

Podcast Nightmare Alley & The Fight - February 2022

Paul Darke & Alston Wilde (are the 'Unknown' speakers).

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Welcome to the latest podcast. I'm here with Proust, Noir and myself. Suddenly, Mira can't make it today. So it's just the two of us. I hope it'll be a short but sweet podcast. We're looking at Nightmare Alley, the 2001 version, and a Guardian documentary. From 2017, I think, called The Fight. So let's start on Nightmare Alley. Uh, I'll, I'll start by saying, as you know, I'm not a particular fan of Gil and I, Del Toro.

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I didn't like his last one. Something about water. I forgot what the name of the oh, but I know that you're a big fan of his. You loved. I wanted to run. What was it called? The water. The shape of water. Shape of water. Which which we have covered, but I think I didn't look like, but. So I'll start by saying I was very disappointed in this, primarily because I wanted a lot more disabled people in it.

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And there is a serious lack disabled people in it, which for the kind of film is set in a kind of freak show, corny thing. And you've basically got one person of short stature is the only disabled character throughout. And I was very disappointed because I wanted more. I wanted that either exploitation or inclusion, you know, whatever. I just wanted that.

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And so I was left quite disappointed. But that's my initial visit. What about you? Yeah, I did. I did not. I mean, the just the disabled person who was well, the one disabled person we know about, it was fair. And I will admit my bias beside my visual system so there could have been other disabled people and a whole lot of questions around.

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But anyway, but I did notice that they have come on very soon so so that and I was quite excited by that. Oh, this is going to be a lot more and devices that never, never if there were or disabled doctors that wasn't apparent. So yeah, I will I will give you that and it didn't have a huge role.

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I did not know it, but I do it right. Do the horror. And I hope this one as much as the stress of whatever different ways I like it. I like the kind of narratives of of which in some ways was a narrative of, of of a geek. And I think that's the I think that's why I liked it, because we didn't really realize it was a narrative or perhaps you want a picture from that.

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But I think maybe I possibly targeted the idea while I was watching it. But but no, I thought it was really good because in some ways, as seen by some as the lowest of the low end within the feature itself, I found that quite helpful. So, yeah, I will I will acknowledge that in terms of employing disabled actors, it was probably not very good not as good as the shape of Walter, which got criticized and said despite the fact that it did actually employ an actor with impairments, even if she wasn't even her, if her kind of identity is an issue as a symbol that it was going to.

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So yeah, you'd think given the fact that she was a of the, the, the crew invited quite a few. A few more of this, the disabled people. And so. Absolutely. So why did you like it so much? Why? Well, as I said, because I think in a way it told the story of of somebody who's at the bottom of the the freak show feature hierarchy.

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And of course, even though we can talk about, well, how would we define an impairment or disability unit, I'm trying to sense you're not giving you a spokesperson for the saying it, but one could argue that the central character played by Bradley Cooper was disabled in the end, given the impairment that he acquired So it's really hard stuff about this film without spoilers, but it still took quite a acquire within the narrative.

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But there wasn't there wasn't any surprise there was that because like you knew the moment he saw it, the existing one, that that's where it was going to go. And I was very that annoyed me that it was quite a transparent, predictable plot. And again, I wanted more and that then to me, one of there was so many problems with that it was both because I because I just like it.

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So I've not been very critical of the use of the the critique, something I've been so well thinking about. To me, the the main character need to have a degree of charisma in one way or another. And I personally felt he was pretty charisma free throughout the entire thing. I didn't there was no transition of him moving from being this kind of inarticulate, quiet, you know, kind of repressed growl guy to him becoming the talk of the town in doing his mentalist act, so to speak.

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I wanted a lot more of the transition of that because, in fact, that transition was basically a jump cut from his head. And then the next time you see him is in the in the calm show, etc., they're leaving. And the next show is is a headline act. And it's kind of like there's no one I wanted to see was more of that transition because because he was a he was a pretty mumbly charisma free guy, which I again, I just still need there's going to be a lot more to this, you know, a lot more where it's going.

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The other problem was, is I love the sets. I think the set particularly the psychiatry software for all of that. And I'm always worried when I love the set because that means I'm not watching the movie. I'm looking at the set. And I think that's a serious problem. Del Toro has. Is is the sets are often so fantastic that the characters suffer by comparison or they're they're just not very good.

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Unknown

I'll give them the benefit of the doubt. They suffer because they say so fantastic. I I think the other thing is I was a bit annoyed by, for example, the Toni Collette character kept going, don't go all spooky. I think she kept saying, you know, we get spooky. Don't be spooky. Spooky is wrong. While she's flipping out the tarot cards, cards, it's kind of like you're doing spooky yourself.

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You know, you believe in in these Gods stuff. It's kind of like you're just talking shit, basically. So and that seemed a bit could have been self-delusion, you know, that kind of thing. Oh, well, you know, that's that spooky. Don't get caught. This is real, but again, there wasn't enough clashing or parallels or all kind of something that it it just lacked throughout out.

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So. So they're my primary criticisms. Okay, there's quite a lot that I'll start with the Collette thing and the Spooky I can say we mean, but I think it took me a little while to work out what was said, what they meant, and to me just meant, you know, don't do that thing of actually a creating characters to give people false hope.

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Unknown

You know, one could argue that the tarot cards, you know, the not the not doing anything, anything other than give me something to interpret, but I'm not I'm not really an expert in the occult, you have to say. So, yeah. I'm going back to the transition from it was it was a quick transition woman that a woman was having said that, one thing that came to mind when you were talking about it was in terms of charisma.

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Unknown

I kind of disagree I can see how I was dislikable, but I think I think he does have charisma is definitely get more into this, I thought, than it was. Well, it was it was actually quite good in the things of the character didn't gel so much. But anyway, I thought it did have charisma. The thing was on its own, it's about the charisma and people get to the top of the game a lot.

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Unknown

Most a lot of people love charisma, you know, powerful, bad people. So that did bother me. So the joke. Yeah, I'll give you that was the bulls. And then we said, Now who's the transition's, uh, the sets, all the set?

Well, yeah, I yes, actually, I agree with you. I think I think probably I allowed myself to get very seduced by the sex I just.

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I just find his work so beautiful, and, yes, that probably meant to be quite critical. And to me, the bit that I just what I saw the inside of what is called now. Lilith Well, when it was that. Yeah. Cate Blanchett's of the best on the role just to test this in in the world where we just I thought this is just amazing.

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Unknown

So yeah I was seduced by that. I think so what else would you then discuss? Well, I think I had good bits and one of the bits I think what made a big difference, I watched it, but then I also watched the, the original version from 1947. Yeah I didn't and that's from my lesson from thumb to own power and to me to own power has the charisma that Bradley Cooper didn't.

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Unknown

And I agree with you about some of the most successful people lack charisma, but what they're good at is the performance of it. And I didn't see him transition in to be able to perform charisma it just seemed like he got caught up in the tricks of mentalism etc. So I thought but again it was very interesting watching the 1940 71 and I know the director answered it's not a remake, but I think he's being quite disingenuous because there is so much that is pretty much the same always.

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Unknown

Right. Okay. Which, which surprised me because he made a big point of saying it's not a remake, it's a kind of reinterpretation of the book and, and it made you want to, it actually you've done a remake and been actually open and more explicit about that because I think it would have made it better. What was interesting about the original was the lack of the set quality that made you focus more on the characters actually.

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Unknown

So for example with the original 40 71, the, the psychology office is, is almost like at like a little modern office that's got absolutely no started whatsoever. So you can focus more on character. Again, I had, I had problems with the Kate the Cate Blanchett character and, and the very fact of of the way she worked with Bradley Cooper in swindling for that phrase because particularly the very rich guy of his name is what was he grindle is you know he put a lot of work.

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Unknown

He was very rich. He employed detectives and all this kind of stuff. And to me it was pretty obvious a psychiatrist telling him, you know, this it's kind of like there's a big company, even the one person. So it must be her. And yet. Yeah, yeah. No, that's it. That's good. Yeah. That was a big book I did.

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Unknown

Like when when the earlier people marry Steenburgen and Mrs. Campbell. I loved when she just stood up and shot her up and in the head and in itself, I feel yeah, that's what you are. That's the kind of thing you wouldn't going the original because it was so old. And I just loved the sudden explosion of violence as a result of lies and deceit.

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Unknown

I thought that worked really well, and I would have wanted more of that. Yeah, I think yeah, I agree. With most of all of what you said. The I think I think comedy one reason I like it was well, back to Bradley Cooper I think all that stuff about charisma and power and the fact and some of his attributes that we talk about a few minutes ago, I think partly for me that corresponds to want to do the kind of subtle narratives about about alcohol and and about how a lot of a lot of the his actions were kind of one way or another centered around alcohol.

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And I'm just of course it is the ultimate shit to get projector and that kind of thing to the questions I was left with, which is probably why I want to I think, you know, I really enjoyed that. Well, I did. And John so is to me it kind of is gender with more disability, but it did movies with those questions that I think a lot of good disability films it will bring up about about who is disabled and, and, and how we become disabled and how and what the impairments count and things like that.

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Unknown

Because it causes the disabled that not that I not aware of anywhere there where you just can't character wasn't disabled so I like the fact that it would that be kind of muted that without politicizing it which is quite unusual. So I guess that's why I was seduced into like Al Gore's you most of the criticisms should mirror isn't he who usually took to have a temper and find things I thought of to argue my body well and again try not to give anything away and again having watched the original that made me wish Del Toro had done this the the the original has a happy ending a happy ending so to speak in that book

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where he arrives he goes back to wherever he goes back to Molly. The love interest obviously is working there as well. And then she suddenly meets him as whatever. And and then there's there's a kind of where they meet and she's going to save him and bring him back from that. That moment. And I would have liked that to be in this almost as an added point of hopelessness about the continued delusions of Molly about being naive that.

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Unknown

Yeah, but but then the additional problem I really had and I would have liked to have seen, I suppose is this terrible thing where you often you wish you'd seen a different film which might criticize the Willem Dafoe character was almost a plot device vice to explain the narrative thrust. And I would have liked to see the parallel story of Willem Dafoe, of how he got to that point of doing what he did.

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Unknown

I would love that. I mean, I love Willem Dafoe. Absolutely. I was disappointed the I mean, and yes, you could see why he was very clear in the narrative. And yet there are certain moments I think I get I get where this is going. And that was a wasted opportunity because he he he had no problem in doing what he did to how did he get to that point?

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Unknown

And then you see him, that does it to him in the end. I don't think it is. You know, it's not and it should have been him I say that that notion of friendship was only in. Oh, yeah. To make it even darker than the horror movie. Absolutely. So, you know, he was just he that's the way he looked at people in spotting an opportunity to create something that that would benefit him and that and I thought, why is it not him?

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Unknown

It should be him coming back to do that. And then again and bring Molly back in again so that she could kid self. And I wanted the absolute abject darkness to be in the modern version. And and although maybe they chose somebody else because maybe I got a very strong idea that there was something being said about all humankind involved.

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Unknown

Those let's say so. And again, that goes back to who was disabled. So but which you could argue is problematic. I don't know what I'm right about. I didn't actually go and look at the original film, but I did read about the author and it just seemed to be quite a lot of parallels in the film. With the old author's trajectory, who did it, but not the the central character of this isn't a astonishing artist, by the way, that it isn't killing yourself to see in the book.

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Unknown

But of course, the original citizen Carter was it the Dixie Hotel to Ariel in a really kind of scummy hotel. So there does seem to be some real residences with the original authors of life who seem to also do similar things within his life. So yeah, I think that he's the author's first wife. He divorced, he married C.S. Lewis.

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Unknown

And it's kind of like, you know, there's all these little parallels there. But but I suppose I want to see something a lot more atmospheric and a lot more disabled people, a lot darker and, and it just end with something. The, the plot. One of the best things I liked was when he goes to see Grindle and I thought he was turning up a prison, you know, but it turns out it's where these Grindle leads.

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Unknown

Yeah. Yeah. And I really like that because he's in prison himself. And I thought, yeah, yeah, yeah, that was really strong. Well, I think that there are some really strong elements, and I think you just get a few too

many of those and you think it was the whole thing. But I will acknowledge most of your criticism. But I l well, we should we should write the script of, of, of Gresham and is and is and is.

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Unknown

Why we should do that film, make it really great. And Willem Dafoe can play all the roles, all of the men, especially the women, ha ha ha ha.

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Unknown

Roy, I think I think we've done that one enough, but I couldn't recommend it. It's incredibly long and again, I'm not a big fan of very long films. It's two as a which again is a little too long for me. I didn't feel it, but yeah, I would just sit there enjoying the sets. But if I was and I actually I've already thinking about how I can get those real shots of it on my walls yet to be that but but I would recommend it, you know, and I think his films are are always interesting and that that that's the thing about, you know, whether you know, whether the nuance is it.

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I suppose the final thing I would say is I thought Molly was a bit of a weak character and yeah she was the most late. And you know you just so I think you left that relationship after you left it to be honest ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. On that note, we will move on to the fight which I don't think it's been up on The Guardian too long.

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Unknown

And it's interesting that IMDB don't give it a date because I think it's about 2017. But I think it's only been out fairly recently, particularly in the West. I'm sure there's a lot more in America, whatever. But it's a documentary about disabled people's fight in Bolivia. And the main demo that they do in the city center of La Paz.

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I think in order to try and get the government to give them a monthly pension of -£56, -£40 a week. So. So you chose this one so where did you come across it? Um, I think I was actually doing some research for a job that I have and I just came across it and I looked at the trailer and I thought, that's really interesting because you know, when you can't quite vision and you can learn lots about the UK movement and even about the American movement.

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Unknown

But you know, as always, with things like that tend to be, tend to be marginal to tidbits we have are just starting to think. I think I need to basically look at the things that are happening in other countries. And yeah, I found it incredibly obsessive and really one of one wonder what sticks is quite sure, which was a bit of a relief because yeah, it's yeah, it was.

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Unknown

I think I'm going to watched it, what I learned from it in terms of our movement. Yeah. I think there are things to be learned, although process, process that process. Well, in some ways it is echoed some of the stuff that we saw in Crip camp and particularly one day that did that occupation against incredible odds. But I mean, this, this particular, this particular protest they were with them on 35 30 to go longer than that.

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Unknown

I think they were actually in that city 35 days. But they've done it for 30 odd days before. And the caravan, the issue is journey the length of journey that and and some of them having extraordinary empowerment issues to face. I think one thing actually sort of all the place but one thing that I thought immediately struck me about it was the images that it started off with and they were never commented on but I think it went back to that person, either one or one or two more times but never commented on how it was, which was a man who looks like you have probably cerebral palsy who was crawling on the ground in nothing

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Unknown

with the protests against him. I mean, it's I've been thinking all morning sun watching recently. I've been thinking, oh, lord, I don't know. I think about it. I don't know. I do. I find it extremely powerful or do do I actually think it shouldn't? I don't know. I'd be interested to know what you thought of it. I thought it stood out as very powerful in.

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Unknown

Normally, I would have seen it in a different light. But I think the very fact of the way it's against all of the police barriers and the kind of motionless, kind of hard, soulless, dehumanized things that the individual had to do to be seen and was still invisible. I think that gave it immense power. I think they didn't need to come back to it, but I think that as an opening shot worked really, really well.

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Unknown

Yeah. I thought it was a really, really good documentary. And I know that the director, Violeta Isler, and Dan found show that they've done quite a few about injustice in Bolivia, prisons and cocaine, all that kind of stuff, which is quite interesting and is really good that The Guardian. And I'll put a link on the website with this podcast.

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Unknown

Yeah. Should not see it for free. It's only 29 minutes. I thought what was most depressing is, is we knew nothing about this. Yeah. I don't ever remember it being covered. The fact that people end up dying as a result of being on this demonstration for -£14 a week to survive. And on what looked to be a young girl with Down's Syndrome ten was eight or ten in a coma.

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Unknown



Yeah. And combined with the fact the other thing is this was under this supposedly most progressive socialist government in the world at the time, which was the Morales government has since been deposed, etc. But this was in the middle of his. He'd been in a while and he was in for a while after. And I thought that was one of the, you know, as someone of the left I thought that was utterly despicable of what it says about the left, because I think the left is, is often let down disabled people more than any other group in the sense that I have no expectation of the right, whereas the expectation is of the left to deliver

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something and even if it's the bare minimum, which I found today, I thought it was quite nice that it had a couple of key people in it talking about, you know, the long journey they're being told over the mountains in in kind of like convoys of wheelchairs tied together in front of the car behind a car I thought it worked really well.

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It was short. 29 minutes. A big fan of. Sure. As we know, from all of the chapters, which were really useful because you could go back because although I didn't realize Mikael ever need to look at his book and that was really useful. And equally, how we we are privileged despite the oppression and abuse and, and the the sacrifice of 100,000 disabled people in the last year under COVID.

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Unknown

You know, we we are better off than most people in the world. Yeah. And I think it's good to remember that and equally to remember how passive we are as well. Exactly. And I thought it made you think about all of those things, not necessarily coherently or clearly, but it just made you think about them. And that's that's the best you can achieve with something like this.

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Unknown

Absolutely. And talking about, like I said, I'm still processing and the lessons to be learned from it. That's a very reasonable thing to do. And one thing that's shone out to me about it was was the real the real collectivity. The I mean, you're you see what the let me say. But it did feel like this was not as hierarchical.

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I think perhaps we do things I mean, like we just the people, you know, I mean, you do the things I've been involved in, but I did used to feel that within our own community. But there was just I don't know, I tend to think that was tied to be to being even more oppressed than we are. But we got such a strong sense of mutual support, which I found quite amusing.

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Unknown

I think the elements of that written into films like when they're on the procession with the wheelchairs tied together with the rope and things like that. But I thought it was also really quietly intersectional. You

got the the particular anger at a racist slurs from the police about being a gringo. And you also got a snapshot into the strength of the women Yeah, we didn't.

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Unknown

And I've just thought because a lot of ground, it looked quite a simple spill and it actually caused an awful lot of ground, I think by as I said, I'm still processing it. And yeah, I felt quite horrified by the images of them just being tossed, knocked out. And let me just keep re responding how not to be locked out metaphorically and physically.

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Unknown

All of the plaza and then the double locking out when they eventually talk to the politicians and the media weren't allowed in and all that. It's just it was kind of quite chilling. Yeah, absolutely. I think it was it was that the kind of that parallel is seeing the the pure humanity of the disabled people seeking change for all disabled people combined with the kind of the state's indifference to humanity, really.

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Unknown

And that that line, that blue line, that split between power and oppression, that seemed immovable and indifferent and full of contempt. Yeah. You know, that applied to everybody. It wasn't just about disabled people. Yeah, it was for everybody. And yeah, it was them and us. And that's what this what we're moving into And I think it was that I'm bringing that parallel to it because it wasn't there when they were making it.

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Unknown

But, you know, COVID and post-COVID, you've seen that writ large and you're going to see even more now with the the abolition of all restrictions, all of that, that are just going to kill many more people, particularly disabled people, elderly people in a way that is just nothing short of a population call by based on economics. Yeah. Cost-Benefit analysis.

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Unknown

We can do with getting rid of them. Yeah. And that's the battle for home, the horrific nature of that in a kind of very visceral visual, a confrontational way in which made it an incredibly depressing experience. To do, but exceptional in what it made you think and feel. Mm hmm. I mean, the cheering was definitely the horror of it.

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Unknown

But it was also strong on humanity. There was one thing I'm not very good writing, but there was one thing I wrote down which I thought was showed a lot of that, which was, if we aren't the people, then who are the people? And not just the thought people who are these people the Eagles know? Yeah. If we all.

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Unknown

Yeah. And that combined with the fact that it ends with the fact that, you know, someone drove a car through the demonstration, killing a number of the disabled people, you know, you didn't bother with who that was. What what happened to them? It was just that. And that happens so often now, like in the Black Lives Matter, things that kind of absolute hatred that drives people to just drive straight human beings who are oppressed because they think it's just so wrong of us to comply or do something about it.

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Unknown

And yeah, I think it and you're right, you know, if we're not, the people who are the people is just a perfect summation of it. Yeah. And so that talks until you say about the pandemic. And of course, you know, the underlying conditions of that digital and black conditions. That, of course, is what some people called their life.

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Unknown

Yeah, I think it will be you know, talking about it in relation to us and probably for the next podcast, the one after that, it'll be very interesting to see the Dan action film that the BBC are doing that show, which I think is called Alan and Barbara is it called Johnny and Barbara than Barbara Allen or something?

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Unknown

Yeah, something like that. So the title. Sorry. No, no, Alan, we'll get it right when we cover it in the next podcast. But I think that's out either this month or next month touches of March, 20th of March. So we'll probably do that next time. So I think it'll be having seen this in comparison to back will be a fascinating experience.

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Unknown

So yeah, we talk about those two together again. Oh, that whole role of that. What that was so for example, just the very simple thing of the Bolivian one was about basically subsistence to exist, whereas the kind of the British one was about access to public transport. Yeah. That it's on a whole nother level. Yeah. Yeah. It'll be interesting to talk about them in the past, so I'm sure we'll come back to this.

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Unknown

Yeah. Yeah. I'm wondering now, given Crip camp as well, next on the drama of course proper and all, but I wonder just how many documentaries there are about people's protest, something they might actually look up. I think there are quite a few, you know, and I think, you know, when when I did a film festival back in 2000, I think there was a few and there was a there was a I was on the jury display film festival in Munich in about 96, I think with Steve Dwoskin and I did it a couple of times.

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Unknown

And even then there were quite a lot of films about, you know, the movement and demonstrations and whatever side it seems to be. I think what's interesting is, you know, we've spoken about a film that we recommend people watch where I recommend people watch Freaks in an

Italian film about Nazis and freak shows. And and then there's this Netflix film called Forgive US Our Trespasses, which was, which is which is a show about a disabled boy and, and living in Nazi times and action people, etc. It seems to be coming that there's an increasing amount of mindset stream content about that, which is interesting in itself.

00:36:00:19 - 00:36:23:08

Unknown

And it'll be interesting to think about why that's the case, that it's becoming more mainstream thing. Is it because you know that just it's parasitic in the sense that because disabled people have been doing it a while, mainstream sees that stuff and then exploits it for its own narrative purposes because like they've exploited every other angle and they just need something new.

00:36:23:22 - 00:36:50:20

Unknown

Or is it kind of like a new transition? And I think it's interesting because I think disabled people are probably in the worse position in the West. They have been for a long time. Decades, even when things are suddenly going backwards quite rapidly the last ten years. And so you getting this kind of protest and again, I don't know what the answer is, but it's interesting to think about again, you know, Netflix is doing a lot more and all that kind of stuff.

00:36:51:01 - 00:36:53:24

Unknown

It's interesting. Yeah. Hmm.

00:36:56:07 - 00:37:24:08

Unknown

Okay. Scenes, thanks to you. Thank you for that. So we'll see you on the will. You'll hear us on the next podcast. Miro will be back, hopefully. And but keep your eyes out for freaks out. Forgive us our trespasses. The Barbara and Allen main story, which is on the BBC and anything else that's coming up. Thank you, Alison.

00:37:25:10 - 00:37:26:04

Unknown

I can't call.