Our 12 favorite movies from TIFF 2023

Big film festivals are always a somewhat surreal experience. You spend a few days or even a week mostly stuffed inside of a theater, trying to cram in as many films as possible. Then, you have to sort through them and pick your favorites.

It’s a fun challenge, and it’s particularly tough at the Toronto International Film Festival, which is huge; this year’s edition featured movies from 70 different countries. We managed to squeeze in quite a few features — between the two of us, we saw a total of more than 30 movies during the festival — but still couldn’t see *everything*. So this list of our favorite films from TIFF comes with some caveats, namely that there are definitely some gaps in what we managed to watch, which is impossible to avoid. Also: this list does not include Hayao Miyazaki’s *The Boy and the Heron* since we already reviewed it earlier this year to coincide with its Japanese premiere.

Much like last year, the best films from TIFF 2023 are a diverse bunch, not just in terms of geography but also genre and style. There are darkly tragic Korean dramas, stylish Saudi crime capers, and a French romance that doubles as an AI dystopia. Here’s what we loved the most in Toronto this year.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-blurple-1″>Directors: Xu Haofeng and Xu

Junfeng

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>*A Normal Family*

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Not since *Parasite* has the twist in a drama hit me quite so hard. It’s especially jarring in *A Normal Family* because it starts out almost like a comedy. It’s the story of two brothers; one a high-priced lawyer named Jae-wan (Sol Kyung-gu), the other, Jae-gyu (Jang Dong-gun), a doctor who never turns a patient away. Initially, the film is almost

comical in how stereotypically it presents its characters. There's the do-gooder brother, the sketchy defense lawyer, the young trophy wife, etc.

***A Normal Family* kicks off with a brutal bout of road rage that brings the two not-exactly-close brothers together; Jae-wan finds himself defending a rich kid who rammed into a family's truck, while the victim is a patient at his brother's hospital. But that's just a table setting, and eventually, the family is confronted with a second tragedy, this one involving their kids.**

As the story gets moving, all of those stereotypes get thrown out the window – as does the lighter comedic tone. What follows is a dark and

tragic look at what lengths people will go to save those they love and how even seemingly firmly cemented morals end up malleable. I won’t spoil anything here, but *A Normal Family* has the kind of ending that I just can’t get out of my head. *—AW*

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w-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>The Beast

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AI stories in science fiction are nothing new, but they’re bound

to make more of an impression given the current climate around the technology. Part of what makes *The Beast* so fascinating is how different – and much more subtle – it is compared to the majority of AI fiction. It takes place in 2044, a time when AI has helped

turn the world into a much less volatile place but does this through a procedure that sands off some of the rough edges from humans.

Going through this process involves revisiting past lives, a little like *Eternal Sunshine of the*

Spotless Mind, and *The Beast*'s story ends up following two occasional lovers — played by Léa Seydoux and George MacKay — through multiple time periods, including (the film's) present. Essentially, the movie uses its sci-fi conceit as a way to explore different

kinds of love using the same two people but in three different times, all with very different circumstances. It starts out quietly sweet and romantic before eventually twisting itself into something darker and more disturbing, all while presenting the

future as a kind of quiet dystopia. *—AW*

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bd dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray”>Image: HanWay Films

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Paul (Nicolas

Cage) is a tragically boring professor, the kind of person who makes little

to no impression when he meets someone new and whose work constantly

goes unrecognized. Which is what makes it so strange when Paul starts appearing in

people's dreams – not just those he knows, like his kids, but eventually, it seems,

everyone.

It starts out fun and as a chance for Paul to maybe, just maybe, get

his foot in the door with that book he’s been meaning to write. After all, he

quickly becomes arguably the most recognizable person in the world, the

first one to experience a new kind of viral fame. But the dreams start to turn into

something else, and with them, the world's feelings about Paul.

Dream

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could be called a comedy at first, the kind that trades on

awkward existential jokes (and even a rare good fart gag), but by the end, it’s

a full-on horror nightmare.

And it’s all anchored by a strong performance

from Cage, who manages to embody the meek, sniveling Paul in a way that’s equal

parts hilarious and terrifying.

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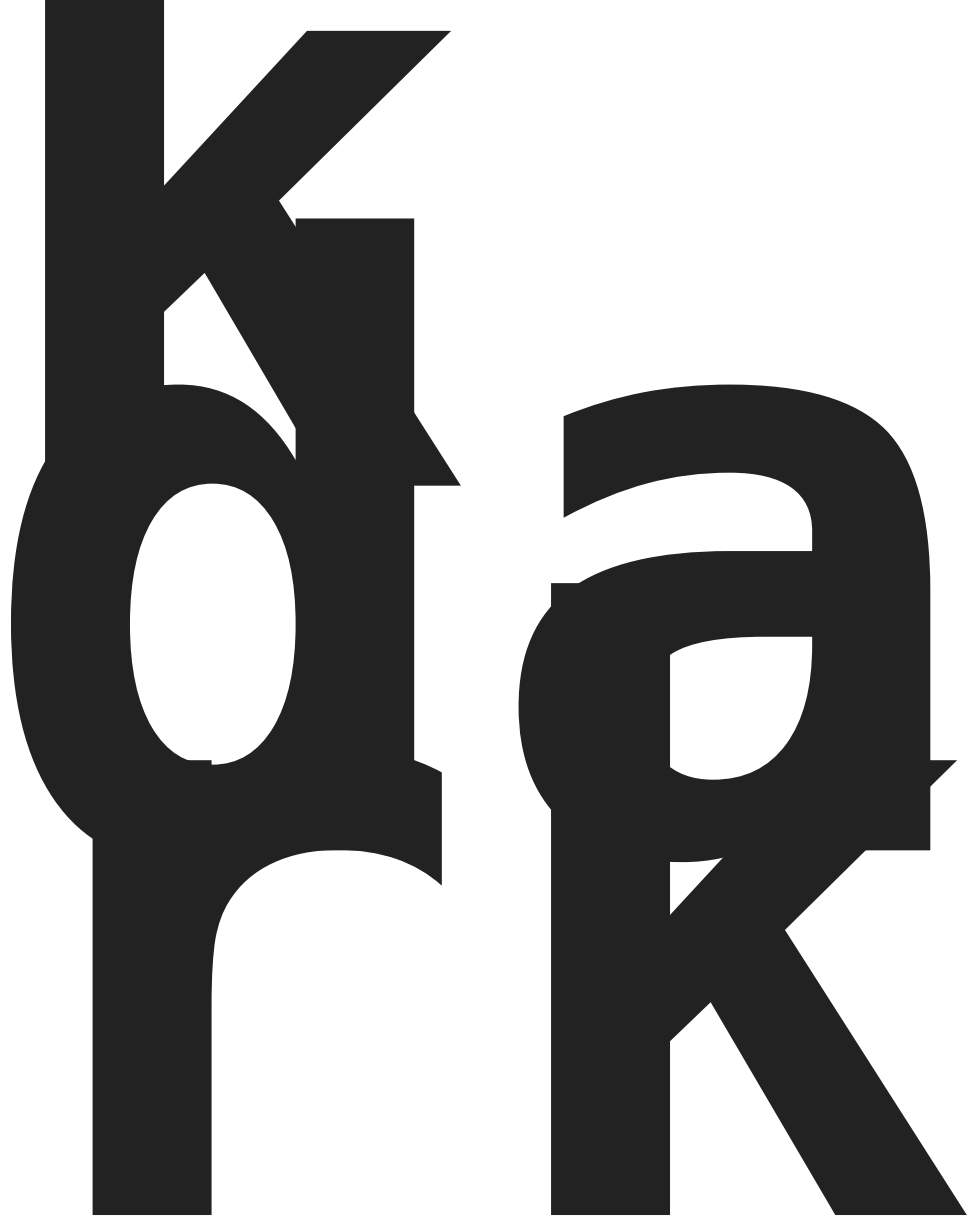
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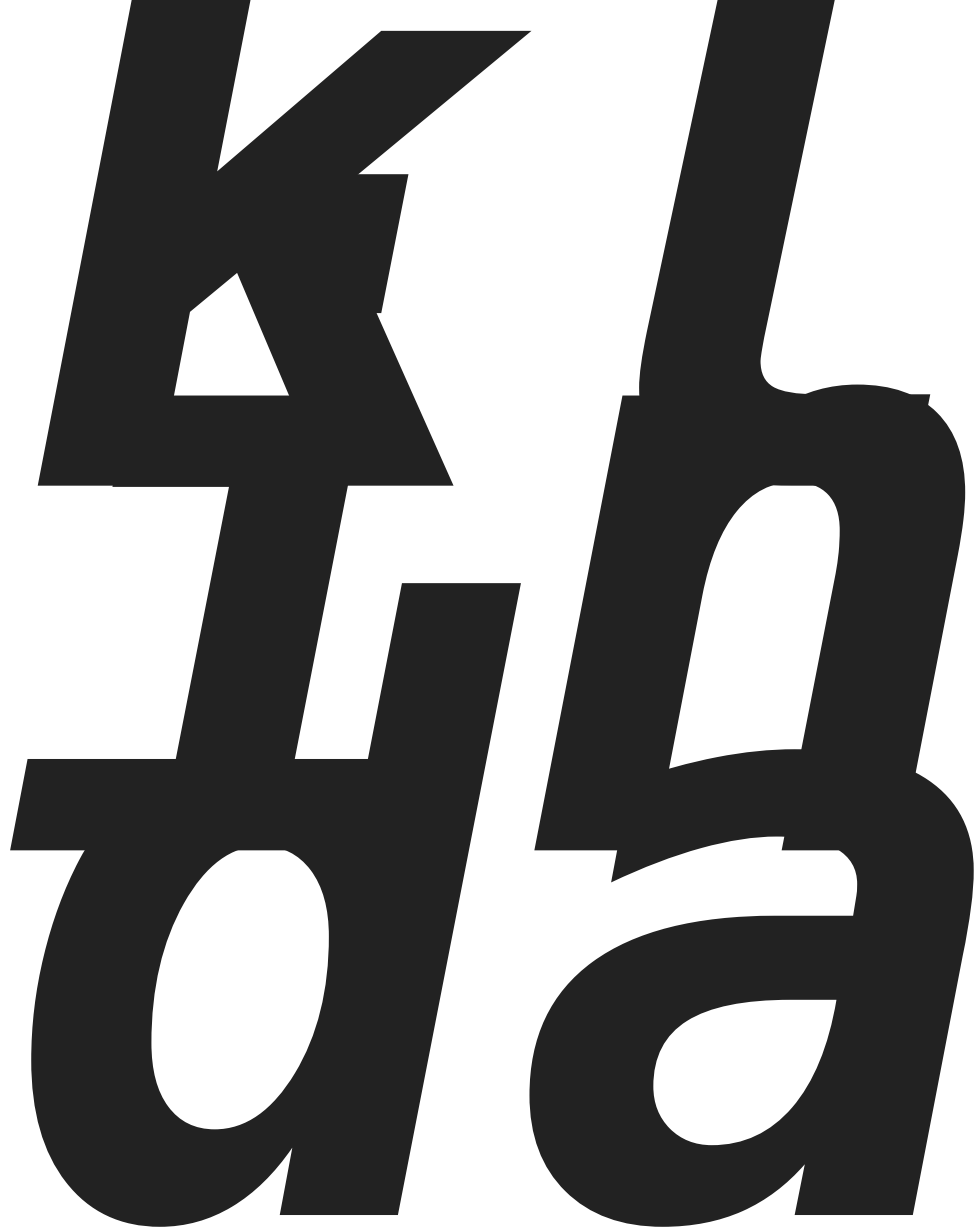


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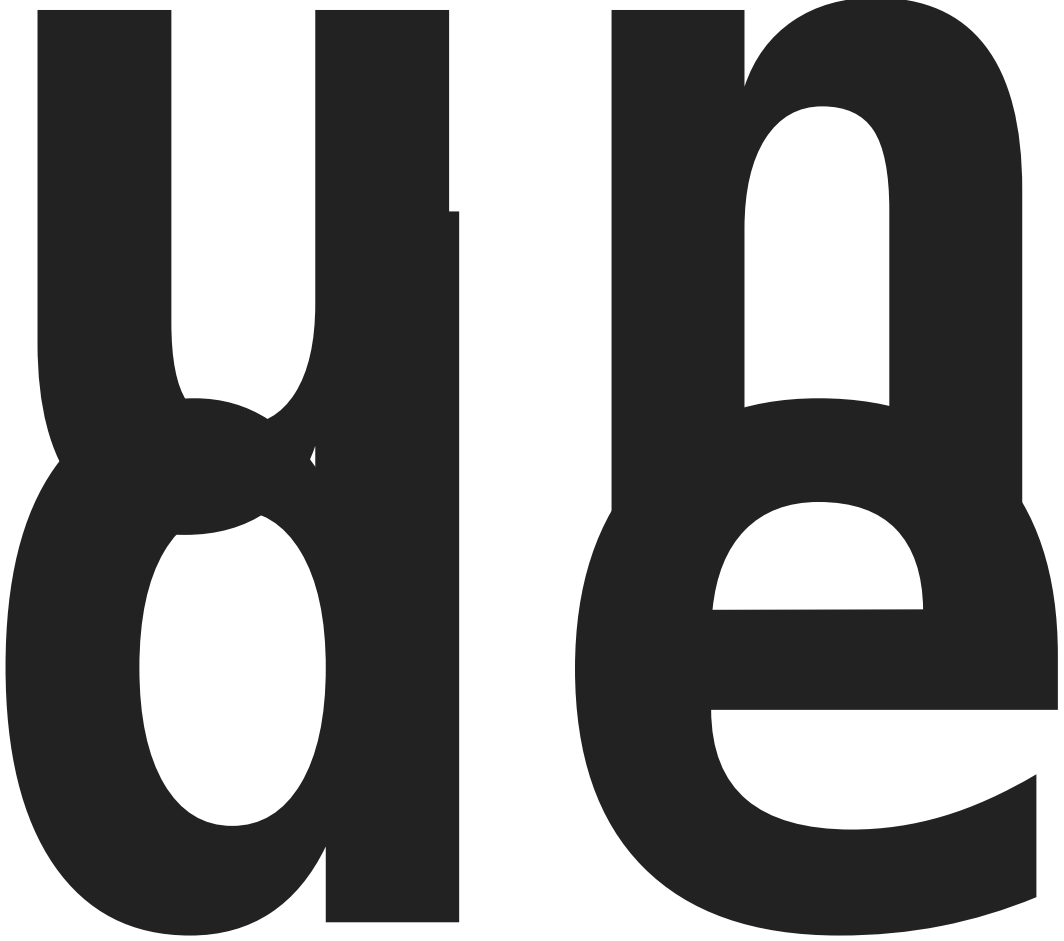




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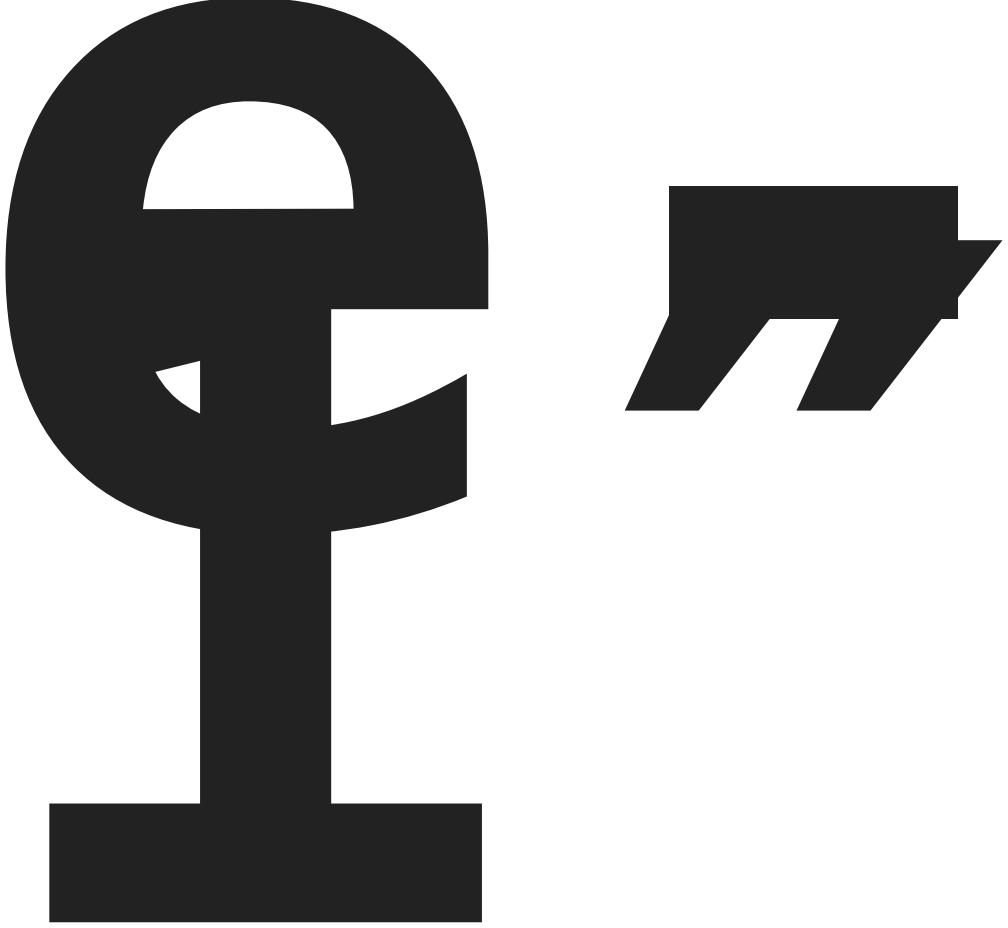








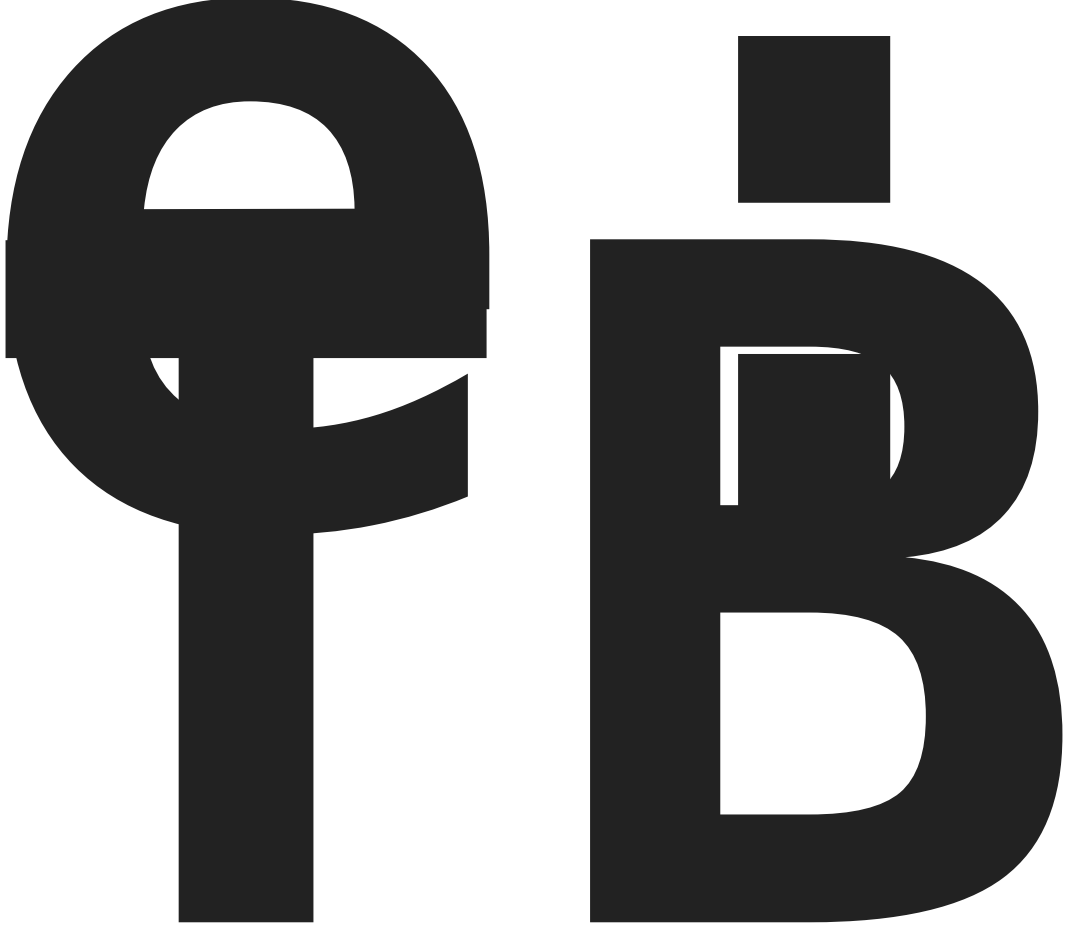




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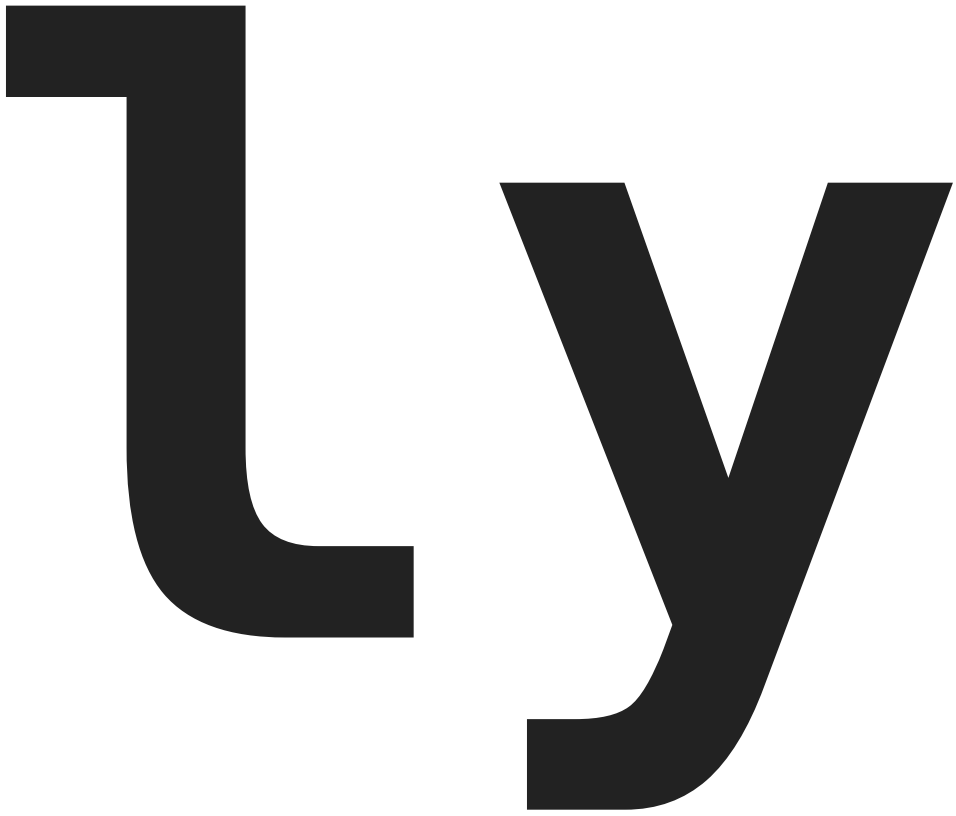

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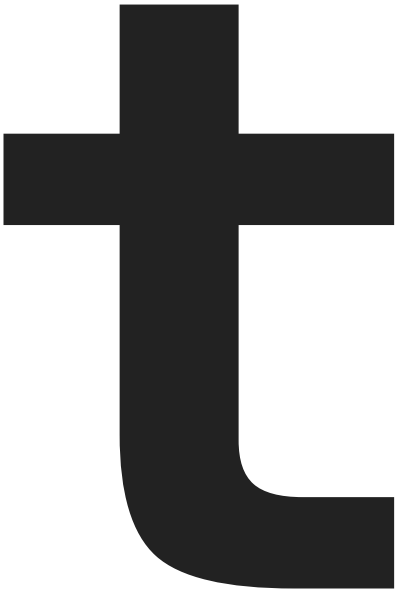
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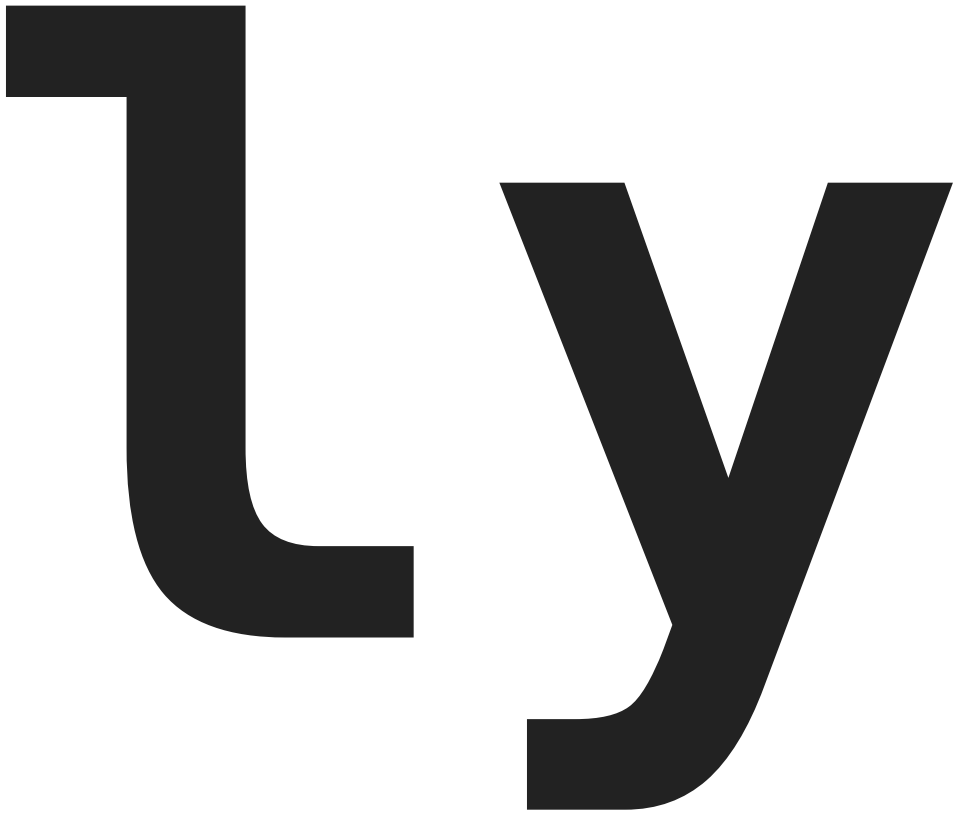


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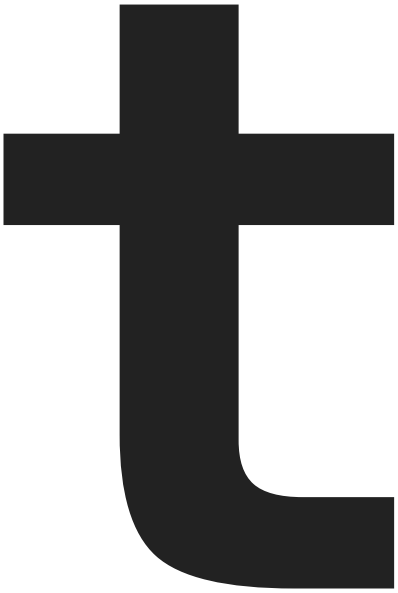
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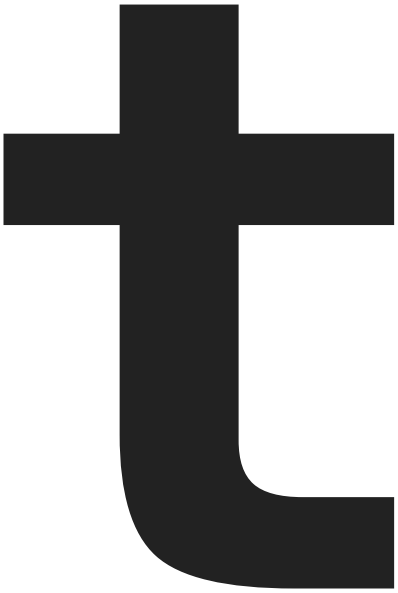
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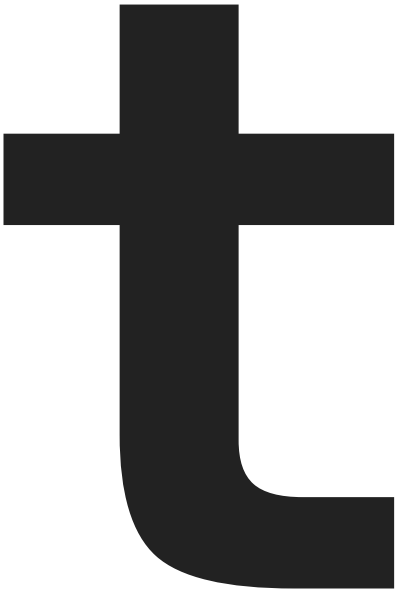
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