

The Cozy and the Strange in *Strange Horticulture*

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Unexpectedly, the primary affect of *Strange Horticulture* (Bad Viking 2022) is coziness. From the gentle rain falling outside our plant shop to Hellebore the cat snoozing happily in the customer window, the game feels safe, abundant, and aesthetically soft, the three characteristics by which Cook et al. identify a cozy game (2018). Certainly, evil lurks, not only outside the shop in the occult world where the local coven fights a cult, but also inside the plant shop's leafy glasshouse environment. Along with beneficial specimens, our plant collection includes those that cause great pain, disorientation, and even death. Yet, the threats of the game's unfolding murder mystery—and the strange plants that chart our way through it—lose their jab in the comforting play of *Strange Horticulture's* simple mechanics, easily-followed rules, and non-punitive outcomes. Magic and murder are no match for coziness. Thus, distinct from what Waszkiewicz and Bakun have defined as a *dissonant cozy game* that makes meaning through disjuncture, *Strange Horticulture* works because it revels in the tension between the cozy and the

