Game*), adds an intriguing, inquisitive quality that draws us in further.

All these elements come together with a delicate tonal balance that would have been difficult even for veteran filmmakers to achieve. See *Twinless* with your other half, whoever they may be. This is a movie you'll want to talk through."

Christy Lemire, *Roger Ebert.com*, September 5, 2025

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"James Sweeney wrote, directed and stars in a movie that also felt very Sundancey, but it also is something quite unique and different, maybe more in the vein of Miranda July's eccentric indies films. I hadn't seen either of Sweeney's two previous movies, so I went into this fairly deaf, dumb, and blind about his work.

Dylan O'Brien plays Roman, who we meet at the funeral for his dead twin brother Rocky, and when he attends a support group for twins whose siblings have died, he meets Dennis, played by Sweeney. Dennis is gay, Roman isn't, but his dead brother Rocky was, and the two form a quick friendship though Roman's grief and rage keeps Dennis from revealing a major secret about himself. When Roman starts dating one of Dennis' co-workers (Aisling Franciosi), Dennis starts feeling like their third wheel but he's also in danger of having his secret revealed to his friend.

Twinless is NOT a comedy as much as it is a character drama with a few odd quirky moments. About 15 or 20 minutes into the movie, it delivers a major twist that completely changes the dynamic introduced in the earlier part of the film. Once Dennis' big secret and truth is revealed, your opinion about Dennis is likely to change drastically – maybe he'll grow on you, or maybe you'll not like him nearly as much.

Roman isn't just grieving, but he's also very angry, something that blows up in a few key moments, and O'Brien's performance is quite good, though his more dramatic moments are a little overwrought. By contrast, Sweeney has written such a terrible character for himself that it's hard to empathize with him fully, and that's likely to be the make or break for most people watching this movie. Another irksome thing is that Sweeney cast the wonderful Lauren Graham as Roman's mother, but then really doesn't give her very much to do.

Twinless gets points for being so original, but it also has so many tonal and pacing issues, it's hard to fully get into it. Sweeney is a decent filmmaker, but he throws in too many needlessly gimmicky things like split screens that also detract from the story being told. On top of that, there's a predictable aspect to Dennis' relationship with Roman that makes the viewer feel like he might be falling for him, which does make the film more interesting even if it doesn't really pay off.

This feels like another Sundance movie that might play great at the Eccles, but I had a tough time figuring out who might like or love this movie in the real

world. Any potential *Twinless* might have is spoiled by being so tonally erratic and going to strange places that makes it hard to connect with either of the main characters."

Edward Douglas, *The Weekend Warrior Newsletter*, February 4, 2025

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WARNING – THIS REVIEW CONTAINS PLOT TWISTS

"Producer James Sweeney's *Twinless* is such a great black comedy-drama, and I hate that small parts of the film were getting leaked out of the film festival circuit last year. I will admit that I wasn't trying to go out of my way to see this one, but with executive producer and lead actor Dylan O'Brien appearing in *Sam Raimi*, Damian Shannon and Mark Swift's *Send Help*, I decided to give it a shot. It's not exactly what I expected going in, but I mean that as a good thing. Doing the introductory title sequence twenty minutes in is surprising because I didn't think it was ever going to happen, but at that point, Sweeney, O'Brien, and director of photography Greg Cotten lead the way during one-take sequences and other smart camera techniques. Frankly, *Twinless* is nothing without the stylistic filmmaking and the rhetorical style it develops along the way.

I especially love the shifts in narration and perspective, beginning with grieving twin Roman (O'Brien), then Japanese-American gay man Dennis Benver (Sweeney) seeing Roman's then-alive gay twin brother Rocky (also O'Brien) romantically, and back to the present, where Benver has invaded the spaces of Roman's life. The Halloween costume party scene towards the end of the second act is also a neat means of switching narrations and who gets to deliver dialogue, from Benver attempting to hit it off with Sammy (François Arnaud), another gay man at the party, to Roman confiding in Benver's receptionist colleague, Marcie (Aisling Franciosi), about Sims and his twin brother from different areas of a house. Again, Cotten has ways with the camera, and I can almost see how the scenes are put together.

Sweeney's performance takes a while to settle in, but by the time we get to learn more about Dennis Benver, he's just wired weirdly, which might be why Roman befriends him almost instantly—and why Rocky is the first to make a move. In fact, I feel as if Benver acts as that one archetype in comedy-dramas who digs deeper and deeper into a lie and forgets who they are at their core, and even getting back to the truth makes their whole reality implode. Think of Freddie Prinze Jr.'s Zack Siler or Heath Ledger's Patrick Verona, but even more

unethical. The thing with Benver is that his lie is very specific, and every single action and decision that he makes is harmful to those around him. In my honest opinion, he's just psychologically unwell, and by the final act, the conflict resolution is utterly darkly hilarious.

O'Brien does a brilliant job at portraying both the flamboyant pre-deceased twin and the depressed, not-too-reserved, nearly-quick-to-anger, seemingly heterosexual twin. The actor is out of his element in this film, and suffice it to say, I am satisfied with his part. Sweeney's decision not to give Rocky his side of the story is wise, but it would be insightful to add wider context to Benver's and Roman's relationship with him. In terms of the names, I would never think "Roman" and "Rocky" would fit this guy's face, but even coming up with them in the first place is interesting. Perhaps Roman is meant to depict the grieving brother as the soldier type in the twin duo, whereas Rocky is probably named after Rocky Road—not for my palette, specifically, but definitely a flavor that's an acquired taste for a portion size of the world's population.

Finally, there is Franciosi as Marcie, initially introduced as the dumb, gullible archetype in comedy-dramas. However, the character turns out to be wiser than she is portrayed at work. In parallel with Benver, Marcie is invited into the two protagonists' spaces and feels welcome there, not as a third wheel but as a helpful spare tire within the dynamic between Benver and Roman. As beautiful as she is, Franciosi puts on an integral performance as a careful, understanding partner, sort of like the conscience that the men don't have. For these reasons, I can appreciate the actor more, and she's surely gotten a fan out of me.

Overall, *Twinless* is a great film, but I can see where Sweeney's filmmaking might be monotonous for some viewers. That makes the pacing off-putting at times. Then again, that's made up for in the minutiae, such as references to Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen or *The Parent Trap*. It makes sense, then, that the film is categorized as a dark comedy-drama rather than a romantic comedy-drama. The archetypes and tropes seen in, say, *She's All That*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, and John Hughes films are all subverted here. It isn't love that two individual men seek, but closure and how each aims to obtain it.

Rhetorically speaking, it's all present—the character, the emotion (such as when O'Brien masterfully sobs into Sweeney's arms at one point), the logic of Sweeney's screenwriting, the timing, the word choice, and the delivery—, and the mise-en-scène is some of the best that I have seen in a film in a good while.

John Daniel, *Hue Watched* It, 2 February 2026