

FILM ROUNDUP

KEITH UHLICH



They Shall Not Grow Old.

Climax (Dir. Gaspar Noé). Starring: Sofia Boutella, Romain Guillermic, Souheila Yacoub. Misery loves company, so leave it to perpetual provocateur Gaspar Noé to convene a gaggle of professional hoofers for an initially effusive dance party that goes violently off the rails. It's not like the unpleasantness is deferred. From the first shot of a bloodied, woman crawling through a snowy landscape, it's clear that any pleasures—such as a gorgeously staged musical number set to a pulse-pounding '90s EDM track, and photographed in a stunning single take—will be either fleeting, or mere prelude to the reproachfully shallow life-stinks/we're-all-gonna-die shtick in which Noé tends to trade. His shameless compulsion to chastise his audience, and perhaps himself, while wallowing with gleeful abandon in Boschian visions of horror (a bowl of sangria gets spiked with LSD; a child gets electrocuted; a woman self-aborts; the camera turns queasily topsy-turvy for the film's, uh, climax) is somewhat admirable. Personally, I prefer my dance cinema with a much less heaping helping of scold. [R] ★★

Greta (Dir. Neil Jordan). Starring: Isabelle Huppert, Chloë Grace Moretz, Maika Monroe. The Irish writer-director Neil Jordan (*The Crying Game*) does another of his jubilantly trashy adult fairy tales, this one a fun big-city riff on "Little Red Riding Hood." Chloë Grace Moretz is the unwitting innocent, Frances, who finds a purse on the subway and returns it to its rightful owner, the seemingly lonely, older shut-in, Greta (Isabelle Huppert). In reality, she's a psychopath who delights in luring younger women to her home, then torturing them slowly and malevolently. The meta pleasures of watching one of cinema's premiere actresses tormenting an ingenue of the moment are incalculable. And Jordan adeptly walks a fine line between seriousness and silliness (Huppert doing an impromptu ballet while incapacitating one of her victims is just one camp-flirting highlight). This is more a divertissement than a major work, but still a monstrously enjoyable good time. [R] [Read interview with Isabelle Huppert on page 18 of this issue] ★★★★★

High Flying Bird (Dir. Steven Soderbergh). Starring: André Holland, Melvin Gregg, Zazie Beetz. A sports movie only superficially, the latest effort from the prolific Steven Soderbergh, and written by Tarell Alvin McCraney (*Moonlight*), is at heart a self-aware act of disruption. André Holland plays Manhattan-based sports agent Ray Burke, who's trying to keep his career and his client base afloat during a basketball league lockout. He enlists his assistant (Zazie Beetz) and one of the players (Melvin Gregg) he represents to his cause, mainly through selfish and sneaky tactics that, perversely, double as liberating acts of defiance against the white league owners. (Kyle MacLachlan plays one of the more officious of these overlords.) It's a provocative and propulsive tale about using the system against itself, a theme that extends to Soderbergh's decisions to shoot the movie on an iPhone and release it on that content mill to end them all, Netflix. Cake has rarely been had and eaten so delectably. [N/R] ★★★★★

They Shall Not Grow Old (Dir. Peter Jackson). Documentary. Peter Jackson's WWI documentary is no less a spectacle than his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Granted access to a treasure trove of silent, black-and-white footage from the French front, Jackson and his technicians cleaned up the images, and added color, 3D effects and sound. Lip-readers were even brought in to discern what the soldiers might be saying. The film is interwoven with recordings of WWI veterans recollecting their experiences, mainly the daily grind of trench warfare, which alternated between panicked bloodshed and fetid boredom. The overall effect is very rich and strange, the verisimilitude of the voiceovers contrasting with the alien nature of the reprocessed imagery. There's something terrifyingly unknowable in this technologically bridged gap. Jackson has literally and figuratively re-animated the past, but allows the pervasive sense of death and decay to remain. History becomes an abyss, its shellshocked inhabitants gapping back at us with rictus grins. [R] ★★★★★ ■