



THE PURITAN POST

| by Hank W. Mardukas |

This Week on TV

Castle Rock (Hulu)

After last season of *Castle Rock*, which I reviewed way back in our very first Issue and which I didn't particularly care for, I was hesitant to check out season 2. That said, *Castle Rock's* second season is an enormous step up from the first. *Mean Girls'* Lizzie Caplan leads the new cast as a version of the classic Stephen King character Annie Wilkes, made famous by Kathy Bates in *Misery*. The story revolves around her trying to control her psychotic urges in order to provide a "normal" life for her and her daughter, played by *Eighth Grade's* Elsie Fischer. If you weren't thrilled by season one, I highly recommend giving the new season of *Castle Rock* a chance.

Also This Week on TV

Wounds (Hulu)

Wounds is a movie which I went into with very little expectations but came out pleasantly surprised by. Arnie Hammer plays a directionless, pompous bartender who after witnessing a violent bar fight one night, recovers a mysterious phone left by some college kids. When he brings it home, he and his girlfriend played by Dakota Johnson discover it contains horrifyingly disturbing images of severed heads and dead bodies. What unfolds is a grotesquely distressing Body Horror mystery. I thought the acting from the two leads along with the supporting cast, including *Joker's* Zazie Beetz, was quite good. And while *Wounds* suffered from typical Horror tropes at times, I thought it was pretty solid and had an unsettling and memorable ending.

Director Spotlight: Dario Argento



Birth: 9/7/1940 Rome, Italy
Notable Works: *Suspiria*, *Inferno*, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, *The Cat o' Nine Tales*, *Deep Red*, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, *Opera*
Fun Facts: Owns a Horror museum and memorabilia store "Profondo Russo", named after his movie, in Rome.
 - Co-wrote Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* and was a script consultant on *Dawn of the Dead*.

THE PURITAN POST'S IV WEEKS of HALLOWEEN WEEK III: Review: MIDSOMMAR (2019)

The last Horror movie I saw I would consider to be an instant classic was probably *Get Out*. That was until I saw *Midsommar*, Ari Aster's impeccably unsettling and trippy follow up to his debut, *Hereditary*. *Midsommar* is a movie that I loved from start to finish. While there are a few Horror comps such as *The Wicker Man*, it was really unlike anything I've ever seen before. Not only is *Midsommar* one of the best movies I've seen all year, but it is also one of the best Horror flicks ever made.

The movie follows a young woman named Dani (Florence Pugh), who after losing her entire family in a tragic murder-suicide, tags along with her boyfriend (Jack Reynor) and his group of friends to a bizarre festival in Sweden only to find that is part of a sinister pagan cult. Aster himself categorizes the movie as a "breakup" film, as Reynor's Christian character is already trying to breakup with Dani prior to the tragedy that unfolds in her life. As we enter the eccentric, occult world in Sweden, their relationship continues to deteriorate and we grow more and more empathetic with Dani. The script, based loosely upon personal experiences of Aster, works marvelously, playing upon the "dumb Americans abroad" Horror trope we've seen before in movies like *Hostel*. The movie excels brilliantly in telling Dani's story, continuing to build her up and break Christian and his mostly unlikable friends down, ultimately building to a satisfyingly grotesque and empowering ending.

From a technical perspective, *Midsommar* is phenomenally well made; with everything from the gorgeous, ethereal cinematography; the sure-handed, stunning direction; and otherworldly production design each working together in perfect harmony. All the technical elements play a part in engrossing you in the psychedelic and ominous world Aster has contrived. The terrific cast of actors do their part in cementing the distinct tone and startling realism of the movie as well. The aforementioned Pugh is the true standout of the picture, with an emotional range that is unparalleled to most actresses her age. I expect her to garner some much deserved awards recognition this winter. Reynor and his friends all fill their roles as the de facto antagonists of the film rather nicely as well. Among them, Will Poulter, who plays Mark, certainly separates himself from the rest, adding some much needed brevity in the form of well-timed comedic relief that was sorely lacking in Aster's debut film.

I am now trying to get ahold of the extended Director's Cut of *Midsommar*, which they temporarily re-released in theaters and is now apparently exclusive to Apple TV. The cut features a whopping 30 minutes of new footage, which I would personally love to see. When a director has as distinct and unique of a cinematic vision as Aster, I really wish that A24 would've allowed him to release his full intended story from the get-go. In the short span of two feature films, Ari Aster has cemented himself as one of the most visionary and original storytellers the Horror genre and cinema as a whole have seen in quite some time. Aided by a fantastic crew and a tremendous cast led by Florence Pugh, *Midsommar* is a singular, haunting fairy tale any Horror fan should see.

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