

QLH-S3E3: Nightmare Alley (2021)

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SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers



Jessi Chartier 00:04

Welcome to Quiet Little Horrors. Here we talk about the films that creep under your skin and take up residence in the dark.



Jen Myers 00:17

We talk about movies. So we're going to talk about parts of movies that may be spoilers. If that doesn't bother you, you can keep on listening. Or you can hit the pause button and go watch the films that we're talking about before you continue here. Consider yourself warned.



Jessi Chartier 00:35

Let's talk about 2021's Nightmare Alley. Stan, a drifter, finds himself attracted to the con artistry of a few carnival sideshow acts. After learning the secrets to successfully swindling people, Stan and his new wife Molly hustle the elite of Buffalo, New York with a wildly successful nightclub act of mentalism. However, Stan finds himself hatching a new con with a local psychologist which unravels his whole life. There are so many good actors in this film. Yeah, and I have so many thoughts about the movie. I don't know how we're gonna cram this all in together.



Jen Myers 01:13

Yeah, I'm really glad that we I feel like we got a head start on some of the big themes and topics and the mini. And I think we kind of need that. Because yeah, there's, there's a lot to talk about here. Yeah, well, can I can I just start out by saying, I think I told you this, when we start talking about doing this, I feel like I should do a disclaimer. I really love this film. But I think it just because it is like so squarely hit the exact center of like my interest and my sensibilities, that it was just like, I don't even know if I can discuss it that objectively. It was just like, oh, they made this film for me. And it's just like, Oh, that was so nice to them to do that. And

there's a part of me is like, I don't even know how to discuss this objectively. But I think that you're right, like a big. So that's all to say, I was really looking forward to this film for a lot of reasons. And I do a huge reasons, what you just said is like the cast is phenomenal. And when they announced who was going to be in this, I'm like, Okay, I'm just even more excited for this than I was. But it's yeah, it's quite a list.

J Jessi Chartier 02:15

It is quite a list. And what I love about this particular version is that, at least compared to the the 47 version of it, the characters each have so much more depth than the 47 version of it. There are things I love about the 47 version that I don't love about the 2021 version.

J Jen Myers 02:38

But that's okay. You're also allowed to not like things I won't take it personally.

J Jessi Chartier 02:43

No, it's fine. This film. So here's what I really loved this version of the film. I don't think it's a horror film. I think it is a thriller, an opulent thriller, because it is gorgeous. I mean, everything that Guillermo del Toro does is amazing. from a visual standpoint, it's just beautiful. The colors, the costumes, the sets, the component, like the composition of the shots, like everything is just beautiful. And then when you add amazing acting to it, it's just, it's breathtaking. There were some things in the movie, though, that I felt like were hyper saturated when it comes to the storyline. And I don't know if that was because they were trying to stay true to the book. I don't know if they were trying to adjust it for a more modern audience. I don't know if it's just the style of the artistry within this, the collection of people that were making this film, so I mean, I loved it, but there are also parts where it's like

J Jen Myers 03:50

I mean, that's, that's fair. Although it is interesting that you mentioned that you weren't 100% buying this as a horror film. Consider that, like you mentioned, it is directed by Guillermo del Toro, who is known mostly as a horror director. So I'd be interested to you know, if you have anything more to kind of expand on that what like what didn't hit for you in terms or are you thinking that instead of horror, it was really just more thriller?

J Jessi Chartier 04:14

Yeah, I think it was just more thriller for me. Like the typically when I think about a horror film, I tend to think about the psychological exposure and vulnerability of an of the main character. And although the main character did have some exposure here, it wasn't as it wasn't as direct or as exploratory. As some of the other films that we have on this podcast like the relic or what's another one that we've done in the past that was just as exploratory or even Carnival of Souls? Like I felt like that there was there's that's a bad one to compare it to because carnival

Souls was kind of a weird film that was an off budget film, maybe like wake in fright. Yeah. like wake in fright. That's a great example. Like that was truly an exploration of psychology and being very, very raw, right? This movie, I felt like, which again, I don't dislike the movie. It's brilliant. Like, it was like we were conned in the car. The whole movie is like one big fat con you follow through, right? So from a craft standpoint, it's, it's perfect. It's just mwah, right? Like, it's great. But from a horror standard horror film, and I just don't I don't think it hit. I do think it hit film noir.

J Jen Myers 05:35

I was just gonna say like, this is like a perfect opening to talk about the connections between or differences. Where does film noir and and horror began or vice versa?

J Jessi Chartier 05:46

I think film noir for me is a little bit more sanitized. Hmm. It's packaged in a little bit easier of a pill to swallow. I feel like horror should make you feel uncomfortable. And filmed to new ours should make you feel curious. Interesting. Yeah. And so I think that that's but again, those are fine lines. And those are surjective fine lines, you know, what's curiosity to some is horrid others, you know, yeah.

J Jen Myers 06:15

And that's an interesting thing, because I don't know, if I, if I, I feel like this film really did interest me. And where's that precise intersection between noir and horror, like I mentioned in the mini, I'm a huge fan of film noir, and have been watching that, you know, extensively for very long time, I've actually, I actually consider myself to be much more well versed in film, film noir than like horror, for example, which is something that's a little bit newer to me that I've you know, really only been immersing myself in for the past few years when it comes to film. So this film that this film, particularly I felt like I was living in that intersection, although I have a really hard time kind of defining, again, where the line is, and whether it's like one or the other. For me, I feel like it ended up I don't think it is in one or the other. For me, I think maybe that's one of the reasons that I liked it is because I feel like it walks that line. And that's what intrigued me about it is that I hadn't really thought about. So a film that is neither nor no horror, but it just lives in that on that line between the two. And I kind of felt like that with this movie. It really, it really grabbed me because I think it activated all the things that I love about noir, and just gave it some some touches that, you know, pushed a little bit more towards the horror line that I really enjoy. How you know, but having said that, I don't know if the horror touches were deep, or if they were superficial. Because I do think there are a lot of kind of typical, for lack of a better term, you know, kind of typical horror trappings. In this film, I feel like carnival imagery has been maybe a little bit overused in horror, and things like there's things like in the kind of final con that goes wrong. In the end, when Stan is trying to present Molly as an actual ghost to his mark who's is desperate to see his his dead wife, you know, it's very, like kind of fake, bloody and Gothic. So there's like these touches that are in there. But those are, those are definitely kind of like touches on, you know, I think the foundation of it is definitely more than noirish, I think but I don't know, I think ultimately I just kind of became

fascinated by the fact that you could combine those two things in a way. And that for me personally is more interesting in more interesting than the question of whether or not they actually succeeded with it.

J Jessi Chartier 08:41

Yeah, I just think that there was maybe for me, it's the fact that there's like, closure. Or it's like there's a clear like, I don't know how to explain it. But there's there's almost like a stronger close in this movie than in our other films. Like I think about like images, for example. No, like, images isn't like there. In most of the films we have. There's no like suspense. Scares, there's no you know, there's very little of that. It's more about just the demise of someone's psychology and I feel like here we don't really have that we're just we're a little bit more distant from the from the characters.

J Jen Myers 09:24

Well, I think there's definitely no suspense, right? Because I think that's what we're here is it's almost like we get a Shakespearean prologue or like a Greek chorus. In the beginning, it says, Hey, this is what's happening in this movie. And it doesn't happen literally. But if you know anything about film, or you don't even need to know this particular story, if you know anything about film noir, the way we talked a little bit about how in the 1947 version, they seem to try to soften Stan's character and not you know, like they make him they give him some plausible deniability for having actually caused Pete's death and things like that. In the new movie they not only do they make that totally clear, they add other things like they implicate him in his father's murder, and covering it up and things like that. And that's where it begins. So we, I don't know, I feel I feel like the 2021 Nightmare Alley. It's not about suspense or kind of like figuring things out. It's I think it's it's not a what it's a how it's kind of like, we know from the very beginning that this man is going to be systematically dismantled, in equal measure for his overreaching and what he has his missteps. And that's what it's about. It's about how that happens. So it's it's not there's no like mystery about what is going to happen. It's just about how it's going to happen. And it reinforces the sense of inevitability about the darkness that's inside people. I guess, if there's any curiosity, that's what I find interesting, because I think that's something that we're not typically, I don't know, like, into when it comes to our stories, you know, we always want the glimmer of hope we always want some ambiguity to it's interesting that you mentioned earlier that the horse should make you uncomfortable, because I think it's, I find it far more uncomfortable to be kind of faced with that grim inevitability of there is no escape, what dark seeds are in you are going to, you know, bloom and poison and take everything down. And there's no way around that. And I find that extremely uncomfortable in a way that I don't think that we let film usually be.

J Jessi Chartier 11:39

Yeah, that's a really good point. And maybe I've just been watching too much X Files because I feel like that's, that's a that's a truism throughout all of the X Files series. But like, one of the things that I don't know, it's interesting, because I often think that I don't know, it's just weird. I connected more with the characters on the 47. One than I did from this one, because

J Jen Myers 12:01

totally fair. Yeah. I'm not trying to argue out of any of that. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

J Jessi Chartier 12:05

Yeah, exactly. I think that each film appeals to different elements of it, you know, like, sure, like the inevitability of Stan's downfall was very, for me, it was kind of like, Oh, we've got a bad guy. Clear, you know, clear is clear can be, but in 1947, like, bad stuff can happen to mediocre people. And I think that, that it was kind of what stood out to me is like, nobody in the 1947 was good or bad. They were just kind of moving through life making decisions as they arose, versus the 2021 version. It was like, something is going to happen. Yeah. You know,

J Jen Myers 12:54

yeah, I think that's also something I can I feel like maybe if there's any kind of distinction I can draw between the film noir aspects and the horror aspects is that I feel like typical noir does have a little it definitely has kind of, like, you know, there's some inevitability and darkness inside you coming out and stuff like that. But I think like, it's like you mentioned that it tends to be external circumstances, like the universe is setting up people. Right. And there are definitely some classic noirs, you know, the, the characters, kind of sometimes they're worse than others are a little bit grayer than others. There's definitely some ones that have like completely innocent people who just keep getting set up by circumstance like Detour, and you know, they keep kind of just maybe making the mistake in the moment, but it's much more clearly of like, the universe is going after this dude. And I think that horror, that's not necessarily what word does sometimes, like I think it does, if we talk about, like, typical slashers and stuff like that, but the stuff that we usually talk about is the reverse. It's more of psychological stuff coming from within. And that's where I feel like the 2021 Nightmare Alley isn't it's not external. Even though external things happen, it's not a hapless do-gooder, who just you know, being thwarted by the universe at every turn. It's a very careful deliberate story about somebody who has already orchestrated his own downfall. And yet it doesn't it's not going to stop until he like sees it through and so I feel like that's it has the film noir trappings but the heart of it I don't think is as noir as it is horror, because it is more about the kind of the psychological, I don't know I feel like you could even make the argument that Stan knows himself knows this is all going to happen. But he can't stop there's just he has to have to do this. And I don't know there's something something in there I guess. But it is it is slippery. But I think that is the main difference between the two films is kind of this kind of like external internal type compulsions?


J Jessi Chartier 14:57

Yeah, yeah, I think you're right. I think that that is the biggest comparison between the two, I do want to talk a little bit about how some of that because it's so much more clear in the 2021 that the ego is what's going to kill Stan. Like, that's just gonna, like, make him fall apart and reduce him to the lowest version of himself that he can, which is the geek, right? It's just it's such interesting thing. Let's talk about that. Let's talk about the carnival culture and how that

kind of adds to the flavor here. I do this. So I did not know the history of the geek, huh, until I saw the 1947 version, which was the first version of this I saw. And I found it fascinating. And I also found it incredibly horrible and horrific, because

 Jen Myers 15:44


There will be a fun, if there's anybody listening who also does not quite know the history of the geek, that's going to be a really fun Wikipedia journey for you. So go ahead and do that. But also now cuz we got to talk about it. Yeah, but we can summarize it. Yeah.

 Jessi Chartier 15:59

Yeah. So the the whole idea of the geek in the in the carnival was it was it was character that would do very violent things like rip chickens heads off and drink their blood. They were supposed to be base, animalistic. It's like what would happen if you took a human and stripped all levels of humanity from them, and they became very Neanderthal but even less neat, Neanderthal like, just like true, true base humanity.

 Jen Myers 16:32

Yeah. And let's even how, like in the 2021 movie, they they talk about the, the person in the film, in the sense of like, I think they weave this mythology around them, like they found them in the jungle somewhere, you know, it's like, like, this is a creature that just came that way that it's not a human that's been reduced to this level, but they found like a not quite human creature somewhere. And that's what this is, you know, I think that's the kind of the stories they weave around it.

 Jessi Chartier 16:58

Yeah, it's like a feral human. Yeah, that is the story they weave around it now in the movies. And we think the book, we can't verify that because I honestly haven't read the book. But the narrative around the geek in this particular storyline is that they are often someone who is just desperate for a job, often an addict of some way, shape or form, that they will basically do anything for to meet their their needs or their addiction. And so it becomes very exploitative of whoever is in that position. Now in the movie, they use this to their advantage, because they say that you can never get any worse than a geek that it is like the lowest of the lowest level. And that in the 2021 version. Willem Dafoe has this great little monologue over a dinner where he explains how you find a gig and how you get a gig and it's you find someone who's at their and their wit's end, and you tell them that's only temporary, you basically con them into playing the geek. And then you get them addicted to opioids, right heroin of some sort at the time, right? You get them addicted, and then they are dependent on that addiction, and they will do anything that they need to in order to feed that addiction. So you have your geek, then it's very inhumane.

 Jen Myers 18:20

Jen Myers 18:58

Yeah, and just a quick note, I have read the original novel, although it's been a minute, so I looked this up and double checked that that speech does come from the novel, that all those details about how a geek is created is from the novel and just want to throw out here that the the author of the original Nightmare Alley novel William Lindsay Gresham based this on his own experiences. So while it's not like verified, there's no way to verify it, there's a really good chance that that literally came from reality. And he just put it in his book. So just to horrify everybody about the state of the world, there's a really good chance that that whole thing described a real process that was that actually happened to people.

J Jessi Chartier 18:58

Yeah, and it was it was I was gonna say it was a real carnival act like, oh,

J Jen Myers 19:03

It was gnarly.

J Jessi Chartier 19:04

Yeah, this was not just designed for fiction. It's nonfiction. Exactly. But I think that one of the things that we see talking about like the you mentioned that you succumb to your fate, in this movie that is Stan's fate is that he becomes the geek which I found really interesting, because in the original, and the original film, and I don't know what happens in the in the book, but in the original film, he becomes the geek but then he reconnects with his wife, and you get the impression that they might become the next Zeena and Pete, they might that he might be able to get out of the geekdom and move into just being an alcoholic like not being so there's like, not a level of hope. But there's a level of cyclical nature to all of this. Right? And in the 2021 version, however, it is just it's just utter despair. Stan just ends up the geek.

J Jen Myers 20:04

Yes, no, yeah. Again, I'm refreshing my memory on the novel because I it's been a little while since I read it. But I think it is important to mention that the 2021 Nightmare Alley is not intended as a remake of the 47 movie, it is is one of those deals where they're going back to the original source material and making a new adaptation, which is not to say that they didn't like or was disrespecting the 1947 version at all. In fact, I think I read somewhere that Tyrone Power, who plays stand in the the original movie, his daughter is like an extra in Nightmare Alley 2021. And so they like it. But I think that yeah, they definitely had the intention, as far as I understand, to go back to the original novel. And so yeah, I think the original novel is much more of the cycle of geek-to-geek thing. And so I think that's why the movie is so heavy. And in that particular kind of fatalism also, like, I'm gonna throw this in here. Just another thing about the the author of the novel that I think is is kind of interesting in this particular discussion. So William Lindsay Gresham died by suicide in the same hotel where he wrote a lot of this novel. And when they found his body, there were a business card, there was no notes, but business cards are found in his pocket. And one of them read: "no address, no phone, no business, no

money, retired." And that's it. That was the way he died. So wow, I just think that there is something there was something definitely dark, I think, in the author of this novel, and I think it was in the novel. And I think that going back to that source material to make this movie, I think that there is just this core of inevitable doom and dark fate. That is just that is the core of the story, I think. And I think that that's in this film, and it is it's, it's awful, and it's inevitable, and it's doom-ridden and bleak as hell. And I think that is legitimately what the core of the story is.

J Jessi Chartier 22:09

Yeah, I think you're right. I think that there's, I don't think I could add anything to that you haven't covered.

J Jen Myers 22:16

It's just Yeah, I think just the tagline is bleak as hell. That's just it.

J Jessi Chartier 22:22

Bleak as hell. And you know, it's interesting, because what I mean, when you just every acting, every actors portrayal of what's going on in their lives is just so spot on. It's just such a good cast. Mm hmm.

J Jen Myers 22:35

Did you have a favorite I can throw in that in this is kind of just because I like her so much. But I really liked Toni Collette

J Jessi Chartier 22:45

was great. She was just a character. She

J Jen Myers 22:48

was really good. Well, and it's also I have to say, though, in the 40s 1947 version, that characters you know, is played by Joan Blondel, who I also think is one of the best parts of that film like is really great. So that I think they just managed to knock it out of the park with both of these actresses, doing same roles, obviously, with slightly different sensibilities, because they're different people in different times in different films. But yeah, I think that I think the only thing in this film is that you I think, you often feel that some of the actors, you want more of them, because there's just so many great people in it. Like you couldn't pass if you if you got as an as much as you wanted from everybody. The film would be like eight hours long. Yeah, but she's definitely one you I think you feel that you would like to see more of

J Jessi Chartier 23:29

100%. And I feel like that we like her because she is probably the most authentic and grounded. of the characters we see. She doesn't have any she doesn't have a hustle.

J Jen Myers 23:40

She has learned how to navigate without compromising herself. And even just things that are kind of like, like, she's come to peace with even those things that other people might find suspect like she very clearly wrong. They really only hint of this in the 47 version. But I think in the 2021 was a lot clearer that she is sleeping with Stan, even though she's married to her husband, but it also is really clear that she still really loves her husband. He's just beyond her in certain ways. And so she's figured out this is the way that she needs to live her life and she very kind of comfortably and confidently does that. And it is an interesting thing to see.

J Jessi Chartier 24:19

Yes, yes, it is that I think that that's You nailed it right on the head. She like she just she knows how to navigate the world. I also really did also like David Strathcom or Strathern. Who played Pete Yes, I'm my only other exposure to him was in The Expanse.

J Jen Myers 24:34

He's one of those guys okay, I know I've seen in several things and I don't not one particular is jumping out to me but he is very good in this

J Jessi Chartier 24:42

he also and he I feel like those two Zeena and Pete, Toni and David, play really well together? Because he's in the same boat. Yeah. He's in the exact same boat. He's like I've learned to navigate. This is what the reality is. I think it's one of the reasons He goes out to drink when when Stan comes in for a bath, like,

J Jen Myers 25:03

I think that they I think like goes, yeah. Oh, yeah, totally. I


J Jessi Chartier 25:07

think he knows too, because he's friendly with Stan. Mm. Yeah. And like, I don't know, I just think that that those two together, whatever direction they were given about how to play off of each other, or how to play in their characters, it worked like it worked just really, really, really


well. Yeah, I mean, and Cate Blanchett always amazing. And, you know, Bradley Cooper is always amazing, but I really liked the dynamic and how the characters were represented of Zeena and Pete.

 Jen Myers 25:33


Yeah, well, I mean, but I think that just what you mentioned the last two that we could go into, I think we want to talk a little bit more about the differences in the characters of Stan and Lilith, as compared to the 47 version in this one because there's a there's some pretty big a lot of these characters and plot points carryover from the first film to this the second film, but there's a huge difference that we felt I know, we've chatted about this earlier, and the way Lilith is portrayed. I don't know. Did you want to take that?

 Jessi Chartier 26:04

I got so many thoughts.

 Jen Myers 26:05

Oh, I know. Thought I'd pass it over to you.

 Jessi Chartier 26:07

Okay. So, Stan, and Lilith in the first movie, were portrayed as just straight up con artists, that they both were driven by power and money. That's it. And I loved that about it because they were on equal footing. And that the the only thing that was different was that Lilith was smarter than Stan she had an out she had a record. So she recorded all of the sessions she had was Stan. And at any point in time, she could pull the ripcord and be like, You're delusional. I'm a psychiatrist, the world is going to believe me, I'm going to say that to the world that you're insane. And they're all going to believe me, because I've got this degree behind me, and there's nothing you can do about it. So like she had a clear out. And that allowed her to hustle, Stan if she needed to, which she did, she did at the end. And so her and Stan's motivations were identical. And I kind of liked that because it was like, there. So when Stan ended up becoming the geek and ended up behind, like, I guess, coming to his own fate, it felt more unfair, it felt more. Because the world's not fair. Right? Like it just it felt more. I don't want to say authentic because that's not the right word. But it did it felt more real, like people sometimes are just greedy. But in 2021 Stan, who still is the con artist driven by money and power, Lilith is driven by revenge. She's driven by vengeance, like she has orchestrated this whole chessboard, in order to get revenge on a man who definitely deserved to be punished. Don't want to give that any kind of leeway, definitely deserved to be punished. But because she had her own agenda that was very clear and very justifiable. The downfall of Stan felt more like here's what it is, it felt less like betrayal. And more like it was just part of the plan from the beginning.

 Jen Myers 28:14

Jen Myers 28:11

I think it was part of the plan. Like I think that I in fact, I I focus less on Lilith wanted to get I mean, I agree with you. 100% I think that her character in the more recent film is entirely based on vengeance, like there is not a you don't get a sense of just greed or wanting to con people in that. But I also think that she very deliberately wants to destroy Stan Oh 100% But I'd rather was the main thing I picked up on because their first interaction and this happens the same way and in the novel in the the first movie to where their interaction is when Stan and Molly have their high class nightclub act or they're doing kind of the same things that they did in the carnival except now they're doing them in fancy dresses in a nightclub with people with lots of money. And he based San basically shows up Lilith there. And you can see for a moment like she does not like to be showed up by a man and public like that. But I don't think I mean, at least me I didn't quite realize how much she had held on to that until the end when you realize that she I think she had been harboring that the whole time. And like I almost feel that maybe her desire to get revenge on stage was even stronger than anything else. Or maybe it just nicely aligned with getting revenge on Grindle. But she she just she's vicious. She's absolutely vicious and she she doesn't want to hurt Stan she wants to completely destroy him, like so ferocious and so huge. Like it's it's such a that's what's like feels like the biggest departure because that is not in the 47 version at all. Like you said, Lilith in the 1947 version is much more it's not

J

Jessi Chartier 28:14

and I think what I liked about the 47 version. I mean, yeah, What I liked actually better about the seven for the 47 version in regards to those two relationships is that Lilith ended up doing to stand with Stan ended up doing Tamale and what Stan did to like everybody else. It was just like use them until they're no longer useful. Yeah. And Lilith in the 2021 version was much more she that was not the case. She was just like, I'm just going to use you for my end, which is fair. But people usually aren't that. I don't know, I think I'm more disturbed by the casual nature of the 47 version, which is much more commonplace. Is it? For people to just? I do I think so. I think that we're really

J

Jen Myers 30:46

what what you're saying, but I'm not? I'm not sure. Well, here's the thing. I think the differences like we're talking about, like people's motivations, right? Right. So and I totally get what you're saying. Like, there is something really chilling about this more straightforward, just straight up greed. Like, I don't really care. I'm just using it but I don't know if I feel like that has helped. I think people tend to act more from internal emotions, whether they're aware of it or not. And to me, I feel like it's the opposite. It seems more realistic to me that somebody would be ruining another person because they just freakin feel like it you know, as opposed to it being this like, I don't know, again, maybe this is no, it says a lot about experiences in the world. But you know, as opposed to this, like, cool, dispassionate I'm just doing this thing, which I agree like, that is in some ways more chilling. Um, but yeah, I don't know, I found the the second Lillith to actually be a little bit more realistic because I feel like I know of more cases where people do that. I think the only realistic thing is that she had this white hot hatred that she then and then she systematically pursued this very deliberate plan. Cool-headedly. That seems to be the only really unrealistic thing but the like, the actual emotions that I don't know, it makes more sense to me. But But yeah, I think both are pretty scary, though, right?

J Jessi Chartier 32:14

Both are pretty scary. Because the 1947 version reminds me of mean girls like it just it's something that's just so commonplace and almost acceptable to just be so dismissive. Again, so I'm just going to use you for what I want and then just abandon you. Right. I do think that Lilith in the 2021 version is also terrifying. And I will say, I loved Cate Blanchett portrayal or her acting better than I loved the 47 version. I think, definitely more.

J Jen Myers 32:48

Yeah, they, give her more in 2021 version. Yeah.

J Jessi Chartier 32:54

Yeah. 100%. And I love how in the scene where she's actually betrayed Stan, at the end. You that Cate Blanchett portrays Lilith as being genuinely scared. Yes, but still going through with it. Right. Like her mannerisms, her voice trembles her mannerisms are shaky. She like stumbled a little bit as she's just walking away. Like, it is clear that she is using every ounce of energy to keep herself together. And I think that that is brilliant. That is a brilliant acting capability to be able to portray that. So I will give a shout out that I do think that the demonstration of the characters arc in regards to emotional state, the acting is far superior. I just like I just like the cooled disconnect. I'm more chilled by the cool disconnection in the other 47 version than I am about this highly organized, very calculated kind of plan of attack to destroy these two men. It just it feels it feels more cinematic, versus the 47 version, which is like oh yeah, I've known lots of people who have been assholes like that.

J Jen Myers 34:14

Make sense? Yeah, I think maybe in the 2021 version, I think it I think this is very subtle, and it could be could just be me projecting onto this but I also got a hint of like, I think I felt like one of the reasons that Lilith just like got so angry when it's a relatively minor thing he does show show her up in you know, in front of this crowd, but like, you know, if you have a healthy self esteem, it's not that big of a deal, but she's just like freaked out internally right? But I do I got the impression that maybe there was a little bit of like, How dare a man do this to me. I have worked so hard. I'm a doctor. I have money. I you know, I'm on my own. I got a sense that it was a little bit of like, she was prepared to just straw men in general. Yes. Like she's just was, you know, she's just like is like a tiger lying and wait. And the minute they disrespect her, she's like, Oh, okay, you're my next target, that sort of thing. And I feel like that played into her plan because I feel like there was an element of that with Grindle especially when we consider that. So Grindle is the the big fish that she treats as a psychiatry patient, and that Stan starts swindling. And his Grindle's big thing is that his young wife died after a botched abortion that he had pushed her to. Yes, which is also has implications for so there's a reason that if Lewis wanted to destroy him, the you know, there are some it all ties in right, it all ties into this idea that also in the 2021 version, there's a scene where Lilith reveals his scars she has on her chest from abuse and things like that. So I got this sense with her that she's almost like this kind of, she just basically wants to destroy men, because she's been hurt. And she's seen, you know,

things hurt in the past. And I feel like Stan stumbled into that trap. So I feel like her anger with him is less about him specifically and more with him as a symbol of men who do that sort of thing. And she's just like, not having it. And not that this is an all a healthy way to deal with that sort of thing. But there is something that is kind of in a cinematic way compelling about that, right?

J Jessi Chartier 36:27

Yes. Yeah, I agree. I there is something cinematic about it. Like I said, I think it's beautiful. I think the thing that just like I'm more terrified by the reality, like the cool reality of the 47 Virgin versus the it's like watching Ocean's 11. Right? Like, I love Ocean's 11. The likelihood of that ever happening is so low.

J Jen Myers 36:47

That makes sense. I totally get that. Yeah. Although that is interesting, because it makes me think a little bit more about our specific conversation about film, noir versus horror. This is so great, because those are two really difficult words to say and keep saying them a lot. So but yeah, maybe that's something where it does. Or if they're thinking about it in more of a horror mindset, they're like, how can we play this up cinematically? Because I do think that is something that Del Toro is good at those kind of, you know, very cinematic flourishes. And I think this is an example of that in character. Yeah.

J Jessi Chartier 37:20

Yeah. Agreed. Agreed. Well, sweet enough. Let's talk a little bit about the ending. Yeah. With with Stan. Now, one of the things that that you were mentioning earlier, is that you really like the idea that Stan is kind of becoming an into his typical form. And I tend to see it as I don't know, falling. Just the slippery slope of the moment, your ego gets the best of you. Mm hmm. Because he decided to do the spook show regardless, even though everybody told him not to. But you want to talk a little bit about about that, especially since we talked a little bit about how new are is often like about justice? Yeah.

J Jen Myers 37:59

So I mean, and I think also, I'll just quickly like, kind of summarize what does happen even though again, we spoilers all over the place. And we talked about this a little bit in the mini, there is similarity of ending between this in the 47 version in terms of like, what happens, which is what happens is that, you know, the the high class stuff goes wrong, he gets betrayed by Lilith, Molly leaves him. And so he descends into alcoholism, and one day shows up on the doorstep of a carnival. And in the 2021 version, he has that beginning of the talk that he had early on with Willem Dafoe about how they get geeks. And, and, you know, he except he's on the other side of it now. And the carnival owner is like, Oh, this is just a temporary thing, right. And, you know, he Stan starts just laughing, sadly, uncontrollably. And he's like, I was born for this. And that's the end of the film and the 2021 version. And like, we talked, I think we talked about this in the mini a little bit, just to kind of compare and contrast. It's different than the 47

version, where, like you mentioned, I feel like the 47 version might it shows Molly, it shows maybe there's a little bit of hope for redemption or anything like that. But in this version, yeah, he's completely alone. He is just accepting his fate. And that's the way it's gonna be in it's super, super dark and depressing. But yeah, I feel like that is, you know, we talked about how film noir usually? Well, and I think it's a function of the time period that film noir came in, it usually did end with some sort of like sense of justice, like something had to be set. Right. And I think that's part of it, because they had production codes where you weren't allowed to show criminals getting away with anything. There had to be some sort of punishment at the end. It's why like, I think the most famous example I learned is in *Detour*, he isn't actually caught at the end. But I think that they wouldn't let the film go out that way. So they had to add the sequence where he's like, imagining in the future, he's like, one day I know I'm going to get picked up, you know, that sort of thing. And that's how they got around the code. So like, they were really strict that they had to show people being punished for bad things. And so there's a lot of that in film noir. But this is different. This isn't like the cops coming to find Stan. And you know, he's not going through court and being put in prison. He's it's kind of like the universe's retribution. Or even beyond that. It is like it's it literally says, he says he recognizes I was born for this, like, there was something rotten in him from the beginning. And now there's no more escaping it. Like he just he has to stop running now, which is a different thing than justice. Right. It's it's way darker and more depressing. And this one just goes all the way with that. But it it follows the the tone of the film, I think so it kind of fits in that way.

J Jessi Chartier 40:52

I think you're absolutely right. I think that there's Yeah, just the descent, you know. And it's interesting, because in the first book, or the first book, The first movie, the last line Stan has was when he says, Do you think you could be the geek or whatever the question is, in the first movie, he says, sort of like something like I was made for it. Hmm. But then the second was, I was born for it. So I think that that plays into your theory around like, Yeah, this is his inevitability, right? Versus this is his making. This is his own making. Yes.

J Jen Myers 41:27

Yeah, exactly. It's the internal external thing, even though like his making his things he's deciding it's kind of like, inspired or the way that the world has pushed him to those circumstances. Right. And in 2021 version, it's it's very clearly it's like, no, this was always him. This was always his fate. This was always inside him. All he was doing his whole life was running away from it. And now he's done running. And that's it.

J Jessi Chartier 41:55

That's exactly right. And I you know, I love Bradley Cooper's acting. Now, I know, everyone's like, Oh my god, he was amazing. And *A Star Is Born*, which I've never seen. Don't be hater, people. Don't be haters.

J Jen Myers 42:08

I haven't either. Actually, I hadn't seen him in a lot of stuff

I haven't either. Actually, I hadn't seen him in a lot of stuff.

J Jessi Chartier 42:11

I have no desire to see a star is born. But that's also because I've lost friends to addiction. I've lost friends to suicide. So like, I don't need to relive that. So

J Jen Myers 42:22

No, that's totally fair. I haven't seen it. I'm always just not going to see it because I just don't get it.

J Jessi Chartier 42:28

It's just, it's not something that I really want to see. But I will say that watching this movie, I can understand why people love him as an actor. Like, when we got to the end his last scene, like I was exhausted for him as an actor. Like the amount of talent he had to bring to the table. I mean, this is true of everyone right now, even Cate Blanchett, but I felt it in that last line, just because it was the last line. But he did a really great job of just being incredibly powerful and subtle in his subtle because the first, like 10-15 minutes of the movie, he doesn't have any lines. It's all just a nonverbal acting. Mm hmm. And so it's um it's great. I just think it's yeah, it's just it's phenomenal. So shout out to all the actors on this film because they did a phenomenal job across the board.

J Jen Myers 43:16

I think so too. I will add as a kind of a funny note real quick is I haven't seen Bradley Cooper in a lot of things. But it just so happened that I saw this movie on Christmas Day in the theaters. And exactly a day before, Christmas Eve, I had gone to see Licorice Pizza, which Bradley Cooper plays a very small, completely unhinged comedic character in like, could not imagine anything further from this role. And I saw these two movies in two days of each other. And it was a very bizarre experience, especially not having seen much of his work previously.

J Jessi Chartier 43:52

He's definitely a ventriloquist. Like, he's, he's a he's a very good actor, because you he loses like, you can't. It's easy to forget who he is when you're watching the films.

J Jen Myers 44:01

Yeah, it was fun. But yeah, no, I think he did a good job with this. It's and like he said, it's a difficult thing. I think that there would be a, an impulse to soften it up, you know, and I'm kind of glad that nobody did that. I kind of glad that they let it be this bleak, because I think that's what kind of gives this film. You know, a little I don't know, whatever makes it kind of unique, I

think is that because I think it would have been really easy to succumb to the temptation to to soften the edges out or anything like that to make it a little bit easier in this way or not. And it it doesn't and I I don't know if I enjoy it. I think I enjoy it, but I respect it. Beyond any other feelings about it.

J Jessi Chartier 44:43

I think that's one of the reasons I really respect del Toro's films is because he has the ability to craft something that is credibly fantastical, but with wild keeping, clarity of reality, drawing so that it feels it feels right on the border of reality and fantastical. And it blurs the lines a little bit. And I think that that's really, really hard to do. Like I think of movies like, and I love Martin Scorsese, too. So please take this with a grain of salt. But like, Hugo was a great film, but it was very fantastical because it needed to be because that was the storyline that it was telling, right. It was meant to be cinematic. But I feel like del Toro's films are almost like living comic books. Mm hmm. Like, they've got richness to them both in depth and character. He's not afraid to make them to explore all the nooks and crannies of humanity, while keeping that that fantastical element around it like Pan's Labyrinth is a great example. Yes. And so I think that he brought that here in a beautiful way. So it's, it's a great film. You know, I it's, this is one of those comparisons that we we've often talked about, where it's like, I have likes and dislikes. But that's all they are, because both films were really good. Yeah.

J Jen Myers 46:10

Well, they are definitely different beasts, even though Yeah, they have, you know, same overall plots and same characters and things like that. It's like, we did talk about the things that are different. But there's something about the big differences. I think unquantifiable. It's just the tone and the feel of the film is different. And but they are they are different, very different films, I think. And I think they're trying to do different things. And it's very subtle. But yeah, I think they're trying to accomplish different things. And that it makes sense why people would have different reactions to them, because I actually think I love them both. But I think I love them both for different reasons. I don't think the reason that I love the 2021 version really has much at all to do with like, you know, just the story or the characters. It's like a certain vibe that it does that I think is really unique and interesting. And that's not the same thing that I get out of the 47 version at all, which I don't know. I mean, I guess in that sense, they probably succeeded in making something unique and not just the same type of adaptation. So that's something if nothing else, and I think anything that gets reactions out of people good or bad is worth talking about.

J Jessi Chartier 47:24

Agreed? Yes. Yeah. One of the things that we we talked about in the last episode, Jen was the use of tarot cards. What does this time get any better? Did it get worse?

J Jen Myers 47:34

Well, you know, I think it got better in the fact that they just didn't focus on it as much so they didn't really and I don't I actually I would be fascinated to learn if this was delivered or not. I

didn't really and I don't actually I would be fascinated to learn if this was delivered or not. I haven't seen anything on an interview or anything about it. I'll do a quick brag that the co-screenwriter of this movie does follow me on Twitter, so maybe I should take advantage to send her a message and be like, so what do you think about tarot, because it's better in this one. It doesn't they I think, but like I said, they really just don't do as much with tarot as they did in the original one, but because they don't do as much of it. They don't seem to kind of make the same big errors that they did in the first one. So I will give it a higher score in terms of tarot, but I don't know if that's deliberate or not, I don't know. Did you notice anything particular about tarot on this one?

J Jessi Chartier 48:19

I felt like again, it goes back to Toni Colette's portrayal I think of the the character who was just like tarot was just kind of part of her DNA. It wasn't forced. It never felt forced. It was just like, what the cards are telling you that? Yeah, like it was never like, the cards are not telling you that he was like so very integrated into her day to day life that I really felt it was that it was better.

J Jen Myers 48:43

Yeah, I think maybe it just the subtlety of it made it work better in this one. They didn't rely on it as this big important flourish of a story element. It was just kind of a quiet part of it. So yeah, overall, better.

J Jessi Chartier 48:58

Nice job, guys. And ladies, nice job.

J Jen Myers 49:01

That's my final word on it. The tarot is better.

J Jessi Chartier 49:04

The tarot is better. Well done. Well, if people I mean, if y'all love nightmare alley, there's a lot of other really good stuff out there that you should take a peek at. One of my favorites is Freaks, which is a very, very controversial film. So there's a lot of exploitation going on in there. Be aware it was made in the 30s

J Jen Myers 49:27

Oh, it's early 30s. Yeah. It before before the official production code went into play. So I want to say it's like 31 or 32.

J Jessi Chartier 49:35

Yeah, it's super, super early Freaks is a good one. What are some of the other stuff that you have?

J Jen Myers 49:39

Oh gosh, I made such a huge list. Well, I really, like I said, this film really got me start starting to think a lot a lot about the intersection of film noir and horror. And so I started thinking about what are some other noirs that I love that you know, may start kind of edging into different areas. And I'm not sure I can't say that these go into horror unnecessarily, but they definitely maybe get into like thriller territory, which is something else we kind of talked about. So, on my list, I had *The Killing*, which is early Stanley Kubrick, which is, you know, kind of another one of those things where I feel like it's the same way with *Nightmare Alley*, you have a director who is known for their horror, making something that is actually kind of a film noir story, and it's definitely noir. But you know, it's got Kubrick lighting, some, some interesting angles on people and things. So and it's just a great film. So I recommend that and I also wanted to throw *Sweet Smell of Success* out there, which is one of my favorite films ever. And it is definitely a noir. But I, the thing that made me compare it to *Nightmare Alley* is that I think that the the main character, and that is played by Tony Curtis. And it's another case of you have like a very, very good looking almost pretty man who is playing this, this character is a sleaze, but also like constantly striving. So you also kind of are invested in his his struggle. And it just I don't know, it's a great film. It's got some really weird dark characters, and it's a little bit more of a frenetic surreal noir than a typical noir is. So I would recommend that. And then I was kind of thinking about also in the if there's anything that kind of intersects noir and horror already, I think it's *Cat People*, the original *Cat People*, which is another particular favorite of mine from the 40s, which I think is mostly that's another one I don't think that's classified noir that's classified horror. But I feel like it's it's kind of we, we have been talking about a lot of noir that kind of edges on horror. And this is a horror that edges on noir. Like is very clever use of sharp lighting, and things like that, that, you know, remind me a little bit of noir, and it's definitely in that time period. So yeah, and then I also want to throw in this is a book, but especially we were talking about geeks, and carnival culture, there's a fiction book called *Geek Love* by Katherine Dunn. And if you are interested in the kind of surrealism of people who live in the carnival lifestyle, and then also just kind of the grotesqueness of humans, then you should probably read *Geek Love*. It's a really great book and it's but it's really unique. I think if you if you like this movie, I think you'd like *Geek Love*, though, there's also I'm not going to go through every bit of this, but Del Toro did give a list of his favorite films noir, that inspired *Nightmare Alley*, and I found a link to that article. So I'll put it on our website with the show notes.

J Jessi Chartier 52:37

Now, there's a lot of good stuff out there. And we are going to probably circle back and talk more about noir film as we continue throughout the year. So if you like the style of film, please reach out and let us know what you are enjoying these days. We'll see if we can squeeze it into an episode or two. And we will not hover on new are right now for the next episode because we're going to be moving into folk and modern. So we're going to be looking at some new stuff that kind of deals with something different. I don't know what it's gonna look like yet, because

we haven't watched the films and talked about it. But I'm excited to dive into that full core versus the modern life and go from there. But for now, Jen, if people wanted to learn more about us, where could they find us?

J Jen Myers 53:18

Well, we have a website at quietlittlehorrors.com that's got links to all of our episodes streaming and also where you can find it podcast providers. You can also find us on Twitter at [quiethorrors](https://twitter.com/quiethorrors) and on Instagram at [quietlittlehorrors](https://www.instagram.com/quietlittlehorrors). And if you want to email us and tell us about anything that you liked or that you would like us to look at in the future. We're at hello at [quietlittlehorrors.com](mailto:hello@quietlittlehorrors.com)

J Jessi Chartier 53:43

Alright, thanks everyone for joining us. We will see you next time when we talk about the folk beliefs versus modern reality in the next episode. So thanks, Jen so much.

J Jen Myers 53:52

Thanks. Bye. Bye, everybody.