1917 film review: War has never been captured so incredibly

reader comments

9 with 9 posters participating

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Our film coverage sometimes veers outside the typical “nerd” spectrum, and *1917* stands perilously on the edge of relevance to Ars Technica. Anyone who reads our coverage of military tech and the history of war might be surprised to read that, given how *1917* revolves around the German occupation of northern France during World War I.

But *1917* (out now nationwide, after a Christmas launch in select US cities) doesn’t make our list for its accurate wartime depiction. Sobering and brutal though it may be, it’s more of an abstraction than a historical reproduction. Instead of major historical beats and accurate colonel-by-colonel retellings, its story is an interpretation of WWI stories that director/co-writer Sam Mendes (*Skyfall*, *American Beauty*) heard from his veteran grandfather as a child.

Even so, *1917* makes our list because its “one unbroken shot” gimmick is a technological achievement, and it unlocks Mendes’ ability to tell a different kind of WWI story than we’ve ever seen in theaters.

Alberich with a twist

- Lance Corporals Schofield (George MacKay) and Blake (Dean-Charles Chapman) have just gotten their orders.
- Those orders lead the duo to, among other things, a perilous plane crash.
  Universal Pictures
- Blinded by the light? No, by the dust.
  Universal Pictures
- Blake tells a tale about a fellow soldier’s ear.
  Universal Pictures
- Schofield better hurry to catch that train. (Kidding. There’s no train at the end of his mad dash. Just, uh, survival.)
  Universal Pictures
- Schofield and Blake advance.
  Universal Pictures
- Orders, Cap’n?
  Universal Pictures
- Always look both ways before crossing.
  Universal Pictures
- Danger may or may not wait within.
  Universal Pictures
- A haunting moment.
  Universal Pictures
- Any Germans this-a-ways?
  Universal Pictures
- Likely not a friendly.
  Universal Pictures

The film’s first scene revolves around two British soldiers receiving orders to march through supposedly occupied German territory and deliver a message to a nearby regiment. In the film, the Brits think the Germans are retreating to a specific point, the Hindenburg Line, and have thus sent a regiment to strike. In real-life history, this is exactly what the Germans

did, and this defensive maneuver is known as Operation Alberich.

But *1917* changes the WWI story ever so slightly. In at least one position, the Germans have only partially retreated and are hiding out, primed to attack anyone who takes the "retreat" bait. Two messengers have until dawn to alert the British general in charge of the nearby regiment. If they fail, thousands of their countrymen will die.

The tension begins with Lance Corporals Blake and Schofield (Dean-Charles Chapman, George MacKay) following orders to crawl and march through open fields, despite pretty much everyone telling them not to. Germans shot at us two days ago, the duo is told. Mendes and his crew have already established the "unbroken camera shot" gimmick at this point, as the young men march through the trench against the flow of other soldiers to reach a point where they can scale the trench and move ahead. Even before reaching open ground, we see events through a cleverly situated camera hovering far enough from the duo to place bumping, colliding soldiers at the camera's "lens" without breaking the dolly's slowly moving momentum.

But it's when the duo scales the walls that the scale of this no-cuts camerawork becomes apparent. A first-time viewer will likely shudder and clench their armrests thanks to the dramatic tension of wondering whether our guys will indeed be attacked by hidden Germans. But the stuff that had my jaw dropping was how the camera crew hovered and floated around the adventuring duo without betraying their filmmaking presence. No shadows from cameras, boom mics, or other gear. No fresh filmmakers' boots in the nearby mud. No disturbance of the horrors of war that have been scattered around the film's battlefield (which range from dead horses, to much, much worse).

It's one thing to compliment Chapman and MacKay's efforts in these unbroken shots. The film reimagines the old phrase

“theater of war,” as the actors must complete strenuous and agonizing sequences without breaking to remember dialogue or change positions between diving, crawling, marching, and climbing. But it’s a whole ‘nother to watch Mendes and crew dance around the leads. At one moment, the camera is disturbingly tight on one actor’s anguish or horror; within seconds, it has spun to reveal the other actor’s movement and staging while highlighting how much ground the British soldiers must cover to succeed.

Dialogue in service of cinematography

Enlarge / Brothers in arms.

The action in *1917* takes a few organic breaks to let hours of time pass, but the film is mostly careful with its mid-action "breaks" to allow cuts and resets. A tree branch passes in the foreground here. A crowd of soldiers obscures the view there. Compared to modern "one unbroken shot" fare like *Birdman*, *1917* has a much nimbler blink-and-you'll-miss-it approach to hiding its filmmaking pauses.

What's more, its longest 10- and 15-minute stretches relish their lack of breaks. Because these moments stretch on for so long, viewers will likely feel like they're truly following insane orders alongside a single comrade. Mendes and co-writer Krysty Wilson-Cairns (*Penny Dreadful*) top this tension sundae with a delectable cherry of heartfelt-yet-brisk dialogue between and during these sequences. One remarkable example comes when our guys happen upon a formation of trees. Corporal Blake remarks on the trees with just enough detail and flourish to get a mild rebuke from his comrade.

How does Blake know so much about these trees, Schofield quips? His mum, Blake meekly responds. A brief-yet-sweet anecdote follows as the camera slows down for this breathing moment.

Every dialogue beat—the brief motorcade with other teenage soldiers, the encounter with a terrified hiding resident, a pivotal exchange of battle intel—comes off as believable. The script achieves a delicate balance between clarity and emotion, and it usually functions to offer breaks and pauses between dramatic, unbroken action sequences.

In every way imaginable, then, Mendes' film makes its cameras the star, because everything else that happens is in service of these dramatically staged sequences. We've seen other dramatic war films win out by way of cinematography, particularly Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. But there's a different touch to *1917*. In interviews, Mendes has remarked on a lack of modern stories about the scrambling-and-frenetic

nature of WWI, about military forces making things up as they go. Without giving too much away, I will say that this film's focus on the strain and grief of its few tightly zoomed characters is entirely in service to Mendes' stated filmmaking mission.

The resulting film is one of the most sobering works about war that has ever reached the silver screen. If I merely described the film's plot, I would struggle to recommend *1917*; it's a hard watch, and its optimism is only lightly sprinkled amongst WWI's chaos. But as a filmmaking achievement, *1917* is an unmissable document of the human condition amidst the realities of war.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1641349

Here's what a $300 set of official, sapphire-loaded D&D dice looks like

reader comments

73 with 46 posters participating, including story author

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- 2019 was both the fifth anniversary of D&D's Fifth Edition and the 45th anniversary of the game itself, so

series handlers Wizards of the Coast decided to commemorate it with a whopping $300 set of dice. The, er, “gem” of the collection is this D20 with a sapphire in-laid to its “20” spot.

Sam Machkovech

- The rest of the 11-piece set is made of solid aluminum, with the D&D dragon logo in place of the max value on particular dice as appropriate. (The D10s skip this dragon-logo stuff, since that can be a confusing logo on a “percentage” roll.)
- The set includes two D20s, in case you’d rather store the sapphire one somewhere safe.
- Where exactly should you roll these valuable things? In spite of no instructions included in the box…
- …if you firmly tug on the dice-storage box, you’ll reveal a felt-lined rolling caddy. That’s where you want to roll these things.
- Sadly, this $300 set comes in a pretty embarrassing paper box.
- You’re gonna see this logo a lot.
- We could take or leave the tassel as an opening mechanism.
- The logo appears *again*. It’s part of a card…
- …which confirms what numbered place your set is in among the limited 1,974 sets produced.
- A D20 in the hand…
- …is worth an 11-strong set in the palm?
- Also included: a poster with new art and descriptions of the series’ classic Sapphire Dragon monster. Again, we’re docking points here; why couldn’t Wizards roll this poster up for people paying $300 and up, instead of folding it to smithereens like it’s an insert in an average pack of Magic cards?
- Enjoy this new monster spec, Dungeon Masters.
- Some lore.
- These very shiny stickers are hard to photograph. Weirdly, one of them has a circle cut that clips some of

the art.

On the occasion of Dungeons & Dragons' 45th anniversary this November, series handlers Wizards of the Coast celebrated by announcing a rarity from the company: official, limited, super-pricey dice. Are you as old as, or older than, D&D? Does that make you feel so allegiant to the game that you'd like to own a gem-infused 20-sided die with a set of aluminum dice to match?

If so, Wizards had you in its sights with its $300 Sapphire Anniversary Dice Set. Only 1,974 were made (get it?), and from the look of things, they haven't sold out as of press time. While we'd never recommend spending so much money on tabletop dice—we tend to lose our cheapos thanks to errant, booze-soaked tosses amongst friends—we figured we'd at least photograph and describe the set that surprise-arrived at the Ars Orbital HQ earlier today.

The above gallery tells most of the story, though it only goes so far to convey the glory of a shiny blue sapphire inside of a 20-sided die. We've yet to rig up our dice-rolling robots to test Wizards' claim that an in-laid gemstone doesn't negatively affect rolling weight for a D20. Instead, I rolled the thing 100 times while uploading this report's images, and my tally was… drumroll, please… two critical hits, and three critical misses. Hmm.

There's also a non-sapphire D20 in the set, should you wish to protect the set's most valuable die; either way, the set comes with a convenient felt-lined rolling tray, which you'll want for a full complement of aluminum dice by default.

That mix of an in-laid sapphire and the set's limited nature probably combine to inflate the price, but that's it in terms of complaints. The font, the blue-on-aluminum styling, and the carrying case's attachment to a rolling tray are all solid stuff. Should the dice's aluminum stylings intrigue you, you

could head directly to their producers at Level Up Dice and get a similar set for $135 or less. (We'd never suggest spending that much on dice, either, but it's sure less than $300.)

Listing image by Sam Machkovech

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1642029

A young computer engineer tries to solve a mystery in first teaser for Devs

reader comments

22 with 20 posters participating

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[embedded content]
Nick Offerman stars as a sinister Silicon Valley executive in *Devs*, a sci-fi thriller from FX and Hulu.
Something sinister is afoot as a young computer engineer investigates a mysterious disappearance at a Silicon Valley quantum computing company in *Devs*, a forthcoming sci-fi miniseries created by Alex Garland (*Ex Machina, Annihilation*). The first teaser for the FX/Hulu miniseries just dropped, in conjunction with Garland's appearance at the Television Critics Association (TCA) meeting.

In *Devs*, young engineer Lily Chan (Sonoya Mizuno of *Crazy Rich Asians*) is convinced her recently deceased boyfriend was murdered, rather than committing suicide. She suspects it has something to do with the highly secretive development division (the titular DEVS) of the quantum computing company she works for: Amaya.

Nick Offerman (*Parks and Recreation, Fargo*) co-stars as Amaya's obsessively sinister CEO, Forest, with Alison Pill (*American Horror Story: Cult*) playing his second in command, a quantum physicist named Katie. Rounding out the main cast are Zach Grenier (*The Good Wife*) as Amaya's head of security, Kenton; Jin Ha (*Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert*) as Lily's former boyfriend, Jamie, a cyber security specialist; Stephen McKinley Henderson (*Lady Bird)* as Stewart, one of the researchers in DEVS; and Cailee Spaeny (*Bad Times at the El Royale*) as Lyndon, yet another DEVS employee.

- Amaya's Silicon Valley headquarters has a giant creepy statue towering over it.
- Cyber security specialist Jamie (Jin Ha) apparently commits suicide.
  YouTube/FX
- Lily (Sonoya Mizuno) doesn't think her former boyfriend killed himself.
  YouTube/FX
- Nick Offerman and Alison Pill play Amaya CEO Forest and second-in-command Katie, respectively.
  YouTube/FX
- DEVS has a bit of a bunker mentality from the outside.
  YouTube/FX
- But the interior is all glowing, gold-hued sophistication.
  YouTube/FX
- Katie in the lab.
  YouTube/FX
- I guess this is supposed to be a quantum circuit? With,

um, a mouse in the center.
YouTube/FX

- That giant statue looks like it’s keeping watch.
  YouTube/FX
- Things start getting violent.
  YouTube/FX
- “Life is just something we watch unfold.”
  YouTube/FX
- What is Forest really up to?
- “What’s inside?” “Everything.”
  YouTube/FX

Garland expounded further on the miniseries’ themes at New York Comic Con last fall, while giving the assembled audience a sneak peek at first footage for Devs:

> *I read more about science than anything else, and it started with two things. One was getting my head around this principle of determinism, which basically says that everything that happens in the world is based on cause and effect… That has all sorts of implications for us. One is that it takes away free will, but the other is that if you are at a computer powerful enough, you could use determinism to predict the future and understand the past. If you unravel everything about you, about the specifics of why you prefer a cup of coffee to tea… then five seconds before you said you’d like to have a cup of coffee one would be able to predict you’d ask for it.*

The trailer opens with Forest showing Jamie his new work station in DEVS. “What am I actually doing here?” Jamie asks. Forest refuses to tell him: “Don’t worry, you’re going to figure it out.” Cut to Lily confiding that the last time she saw Jamie, he was heading toward DEVS. And then he disappeared. Lily fears something bad happened to him. “You know what happened to him,” we see Katie respond. “If you want answers, ask me what you don’t know.” So Lily asks, “What is

DEVS?” Katie responds by telling her about cause and effect. “This is the only principle you need to understand. Nothing ever happens without a reason. Everything was determined by something prior.”

Lily’s investigation convinces her that Amaya’s execs are fanatics, but would calling the police do any good, given how powerful the company is? There are glimpses of strange technology and a few violent encounters, plus an intriguing shot of Katie seeming to split into three. “The sense that you were participating in life was only ever an illusion,” says Forest. “Life is just something we watch unfold.”

Overall, the miniseries has a similar darkly cerebral tone to Garland’s Oscar-winning *Ex Machina*. “I’m worried about the future. I’m not a pessimist, but an optimist. I do think it’s very clearly the case that technology and technological advances are happening at a rate that we are not able to keep up with,” Garland said during the TCA panel. “Technology doesn’t have checks and balances; it’s not a good thing.”

Devs will debut March 5, 2020 on FX and Hulu, followed by a new episode each subsequent week. Garland already has another series in the works as part of his overall deal with FX, but this one won’t be science fiction. “It’s about civil obedience, and it’s in the here and now,” he said.

Listing image by FX/Hulu

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1641837

Locke and Key is finally coming to Netflix with an appropriately spooky trailer

reader comments

35 with 27 posters participating

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[embedded content]
Netflix trailer for *Locke and Key*, the streaming giant's new series based on the graphic novel series by Joe Hill.
Three siblings who have lost their father discover a collection of magical keys at their ancestral home and must keep them from falling into the hands of a demonic figure in the spookily atmospheric official trailer for *Locke and Key*, a Netflix adaptation of Joe Hill's award-winning graphic novel series of the same name.

(Mild spoilers for the comics below.)

It's a compelling storyline. Following the brutal murder of their father, Rendell, the surviving members of the Locke family—mom Nina and three children, Tyler, Kinsey, and Bode—arrive at Key House, Rendell's Massachusetts ancestral home. Shortly after arrival, Bode, the youngest sibling, finds a magical key, and then another, and another, each with its own special power.

The Anywhere Key, for instance, means the bearer can turn any door into a portal to any place he or she can visualize. The Ghost Key lets the holder's soul leave the body, while the

Head Key inserts into the back of someone's head to reveal their thoughts and memories. But those keys also make the siblings the target of a mysterious being who goes by the name of Dodge and wants to possess all the keys—especially one known as the Omega Key.

Welcome to Key House

- This is Key House
  YouTube/Netlix
- A widowed Nina (Darby Stanchfield) places her late husband Rendell's ashes on the mantel.
  YouTube/Netlix
- Duncan Locke, Rendell's older brother, is not a fan of Key House.
  YouTube/Netlix
- Rendell Locke (Bill Heck) appears via flashbacks.
  YouTube/Netlix
- Tyler (Connor Jessup) and Kinsey (Emilia Jones).
  YouTube/Netlix
- Jackson Robert Scott plays Bode.
  YouTube/Netlix
- An inquisitive Bode explores the Well House.
  YouTube/Netlix
- The Ghost Key fits into this lock.
  YouTube/Netlix
- A disembodied Bode.
  YouTube/Netlix
- Kinsey is horrified at this development.
  YouTube/Netlix

The first issue of *Locke and Key* sold out in one day, and the series went on to win British Fantasy Awards in 2009 and 2012 and an Eisner Award in 2011. But it has proven to be notoriously difficult to get any adaptation off the ground. There was early interest in adapting the series for film at

Dreamworks, with Steven Spielberg producing, before the project morphed into a television series at 20th Century Fox. Miranda Otto signed on to play the mother, Nina Locke, and a pilot episode was completed and screened at the 2011 San Diego Comic Con. Someone even put together a trailer, culled from the pilot footage. But Fox didn't green-light the series, and Dreamworks TV ultimately dropped the project.

In 2014, Universal announced a planned film trilogy of *Locke and Key*, but that project fizzled out, too. It was a crushing blow for fans of the comics (myself included), so it was welcome news in 2017 that Hulu had ordered a pilot for a new TV adaptation, penned by Hill, with Carlton Cuse (*Lost*) producing and Scott Derrickson (*Doctor Strange*) directing. Derrickson later departed the project because of scheduling conflicts, replaced by Andy Muschietti (*IT* and *IT Chapter Two)*. Sets were being built, and there was even a writer's room producing several backup scripts. Then, inexplicably, Hulu passed on the pilot, too.

Fortunately, Netflix stepped in to salvage the project, with Cuse and Meredith Averill (*Haunting of Hill House*) serving as showrunners. Darby Stanchfield (*Scandal*) plays Nina Locke in this iteration, with Bill Heck (*The Alienist*) in a recurring role (via flashbacks) as the late Rendell Locke. The series also stars Jackson Robert Scott (Georgie in *IT* and *IT Chapter Two*) as Bode, Connor Jessup (*Falling Skies*) as Tyler, and Emilia Jones (*Doctor Who*) as Kinsey.

Keepers of the Keys

- Kinsey uses the Head Key.
  YouTube/Netflix
- A chance to peek inside Kinsey's head.
  YouTube/Netflix
- Scot (Petrice Jones) is understandably stunned.
  YouTube/Netflix

- A colorful mental landscape.
  YouTube/Netflix
- Nina finds the Mirror Key.
  YouTube/Netflix
- What powers might this new key hold?
  YouTube/Netflix
- What better place to keep their growing collection of keys?
  YouTube/Netflix
- Dodge (Laysla De Oliveira) wants those magical keys.
  YouTube/Netflix
- Sometimes the best survival strategy is to hide.
  YouTube/Netflix
- Bode wields a toy light saber for protection.
  YouTube/Netflix
- Gabe (Griffen Gluck), Scot, and Kinsey peek inside a mysterious door.
  YouTube/Netflix
- “You have no idea what’s coming.”
  YouTube/Netflix

The trailer opens much like the comics do: with the arrival of the traumatized surviving members of the Locke family at Key House, welcomed by Rendell’s younger brother Duncan (for some reason, the actor playing Duncan isn’t yet listed anywhere). “I could never get your father to talk about his life here,” Nina tells the siblings, striking an early ominous note. She tells Duncan her kids need a home, and he responds, “Does it have to be this home?” Meanwhile, inquisitive young Bode has wandered off to the Well House and discovers a mysterious “Echo,” who tells him that Key House is “filled with amazing keys.” They whisper to those who are sensitive to them—and of course, Bode, Tyler, and Kinsey can hear them.

We see Bode discover the Ghost Key and magically leave his body, while a horrified Kinsey leans over his seemingly dead physical self. More and more keys are discovered, including

the Head Key, which Kinsey demonstrates for her new friend Scot (Petrice Jones). In the comics, the Head Key literally removes the top of someone's head when you insert it into their neck, allowing anyone to peer inside. In this incarnation, the subject freezes and a separate representation of the person (in this case, Kinsey) appears, able to pass through a door to a separate dimension containing one's thoughts and memories. It's a clever way to portray such an abstract concept, and I think it works well.

Tyler seems to be the only one concerned about the potential consequences of using the keys. "This isn't a game," he tells Bode. "We don't know what these keys unlock." Of course, Tyler is right. We see a mysterious door open—anyone who has read the series will know what it is, but it would be giving away too much to mention here—and a voiceover says, "You woke me up. You have no idea what's coming." That "crazy evil thing," as Tyler puts it, is Dodge (Laysla De Oliveira), who naturally wants all those magical keys and will do pretty much anything to get them. The keys of Key House are the Locke siblings' legacy, linking them to the past and to their dead father. Can they use them to fight back against Dodge's relentless pursuit?

Locke and Key debuts on Netflix on February 7, 2020.

[embedded content]
Sneak peek at first official scene from *Locke and Key*.
Listing image by YouTube/Netflix

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1640577

Gallery: The amazing costumes, weird controllers, and gaming rarities of MAGFest 2020

reader comments

38 with 31 posters participating, including story author

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I've said it before, and I'll probably say it again: MAGFest (The Music and Gaming Festival) is the best gaming convention I go to all year. The gathering of thousands of video gamers, tabletop gamers, cosplayers, chiptune music fans, and all other manner of nerds creates an electric atmosphere that lasts through four whole days, both day and night.

Other fan-focused conventions like PAX can capture some of that feeling, but the presence of major game publishers at those shows ends up creating a more corporate feeling. Over 18 years, MAGFest has maintained its atmosphere as a grassroots gathering of all manner of fans, giving them a chance to share in their common interests in a safe and controlled space. It's the perfect way to start a new year.

Here are some of the most interesting images I encountered during this year's show.

- After the apocalypse, these bottle caps are gonna be worth a *fortune*!

- A common sight at MAGFest.
- Chocobos love ukulele music. It’s a confirmed fact.
- There can only be one Solid Snake and one Big Boss.
- Jim Carrey, is that you?
- Does it count as cosplay if you’re dressing up as Mii versions of yourself?
- Keep on keeping on, Sam Porter Bridges.
- We giant black spheres got to stick together if we’re gonna kill Mario!
- Self-explanatory cosplay.
- Why is this racing game so serious?
- Buzz? Hey Buzz, can you explain this crazy space game to me?
- If you missed your chance to print pictures straight from of *Pokemon Snap* at Blockbuster locations decades ago, you can do so at MAGFest!
- You’d be forgiven if you didn’t know that the Atari 2600 had an official light gun. *Sentinel* is the only released 2600 game to work with the controller, though a number of Atari 7800 games supported it.
- The MAGFest indie arcade is the kind of place where you can find people pantomiming showering to control a video game.
- The MAGFest indie arcade is the kind of place where you can find people punching rubber fish to control a fighting game.
- This mesmerizing mirrored shape is displaying an intricate game of territory control.
- The problem with most arcade games is that they don’t have enough buttons. In this game, every button does something completely random, and you have to find the right one to win.
- Blowing in a harmonica-like NES cartridge to control an NES game? Sure, why not?
- It’s hard to tell from here, but the frets and strings on this guitar have been replaced with mouse and trackball controls. There are also a bunch of keyboards

to step on, distortion-pedal style.

- I am utterly unable to explain the existence of this Danny Devito shrine in the hotel hallway, except to say that Devito seems to be growing into a meme among "the youngs."
- This well-worn X-Men cabinet has become a monument to Charles Margolis, the late originator of the "Colossus cry" that still echoes throughout each MAGFest frequently.
- *DanceRush Stardom* was a highlight of the Japan-heavy arcade section, inducing your intrepid editor to do some ersatz moonwalking.
- The light up displays below players' feet had no gameplay purpose, but it definitely attracted a crowd.
- Once a living room appliance, now a passable DJ table!
- Yes, that is an original 1955 Magnavox TV being used as a laptop display in the MAGFest museum. Hey, a monitor's a monitor.
- You need two tube TVs to effectively recreate the Nintendo DS development environment.
- Facebook/Oculus is going to buy Nintendo, confirmed.
- All the best TVs are spherical.
- The flames make it go faster.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1640775

Clever design, lack of Bluetooth make Razer's new

phone gamepad a winner

reader comments

23 with 22 posters participating, including story author

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- The Razer Kishi will attach via a wired connection to the phone of your choice, so long as it uses either a Lightning or USB Type-C port.
- When not in use, the controller’s halves clamp together for easy storage.
- This backside image confirms that the Kishi sports both “trigger” and “bumper” buttons at the top. It doesn’t quite show off the elastic strap mechanism, however, which is used to cinch together the controller’s halves to compatible phones.

What does it take for a phone-compatible gamepad to get our attention in 2020, in a world where pretty much every Bluetooth-compatible game controller can connect to your favorite iOS or Android phone? At this year’s CES, Razer has the answer: a controller that may boost the cloud-streaming proposition of “triple-A gaming anytime, anywhere.”

The Razer Kishi, announced Tuesday at this year’s Consumer Electronics Show, arguably doesn’t look special. It features the same array of joysticks, buttons, and triggers you’ll find on most consumer-grade game controllers. Its trick of splitting in half and sandwiching a smartphone has been done before—with Razer already having its own Junglecat controller, which does just that.

But the Kishi adds a rare combination for this kind of gamepad: a flush fit to your smartphone of choice *and* a wired connection.

This works by connecting to your phone's bottom charging port, which means you'll either need an iOS device or an Android phone with a USB Type-C port positioned in the center of one of its sides. (Razer will eventually sell two versions of the Kishi, one with a Lightning connector and one with USB Type-C.) We haven't received exact dimensions yet, but the device's CES tests have revolved around the Pixel 3a XL, which has a 76mm width and 8.2mm depth. As shown with a Pixel 3a XL, the Kishi appears to fit snugly, mostly because it relies on an elastic band on its backside to fit the controller's two halves against a phone. We'll have to wait to see whether smaller devices will enjoy a similarly tight fit or if the Kishi will slip and slide while attached to smaller phones.

Less Bluetooth in the cloud?

Even with question marks attached, we're intrigued because Razer's new device, slated to launch in "early 2020," is the least cluttered wired-to-a-phone gamepad we've ever seen. In a cloud-gaming era, that matters.

While testing early gaming-on-the-cloud services, particularly Google Stadia and Microsoft's Project xCloud, we've run into lag issues when testing triple-A games with Bluetooth controllers on smartphones. Last month, the testing wizards at Digital Foundry confirmed our suspicions about Bluetooth controllers throwing up extra frames of latency. But that analysis was inconclusive, owing to Project xCloud's early public testing app not yet supporting wired controllers. We've seen controllers connected via wires to smartphones at Google and Microsoft press events, which leads us to believe wider wired-controller support is coming to these services, and that will likely make the difference in latency. Every millisecond

counts when streaming a triple-A gaming experience via the cloud to (and from) a smartphone, and Bluetooth doesn’t help.

Once xCloud gets a wired-controller update, the best solution will be to attach a plastic controller clip to your favorite gaming controller, so that your phone screen is stably held up, *then* add a dangling wire to connect that controller to your phone. That’s an annoying-but-doable option for home use, but it’s a much tougher proposition of controller, clip, and cable to toss into a bag on the go.

Kishi, on the other hand, snaps together when not in use, resulting in a pretty small hunk of plastic for porting around in a backpack. It also includes a connector passthrough for the sake of keeping its connected phone plugged into power, which is a necessary evil while a cloud-gaming session drains your phone’s battery. Sadly, this is a very CES-style reveal, without a price attached or a release date, but Razer’s experience with strapped-to-phone controllers makes us hopeful that the Kishi won’t feel “first-gen” when it launches later this year.

Listing image by Razer

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1640303

Goop’s Netflix trailer: Paltrow sinks into a vagina, spews pseudoscience

Enlarge / Promotional image of Oscar-winner Gwyneth Paltrow emerging from a stylized image of the female genital anatomy.

reader comments

150 with 105 posters participating

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Netflix released a trailer Monday for the six-episode series *The Goop Lab with Gwyneth Paltrow*, which—as expected—appears to spew as much pseudoscience and evidence-free wellness muck as the mogul's notorious "contextual commerce" business, Goop.

In Netflix's own words, the show intends to guide "*deeply inquisitive*" viewers through "*boundary-pushing wellness topics*," such as "*energy healing and psychics*." The show—like Goop—appears to be largely aimed at women, and the trailer's release was accompanied by an image of Paltrow appearing to descend into an artist's rendition of a vagina.

Goop critics were quick to decry the show, arguing that—like the brand—it actually intends to guide *exploitable* viewers through *unproven and potentially dangerous health practices*, such as the same *garbage Goop has been promoting for years*. And the show—like Goop—claims to "empower" women only by convincing them to try dubious treatments and products.

Critics on Twitter have been particularly merciless at trashing and mocking the show (and Goop) all day. The announcements of the show's trailer have been bombarded with disapproving memes, viewers noping out, and messages scolding Netflix for getting involved with the notorious business. (The responses were overwhelmingly negative, but there were some solid puns in there, too)

Despite the swift backlash online, the most cutting and concise critiques of the show seem to appear in the trailer itself. As the teaser notes, the unproven wellness practices

and products shown are “unregulated” and, simply “dangerous.”

In one clip, Paltrow herself asks one of the show’s guests “what the fuck are you doing to people?”

Milking it

Yet, the trailer also offers Paltrow’s justification for the show’s—and Goop’s—existence. In an apparent rejoinder to the unspoken-yet-blaring question of “dear lord, why?”, Paltrow explains: “We’re here one time, one life. How can we really milk the shit out of this?”

Based on the context, she seems to be arguing that privileged people such as herself might as well become guinea pigs for snake-oil salesmen just in case they might attain a slightly more fortunate status than the one they already enjoy.

But another interpretation offers a clear description of Paltrow’s business model, which feeds into the multi-*trillion*-dollar wellness industry. (That’s a lot of milk.) With the ever-elusive possibility of a better life, backed by her celebrity status and good genetics, Paltrow’s Goop hawks uber-expensive, aspirational wellness products. That includes a $350 crazy straw, an $84 water bottle with a “positive energy” rock in it, and an $85 “Shaman Medicine Bag” with “magically charged stones.”

The business model is depressingly successful. Goop’s valuations in recent years have soared to $250 million, and the company has expanded into brick-and-mortar stores on multiple continents. The Netflix series is just the latest sign of Goop’s achievements.

There have been setbacks, too. In early 2018, doctors reported that a woman died of bee-sting therapy, which Paltrow had previously personally endorsed. In September of that year, Goop paid $145,000 in civil penalties to settle a lawsuit

brought by 10 state prosecutors alleging that the company was making unsubstantiated, harmful health claims. And a potential deal to publish a Goop magazine with Ars' publisher, Condé Nast, reportedly fell through over Condé Nast's insistence on fact-checking (*phew)*.

Still, Paltrow has been unwavering and unapologetic, criticizing practitioners of evidence-based medicine for not "believing" in unproven health treatments.

With the new show, Paltrow remains steadfast. In a statement to Cosmopolitan, Paltrow said that the show takes the same "open-minded approach that we've cultivated at Goop and applied a different, visual lens with Netflix."

The series will be available on Netflix January 24.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1639613

Dell's new Concept UFO puts PC gaming on a Nintendo Switch-like device

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- Dell’s Concept UFO portable PC game console.
  Valentina Palladino
- The models Dell showed off can be played in handheld mode, with a center bridge (top) that connects the two side controllers, and while docked.
  Valentina Palladino
- The kickstand on its back is larger than that on the Nintendo Switch and can prop up the device so you can play with the controllers detached.
  Valentina Palladino
- One of the Concept UFO models in docked mode.
  Valentina Palladino
- Dell’s not promising that this concept will come to market.
  Valentina Palladino
- Dell’s Concept Duet dual-screen laptop.
  Valentina Palladino
- Dell’s Concept Ori foldable screen tablet.
  Valentina Palladino

CES may be flooded with new tech coming out soon, but it’s also a place for companies to show off new things that may (or may not) become a reality in the future. Dell’s doing just that within its Alienware gaming family with a new concept device dubbed Concept UFO, a handheld gaming console that looks quite similar to the Nintendo Switch but is built for full-fledged portable PC gaming.

We should preface the rest of this article by saying that this is exactly what its name suggests: a concept. While we got a few minutes to mess around with working models of Concept UFO ahead of CES, Dell currently does not have concrete plans to bring Concept UFO to market. Most questions about specs or detailed capabilities were promptly deflected as well, so the details we know about the inner workings of the device are

limited.

Ars at CES 2020

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First impressions

However, unlike many other concepts I've tested in the past, Concept UFO was quite impressive because it actually worked. It's a rectangular handheld gaming console with an eight-inch display and removable controllers on both ends. Working models I saw all ran Windows and were able to render playable games in handheld mode; docked mode, in which the console was connected to an external display and its controllers were detached; and another portable mode in which the controllers were detached but connected by a center "bridge."

Due to the inclusion of such a large display, Concept UFO is noticeably larger than a Nintendo Switch and feels bulkier, too. Dell did not provide exact dimensions, so we cannot say exactly how much larger it is than a Switch. Regardless, that still makes Concept UFO more portable than most 15- or 17-inch gaming laptops.

The device was comfortable to hold in my hand, and that's mostly attributed to the ergonomics of the controllers. The joysticks, buttons, and D-pad don't have as much variation in placement as they do on the Switch's Joy-Cons, and that makes them a bit easier to use for a newbie when connected to the main console.

Dell also had a narrow bridge that was used to join both controllers together into one larger controller when detached from the console. Since the device is larger than a Nintendo Switch, those with larger hands may not feel the need to use

the controllers with the bridge to get a comfortable grip. However, there will be some who simply prefer playing this way rather than in handheld mode. In addition to being docked and connected to a TV or a monitor, the device can be played upright, with the controllers detached, using the integrated kickstand on the console's back. The kickstand actually expands the entire width of the main console, giving it a larger surface area and making it more stable than the thin kickstand on the Nintendo Switch.

In terms of gameplay, the few minutes I got to spend playing *Mortal Kombat 11* on Concept UFO seemed promising. While playing the locally stored game, I experienced no latency or lag while fighting or during loading sequences, although the back of the machine was noticeably warm while I played. Dell didn't tell me exactly what the gameplay's resolution was, but it appeared to be at about 720p, which is roughly the same quality as if you were to play *Mortal Kombat 11*'s port on the Nintendo Switch. However, a Dell representative did say via email that it is "exploring" resolutions up to 1200p, with their main focus being to strike the right balance between a small screen, intimate gameplay experience, power consumption, and battery life.

The unknowns

Dell wouldn't disclose things like the processor, memory, or storage in the Concept UFO that I got to try out, but it's safe to say that the device would need to be running on fairly powerful specs to be able to produce smooth gameplay like I experienced, as well as to do so while docked to a larger, higher-resolution display. So far, component companies like Intel and Nvidia haven't been able to shrink down the CPUs, GPUs, and SoCs that would be necessary to produce PC-level gameplay like this on such a portable device (certainly not without major size, battery, and thermal-management compromises).

But Dell had to have gotten the internals to power the working Concept UFO models from somewhere because Dell isn't in the business of making its own SoCs—we're hoping Dell will reveal more about Concept UFO's internals, especially if the plan is to eventually bring the device to market. One thing that is not a mystery, though, is the harsh reality that a device like Concept UFO would likely be quite expensive if it were to become available for customers to purchase.

Concept UFO wasn't the only early technology Dell showed off: Concept Duet is a dual-screen device that looks like the company connected two laptop screens with one hinge, and Concept Ori is a tablet-sized device with a foldable screen that looks similar to Lenovo's newly announced ThinkPad X1 Fold. I spent even less time with these concepts than I did with Concept UFO, so it's hard to say anything definitive about them (and even harder still as Dell wouldn't provide any spec details about them).

Overall, Concept Duet seemed like the device of the two that would be more likely to hit the market eventually and the device that more users would actually use. While Concept Ori is more portable purely because it's a much smaller device, its foldable screen wasn't much different from other foldable screens I've seen on devices like the Galaxy Fold and other yet-to-be-released tech. But Dell is simply following trend—foldable screens are *en-vogue* right now, but they have yet to prove their value, and more importantly, their advantage over typical smartphone and laptop screens.

Listing image by Valentina Palladino

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1631389

Latest trailer for long-delayed The New Mutants ratchets up the horror

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Despite a long and bumpy road, 20th Century Fox's *The New Mutants* is finally coming to theaters this spring.
We were starting to think we'd never get to see it, but 20th Century Fox has dropped the latest trailer for *The New Mutants*, director Josh Boone's horror-inspired film originally developed as part of the *The X-Men* franchise. Slated for release in April, the film has been described as a "Stephen King meets John Hughes" YA horror film, with a dash of *Stranger Things* for good measure. *The New Mutants* does indeed feel very different tonally from prior films in *The X-Men* cinematic universe.

It's been a long road for Boone, who first pitched *The New Mutants* as a potential standalone trilogy to the studio after wrapping his 2014 film *The Fault in Our Stars*. From the start, Boone wanted to bring a different vibe to *Mutants*, much like *Deadpool* did in 2016. But while *Deadpool* went for raunchy R-rated comedy, Boone wanted to explore horror in the vein of classics like *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Shining*. "There are no costumes, there are no supervillains. We're trying to do something very, very different," he told Entertainment Weekly

in 2017. But Boon later confessed to some frustration at the "neutering" of his original vision by the studio, which wanted more of a YA focus.

Early screenings of Boone's original cut were positive, and the success of *IT* in 2017 convinced the studio to play up the horror elements it had previously wanted to de-emphasize. Several reshoots were planned but never happened, in part because of conflicts in the actors' schedules, but also because Fox kept changing the planned release date to avoid competing with other films in its stable: *Deadpool 2* in 2018 and last year's *Dark Phoenix*.

Then Disney acquired Fox last year, and studio executives purportedly thought *The New Mutants* wouldn't have strong box office potential. They changed their mind when Boone presented an updated cut of the film, which met with Disney's approval. And that's why the movie is finally, at long last, coming to the big screen.

Per the official synopsis: "Five young mutants, just discovering their abilities while held in a secret facility against their will, fight to escape their past sins and save themselves." Boone's cited influences include Demon Bear, a major villain in *The New Mutants* comics, as well as the 1987 slasher film *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*, which features kids in a psychiatric hospital being trained to control their dreams, the better to fight off main monster Freddy Krueger.

- Danielle "Dani" Moonstar (Blu Hunt), aka Mirage, wakes up in a psychiatric hospital after a tragedy.
- Alice Braga (channeling Ken Kesey's Nurse Ratched) as Dr. Cecilia Reyes, a mentor to a group of emerging mutants. Or is she?
  20th Century Fox
- Much of the film was shot on location at Medfield State

Hospital in Boston.
20th Century Fox
- Dani meets her fellow mutants.
20th Century Fox
- Roberto de Costa (Henry Zaga), aka Sunspot.
20th Century Fox
- Maisie Williams plays Rahne Sinclair, aka Wolfsbane.
20th Century Fox
- Charlie Heaton plays Sam Guthrie, aka Cannonball.
20th Century Fox
- Illyana Rasputin (Anya Taylor-Joy of *Split, Glass*, and *The Witch*), aka Magik, is sister to Colossus, one of the X-Men.
20th Century Fox
- Dani discovers they are actually prisoners.
20th Century Fox
- Under surveillance.
20th Century Fox
- Dani sees something Dr. Reyes did not intend her to see.
20th Century Fox
- Wolfsbane finds herself in a cemetery.
20th Century Fox
- A nightmare scenario.
20th Century Fox
- Sunspot channeling solar energy.
20th Century Fox
- New mutants, assemble!

The *Mutants* trailer opens with a shot of Dani Moonstar (Blu Hunt) rubbing a drop of blood between her fingers, as Dr. Cecilia Reyes (Alice Braga) asks in a voiceover about the last thing she remembers. We get a nightmarish flashback to Dani and a man (likely her father) running away from a fire. Dani wakes up in a psychiatric hospital, hand-cuffed to her bed, while Dr. Reyes tells her the reason she survived is because she's "a very uncommon girl"—a mutant, in fact. And she's not the only one. Reyes introduces her to a group of young

mutants, all part of a therapeutic support group in the hospital. Each of them is haunted by strange nightmares and visions.

Rahne (*Game of Thrones*‘ Maisie Williams), aka Wolfsbane, can turn into a wolf, which clashes mightily with her religious beliefs. Sam (*Stranger Things*‘ Charlie Heaton), aka Cannonball, is invulnerable when he propels himself into the air. Roberto (Henry Zaga), aka Sunspot, has the ability to manipulate solar energy, and his inability to control that power seems to have led to the demise of his girlfriend. Illyana (Anya Taylor-Joy), aka Magik, can teleport and is sister to X-Man Colossus. She’s also known in the comics for her sword, which makes a brief appearance here, emerging from her arm. As for Dani, aka Mirage, she has the “power to create illusions drawn from the fears and desires of a person’s mind.”

Dani’s power is of keen interest to Dr. Reyes, who explains that they must explore Dani’s power in order to help her get better. But as Illyana tells her, “This isn’t a hospital—it’s a cage.” When Dani “sees” something during the tests that Dr. Reyes likely didn’t want her to see, she concludes that none of them are in the hospital to get better. “This place takes your greatest fear and makes you live through it,” we hear Reyes say. “Until it kills you.” And the mutants resolve to combine their powers to escape.

Filmmaker Boone has vacillated in interviews over the years about whether or not Demon Bear will actually appear in *The New Mutants*, but the character is listed among the cast. We see a shot of Dani in the trailer wearing a bear-shaped pendant, and we possibly catch a glimpse of Demon Bear toward the end. So we’ll go out on a limb and predict that this will be the primary antagonist for the film. There’s also a rumored post-credits scene featuring Antonio Banderas as an as-yet-unnamed villain, setting things up for a potential sequel should *The New Mutants* hit it big at the box office.

The New Mutants is slated for theatrical release on April 3, 2020.

Listing image by 20th Century Fox

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1639331

It’s the network, stupid: study offers fresh insight into why we’re so divided

Enlarge / Peoples’ tendency to assume others think the same way they do could be influenced by social network structures. piermichelemalucchi/Getty Images

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Social perception bias is best defined as the all-too-human tendency to assume that everyone else holds the same opinions and values as we do. That bias might, for instance, lead us to over- or under-estimate the size and influence of an opposing group. It tends to be especially pronounced when it comes to contentious polarizing issues like race, gun control, abortion, or national elections.

Researchers have long attributed this and other well-known cognitive biases to innate flaws in individual human thought

processes. But according to a paper published last year in Nature Human Behaviour, social perception bias might best be viewed as an emergent property of our social networks. This research, in turn, could lead to effective strategies to counter that bias by diversifying social networks.

“There’s a fundamental question about how people perceive their environment in an unequal society,” said co-author Eun Lee, a network scientist based at the University of North Carolina. Her interest in the topic was piqued in the wake of the 2016 US election and the mass protests and subsequent impeachment of the president in her native South Korea that same year. “Both sides had been separated into two groups by each issue,” Lee wrote in an accompanying Nature essay. “At the time, I was studying topics related to opinion dynamics models and wondered what was leading these collective segregation behaviors. It seemed the tendency of hearing from like-minded people trapped them in their own opinions.”

> *“There’s a fundamental question about how people perceive their environment in an unequal society.”*

Lee had made the acquaintance of co-author Fariba Karimi of GESIS, in Germany, earlier that year at the Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico. The two decided to collaborate on a study of the effect of “homophily“—people’s tendency to hang out with those who are similar to them (think “birds of a feather flock together”)—on people’s perceptions using network models. They came up with a generic binary model dividing individual nodes into two groups: Democrat or Republican, smoking or non-smoking, male or female, immigrants or nonimmigrants, for example.

The model treated people as individual nodes in a network, with no consideration of human cognitive processes. The emergence of perception biases depended solely on the relative sizes of the majority and minority groups, and the extent to which like nodes connected to other like nodes. To test the

predictions of their model, they collaborated with co-author Mirta Galesic, who leads the research group on human social dynamics at SFI. The team conducted a survey of 300 participants based in Germany, the US, and South Korea, asking about perceptions of specific minority-associated attributes.

The team was surprised to find that the survey results closely matched the model's predictions. Specifically, "People who were surrounded by people similar to them think that their group is larger than it really is, and people who have more diverse social circles think their group is smaller than it really is," Galesic told Ars. "These biases are exaggerated with the relative size of the majority and minority groups."

Thus, social perception bias appears to be a basic property of social networks (and large-scale networks in general), similar to the famous "six degrees of separation" phenomenon, or small world network structure, whereby everyone is separated by six or less social connections.

One future research angle might be to merge the current work with another model the group devised for how people recall information from memory. "We are immersed every day in experiences with different people and this leaves traces in our memory," Galesic explained. "When we are asked to make judgments [like those in the study], we are basically trying to recall what we experienced and make a more or less precise judgment."

Enlarge / Perception bias in hemophilic and heterophilic networks.

There are so many different kinds of cognitive biases, each with its own unique working hypothesis about why such a bias flourishes and how best to combat it. But the implications of the SFI study is that perhaps the explanation is much simpler. "It's basically just what our social network serves us as information, which is then reflected in our memory and is used to make social judgements," said Galesic. "Then the solution is to enable people to meet as many different people as possible, to broaden their social horizons."

The sticking point: people often strenuously resist such diversification efforts, in part because the associated cognitive dissonance can be so extreme and uncomfortable. "My personal opinion is that this is not an individual property," said Galesic. "Most of us are just trying to fit in with the people we need to collaborate with, who are around us in a particular environment. I don't think that people are inherently closed-minded. So a lot of that can be changed by changing the social environment."

This is easier said than done. But tweaks to city design and media ecosystems to make them less sharply segregated might be

a good start. For instance, Galesic acknowledges that while she lives in the fairly liberal city of Santa Fe, her social circle is comprised almost entirely of white intellectuals, even though the city is also home to a large population of Hispanic people and Native Americans. She only interacts with those groups once a year at the annual city festival.

The same might hold true for scientific collaborations comprised solely of women (who remain a minority group in many physical sciences). It's a troubling paradox, since the same support structure that helps women cope with isolation can, in turn, exacerbate it. "When we have a minority group, and this minority is so cohesive as to only interact among themselves, they lose their overall visibility to the majority," Karimi told Ars. "This is disadvantageous, but on the other hand, people need in-group support in order to thrive in academic workplaces." The trick is to find a balance between the two extremes.

There is no easy answer when it comes to implementing structural changes that encourage diversity, but today's extreme polarization need not become a permanent characteristic of our cultural landscape. "I think we need to adopt new skills as we are transitioning into a more complex, more globalized, and more interconnected world, where each of us can affect far-away parts of the world with our actions," said Galesic. "We need to learn not to close ourselves off with the same circle of friends, but instead to intentionally communicate and go talk to other people."

And if you cannot change the system, try changing your personal social network to counter your own social perception bias. "For a society, systematic social changes, including an increase in the number of minorities and getting more opportunities of knowing minorities, might help us live with more accurate perception," Lee wrote. "I think it can be a light in this period of conflicts between minorities and majorities."

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