



THE FILM

VERDICT

17 SEPTEMBER 2023

DAY
5

OLDENBURG REVIEW DAILY

INTERNATIONAL



Oldenburg Film Festival

CHARCOAL

VERDICT: A dark, absurdist farce of wicked schemes bred of hardship in smalltown Brazil reveals helmer Carolina Markowicz as a bold talent.

Carmen Gray, September 16, 2023

Surviving isn't easy, and dignity is far out of reach, for the colourful cast of characters of Brazilian filmmaker Carolina Markowicz's feature debut *Charcoal*. The off-beat, irreverent and suspenseful dark farce, which screens at the

Oldenburg International Film Festival, turns on the desperate opportunism bred of relentless poverty, and heralds a bold new directorial voice in Latin American cinema. It portrays the small settlement of Joanopolis in Brazil's southeast as a place where amorality has permeated the population, church-going having provided no comfort to alleviate their struggles, and wild risk-taking seeming the only route to even temporary relief.

In the cramped, grimy bedroom of a family home, nine-year-old Jean

(Jean Costa) has been allotted the top bunk of a bed, while his ailing grandfather Firmino (Bendito Alves) sees out his last days below. The old man is at a stage of physical breakdown where his bodily fluids are hard to contain, his mobility is severely limited by the large oxygen canister he has to lug around, and any zest for existence he once had has dissipated. Jean's parents Irene (Maeve Jinkings) and Jairo (Romulo Braga) struggle to keep the family afloat, but times are tough, and the money they earn producing charcoal from the furnace of a small factory is scarcely enough.

Submitting to God's will is the only guidance the Church can offer. The family rejects it in favour of taking fate into their own hands, when Juracy (Aline Marta), a new nurse, proposes a shady deal. If they agree to euthanise Firmino, then

[Full review, click here](#)

METAVERSE ENTRY



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MIDNITE EXPRESS

THE BELGIAN WAVE

VERDICT: Belgian cult director Jérôme Vandewattyne uses a spate of real UFO sightings as the launchpad for his incoherent but highly entertaining acid-punk sci-fi road movie about close encounters of the surreal kind.

Stephen Dalton, September 16, 2023

A riotous rollercoaster ride of gross-out horror comedy, sci-fi conspiracy theory and psychedelic acid-trip derangement, *The Belgian Wave* is one of the most unusual and entertaining world premieres at this year's Oldenburg Film Festival. It is also one of the most incoherent, but petit bourgeois concerns like narrative logic and plausible characters clearly do not interest Belgian writer-director Jérôme Vandewattyne, whose default style is maximalist splatterpunk surrealism.



Take Five

Part-time rock musician Vandewattyne was last in Oldenburg to premiere his debut feature *Spit'N'Split* (2017), a band-on-tour mockumentary which morphs into a gonzo horror bloodbath midway through. *The Belgian Wave* feels bigger and more ambitious, boasting high-gloss visuals and slick production design elements that defy its reportedly modest budget of 300,000 Euros. Peppered with knowingly retro homages to the scratchy VHS look and saturated neon palette of vintage 1980s and 1990s cult cinema, this delirious *Midnight Movie* is plainly not pitched at fans of tastefully restrained art-house fare. Even so, it is made with more polish and wit than its pulpy surface aesthetic might suggest, and is way too inventively weird to ever become boring. Genre-friendly festivals and psychotronic movie connoisseurs should take an inter-

[Full review, click here](#)



INDEPENDENT

THE WAIT

VERDICT: Spanish director F. Javier Gutiérrez's atmospheric but underpowered horror western offers a fistful of familiar supernatural tropes.

Stephen Dalton, September 16, 2023

Set on a sweltering desert ranch in early 1970s Spain, *The Wait* is a handsome exercise in old-fashioned supernatural horror, feeling at times like a spaghetti western remake of *The Shining* (1980). The latest nerve-jangler from director F. Javier Gutiérrez, returning to his native tongue following his poorly received English-language franchise flop *Rings* (2017), is visually strong and reliably creepy, with promising hints of the politically charged subtext that Guillermo Del Toro brings to his Spanish period pieces. But this noir-ish thriller never quite delivers the killer twists and shock revelations it promises, remaining firmly in its superior B-movie lane. Following its world premiere in Oldenburg this week, it should draw healthy crowds at

[Full review, click here](#)

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INDEPENDENT

BEAUTIFUL FRIEND

VERDICT: A sociopathic amateur filmmaker kidnaps the woman he wants to play his fantasy girlfriend role in Truman Kewley's quietly chilling psycho-thriller debut.

Stephen Dalton, September 16, 2023

An immersive first-person dive into the mind of a sociopath, *Beautiful Friend* is a quietly powerful first feature from US indie writer-director Truman Kewley. Shot with crisp formal precision and leavened by hints of darkly ironic humour, this lean two-hander involves a mentally fragile young man abducting a woman and holding her captive, hoping she will fall in love with him. There are distant echoes here of William Wyler's classic psychological thriller *The Collector* (1965), but also more recent domestic-prison dramas like *Room* (2015) and *Girl in the Basement* (2021). Following its world premiere this week in Oldenburg, Kewley's disquieting debut should generate further festival buzz, particularly for



Oldenburg Film Festival

its timely depiction of toxic masculinity and beta-male misogyny.

Daniel (Adam Jones) is an "incel", an involuntary celibate whose loneliness and sexual frustration has curdled into a festering, self-pitying, all-consuming obsession. He has come to bitterly resent women for not giving him the attention he craves. "I am a good man, I am a strong man," he assures himself in the hypnotic, chillingly calm voice-over that runs through *Beautiful Friend* like music. "All I want is

what everybody else has." No screen narration has sounded this soothingly sinister since HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

With a triumphant tone, Daniel announces he has finally come up with a world-shaking master plan to fix his problems with the opposite sex. Alarming, it involves stalking women on the street with the aim of kidnap, imprisonment and worse. After a series of failed approaches, which look like dis-

[Full review, click here](#)

STEPHEN DALTON

MEET THE TFFV CRITICS
AT THE OLDENBURG
FILM FESTIVAL



THE FILM
VERDICT

Stephen Dalton, SENIOR CRITIC, has been writing professionally about cinema and music for over 30 years, including for *The Hollywood Reporter* as a regular film/theater reviewer and occasional columnist. He has written extensively for *The Times* of London, where he was a daily TV film columnist for 12 years, *Sight and Sound*, the BFI (British Film Institute), and the UK film and music monthly *Uncut*. His work has also appeared in *The Guardian*, *Rolling Stone*, the *Evening Standard* (London), *Wallpaper*, *New Musical Express*, *The Quietus*, *Electronic Sound*, *Classic Rock*, *The National* (UAE) and other publications. He is based in London.

oldenburg
FILMFESTIVAL

IMPRESSIONS & MEMORIES

OLDENBURG CELEBRATES 30 YEARS



Tim Breuning

Photographer

"What makes this festival so special is there are no specific bubbles of different movies.

At different festivals, everybody just hangs with their crew whereas, at Oldenburg, everybody meets, and connects and new friendships are started.

And that's pretty unique from what I experienced at other film festivals. For me, that is pretty outstanding."

VERDICT SHORT

GRILL

VERDICT: The cruelty of an uncaring welfare state is brought into sharp relief in Jade Hærem Aksnes's stomach-churning satirical drama about poverty.

Ben Nicholson, September 16, 2023

Jade Hærem Aksnes' Grill was inspired by an outrageous story in the newspaper.

A person in Norway was rejected for support with their utility bills and advised by the social services to avail themselves of a barbecue grill on a freecycle website to avoid needing to use electricity to cook. Aksnes takes this premise as the catalyst for her pointed critique by following the efforts of a person

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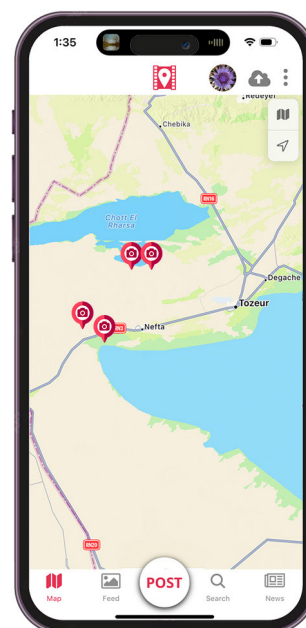
FILM TOURISM



Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977)

Nefta, Tunisia

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Continued from previous page

living on the breadline to follow that unsympathetic recommendation. The result is a film that expertly conveys the anxiety of navigating the modern world when there is no money in your bank account and takes that situation to drastic extremes.

The crux of the film rests with its lead actress, Birgitte Larsen, who plays Tara. With no money at all available to her, even travelling to collect a free grill is an ordeal – she cannot pay for the bus, so needs to sneak on through the rear doors. Larsen is brilliant at translating the unease that Tara

[Full review, click here](#)



Oldenburg Film Festival



Oldenburg Film Festival

VERDICT SHORT

SEAWEED

VERDICT: A young boy grieving the loss of his mother forms a bond with a desert drifter in this heart-warming Israeli drama.

Ben Nicholson, September 16, 2023

Seaweed begins with a young boy listening repeatedly to a voicemail message.

It soon becomes evident that this is the only recording the boy has

access to of his mother's voice, so he re-dials her number and listens again. Understandably, the boy misses his recently deceased mother and finds the thought of letting the final vestiges of her fade away too much to bear. Liel Simon's short takes the framework and aspects of the coming-of-age film but channels them into a piece concerned with grief and acceptance. This handsomely mounted drama is about the process of mourning and what it means to remember.

[Full review, click here](#)

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