



NEW RELEASES

Deerskin

Deerskin is the story of a man morbidly – and murderously – fixated on a second-hand tasselled jacket. So what is Quentin Dupieux's film really about? Delusional narcissism? Obsessional fetishism? Psychic breakdown, or male midlife crisis taken to outlandish extremes? Is it – since the jacket appears to take on its own baleful personality – a tale of quasi-demonic possession? Or perhaps – to quote barmaid Denise, referring to the movie that she thinks phoney director Georges is trying to shoot – the real subject of the film is '(the) jacket – or rather, the fact that we all hide behind a shell to protect ourselves from the real world.'

Denise here pre-empts, and effectively short-circuits, any interpretations on the part of viewers and critics – which is characteristic of the knowing irony of writer-director Dupieux, once known as hit-making techno artist Mr Oizo. Dupieux specialises in facetiously outré comedies, but while *Deerskin* continues in that vein, it arguably shows him becoming a touch more respectable as an art/cult crossover auteur. While his earlier films, some made in the US, were often critically dismissed as mere pop-conceptual provocations (*Steak*, 2007, a vehicle for French duo Eric and Ramzy; *Rubber*, 2010), Dupieux is now a legitimate festival fixture, casting art-cinema regulars such as Adèle Haenel here and Adèle Exarchopoulos in last year's follow-up *Mandibles*. At the risk of calling them one-joke comedies, he often builds his films on high-concept premises, systematically unpacked to develop their absurdity: in *Rubber* a homicidal tyre, in *Mandibles* a giant fly.

While *Deerskin* can certainly be categorised as a black comedy, its effect is a delicate matter of register, with a measured pace and downbeat tone making the most of the narrative's caustic, desolate edge. Shot and edited, as ever, by Dupieux himself, the film opens in a glumly desaturated palette, seemingly reflecting Georges's depressive state. But once the deerskin jacket is produced, its colour suffuses the film entirely. An equally faded, but strikingly varied range of browns – wood, suede, caramel – suggests that the jacket has recast the world in its image. It also evokes a flavour of the Old West, giving Denise's bar a touch of Tombstone saloon – just as the French Pyrenees here stand in for the wilds of Wyoming or Montana.

The ambivalence also comes from the casting. Denise is played by Haenel, who – although she has appeared in comedies – is best known for radiating earnest intensity for the likes of Céline Sciamma, Robin Campillo and the Dardennes. Here she plays the (ostensibly) sane and considerably smarter half of an unlikely duo, her calmly naturalistic performance, and Denise's sceptical responses to Georges's derangement, representing a baseline of reality beneath the film's craziness. By contrast, Georges is played by Jean Dujardin; he has used his anachronistic matinee idol looks to engagingly incongruous comic effect, notably in *The Artist* (2011), but has increasingly turned to serious roles (e.g., Polanski's *An Officer and a Spy*, 2019). *Deerskin* derives a tremor of uncertainty from his double-edged performance: at once a portrayal of a clueless buffoon and a troubling evocation of a man in pathological denial about his desperate plight, his madness causing him to lose in rapid

succession his marriage, his money, his mobile phone and his sense of self. What makes Georges's situation so comically excruciating is the ludicrous nature of his fixation: a tasselled jacket of the sort once routinely worn in westerns and briefly fashionable among 1960s West Coast rockers (not to mention Charles Manson, as seen in Mary Harron's 2018 film *Charlie Says*). The jacket may also have supernaturally malign powers, like the red dress in Peter Strickland's *In Fabric* (2018); but then, its autonomous-seeming presence might just be an exteriorisation of Georges's disturbance, which begins with deluded narcissism and develops from there (admiring himself in the mirror, he approvingly mutters 'Killer style,' as the subtitle puts it; the original French, no less appropriately, is *style de malade*, 'sicko style'). Either way, a perverse erotic dynamism is at work when Georges converses with the garment, at first half-heartedly ventriloquising a shy female voice, then giving it a more macho personality that soon takes over as boss.

It's only occasionally that Dupieux spikes the deadpan tone with outright bursts of farce, as when Georges tries ineptly to stuff his old corduroy jacket down a toilet. Much of the film plays on the comedy of misunderstanding: a woman Georges meets in the bar offers to appear in his porn film because, surely, someone who dresses like him can only be that sort of director. And when it comes to comic grand guignol, Dupieux gives us some very discreet bursts of gore in the murder montages. Not the least disturbing aspect of the film's humour is that *Deerskin* depicts a world in which no one seems very bothered by death: Georges's several murders seem to go unnoticed in this small mountain community, while a hotel clerk is blasé about the fact that his predecessor has just blown his brains out (as shown with graphic matter-of-factness in a scene in which Georges is oblivious to the carnage, because he is only interested in the deceased's suede hat). This insouciance carries through in the incidental music, sampled from a range of 60s and 70s sources, including Morton Stevens's *Hawaii Five-O* theme (snarling horns) and David Axelrod (incongruously breezy jazz guitar).

Deerskin is very much a meta-filmic affair. In a nicely rivalrous jab from one Quentin at another, amateur editor Denise talks about her hobby of recutting existing films, for example rearranging *Pulp Fiction* in chronological order (the result, she says, 'sucked'). As a faux filmmaker, Georges at first points his DV camera at anything he fancies (not least his suede-covered self), generating footage that Denise, in the absence of a script, interprets as the material for a mockumentary. But, given that she is so much smarter than this clueless poseur, is she really fooled by his clumsy grifting and tall tales about producers who are incommunicado in Siberia? Or rather, does she – as she eventually declares – see through him from the start? If so, that would make her not only Georges's enabler, but a kindred spirit, every bit as dangerous but altogether more lucid. We can speculate on all this, but just when *Deerskin* has worked up a disturbing resonance as a fable of murderous complicity, suddenly – after a brisk 75 minutes – a magnificently derisory punchline turns the whole thing into a nonchalant shaggy dog story. If that isn't killer style, what is?

Jonathan Romney, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2021

DEERSKIN (LE DAIM)

Directed by: Quentin Dupieux
©: Atelier de Production, Arte France Cinéma, Nexus Factory, Umedia
In co-production with: Arte France Cinéma, Nexus Factory, Umedia
In association with: uFund
In co-production with: Garidi Films
In association with: WTFilms, Cinémage 13
With the support of: Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine
In partnership with: CNC
With the participation of: Centre National de la Cinématographie, Canal+, OCS, Arte France
Presented by: Atelier de Production
Supported by the: Tax Shelter of the federal government of Belgium and the Tax Shelter investors
International Sales: WTFilms
Produced by: Thomas Verhaeghe, Mathieu Verhaeghe
Co-produced by: Jamal Zeinal-Zade, Sylvain Goldberg, Nadia Khamlichi, Cédric Iland, Dimitri Stephanides, Grégory Chambet
Associate Producer: Jamal Zeinal-Zade
Production Manager: Arnaud Tournaire
Post-production Supervisor: Abraham Goldblat
1st Assistant Director: Catherine Olaya
Casting: Marine Albert
Child Casting: Ophélie Gelber
Casting (Aquitaine): Laurent Nogueira
Written by: Quentin Dupieux
Director of Photography: Quentin Dupieux
A Camera Operator: Quentin Dupieux
Digital Visual Effects: Compagnie Générale des Effets Visuels, Benuts
Special Effects: Olivier Afonso
Editing: Quentin Dupieux
Sets and Art Direction: Joan Le Boru
Set Decorator: Joan Le Boru
Costumes: Isabelle Pannetier
Key Make-up: Sophie Benaïche
Special Make-up Effects: Olivier Afonso
Key Hair Stylist: Jane Brizard
Production Sound Mixer: Guillaume Le Braz

1st Sound Assistant: Régis Boussin
Supervising Sound Editor: Alexis Place
Foley Artist: Gadou Naudin
Re-recording Mixer: Cyril Holtz
Dialogue Editor: Charles Deville
Stunt Co-ordinator: Philippe Guégan
Unit Publicist: Monica Donatti

Cast

Jean Dujardin (Georges)
Adèle Haenel (Denise)
Albert Delpy (Monsieur B.)
Coralie Russier (neighbour)
Laurent Nicolas (receptionist)
Marie Bunel (bar patron)
Pierre Gommé (child)
Caroline Piette (banker)
Stéphane Jobert (technician)
Géraldine Schitter (shoe seller)
Panayotis Pascot (Johnny)
Youssef Hajdi (Olaf)
Simon Thomas (Xavier)
Tom Hudson (Yann)
Maryne Cayon (Zita)
Thomas Blanchard (man in jacket)
Rio Vega (victim 1)
Maxim Driesen (victim 2)
Jérôme Menard (restaurant waiter)
David Sztanke (victim 3)
Julia Faure (victim 4)
Franck Lebreton (man driving digger)
Ayoub Ali (gloves seller)
Bruno Mary (hunter)

France/Belgium/Switzerland 2019©
77 mins

A Picturehouse Entertainment release

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Deerskin From Fri 16 Jul
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Mandabi From Fri 23 Jul
Limbo From Fri 30 Jul
The Most Beautiful Boy in the World From Fri 30 Jul
Now, Voyager From Fri 6 Aug
The Story of a Three Day Pass (La Permission) From Sat 7 Aug
Censor From Fri 20 Aug
Souad From Fri 27 Aug

WORLD OF WONG KAR WAI

Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)
Fri 16 Jul 14:30; Fri 23 Jul 18:10
In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah)
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2046
Sat 17 Jul 16:10; Sat 31 Jul 14:30
As Tears Go By (Wong Gok ka moon)
Sat 17 Jul 20:30; Mon 19 Jul 20:45
Days of Being Wild (Ah Fei jing juen)
Mon 19 Jul 18:00
The Grandmaster (Yi dai zong shi)
Tue 20 Jul 18:00; Thu 22 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 20:50
Chungking Express (Chung Hing sam lam)
Tue 20 Jul 20:45; Thu 29 Jul 14:30
Ashes of Time Redux (Dung che sai duk)
Wed 21 Jul 20:45; Fri 30 Jul 20:45
The Hand (Extended Cut)
Thu 22 Jul 18:30; Fri 30 Jul 18:20
My Blueberry Nights
Fri 23 Jul 20:50; Wed 28 Jul 20:40
Fallen Angels (Do lok tin si)
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