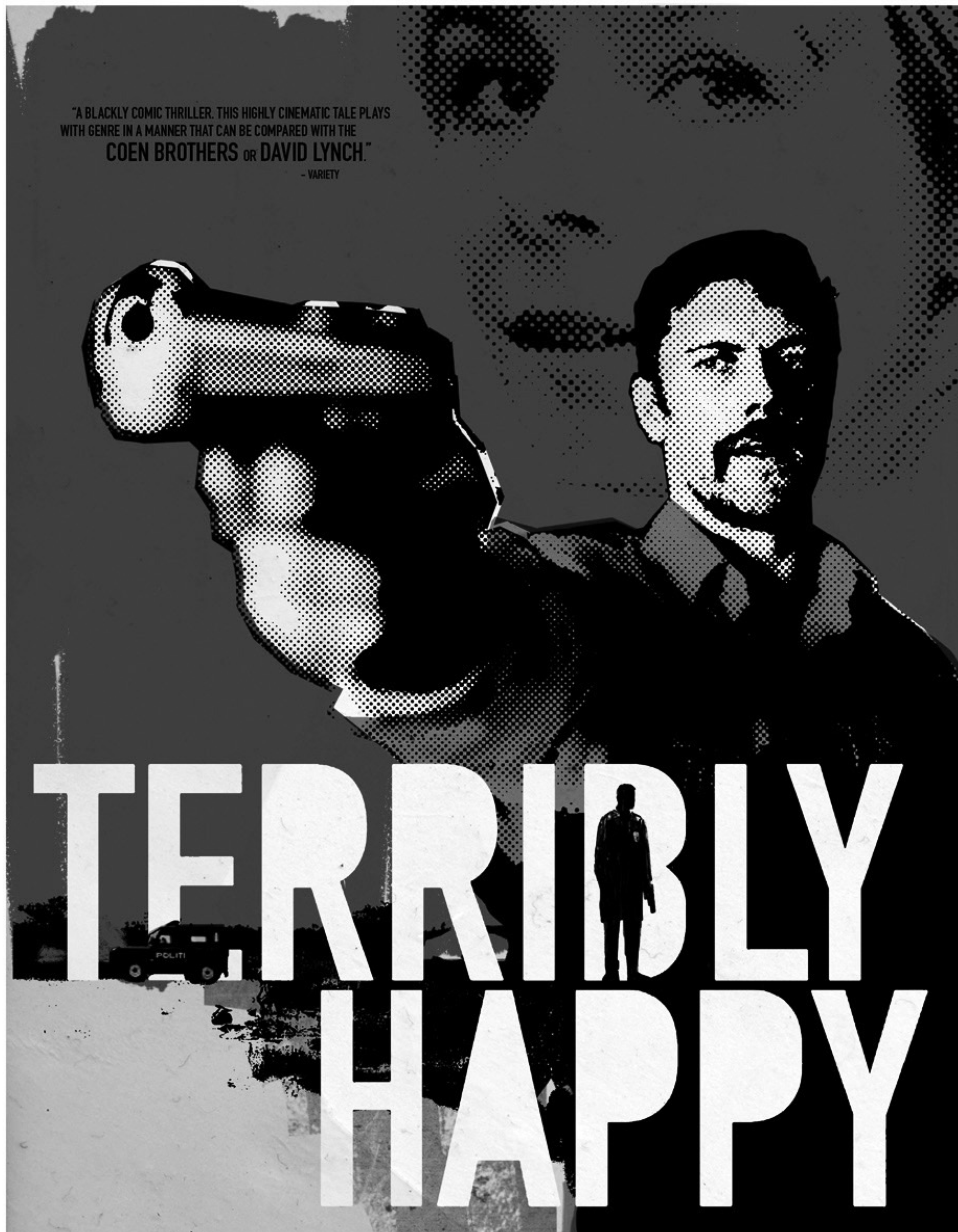


One for the Netflix queue: *Terribly Happy*

By **Karl Rybaltowski**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Directed by Henrik Ruben Ganz, *Terribly Happy* is a film about Robert, a disgraced police officer assigned to a small town as punishment. The tense interactions between this outsider, trying to uphold the law, and the townsfolk, with their peculiar way of doing things, are interesting enough to watch, but when he unfortunately runs into Ingelise, the wife of a violent resident that everyone in the community fears, things boil over, setting in motion events that twist and turn in a fresh way that sets the film apart - and leaves you at the edge of your seat the whole time through, even to the last seconds of the film.

There are plenty of comparisons of this film to such works as *No Country for Old Men* and even *Blood Simple*, and the comparison to the Coen Brothers is not only flattering to Ganz, it's also apt. *Terribly Happy* is equal parts psychological thriller, film noir, dark comedy, and odd Western, and all of it is handled in a stylish way, from the cinematography to the subtle acting work. The small town and its surroundings, a boggy lowland, are depicted with just the right level of drabness, while the townsfolk, even when attempting to be nice to Robert, always appear slightly menacing, malevolent. The subtle cues in scenes where the officer enters a bar, a grocery store, or even the local clinic build a feeling not only of not belonging, of otherness, but also of a threat - everything comes together in an engrossing way, and it's easy to empathize with the unease that the main character feels.

While much of this may make the film sound like a piece of horror cinema, it's much less *The Wicker Man* than it is *High Noon* or *Double Indemnity*. There's a deft balancing of the different aforementioned elements that accomplishes two things. First of all, it makes the feel of the film unique, and though there are numerous shifts in tone throughout, they're almost imperceptible - subtlety might be the operative word for much of what *Terribly Happy* accomplishes, from its understated soundtrack to the nuanced acting of the various characters, townsfolk and outsider alike.

The second effect of this balancing is that there are a number of unexpected twists in the narrative. These surprises, at least in my case, left me in a very peculiar position - I had no clue what would happen next, not even an inkling. All of this served to make the film even more engrossing to watch. Upon reflection, that's a very rare occurrence in the world of cinema these days.

If there is one complaint about the film, it's a certain piece of the final scene. Too many of the events of the film, and motivations of some of the characters, are spelled out in very blunt terms. For a movie that didn't underestimate the intelligence of its viewers and kept things subtle throughout, such a turn at the very end seemed disappointing. And yet, the last moments of the movie, with Robert sitting down for a regular card game with some of the townsfolk, may seem mundane, but still end the film on a sly, satisfying note.

There is already talk of an American remake of the movie, given the splash it made during its limited release in February of last year, so this is the perfect time to catch the original if you want to make a comparison.

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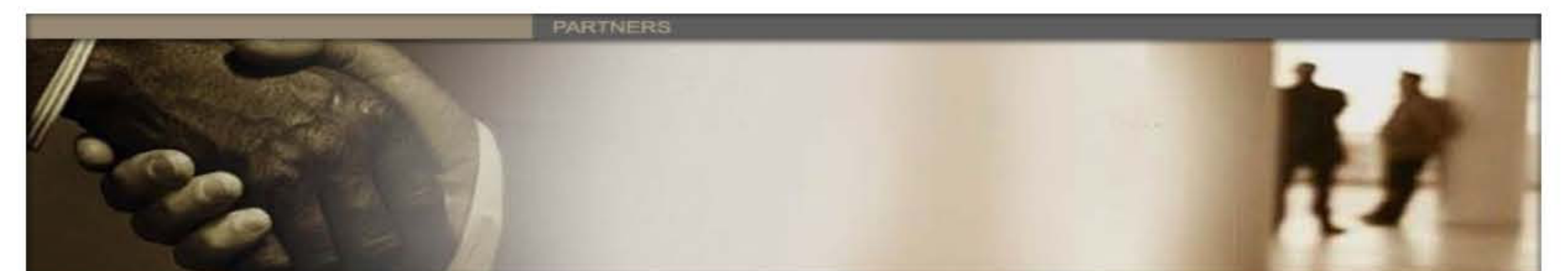


Welcome back! I need your help – last semester I coordinated a weekly column for you called "How to Chicago: A guide to unlocking the city life." It was a weekly calendar with events happening around the city: some free, some with a bit of a cost. I want to know: is this a useful resource for you? Would you like to continue seeing it, or would you rather have another key somehow telling you what's happening in the city? Fill out the TechNews feedback form to let us know what you want in your A&E section!

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