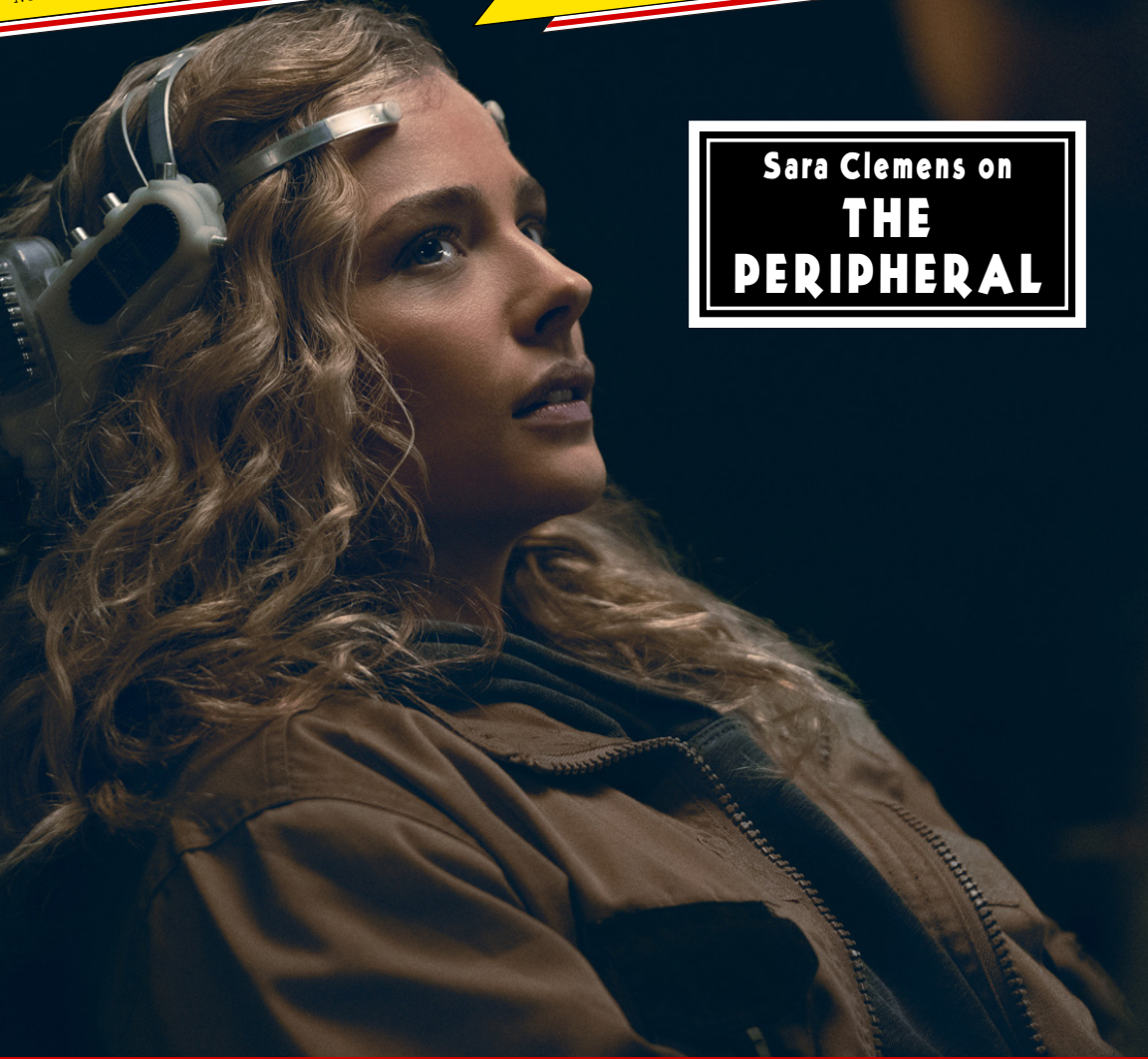


ISSUE 56

EXPLOITS

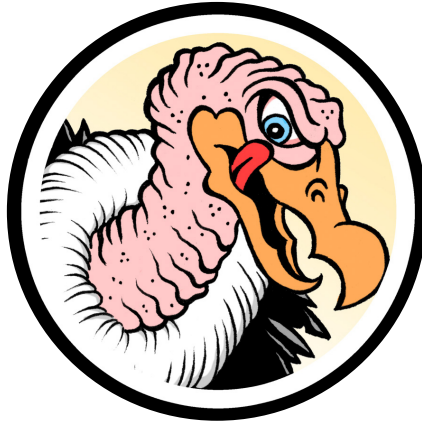
an UNWINNABLE publication

NOVEMBER 2022



Sara Clemens on
**THE
PERIPHERAL**

**DUNKIRK • Les FEMMES GROTESQUES
• EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN •
NIGHT of the DEVILS • WEIRD WEST**



Publisher | Stu Horvath

Vice Publisher | Sara Clemens

Editor in Chief | David Shimomura

EXPLOITS

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

Feature Editor | Melissa King

Music Editor | Ed Coleman

Books Editors | Noah Springer, Levi Rubeck

Movies Editor | Orrin Grey

Television Editor | Sara Clemens

Games Editor | Rob Rich

Copyright © 2022 by Unwinnable LLC

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Unwinnable LLC does not claim copyright of the screenshots and promotional imagery herein. Copyright of all screenshots within this publication are owned by their respective companies

Unwinnable
820 Chestnut Street
Kearny, NJ 07032

www.unwinnable.com

For more information, email:
info@unwinnable.com

[Subscribe](#) | [Store](#) | [Submissions](#)

This machine kills fascists.

DUNKIRK, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES AND DEPRESSION

by Evan Dennis

Using time as a core theme for a cinematic oeuvre might sound like an idea that would run out of steam, but Christopher Nolan's done rather well with it for nearly two whole decades now. *Interstellar's* compression of whole lifetimes into just days, *Tenet's* temporal reversals, *Inception's* dreams that slow time down to a crawl; the director has gotten quite the mileage out of this concept. To me though, the most tangible (and personal) depictions of time are how the characters in his movies have to deal with traumas: how the past haunts you and the depression that results from it, along with how to deal with and overcome it.

For me and many others, 2017 was an awful year to live through, with what felt like a never-ending stream of political and social crises. I went to movie theaters quite often to get away from it all for just a couple of hours. If you were to ask me what that time really felt like, I'd point to that year's *Dunkirk* as a close approximation: the aftermath of a monumental defeat, where all you could do was wait out the dread until deliverance, or a chance to somehow regroup for the next fight. However, the movie's taglines of "hope is a weapon" and "survival is victory" still stick with me. When you're in a place where it feels like nothing can be done, sometimes the best you really can do is just make it through a day. "All we did is survive." "[and] That's enough." Five years ago in that horrible period of time, it felt like a movie that "got" what the general mood was, to be in a place in your life where you want to escape as much as possible but can't. Better yet though, it also felt like a movie that wanted to promise us that if you're still breathing, that's enough of a win, even for just one day.

A decade after its release, I somehow keep finding things to like about *The Dark Knight Rises*. Sure, the script could've used another revision to fix its issues, but the movie still resonates with me in a way few in its genre do: a superhero movie where you're supposed to leave the mask behind for your own good. After years of crime-fighting, Bruce is left as a man with few interpersonal relationships, who is cooped up in his house and takes very little care of himself. Even when he's

forced to put the cowl back on, Alfred and Bane both tell him he's doing so out of a self-destructive desire: "I'm afraid you want to [fail]"; "you don't fear death, you welcome it." It's only when he's literally tossed into a dark pit and forced to watch the results of his failure that he does the work required to get himself out: not just getting back into physical shape, but relearning the fear of death. You only fear death if you *want* to live, and that's what makes this more of a Bruce Wayne movie than a Batman movie in my opinion. Batman is a creation of Bruce's childhood trauma, and the ultimate victory in *Rises* isn't just saving a city, it's also in learning to move past what has hurt you for years. Stepping out from a cave, climbing out from a pit, and into the light and a better life.

While *Dunkirk* and *The Dark Knight Rises* both focus on characters who're irrevocably scarred by the past, like the rest of Nolan's work, they both know you can never travel back in time to fix the damage it inflicts. Just as in real life, you can't undo trauma, but you can always decide what to do in the here and now in order to move forward. 🇺



MUSIC



EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN – In their concert in Helsinki in late September, Einstürzende Neubauten announced that they had brought back their shopping cart for the first time in over twenty years. The cart had been a staple of their set in the 80s and early 90s, proving a versatile instrument: it could be hit, stroked, plucked, tipped over, rattled, tapped and thrown, adding quite vividly to the atonal soundscape that formed a typical Neubauten concert. Their setup on stage these days is less chaotic but still diverse and bizarre, somewhere between **Richard Serra** and **Bob Cassilly**; next to the shopping cart are reusable bags filled with indeterminate material, plastic bottles sawed in half and attached to a spinning plate and a jet turbine engine. Blixa Bargeld comes out on stage barefoot, in a subtly shimmering suit with wildly glittering eyeshadow, his hair down past his shoulders, the elegant, androgynous elder statesman of the avant-garde.

Neubauten have stayed curiously frozen in time for the American punk-slash-industrial crowd, despite being one of the most prolific, vibrant and artistically curious groups to ever get **inaccurately lumped into the scene**. Many still speak wistfully of the tours of old, when they made *unauthorized renovations* on their venues with his improvised instruments and

fire extinguishers were brought in even before the band took the stage. For a certain genre of uninventive punk, 1989's *Haus der Lüge* was Neubauten's apotheosis; everything after it was suspiciously melodic, unappealingly theatrical, experimental in the *wrong* way. (Whether these people have listened to the albums they wax poetic about is hard to say – they certainly never say anything against the wildly danceable remixes of **"Feurio"** and **"Yü-gung,"** or the crooning, creepily romantic covers of **"Morning Dew"** and **"Sand"**). They view the later incarnations of the band with the polite disrespect afforded an out-of-touch older relative, mourning a pneumatic drill that never existed (**it was electric**).

A fair amount of this psychic disconnect can be attributed to the fact that Neubauten haven't actually made it to the States very often. It's expensive to tour, and they lost money the past few times they flew over the Atlantic; Bargeld formerly said they had no plans to tour the US again, which was only briefly reneged for the Year of the Rat tour announcement and then reinstated as COVID hit. It's hard to blame them. Neubauten are such an inextricably German, or at least European, group, it's hard to say how they'd sound in America. Intercontinental audiences have by and large missed the solo projects, theater

MUSIC

work, commissioned material and other art that the members of Neubauten have done between albums; without those points of reference, the uneducated ear can be forgiven for feeling like their (chronologically-staggered) major releases have skipped a couple of stairs.

Part of the reason I made the journey for this concert – 4687 miles from St. Louis to Helsinki, according to Google – is because I knew that I would get something from seeing them live that I would never get from their back catalog alone. Bargeld has been clear that **their philosophy has never been about sound, but context**. There are countless contexts in which any given person experiences art – geographic, cultural, temporal – and I entered into it understanding that I, as a person with no musical knowledge whatsoever and barely any interest in the (nominal) peers of the group I was going to see, was having a contextually different experience than an aficionado of industrial music or the German avant-garde or cult groups from the 80s or people who have worked with Nick Cave or what have you – and in much the same way, the person sitting behind me who forgot to listen to their most recent album and only recognized “Nagorny Karabach” and “Sabrina”

had a contextually different experience than I did as well. A forty-year-old band is drowning in context, in their case even metatextually – “Susej” from 2007’s *Alles wieder offen*, is a dialogue between Bargeld in his youth and Bargeld at the time of writing:

You ask me: old man,
where are you harboring what I had in
mind?
is it drowned or inscribed?
I say:
your doings alone are what remain of me
beneath layers, years, annual rings
it is still engraved there

As I sat there in the audience, in my context, the band was on stage in their own context, not just of performing but of collaborating, traveling, financing, drafting, playing, scraping, merchandising, composing, listening and being listened to, watching and being watched – of stages with shopping carts, and stages without shopping carts, and all the little in-between moments of living life and growing older and making art. In context, it all comes together.

– MADDI CHILTON



MUSIC



PLAYLIST

“Schmerzen hören,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Sehnsucht (Still Stehend) (Berlin 1982),” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Neuen Arme,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Sand,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Ich bin’s,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Prolog,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Ein Stuhl in der Hölle - Live at Düsseldorf Philipshalle, 1990” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Nnnnaamm,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Sonnenbarke,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Was Ist Ist,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Dead Friends (Around The Corner),” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Ich hatte ein Wort,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Sag mir wo die Blumen sind,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Ten Grand Goldie,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

“Redukt - Live,” by Einstürzende Neubauten

[LISTEN ON SPOTIFY](#)



Les FEMMES GROTESQUE – There's something about a collection of short horror stories that can't be replicated in other genres: sublime imagery with terrifying results in tight bursts. *Les Femmes Grotesques*, Victoria Dalpe's newest collection of horror shorts follows this tradition, offering up visions of the weird and the terrifying that will linger in your head long after you're done reading. Non-euclidean houses stretch beyond their walls and deep underground tunnels open with a flourish, exposing the vast, aching beyond.

Dalpe dexterously mixes truly short stories with longer, more robust pieces exploring the connections between the monstrous and the feminine. The stories often feature female protagonists, and those that don't, relay the fears of the feminine through the man's eyes. An undead deity prowls coffee shops in hopes of finding a date but finds only cultists, a swamp hag preys on unsuspecting visitors, a young girl is visited by an unexpectedly verdant seducer. The stories are full of sex, insanity, violence and magic,

offering lifelike characters blended with cosmic nightmares.

These figures most often live on the edge of the normal, on the outskirts of town or in between the animal and human. Like all great feminist literature, Dalpe's newest accentuates the liminal, that space between life and death, civilization and chaos. That terrifying liminality often defines the feminine somewhere between the madonna and the whore, and Dalpe revels in the complexities therein. Her prose thrives on descriptions of ancient monsters lurking in the corners of the contemporary malaise, connecting the now with the occultish past.

By the end of *Les Femme Grotesques*, Dalpe has left the reader with a stable of stories that feels lively and contemporary. Along with folks like Paul Tremblay, Laird Barron and our own Orrin Grey, Dalpe is bringing a fresh take on horror, embedding classic tropes in new frameworks and offering a fantastic approach to the classic short story form.

– NOAH SPRINGER

READ NOW

HOW to READ NOW: ESSAYS – Elaine Castillo’s essay collection is, in my opinion, essential reading not just for writers and academics, but everyone else as well. Castillo’s aim isn’t just about reading diversely, but recognizing that whether we’re engaging with texts or with our everyday sociopolitical realities, we must challenge ourselves to read in an intersectional manner. She posits that we will be doomed to live in our current and inadequate late capitalist conditions if we fail to learn how to read in such a manner. This perspective Castillo brings to bear on literary culture, TV, comics and much more. My only criticism of this collection is that at times Castillo often constructs her essays in ways that feel as though she’s aiming them at people who have had the same American post-secondary education as her. I don’t think this collection should be dumbed down in the slightest, however. I get that at its core, Castillo is asking for everyone (especially white, cis, straight and male people) to challenge themselves to read outside of their comfort zone and engage with texts and culture that do not center only people just like them.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



BLACK PARADOX – In proper Junji Ito fashion, *Black Paradox* starts out weird and then gets infinitely weirder.

– ORRIN GREY

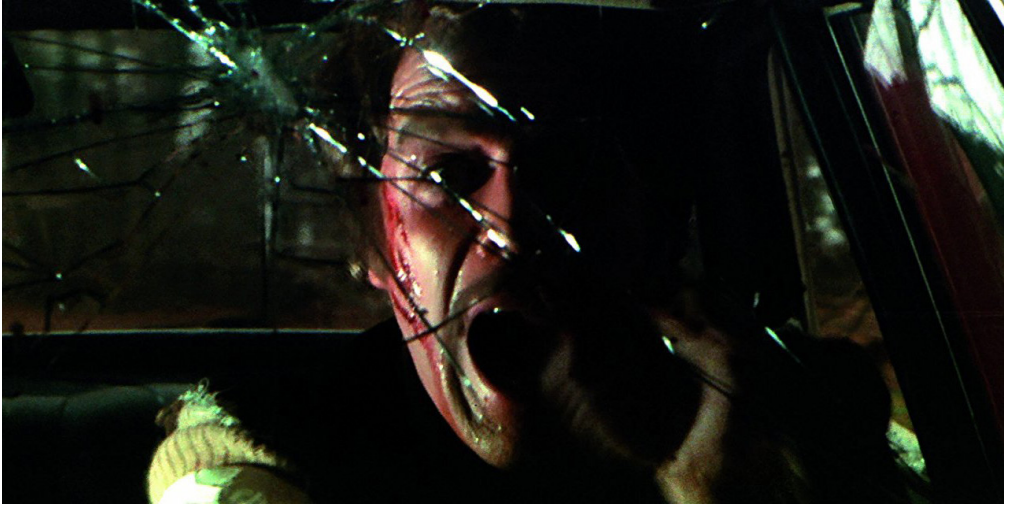
BLACK PARADOX



ITTO – 737

INTO the RIVERLANDS – Nghi Vo continues to craft gorgeous, folkloric odes to storytelling and romance. This is the third novella in the Singing Hills cycle and each one is worth reading.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



NIGHT of the DEVILS – There are few better folk horror setups than a delirious, frightened man emerging from the forest. In a highly surreal juxtapositional montage of medical evaluations and vignettes of sex and violence, the film makes it clear that this near-amnesiac has suffered immense trauma somewhere in the countryside. *Night of the Devils* shows us the truth and the fiction of these bizarre memories, and reveals how a respectable businessman from elsewhere ended up as a victim to occult forces awakened deep within the woods.

After avoiding a collision with a woman fleeing across a forest road, Nicola sets off looking for help to repair his car. He finds a cloistered, extended family, with members who are alternatively hospitable and hostile, but who most of all are in conflict about certain *other* family members not present, and the dark of the night to come. When someone comes knocking at the door after nightfall, the family refuses to admit them into the house, claiming that it is just the wind – an obvious lie that points to the mystery of the strange goings-on around the property.

The paranoia begins to build – along with a sense of being trapped, of the dark, of the liminal natural-unnatural menace just beyond the threshold. Who and *what* is out there, exactly, is only partially explained by the film's terror-soaked final reel.

The melodramatic romance and family dynamics work to the film's Gothic benefit, especially taking place in the atmospheric old woodland home, haunted forest and ruins beyond. What emerges from the woods are manifestations of repressive familial and societal systems, of domestic violence, of overbearing and ever-in-conflict patriarchs, of the idolatry of love and desire. They are the fear of loss – of control, of those we love, of self – writ in torn flesh and the embrace of the ghostly.

That we know Nicola escapes the forest of horrors is of little comfort. The trauma of these experiences holds him firmly to the wheel of cyclical violence, and makes yet another victim of a person who only desires love. Thus we are all made monsters.

– JONATHAN RAAB

MOVIES



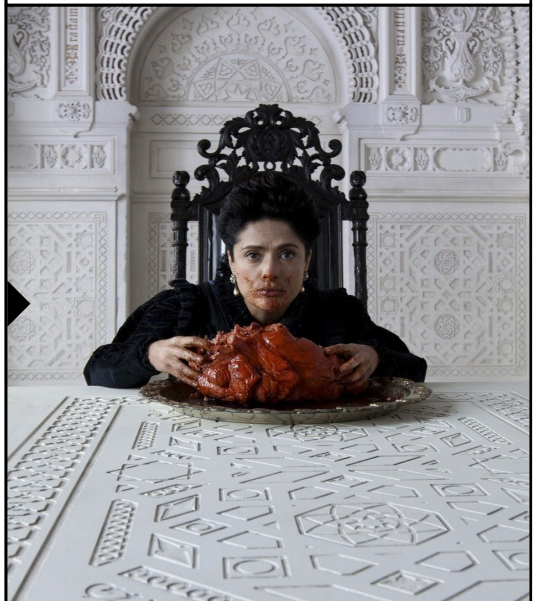
TALE of TALES – Matteo Garrone’s film is one that I did not have ready access to when it first came out in 2015. Now that I’ve watched it, I can’t say I would’ve regretted never having a chance to watch it. That’s not to say this horror fantasy is a waste of time – this definitely achieved what it wanted to achieve as an adaptation of Giambattista Basile’s fairy tales. And it’s got all the elements you’d want of such an adaptation (perfect casting, beautiful sets and costumes). But I think it was a good reminder of what I hate about most fairy tales, other than the inherent racism. Namely, the amount of sexism and female sacrifice that takes place in these tales for the sake of supposed moral development. There are some artistic license moments where these sexist bits are handled in a way that is sympathetic and comments on the treatment of women in the interwoven plots, but it ultimately fell short for me. *Tale of Tales* is heavy on women needing to be traumatized (often sexually) in order to grow or change and I’m rather exhausted by this sort of character arc.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



The MUPPETS (2011) – I’ve seen a lot of Muppet movies, but I hadn’t ever seen this one – at least not until I realized it was available through Disney Plus. And while I feel like its core message of timeless enjoyment and recapturing the glory days still rings true a decade later, I can only imagine how it must have felt to see it on the big screen back in its day, when the Muppets were more of an unfairly forgotten footnote than they are now. Still, it’s a funny and surprisingly sweet movie that I wouldn’t call my favorite in the lineup, but it did make me cry at the end, so there is that.

– ROB RICH



The IRON ROSE – Whomst amongst us hasn’t gone to a graveyard and fucked in a crypt, only to have gotten lost after dark, bang on a pile of bones, bury our sex partner alive, dance maniacally between the headstones, and then bury ourselves alive? Whomst amongst us!?!?

Also, what was with the clown?

– NOAH SPRINGER

TELEVISION



The PERIPHERAL – Amazon Prime’s new sci-fi series is a tale of two timelines of the not-so- and very- distant varieties. The first is early 2030s North Carolina, where a hard-twangd young woman lives in the house she probably grew up in and cares for her terminally ill mother while working at a 3D print shop. She also occasionally helps her Marine veteran brother out with his side hustle assisting wealthy gamers in incredibly immersive VR videogames. They hire him to help them level up, virtually passing him the controller to get them through the hard parts. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Burton, her brother, is good, but Flynnne is better. So good in fact, she barely needs to try. The future-gamer bros hire Burton to get them through the tough parts but when the tough really gets going it’s Flynnne he calls in for the assist, and she rolls her eyes before pulling a headset over them and absolutely annihilating some Nazis laying siege to a rustic European barn in WWII. She even manages to save the sheep.

It’s through this gaming prowess that Flynnne’s introduced to a brand-new, cutting-edge simulation of a post-apocalyptic London in 2100. Everyone in this sim rocks fire ‘fits, the social gatherings are extravagant, the motor-cycles go fast and the hits Flynnne’s avatar takes feel really, really real.

That’s because they are, of course. Flynnne’s mind is actually being projected into a robotic avatar made to her measure in a time 60+ years after her own. How this time travel of the mind works is explained away with the hand wave-y term “quantum tunneling” (one might need to cross-reference the William Gibson novel the series is adapted from to grok the harder sci-fi elements) but it quickly becomes apparent that the denizens of the very distant future have no trouble directly influencing the timeline closer to our own. And it’s in the Blue Ridge Mountains in 2032 where we find the show’s emotional core. Flynnne’s hometown is so small-town that much of the future version of it seems to lag slightly behind our own present, as evidenced by a complete lack of social media that is both bewildering and reason to live in hope.

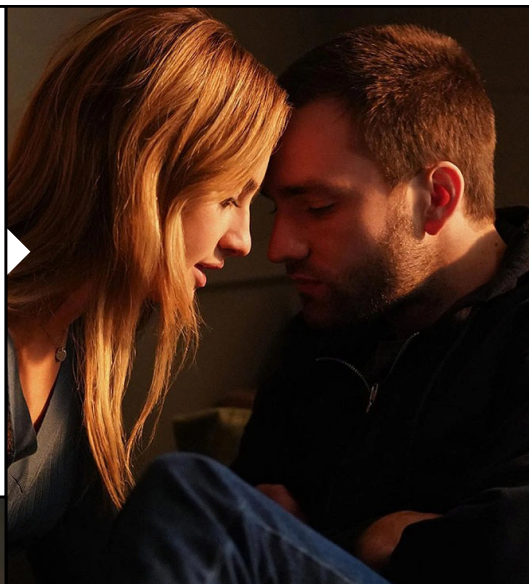
2032 and 2100 each have a big bad villain, but only one moves through his dusty domain with a recognizable monstrosity. There are people Flynnne connects with in both timelines, but in London she’s just a mind connected to a well-appointed robotic body – one that can feel pain, yes, and so we must assume the possibility of the opposite – but it’s only in North Carolina that Flynnne and her compatriots feel like people of flesh and bone. Here’s hoping the London segments don’t stay so bloodless.

– SARA CLEMENS

TELEVISION

TELL ME LIES – Hulu’s ongoing psychological drama is a dark confection. Students at a small liberal arts college in New England are socially united when an incoming first-year student is killed in a car crash. They pair off – the show has a lot of pretty explicit sex scenes – until more and more secrets come out about each of them and their group dynamics. The stars, Grace Van Patten and Jackson White, are next-generation Hollywood royalty. It’s a beautifully shot soap opera.

– CAROLINE DELBERT

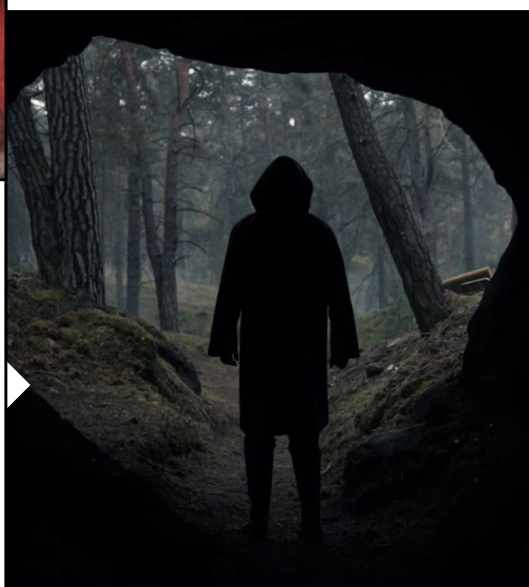


DAYS of the LIVING DEAD – A series about the craft of haunted house-making, this had a great deal of heart and a showcase of the technical prowess that goes into running a month-long attraction. The way everyone just loves what they’re doing comes across so cleanly that you just want to go there and see what’s happening.

– AMANDA HUDGINS

DARK – I’ve always been fond of those time traveling episodes in *Star Trek* where they so scrupulously avoid a paradox. I also find them slightly frustrating because paradoxes are interesting. Well, I won’t drop any spoilers, but *Dark* is all about exploring this particular possibility space and so if you’re into the slightly strange, this most definitely is the show for you.

– JUSTIN REEVE



GAMES



WEIRD WEST – *Weird West* is a sample platter of a game. It draws on the standard western and arcane flavors while occasionally providing the spice to differentiate its dishes from the rest. While it provides brief tastes of its world, those tastes only serve as appetizers for a main course that never comes. Worse, the sample platter format exacerbates a shallowness that is inappropriate for the topics *Weird West* engages with. *Weird West*'s breadth skirts around the challenges of infusing the West with magic.

Mechanically, *Weird West*'s sample platter provides interactions that are both generic and simplistic. The standard suite of stealth and gunplay is starchy and flavorless, feeling more like filler than a meaningful way to engage with the world. The game attempts to spice up these interactions through its seemingly varied characters, but these are spread thinly across its cast that fail to differentiate from each other. Any character's quirk is a surface decoration versus actually changing the flavor of handling *Weird West*'s encounters. Regardless of whether you are a bounty hunter or a werewolf, *Weird West* does not commit to placing you into its world.

This lack of commitment becomes a greater issue when engaging with the Western's cultural baggage – mainly issues regarding gender and colonialism. *Weird West* cannot

decide whether it wants to lean into egalitarian fantasy or misogynistic brutality, instead awkwardly wavering between the two. One character's campaign is a gender-reversal of a standard damsel-in-distress story, while another focuses heavily on gendered violence. Not only is this latter campaign a sudden left turn, but it does not engage with its violence over its brief narrative. The brief-yet-obvious twist is almost a punchline as your pigman protagonist turns out to be a pig of a man. It remains a shallow detour that only fragments *Weird West*'s world.

While the portrayal of gendered violence in *Weird West* is inconsistent, its attempts to frame colonialism in its magical Western setting are cowardly. During a brief section with an indigenous protagonist, *Weird West* constantly uses magic to redirect away from the colonialist violence that marks Western media and history. From relying on a magical motivator for the one indigenous group's westward travel to blaming colonial greed-fueled violence on wendigos, *Weird West* uses magic to escape the sour tastes that pervade the Western genre. It does not sit with the difficult questions – instead skirting around them before jumping into another vignette.

Whether it is to its mechanics or themes, *Weird West* does not commit to anything. Its vignette structure allows the player to only

GAMES

(continued from previous page)

taste its world, instead of grappling with its magical and troubling features. More importantly, the brevity and surface-level approach is unsuitable for the cultural complexities that come with the Western genre, even if it is modified with magic. It throws the player into multiple roles, but does not force the player to simmer in their intricacies. A sample platter may be useful for introducing different dishes, but it does not provide substance.

– WILLIAM DOWELL



FIND-A-FROG – Nardo23's hidden frogs game is part of an annual festival for frog fans. It's a quick, free, cute browser game that will make you the real frog detective. (See what I did there?)

– CARLOINE DELBERT

A PLAGUE TALE: REQUIEM – I have a couple of misgivings about the mechanics, but these amount to nothing more than a quibble in the grand scheme of things because what *A Plague Tale: Requiem* really has going for it are the environments. I mean, if you're at all into architecture, you really need to pick this one up. The first game in the series, *Innocence*, did a great job on this point and *Requiem* takes things a step further. You'll get to explore beautifully detailed castles, colosseums, farm houses, urban mansions and much, much more. *Requiem* takes place in medieval France, but the vestiges of ancient Rome are still ever present, something which provides a fascinating insight into how architecture is reused and repurposed over the course of time. The game is well worth a gander.

– JUSTIN REEVE



HOROSCOPE

JUPITER DIDN'T COME CLOSE
ENOUGH. WE'RE STILL SAFE. ♃