

# FAN OF FIRE

ISSUE #38 // DECEMBER 2010

## SMASH VIS CAMERA

Leon Gast on his documentary about the original paparazzi photographer, Ron Galella •

## ART

by Rebecca Marino and Julien Pacaud

## MUSIC

Delta Spirit EP and Talons album reviews

## SHE'S HEARING VOICES

Nick Suarez can shoot in front of white walls too, and he's better than Terry Richardson •

## POOR SPIRITS

We track down the jungle punk band so new they don't even have a MySpace yet

## FILM

Never Let Me Go and Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows: Part 1 reviews

The Adventures of Tintin: Secret of the Unicorn and Conan 3-D previews



## STYLE

by Sara Coe and Daniel Luxford





# I. Zawadzski

In their introductory words each month, magazine editors often speak of the lavish parties they've been to, the famous celebrities they've been having drinks with and the amazing quality of life they're experiencing right now, which you can part of yourself, by reading their magazine. While it's an exciting time for us at the moment, and we feel like we're genuinely on the tip of something very big (oh, hi iPad app), we're not hanging out with the Beckhams or hitting up popstars' birthday parties just yet. In fact, we prefer to sneak our way in.

A couple of weeks ago the latest *Pirates Of The Caribbean* film wrapped shooting in London, and while a couple of friends were there on their own merits, I certainly wasn't. Chancing upon an extra ticket, it's surprising how far a misplaced Russian accent

and confident pronunciation can get you. Thanks go to Ian 'Ivan' Zawadzski for not showing up.

Once inside, to be honest, it's not that surprising editors will write about this sort of stuff every week. Taking up all three floors of a suave private members club in central London, a free bar, decent enough DJs and an enviable dose of cool from top to bottom, the wrap party was a bit of a blow out for the crew involved, and there couldn't have been a better place to have it.

These sort of parties are so great because they feel exclusive, the annoying thing is that to ever get in it's all about who you know. For once, I knew a few people on the inside, and even they were only in there because they had a job on *Pirates 4*, which they got because they knew someone. *Pirates 5* isn't going to be shooting for some

time yet (oh yeah, by the way, they're already working on 5 and 6) so we made the most of our time inside. It's surprising how loose-lipped writers, producers and set crew get after a few drinks, more on that over the next few months, but you can see how easy it is to enjoy yourself at these things.

We're certainly not one of those scenester magazines, nor a megalith title invited back to film stars' mansions every week, but we'll freely admit, we like a good party too, though it's a double-edged sword on a moral level, entering that world every weekend.

Also, free tip for you, if Johnny Depp's body guard attempts a jovial arm twist, take it, the punch to the chest you'll get instead, is much worse.

*Sam Bathe*  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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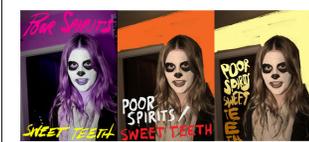
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ARTWORK BY  
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# December 2010



## It's chillzzz

**Sam Bathe tracks down jungle punk band Poor Spirits, a duo so new, they don't even have a MySpace page yet**



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**T**he latest in a long line of bands from the UK, Poor Spirits are a duo of two young women, Sam Bathe and Jessi Tejada. The pair have been making waves in the indie scene since their debut EP, *Sweet Teeth*, in 2009. With their EP, *It's Chillzzz*, they have expanded on their sound, incorporating more of a garage rock feel. Bathe and Tejada have a unique chemistry, with Bathe's raspy voice and Tejada's driving bass. *It's Chillzzz* is a collection of seven songs, including "Sweet Teeth," "I'm Not a Girl," "I'm Not a Boy," "I'm Not a Man," "I'm Not a Woman," "I'm Not a Thing," and "I'm Not a Place." The album is a testament to the duo's growth as musicians and songwriters. Bathe and Tejada are not just talented musicians, but also savvy businesswomen. They have built a strong fan base through their social media presence and live shows. *It's Chillzzz* is a must-listen for anyone who loves indie rock with a touch of garage.

BY ANDREW DECEMBER 2010

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## BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL 2010

The annual film festival in London is back, and it's bigger than ever. This year's festival features a diverse selection of films from around the world, including documentaries, feature films, and shorts. The festival is a celebration of cinema and a platform for emerging filmmakers. The lineup includes films from established directors as well as debut works. The festival is held at the BFI Southbank and runs from October to November. It is a must-visit for film lovers of all ages.

BY ANDREW DECEMBER 2010

**BRIGHTON ROCK** is a classic British film that has stood the test of time. It tells the story of a young man who falls in love with a girl who is involved in a criminal underworld. The film is a masterpiece of British cinema, featuring a stellar cast and a gripping plot. The film is a must-watch for anyone who loves classic British cinema. The film is a testament to the power of storytelling and the art of filmmaking. The film is a must-watch for anyone who loves classic British cinema.

BY ANDREW DECEMBER 2010



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## She's hearing voices

BY ANDREW DECEMBER 2010

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# It's chillzzz

***Sam Bathe*** tracks down jungle punk band ***Poor Spirits***, a duo so new, they don't even have a MySpace page yet



**T**he latest in a long line of bands out of Long Beach, California, after stumbling across Poor Spirits' debut EP, *Sweet Teeth*, we were blown away, but at the time, couldn't have even told you they hail from the west coast state.

With their EP posted on the website HamsterMountainCasino.com, you'd have expected the band to have set up their own identity online too, but scouring MySpace and Facebook threw up no results (and still won't), in fact we had to go back to the blog where we read about them merely to get in touch. Track them down at last we did, and after first realising we'd unwittingly pretty much met before, settled down to an interview with one of the band members, Carlos, to uncover one of the best new bands on the planet you certainly haven't heard of.

**FAN THE FIRE:** How many of you are there in the band? And what are your guys' backstories?

**CARLOS:** Just two. Danny does lead vocals, and I do the production and occasionally hit background vocals. Hmm our back story? We currently live in Long Beach, and for the past two years I've been producing instrumentals for friends, projects, wizards, and anyone who wanted to hear something. Danny heard some of my tracks and told me he wanted to sing on them. So I played the songs and he started singing. It just started vibing, things clicked, a unicorn gave birth; we were next level pumped.

**FTF:** Have you been in bands before or is this any of your first projects?

**C:** I was in a band before called Sparrow Love Crew for a couple of years. This, to my knowledge, is Danny's first project.

**FTF:** Are you working on Poor Spirits full time or do you have other bands or jobs on the side as well?

**C:** Unfortunately were not able to work

full time on Poor Spirits. We both have jobs on the side to pay the bills.

**FTF:** There's pretty much no existence of you guys online, just a blog post on the Hamster Mountain Casino website, with a link to download your EP, *Sweet Teeth*; was it a conscious choice to put the music out there before you had set up MySpace and Facebook pages?

**C:** It wasn't planned for the most part. We had some songs that we thought were chill, our friends were pretty pumped. My friend Sean made a mental album cover and after a couple glasses of whiskey I decided to just float them on the web. I still need to go and dial out everything else.

**FTF:** Do you know the guys at Hamster Mountain Casino or is it your own site? How did the EP link came about through them?

**C:** I write and find videos to put up on Hamster. I figured since our friends read that blog it would be easy for them to download the EP there.

**FTF:** Are you planning on going back and remixing and mastering the EP or are you happy with how the spur of the moment release has come out?

**C:** At this very moment I have no clue. I'm really pumped on how the demo sounds. We are gonna go back and remix some tracks and possibly get it mastered in due course.

**FTF:** Did you record the EP at a studio or was it more of a low-key demos thing?

**C:** It was in a warehouse in Long Beach. Danny liked some of the beats I had and wanted to sing on them. We bought some brews, powdered donuts, two keyboards, a laptop and *Sweet Teeth* was born.

**FTF:** Long Beachers Cold War Kids and We Barbarians since retweeted the EP download link, are you friends with those guys?

**C:** They're some great bands and people who live in Long Beach right now. We're friends with both bands; I used to live with Jonnie [Bo Russell] from Cold War Kids and Danny lives with Nathan from We Barbarians.

**FTF:** Your music style is certainly very individual, where do you draw most of your influences for writing?

**C:** Thank you. It's kind of a weird process. I'll just make a melody or skeleton track and have Danny listen to it for a while. We'll think of melody to sing and Danny writes and records the lyrics. Danny is an insane artist and the ideas he comes up with blow my mind.

**FTF:** How would you describe your music style? Who do you think it stacks up against in terms of bands at the moment?

**C:** I don't know yet how to describe it or what it will look like in the future. We called the genre jungle punk for now. Whatever that means. In terms of who we stack up against, I don't know either; we both love different music and bring that love to the table. Anyone from Gorillaz (Albarn is mental) and Crystal Castles to Washed Out, Outkast and Talking Heads.

**FTF:** What's Poor Spirits' next move? Have you got shows lined up or are you working on another EP?

**C:** Everything is up in the air for now. We love the way this EP sounds (being a demo). We're looking to play shows in the near future. There are about 4 or 5 other songs we want to finish. There's a studio we might record the next stuff at in Long Beach. If not we'll grab brews, powder donuts and hit the warehouse again.

*Poor Spirits' debut EP, Sweet Teeth, is available to download now from hamstermountaincasino.com, but good luck finding them anywhere else online*

# West Coast battlecry

*Lucia Binding* explores the music-makers  
behind late-show hype-band **Warpaint**



Having just released their album *The Fool* on October 25th this year, LA all-female psychedelic rock quartet Warpaint are kicking up a storm.

Making an impression at the CMJ Music Marathon last year, they were signed by the esteemed indie record label Rough Trade Records shortly after. The hauntingly sultry voice of Emily Kokal completes the underwater mood of their eclectic new album; the Cat Power-like vocals not dissimilar to the hypnotizing sound of The xx.

Formed six years ago, Warpaint has seen members including Hollywood actress Shannyn Sossamon and current Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist Josh Klinghoffer, whose band mate John Frusciante helped mix and master their 2009 EP *Exquisite Corpse*. The hypnotic self-released EP reached #1 on the Los Angeles Amoeba Records' local artist's chart; unsurprisingly as it grasps the group's mischievous dynamism and authentic guitar work they are infamous for in live sets.

The experimental rock band now consists of Emily Kokal (vocals/guitar), Theresa Wayman (vocals/guitar), Jenny Lee Lindberg (bassist/vocals), and Stella Mozgawa (drums/keyboards). Since the latter joined the band in 2009 their sound was completed, allowing them to experiment with electronics and keyboards on *The Fool*. The enchantingly chilled single *Undertow* is reminiscent of Nirvana's *Polly*, with undertones of an ominous relationship, declaring 'Why you wanna blame me for your troubles? / You better learn your lesson for yourself'.

With their dreamy videos and hipster edge it is easy to underestimate the strength and profoundness of Warpaint's lyrics, as well as their confidence onstage. Having opened for The xx and Vampire Weekend, amongst other, they know how to captivate and excite the audience, The Guardian claiming they are 'spellbinding, reducing the crowd to silence'. This calm and collected band seep coolness, and are the ones to watch come the New Year. *Warpaint's stunningly subtle new single, Shadows, is out on January 10, 2011*





## MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE DANGER DAYS...

RELEASED OUT NOW

After pretty much single-handedly starting the Emo scene with debut album *I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love* and *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* two years later, My Chemical Romance have been forever trying to ditch the label. Emo in the public eye has been given nothing but bad press, and the band bombarded with ludicrous claims of inciting self-harm amongst their fans. They don't, and never have, but at last seem to have brought things back around to solely about the music.

They're yet to produce a bad album, but whether you'll like their music has always been very much dictated by personal taste. *Danger Days*, however, is much more accessible, and their strongest voyage down the punk-rock vein. MCR's lyrics still have all the heart and power of old, but they feel less self-indulgent, while the gilt-edge riffs of course remain. There will still be haters but they have no real grounds to stand on.

★★★★★



## DAFT PUNK TRON: LEGACY OST

RELEASED DECEMBER 7

When it was announced that Daft Punk were soundtracking the new *TRON* movie, there was about as much excitement for their efforts as Joseph Kosinski's feature debut. It's a match made in heaven, though whether their first soundtrack would be a stumbling block for the French dance duo remained a doubt.

As you'd expect for a soundtrack, the *TRON: Legacy OST* is much grander and more classical than anything Daft Punk have done before, but it's still got their signature touch. It's much more artistic as a body of work, making use of 100-piece orchestra when recording. There aren't particular tracks that stand out as standalone songs, they're often a little too subtle for that, but still *Derezzed* and the end titles infuse a dreamscape unmatched by others. It's not mind-blowing on its own, but I'm pretty sure with *TRON: Legacy* playing in foreground, this soundtrack debut is up there with some of Daft Punk's finest work.

★★★★★



## TALONS HOLLOW REALM

RELEASED OUT NOW

Talons are the new math-rock band you probably haven't heard of. Bringing the genre to the mainstream a couple of years ago, Foals have had the twitchy guitar stable to themselves for recent memory, but this Hereford six-piece are hoping to break in on what can be a surprisingly captivating style.

Going fully instrumental, Talons pitch a somewhat unexpected violin on top of a wall of guitar and drums for a frantic and frenzied debut. From front to back, *Hollow Realm* is packed with energy; it feels planned out, but the volume and texture is still particularly striking. They know how to bring their thoughts together, which is a good job because if the band were anything other than super-tight in the studio, this could have been a mess. At times *Hollow Realm* still proves a challenging listen, that comes with the territory, and at it's most onrushing moments, can stray slightly off course, but it's still an impressive debut.

★★★★★



## DELTA SPIRIT THE WAITS ROOM

RELEASED OUT NOW

Venturing back to Prairie Sun Studios, where they crafted the stellar *History From Below*, Long Beach four-piece Delta Spirit set about a new five-track EP to celebrate what has been a hugely successful year.

The band normally split pretty evenly down the middle between slower-paced and faster stuff, though *The Waits Room* drops a little more on the folkier side. Reworking a couple of tracks from *History From Below*, at its core, fans will find a lot to love about *The Waits Room*. Played mostly acoustic, the new *Bushwick Blues* is effortlessly captivating, keeping the same bassline hooks that stand out on the original version. Of the new songs, *The Flood* and *My Dream* are down Delta Spirit's folky side, and it shows off their songwriting craft to a tee before Springsteen cover, and pretty heavy rager, *John Henry* helps draw the live recorded EP to a resounding close. On four releases now, these boys are yet to put a foot wrong.

★★★★★



FILM





# CONAN 3-D

RELEASED AUGUST 19, 2011

Not a three dimensional rendition of a popular (and recently resuscitated) American talk-show, but an all-action cinematic re-imagining of the character made famous by political governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Conan 3-D* is headed our way. This is a re-imagining, not a continuation, and as such nothing but the name is related to the previous two-film franchise.

The first Schwarzenegger film, *Conan The Barbarian*, was fairly well received by fans of Robert E. Howard's character, and as such this remake has the added challenge of not only living up to fan's expectations, but also of justifying its existence by bettering an already existing film. The role of buff hack and slasher this time falls to Jason Momoa (*Stargate Atlantis*, 05-09). There are shots online of him in his barbarian getup, and it has to be said he looks the part, suitably decked out in muscle and frowning menacingly.

*Conan 3-D* is directed by Marcus Nispel, whose last project was last year's reboot of the *Friday The 13th* franchise. Needless to say, it was not well received. Hopefully he can do a better job with this franchise, which should at least allow for plenty of good old fashioned, sword-swinging fun. It's in 3-D, inevitably, and will serve as a sort of origin story, beginning with Conan's father being murdered and his village destroyed. There's the whiff of a franchise in the air, one would assume, if audiences turn out for this. Stephen Lang plays villain Khalar Zym; the last time he played a villain in the film was as Colonel Quaritch in *Avatar*, and that film did pretty well at the box office. Lionsgate will be pleased with a third of the gross for *Conan 3-D*.

# HUGO CABRET

RELEASED DECEMBER 9, 2011

Martin Scorsese carries a deserved weight in the world of film. When he speaks, people listen. His encyclopedic knowledge of cinema and his ceaseless passion for filmmaking recently took the form of an advocacy of the 3D format, currently so in-vogue but decried in some areas as harmful to the medium. Scorsese takes an optimistic approach; suggesting, as others have done, that it broadens the opportunities that filmmakers have to experiment with their medium.

Naturally, all this talk is preceding the release next year of Scorsese's first 3D film, *Hugo Cabret*, an ensemble adventure piece. Based on Brian Selznick's 2007 novel (though the term applies fleetingly) *The Invention Of Hugo Cabret*, the film tells the story of the titular orphan boy, whose secret life in Paris is transformed into a magical adventure when he finds a mysterious broken machine. The fact that the inspiration for the book was Georges Melies - the pioneer French filmmaker - is fitting, and Ben Kingsley (who provided gleefully melodramatic support in Scorsese's last film, *Shutter Island*) plays him in this adaptation.

As for the rest of the cast, it's undoubtedly an impressive line-up. Starring as Hugo, Asa Butterfield (best known for *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*) is backed up by the likes of current go-to-girl Chloe Moretz, Sacha Baron Cohen, Jude Law, Christopher Lee, Michael Stuhlbarg (currently seen in the Scorsese-produced *Boardwalk Empire*), Emily Mortimer and Ray Winstone. You get the picture. One massive director - James Cameron - has already given us 3-D's biggest exposé so far, but hopefully Scorsese can bring another dimension - ahem - to the medium, and deliver something truly spectacular.

# THE MECHANIC

RELEASED FEBRUARY 11, 2011 (USA) TBC (UK)

It's quite fitting that Jason Statham - who has become something of a throwback to the kind of action stars that were popular in the '70s and '80s - should be starring in a modern remake of a film that originally starred Charles Bronson (and, incidentally, was directed by Michael Winner).

This remake is directed by Simon West who last directed *When A Stranger Calls* (also a remake) and is probably best known for directing *Con Air*. It's an action vehicle the likes of which Statham has now become synonymous with, although the actor doesn't seem to mind being typecast; in fact, he seems to revel in this sort of project, and to be fair, he's pretty good at what he does. The fact is, unlike in the '80s when action stars of his calibre were two-a-penny, now they are comparatively few and far between.

*The Mechanic* tells the story of Arthur Bishop (Statham), an elite assassin and the best in the business. When his mentor (Donald Sutherland) is murdered, he takes matters into his own hands and sets out for revenge. Complications arise when his mentor's son, Steve (Ben Foster), shows up wanting to learn the trade. Ignoring the fact that it's a remake, *The Mechanic* still seems perilously short of ideas, but Statham is a reliable action lead and West has directed in the genre before, so this could still end up a guilty pleasure.

# TINTIN

RELEASED NOVEMBER 11, 2011

Although Steven Spielberg is ever present as a producer - you only need to pay attention during credits sequences - his recent directorial output has slowed. In the early 2000s he put out a fair few films, but since 2005's *War Of The Worlds* he has only one credit to his name: something about nuking a fridge, apparently. And yet, there are few directors working today who would seem like a safer pair of hands for the beloved *Tintin* franchise to fall into. And that's without mentioning the fact that Mr. *Lord Of The Rings*, Peter Jackson himself, is Spielberg's partner in crime on the project. If this is successful, there is a trilogy planned, with Jackson to direct the second and the two heavyweights to join forces for the third.

Early stills have now been released from the film, and it must be said that they inspire a great deal of confidence, with the animations and art designers looking to have got the characters down perfectly. The film is entirely CGI, but employs the motion capture techniques that are becoming more and more popular, which Robert Zemeckis is such a fan of and that Jackson incorporated into both *Lord Of The Rings* and *King Kong*.

The elements are all in place. Notwithstanding the great choice of director/producer combo, the cast is well chosen too, and includes the vocal talents of Jamie Bell as Tintin, Simon Pegg and Nick Frost as Thomson and Thompson (should be great), as well as Daniel Craig and Toby Jones, amongst others. John Williams is in place to do the score (pretty much guaranteed excellence there, then) and Edgar Wright has a writing credit. All in all, this is shaping up to be a fantastic adaptation which, fingers crossed, will do justice to Herge's great characters. Oh, and it's in 3-D.

# SEASON OF THE WITCH

RELEASED JANUARY 7, 2011 (USA)  
JANUARY 14, 2011 (UK)

Nicolas Cage has been extremely prolific in this decade, particularly in the latter half, starring in all manner of projects ranging from good (*Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans*) to bad (*Ghost Rider*) to diabolical (*The Wicker Man*). Cage has starred as a sorcerer this year in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* but in Dominic Sena's *Season Of The Witch* (no relation to *Halloween III: Season Of The Witch*) he'll be hunting down an accused witch, played by Claire Foy.

Sena's last directorial release was last year's *Whiteout*, which underperformed financially, and wasn't well received by critics either. Before that, bar TV work, was *Monster's Ball*, a film which, despite good reviews, is probably best known for Halle Berry's exposed chest. An interesting back catalogue to be sure, and one which inspires both confidence, and a lack of it, for this latest project.

Cage plays a crusader who, along with his comrade (Ron Perlman), returns home to find his homeland ravaged by plague. They are ordered by the church to escort the accused witch to a remote abbey, where monks await to perform a ritual that, they hope, will end the pestilence. The supporting cast includes Stephen Graham (*The Damned United*, *Public Enemies*) and Christopher Lee, and rounds off a project that could be quite interesting, but will have a lot to prove early next year.

# FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

RELEASED DECEMBER 21, 2011

In the recently released (red band) teaser for *Friends With Benefits*, Justin Timberlake probably spends more time in bed with/kissing/rolling around with Mila Kunis than he does doing anything else. Lucky him. But what is all this scantily clad frolicking really about? The story revolves around a 'no strings attached' relationship between two professionals who are too busy to look for love. No prizes for guessing what happens. Dylan (Timberlake) falls for Jamie (Kunis), only she has a boyfriend already. Cue romantic comedy.

There are various reasons not to dismiss *Friends With Benefits* prematurely. Firstly, it's directed by Will Gluck, hot off the heels of his well-received comedy *Easy A*, the film which flagged Emma Stone up as a rising star. She is present here too; another bonus. Timberlake and Kunis seem to have good chemistry in the teaser, which will be important to hold the thing together, and the supporting cast - including Patricia Clarkson (so effective as one half of Stone's parental team in *Easy A*) and Woody Harrelson - is intriguing.

Hopefully Gluck will be able to take the simple, tried and tested concept behind this film and do something new with it. *Easy A* was smarter than most comedies and a writer's credit for Gluck on this film - as with that one - is hopefully a positive. Justin Timberlake, whose initial move into acting was greeted with scepticism, has just given probably the most accomplished performance of his short career in David Fincher's *The Social Network*, so there is reason to believe that he - along with Kunis, whose own film career is beginning to take off - can make this something worth watching.

## Release radar

*Tron Legacy* DECEMBER 17

*True Grit* DECEMBER 22

*The Green Hornet* JANUARY 14, 2011

*The Adjustment Bureau* MARCH 4, 2011

*Battle: Los Angeles* MARCH 11, 2011

*Sucker Punch* MARCH 25, 2011

*The Thing* APRIL 29, 2011

*Thor* MAY 6, 2011

*Pirates of the Caribbean: On*

*Stranger Tides* MAY 20, 2011

*Kung Fu Panda 2: The Kaboom*

*Of Doom* MAY 26, 2011

*The Hangover 2* MAY 27, 2011

*Cars 2* JUNE 24, 2011

*Rise Of The Apes* JUNE 24, 2011

*Transformers: Dark Of The Moon* JULY 1, 2011

*Larry Crowne* JULY 1, 2011

*Harry Potter And The Deathly*

*Hallows (Part Two)* JULY 15, 2011

*Captain America: First Avenger* JULY 22, 2011

*The Smurfs* AUGUST 3, 2011

*Conan 3D* AUGUST 19, 2011

*Spy Kids 4* AUGUST 19, 2011

*Straw Dogs* SEPTEMBER 16, 2011

*The Adventures Of Tintin: Secret Of*

*The Unicorn* OCTOBER 26, 2011

*Hugo Cabret* DECEMBER 9, 2011

*Sherlock Holmes 2* DECEMBER 16, 2011

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*interview with*

# Yony Leyser

*director of **William S. Burroughs: A Man Within***

*words by **Andrew Simpson***

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Fans of the writing of William Burroughs probably believe they know the man. The author of classics such as *Naked Lunch* was famous for challenging what could and could not be talked about in 1950s America, telling tales of drug addiction, homosexuality and flophouse existence in the American underbelly. But unlike his Beat era contemporaries Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, whose work gives a startlingly naked account of who they were, Burroughs remains something of an enigma, especially as his life's more lurid elements, such as shooting his wife dead in a drunken game of William Tell, naturally steal the spotlight. *William Burroughs: A Man Apart* is an attempt to de-mystify him using archive footage, home movies and interviews with people who knew him. It provides insights into Burroughs' famous non-literary habits, like loading himself with heroin and discharging guns. It also bravely puts his literature to one side in favour of exploring the man behind the ink.

Twenty-five year old director Yony Leyser first discovered Burroughs as a frustrated teenager growing up on the outer curb of Chicago. "I think Burroughs' work held a lot of relevance in the early 2000s in the Midwest. It was so conservative there, it was almost like a replication of the 1950s," he says, comparing his own upbringing with Burroughs stifling Midwestern roots. "In high school when you're given these really prescribed books that are kind of awful, you pick up something like *Naked Lunch* and you're like what the f\*ck?!" Burroughs' writing hadn't lost its power to shock and surprise, fifty years after the fact, but just as Burroughs would eventually escape his roots, the open, unabashed Leyser seems to have found his place in Berlin, a city that thrives on the sort of creativity that Burroughs found in New York in the 1940s.

*A Man Within* is not the first film to try and get a handle on Burroughs. Cronenberg's controversial take on *Naked Lunch* used the imagery and tone of the book, combining it with real episodes from Burroughs' life.

"I took this film as more of a hunt to find the man, and I think Cronenberg did something similar," says Leyser, explaining why he took a different approach. "*Naked Lunch* is great as a Cronenberg film, but as an adaptation people are often very critical of it. There's not a lot about his literature in my film because I feel like his books are so potent, people should just go to the source. Who am I? I don't feel like I am qualified to do that."

Leyser is more interested in how Burroughs' influence indirectly trickled down through popular culture. "The suburbs were really dreary and drab, but when I moved to the city as a teenager I discovered everything from The Clash to Sonic Youth, and even past punk rock to Nirvana. All those guys blew my mind," he says. Soon, he "had the link to Burroughs' work through punk rock, through contemporary literature, through some of the filmmakers who incorporated his ideas." The film sees punk icons Patti Smith, Iggy Pop and Sonic Youth give accounts of their relationships with Burroughs, as well as his influence on their music, which provides the bulk of the soundtrack.

Controversial director John Waters (*Pink Flamingos*), meanwhile, testifies to Burroughs' importance to all those wanting to challenge the status quo, and archive footage fills us in on his relationships with artists like Andy Warhol. "They're talking about sex, it's really juicy!" laughs Leyser. Burroughs is revealed to have coined the title of the film *Blade Runner* and the term heavy metal, as well as inspiring artists, writers, song lyrics and lifestyles. Burroughs himself moved into many of these fields during his life, and didn't even see his books as literature in the strict sense, but rather as different mediums coming together. "Burroughs said that he was transcribing a film into words," says Leyser, when discussing what made his writing so broadly influential. Martin Amis once dismissed Burroughs as merely "a writer of good bits", is criticising his work for lacking coherence. But he, like many others, failed to grasp Bur-

roughs' wider importance. As Leyser puts it, "he influenced a whole generation of influencers who influenced a whole generation of influencers."

All of the interviewees had some kind of relationship with Burroughs. "It wasn't like I was trying to find famous people," Leyser says. "These are people who were genuinely influenced by him. They wouldn't be who they were without Burroughs." That debt made securing interviews easy. "I didn't go through any agencies," he says. "I got everyone by people saying 'Oh you should go and speak to so and so'." One such recommendation led to Leyser calling Peter Weller, the actor who played Burroughs in Cronenberg's film. Weller not only agreed to participate, but became the film's narrator, even helping to raise funds by performing readings of Burroughs' work. "He loves his role in *Naked Lunch*," says Leyser, explaining Weller's willingness to come onboard. "And he didn't even get invited to play it: he was at Cannes and he hounded Cronenberg to get that role, he begged him. He knows *Naked Lunch* back to front." Weller, now an art history professor, brings intelligence and wit to both his narration and on-screen interview, telling some hilarious stories and providing some of the film's most insightful moments.

While Kerouac wrote of menial work and jazz in *On The Road* and Ginsberg of homosexuality and mental breakdown in *Howl*, Burroughs wrote of his own experience, as the titles of two of his most famous books put it, as a 'junky' and a 'queer'. The Beat writers' commitment to portraying their own experiences living lifestyles others considered 'deviant' made them countercultural heroes, and forerunners of both hippy and punk culture. While the film makes clear Burroughs did not accept the Beat label, the personal experience of Leyser and those he interviewed hold him up, as Waters puts it, as "a religious figure for people who didn't fit in."

But Burroughs' work also set him apart. "He was a lot more controlled, and a little less manic," Leyser says when comparing him to his contempo-



***“These are people who were genuinely influenced by him. They wouldn’t be who they were without Burroughs.”***

raries. “The mania that Kerouac used wasn’t present in Burroughs. As it says in the film, Kerouac was way up high, while Burroughs was way down low. They’re all lumped together but their literature is actually very different.” What’s more, for Leyser his work has proved more enduring. “As a teenager Kerouac and Ginsberg held true, but

less so as I grew older. A lot of that poetry and literature has dropped out of people’s consciousness, but I think Burroughs’ work is timeless.” The film suggests that this was because he was constantly trying to challenge society, and to prevent people being marginalised. He is quoted as saying “artists to my mind are the real implementers

of change” and several interviews testify to how he was consciously trying to blaze a trail to freedom in which others could follow. That his work remains challenging is shown Leyser argues, by Burroughs’ worldwide popularity “There are fans of William Burroughs everywhere now,” he says, before laughing put loud. “Can you imagine Naked Lunch translated into Japanese?!”

The reason why the film works so well, and feels so overdue, is that Burroughs has remained a somewhat unknown figure despite the efforts of Cronenberg and others. Burroughs never revealed very much of his emotional life in his work, preferring visceral, surreal imagery to self examination. Much of what is here feels so new, and by offering a glimpse of the man through those touched by him, and giving insights into key moments in his life, *A Man Within* helps to humanise the most other-worldly of authors. So instead of the lurid stories, we learn of how the guilt of having killed his wife stayed with him his entire life, about his reactions to the death of both his son and close friends, and into his relationships. Most importantly, it gives us a better grasp on how he related to the world, and in doing so it reveals real differences between the Burroughs of the page and the Burroughs of the day to day. “I was surprised constantly,” Leyser says, concluding. “In my film you see him talking about sex with Allen Ginsberg, and he’s just squirming. He’s not even able to get it out, yet he’s able to write something like *Naked Lunch* and open up. It’s just absurd that he was able to write something like that. People couldn’t even say those words back then. He’s able to influence and create these great works, but inside, behind the persona, he’s less comfortable.” That there was another character waiting to be revealed behind Burroughs’ writing will only add to his allure, and give new insights into how he came to write what he did. Those that see the film will invariably have one reaction, as Leyser did. He puts it simply; “I went back to the work.” ♣

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*interview with*

# Leon Gast

*director of **Smash His Camera***

*words by **Andrew Simpson***

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It seems oddly appropriate that within five minutes of sitting down, Leon Gast is having an argument about the First Amendment. Gast, the genial, Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker, is speaking about his new film, *Smash His Camera*, which won him the best director award at Sundance earlier this year. It tells the story of a man who may be America's first (and certainly first majorly successful) paparazzo, Ron Galella, and it's a whistle-stop tour of twentieth century celebrity. Focusing mainly on Galella's famous stalking of Jackie Onassis, a moment from which supplies the film's title, it calls it's subject 'The Price Tag of the First Amendment'. This is where the argument comes in.

Galella was the first of a now very familiar pack of invasive predators, hanging around both public and private events in an attempt to photograph the stars. Achieving some unique fame himself as a byword for intrusion, Galella also happened to take great photographs, but at the expense of many people's abilities to leave their homes without suffering harassment. His tactics included hiding in bushes, jumping out from behind coat racks in restaurants, and wearing elaborate disguises. Gast, sitting in the lobby of the Mayfair Hotel a few hours before a packed screening of *Smash His Camera* at the London Film Festival, is a man who clearly revels in the quiet life he leads in Upstate New York. It's unsurprising, then, that he doesn't think much of Galella's invasive approach to personal space. "Galella said 'I want to take pictures on my terms, not on the celebrity's, and if they're on public property, it's my right'. This is how the First Amendment in the United States has now been stretched beyond what it was intended to be," he says, echoing an argument made in the film.

Before he can continue, a shout of dissent from the other end of the table introduces the film's producer. Gast sighs. "He's a lawyer," he says, gesturing, before launching into a debate about privacy that expands to include anonymous donations funding the

Tea Party movement. While seemingly off-topic, this five minute back and forth (the pair seem to have forgotten that there is an interview happening) doesn't just offer the kind of good spirited debate that US politics is currently missing; it also gets to the heart of what makes *Smash His Camera* so good. The film poses questions about what we have the right to know about other people, and what others have the right to stop us knowing, especially if they're famous. All of this is fragmented through Galella's story, and the various public figures who pop up to argue with each other over whether he is a stalker or an artist. The fact that the two people principally responsible for making the film don't even seem to agree on its subject simply mirrors the debate happening on-screen.

This all takes a back seat to the endlessly entertaining figure that is Galella. His relentless, obsessive pursuit of Jackie Kennedy, and the story of how Marlon Brando broke his jaw after he got too close, lay bare an incredible tenacity which landed him with a restraining order, as well as setting a benchmark for his profession. "Brando punched him and knocked out some of his teeth. We're not sure how many, as sometimes he'll say four and then he'll say five. Incredibly, he went back to work," Gast says, shaking his head in disbelief. "He had broken teeth and a broken jaw, and he went on another shoot afterwards!" Galella's version of events is absolutely priceless, and had Gast and his crew in stitches behind the camera. "He just waved at his jaw and said 'all the novocaine was still there, so it was completely numb!' It took a lot of self control not to laugh; you didn't want that in the background as you were filming!"

It's moments like this, as well as the affection with which he speaks about his subjects, that will make audiences feel unsure over how to feel about Galella. Gast underwent a similar trajectory. "You know my preconceived idea was that this guy is a stalker, this guy is a pest, this guy is somebody who invaded the privacy of celebrities," he says. But his subject

made him let his guard down on their very first meeting. "He's got about half an acre of greenery behind his house," Gast says with obvious glee, "and Ron turns to me and says 'you see that row of evergreens, every other one is fake, after Christmas I buy fake trees because real ones are like two hundred and fifty dollars!" he laughs, "and that was it!" Galella's gauche home, with its fake Roman water features and artificial flowers, is compared to that of Tony Soprano, but Gast, a product of the fictional mobster's New Jersey, seems to have seen it less as a sign of ruthlessness and more one of oddly endearing eccentricity.

Gast was also won over in more conventional ways. "When the shoot was over, he gave all of the production crew framed prints of his most famous picture of Jackie, signed to each of the guys," Gast says, obviously touched. When it is suggested that this may be part of Galella trying to ensure a more favourable portrait (he uses free copies of his book to butter up celebrities throughout the film), Gast makes it clear he is under no illusions. "He said they were hand printed. He's full of sh\*t, but it was still very generous of him. I got to really like the guy."

*Smash His Camera* makes a strong case for Galella's work being among the most artful and iconic celebrity photography of the '60s, '70s and '80s. Not only capturing people like Marlon Brando and Andy Warhol in unguarded, revealing moments, his work is also beautiful. Numerous recent books and exhibitions now mean that Galella's relevance as both artist and chronicler of some of Hollywood's most iconic faces is becoming more widely recognised. With a few decades now past, people seem able to see beyond his behaviour to the true worth of his work, and most of the people in the film arguing that his work has no value hold very obvious (if understandable) grudges. Whether the ends justify the means, however, is very much left up to the audience.

Gast for one is clearly convinced of Galella's cultural relevance. "One person we interviewed said that if

10,000 years from now you could have either a room full of Titians, Michelangelo, or Ron Galellas, which would you have? Certainly if you wanted to know something about the culture of the time it would be Ron Galella's. You go into his house and in every inch of this place there are photographs of movie stars, everybody. You look at the walls and you say 'oh my God, he's got Ronald Reagan! He's got everybody!'

Gast's enthusiasm is, perhaps, unsurprising. His previous documentaries on musicians and sporting heroes mark him out as a filmmaker fascinated by the minting of cultural icons, and how in particular moments they become something more than just people. The wonderful *When We Were Kings*, a look at Muhammad Ali's graduation to Greatest Boxer of All Time status at the Rumble in the Jungle in 1974, is the prime example of this, and it won him an Oscar. What is different about *Smash His Camera* is that Gast is using its subject as a way to once again look at the creation of icons, only this time not from the perspective of the icons themselves or their fans, but a man who could be argued to have created them. Galella's archive of three million photographs wordlessly put the case that without him Jackie O and many others like her might never have achieved the same kind of status in the public imagination.

Galella, for one, isn't especially modest about his own importance, describing himself as "Ron Galella, paparazzo superstar!" His house, lined as it is with his own work, is described by Gast as "a temple to him, really." Taking that into account, the question of whether Galella has any regrets seems rather moot. "Regrets? I don't think so" Gast says. "Some of the press still have ill feelings about Ron, and I remember I said to his wife, who's sensitive about it, that you have to learn to deflect that kind of stuff. He always tells her the same, to be more thick skinned." Fittingly, Galella's only regret seems to be not being tenacious enough. "He knew Marilyn Monroe was at the 20th Century Fox lot shooting *Bus Stop*, and he waited, but then

***"He had broken teeth and a broken jaw, and he went on another shoot afterwards!"***

he just gave up and left," Gast says. "He then heard that 10 minutes later she came out. After that he had the attitude that he was never gonna leave until he had gotten the shot." *Smash His Camera* follows a then 78 year old Galella, "the guy with the milk crate", as he is invariably the last paparazzi to go home, often pursuing tip-offs long into the night.

Galella only cares about the work he produces, so it makes perfect sense that he has no sense of guilt. But he does regret the disappearance of the artfulness and craft from his profession. Galella spends much of the film lovingly developing photographs, or talking about his spontaneous, one on one 'relationships' with his subjects. While it may merely be "the art of the paparazzi", he considers it art nonetheless. But this art is no longer possible in a world where there are many more like him, and with even fewer scruples. "His tactics are, relatively speaking, rather tame," says Gast ruefully, speaking of what Galella calls a 'gangbang culture'. "I have no doubt that if he did get a shot of Jackie O getting out of a limousine with her undies showing, he wouldn't publish it." You get the feeling that both Gast and Galella share a sense of loss for a better time, one in which people looked to raise their idols up, not to bring them low.

The way that celebrity has changed in the interim is underlined in a scene filmed at a Galella exhibition, in which Gast asked a young woman to name the celebrities in Galella's pictures. Gast was shocked out how little she knew. "That's very true," he says

speaking about the scene, "and neither would I recognise most of the people who are most famous now. *Glee* is the most popular show in the States, and I have no idea who any of the people are, in so much of what's popular today." Rather than being a case of each generation possessing their own distinct set of icons, the film seems to say that this is a product of a culture of stardom that favours the transient, interchangeable faces of today over the immortal stars of Galella's era. The fact that Ron's profession has helped create the culture just adds to the irony.

*Smash His Camera* ultimately reveals Galella as wanting to "show the humanity, but also glamourise that humanity" in celebrities, an aim that seems to come from a misguided sense of affection. Seeing himself as an innocent performing a social virtue, this strange naïveté allows him to do his job in the face of increasing contempt, and is tragic in moments such as when he writes a crude handwritten letter to Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, knowing full well there is no chance of a response. This warped sense of connection doesn't render Galella's intrusions any less serious, but makes his stalker tactics more understandably human. When Galella says of his most famous photo of Jackie, "I don't think she knew it was me, that's why she smiled a little," it's even rather moving. "Seeing the pictures, they're all beautiful", says Gast, finally. That such poignancies can be found in such dirty work only makes Galella, and the picture of which he is the subject, that bit more of a star.



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*interview with*

# Alistair Banks Griffin

*director of Two Gates Of Sleep*

*words by Andrew Simpson*

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Alistair Banks Griffin was originally a painter, attending the same art school as Gus Van Sant before deciding to become a filmmaker. Having gained experience on HBO shows *The Sopranos* and *Carnivale*, his debut feature, *Two Gates Of Sleep*, premiered in the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes before receiving its UK premiere at the London Film Festival. It tells the story of two brothers living on the Mississippi-Louisiana border who honour the wishes of their deceased mother by carrying her coffin to its final resting place. The journey through the local forests and swamps changes them both in unexpected ways. Starring Brady Corbet (24, *Funny Games*, *Thirteen*), the film is an example of the sort of a minimalism more common in European cinema, featuring extended, near wordless scenes, as well as some of the most beautiful cinematography of any film this year.

**FAN THE FIRE:** *Two Gates Of Sleep* is mostly wordless, and is more reminiscent of something like Alexander Sokurov's *Mother And Son* than it is of most American indie movies. Is that intentional?

**ALISTAIR BANKS GRIFFIN:** Well *Mother And Son* is a perfect film to talk about. It was a huge help for me just to have something in front of me while I was writing that was so closely connected to what I wanted to do. And I stole a few things from that film which you may have noticed! I think its one of the most sublime, perfect films ever made. What I love about that film is that so much of it is silent, and focuses on this mother and son relationship which is very strange. That was something that from a visual and a dramatic point of view I wanted to use.

**FTF:** One American director that your style brings to mind is Terrence Malick, especially in terms of its exploration of man's relationship with nature.

**ABG:** He's a huge influence on me. I made a connection early on with Malick's use of the interiorised monologue, which he has very much coined as his style. I was very conscious of trying to not go there, and to try to

achieve that interiorised speaking without actual speaking, which is the real challenge. I use a combination of a very particular type of direction and performance, and the mise-en-scene with the environment, whereas Malick has a lot of big sweeping camera moves and a certain type of editing. I wanted to go a little bit more locked, to be strict from a compositional and sound point of view, and to use the nuances of that approach in crafting a sonic space. I think of it like architecture, trying to create a space you're entering, like a cathedral or a large room of epic nature.

**FTF:** Talking about composition, the film has the quality of a painting at times doesn't it?

**ABG:** I started out as a painter and I'm a huge fan and consumer of both contemporary and classical art. My background is in art history more than anything, and composition is a crucial thing for me.

**FTF:** It looks beautiful. How did you achieve the look of the film?

**ABG:** Jody Lee Lipes, my cinematographer, is incredible. I think we found a beautiful symbiosis. If I had my way I'd try and shoot my own films but I think it's probably a mistake for a director to do that. There are certain contexts in which that works very well but in this film I really needed to be next to the camera as well as behind it. We very much came to agreement compositionally, but there were also little things that I might not do that Jody made very compelling arguments for. That aspect of the relationship was incredible and we were able to produce something really striking.

**FTF:** Was that hard to achieve shooting digitally?

**ABG:** It was a strange thing for me because I've always shot on film. Jody made me very comfortable with that in proving that could make something just as cinematic. I doubted that at first! I would love to be able to shoot on film at some point, but I was really impressed with how things have leaped forward in the last couple of years. I think I'm very lucky to be making a

film right now because this is the first real generation to have digital tools which, if they are not on a par, then are at least close to film.

**FTF:** You shot the film very quickly, which must be hard for a film that's mostly shot in an environment you can't control. Did it still represent your vision in the end?

**ABG:** When you make a film like this, you have eighteen days to shoot, and you have no room for error. I very much feel like the film you make at the moment you make it, is what it is. Everything has to be about the moment everyone's in, where you are in your career, where an actor is in their career. I'm very much into the idea of restraint. I'm a big fan of Matthew Barney's early work, where its all about what happens when you apply limitations. He would strap himself to a wall and do a drawing on a ceiling, and not be able to achieve it because his body wouldn't let him finish the drawing. So it becomes what it becomes.

**FTF:** The film seems to be shot mostly in natural light, which in the night scenes makes it very hard to see what's going on.

**ABG:** Almost every exterior was natural light, but I was very keen to do that that way. If I could shoot it all with natural light I would! But some of the stuff you think you are using for the realist aspects of the film, end up making more sense as something that's not quite reality. That's especially the case with the night lighting, which is easily the hardest thing to do in cinema. In the night scenes I felt that the only way that footage would work was in a surrealist context.

**FTF:** Would shooting the whole film in natural light not have been possible?

**ABG:** I just saw a film that was shot in complete darkness. It's called *La Casa Muda*; it's a Uruguayan horror film shot in one take. It's about to get a huge Hollywood remake, and it's a phenomenal piece of cinematography. There's a part in complete darkness with a little bit of moonlight; it's the most insane looking thing, it's crazy!



***“When you make a film like this, you have eighteen days to shoot, and you have no room for error. I very much feel like the film you make at the moment you make it, is what it is.”***

**FTF:** *Two Gates Of Sleep* is shot in Louisiana not an area of the world associated with arthouse cinema. Did you want to show this part of the world in a new way?

**ABG:** I thought about that, and I know just for my own sake I couldn't have shot this anywhere else. At one point I was supposed to shoot this in Argentina, but at the end of the day

I literally grew up five feet away from these frames, I know every little inch of that forest and I knew exactly what I wanted. I don't think there was going to be any way to achieve that anywhere else and in that sense it was crucial to be shooting there. But my work also has a really strong connection to William Faulkner. His fictional community was very close to this area, which is

just north of the Louisiana border.

**FTF:** So you wanted to make it about this particular place?

**ABG:** I wanted to very careful to not show anywhere that told you exactly where you were. The film isn't just about the States. I think there's a kinship to Southern cultures, a kind of Southern malaise. Apichatpong Weerasethakul is making films in that way, and it's the same with Lucrecia Martel, Lisandro Alonso, and Carlos Reygadas, where you feel there's a Southern rule, a collective sadness, or strangeness, or beauty. I am still very conscious of it being a film that's being made in America and I think it does feel like an American film, but I was doing my best to bring these other elements to it, to offset and distinguish it from what you are typically seeing in American cinema, which I think has gotten to this place of indicating where and what you are, and being uber-political. I don't have a real problem with that but its being done so much, and a lot of American directors feel like they have to meet these prerequisites. I didn't want to be that way. I'm much more interested in doing something ancient, connecting back to those classical works which doesn't really have anything to do with contemporary politics.

**FTF:** The area is shot in area badly hit by Hurricane Katrina isn't it?

**ABG:** That part of Louisiana was absolutely devastated by Katrina, and you see a couple of scenes in the film where the entire forest is laid to waste. I almost had to quit because it looked and felt so different. I was devastated, not just for myself but for the people and the place. It was just heartbreaking in every way, there was so much death. I gave it a few months before I went back, and I'm so glad I waited because when I came back the undergrowth, which had been dormant for four hundred years, was just skyrocketing. A part of everything I was trying to say was happening right there and then, and it was speaking to me to keep making this film. If I'd made the film before that it would have been entirely different.



# BFI LON-

# DON FILM

# FESTIVAL

# 2010

by Nick

Deignan

For 31,104,000 frames (around two weeks in layman's terms) in mid-October, the world's finest filmmakers arrived in London to exhibit their work at the 54th BFI London Film Festival. The greying husks of our capital's busiest cinemas were relieved of their monotonous daily chores – screening Hollywood's 3-D conversion nightmares – and allowed to coruscate once more. Cineastes emerged from their basement apartments, squinting and stumbling towards the centre of town to take in the awesome sight – European 'arthouse' films, World cinema from Africa and the Far East, and America's burrowing independent talent all rubbing shoulders together and entrenching themselves in the Charlatan's lair of Leicester Square.

Many international film festivals demand that a film cannot appear at any other festivals before their own if it is to be considered for inclusion. Well that just isn't the British way; and so the Opening Night Gala played host to a jet-lagged print of Mark Romanek's *Never Let Me Go*, a film that has appeared at so many festivals this year it is like a weary prostitute at the end of her shift, smelling more of man than woman. The whorish nature of the film's festival schedule certainly doesn't take away from its potency as a masterful piece of filmmaking, however. Strong central performances (discounting the forever irritating Keira Knightley) and alluring camera work are beautifully woven into Romanek's haunting vision of a subtle dystopia.

The rest of the festival was a dazzling cacophony of influences and cultures. The United States' independent filmmaking sector certainly had the longest table at the market (I'm creating an analogy here... there is no actual film market at LFF), from the disturbing *Black Swan*, via the slacker-style of *Cold Weather* and *The Parking Lot Movie*, and the touching warmth of *The Kids Are All Right*, to the

manicured, assembly-line perfection of *Conviction*.

Latin America also provided a number of stunning projects, proving that there is plenty of talent outside the behemoth of the Mexican film industry. Michael Rowe's gripping *Leap Year* received a special mention from the jury on awards night, while Pablo Trapero's bold *Carancho* was an excellent example of South America's unique ability to fuse social commentary with stirring violence.

The shining stars of the British industry – Danny Boyle, Mike Leigh, Tom Hooper – were left with little support from behind, as a meagre showing of uninspiring films failed to light up the festival. Joanna Hogg's captivating *Archipelago* (receiving a special commendation from the festival Jury) was an anomalous masterpiece, while Clio Barnard's interesting stylistic choices in *The Arbor* were let down by horrible handling of the subject matter.

The award for best film was presented to Alexei Popogrebsky for *How I Ended This Summer* – a film that this critic was unfortunately unable to see, so you will have to watch this space for a review of the film in the near future.

The highest honour of all, the BFI Fellowship, was awarded to the unrivalled monarch of British filmmaking, Danny Boyle. And fittingly, it was his latest offering, the visceral and powerful *127 Hours*, that rounded off the festival.

What follows is by no means an exhaustive account of the entire festival, or even a consciously edited set of highlights. It is a somewhat arbitrary but hopefully still valuable cross-section. Most of the major films are covered (if you can't find them here they may have been included in our November issue) along with many of the lesser known surprise hits and valiant efforts from the smaller screens.



Rowan Joffe is an extremely talented artist and one of the jewels in the crown of British cinema at present, but this film is pointless and uninspiring, and far from his best work.

## BRIGHTON ROCK

**DIRECTED BY ROWAN JOFFE STARRING SAM RILEY, ANDREA RISEBOROUGH, HELEN MIRREN, JOHN HURT, ANDY SERKIS, STEVEN ROBERTSON, NONSO ANOZIE & STEVE EVETS**

**RELEASED FEBRUARY 4, 2011 (UK) TBC (USA)**

In recent years surprise screening spot has proved a must-see event at the festival, offering *No Country For Old Men* in 2007 and *The Wrestler* in 2008. But last year's decision to screen a Michael Moore documentary left the festival organisers with a lot to make up for in 2010. The most obvious option was the recently completed, all-British remake of an old classic, *Brighton Rock*; so there wasn't much of a surprise when that film's credits rolled.

Rowan Joffe is the rising talent behind the screenplays for *Last Resort*, *28 Weeks Later*, and this year's *The American*; but this remake of John Boulting's 1947 original constitutes his directorial debut. The film stars Sam Riley as Pinkie, a cold-hearted Brighton gangster who is forced to court and marry a naïve young wait-

ress, Rose, to prevent her from speaking out about a murder he has committed. The original, starring Richard Attenborough in one of his career-defining roles, is one of the few British films pre-1960 that is still spoken about and enjoyed by younger generations as a 'cool' and spellbinding film. The first question that arises when a remake appears is, "why remake it?" That question is even more pertinent when discussing an untouchable classic, and unfortunately Joffe doesn't seem to have the answers.

The original was a noirish classic, filled with shadows, sweeping camerawork, and chilling melodrama. Joffe has moved the action to the 1960s and gone to great lengths to use vintage lenses and equipment to ensure a timely feel and grain. Unfortunately, this jars horribly with the nourish tone and rapier dialogue, and makes for an uncomfortable and inconsistent viewing experience. Unlike the original, you do not feel as if you are watching a genre classic; this feels more like a desperately self-justifying experiment. There is no clear reason for this temporal shift, beyond a few 'mods and rockers' references. Although, almost

by accident, it has interesting connotations for Rose, whose rebellious streak and belief in the power of love is in conflict with her traditional values and dogmatic religious upbringing.

Sam Riley's performance is pure mimicry. This is not his fault, but there is only really one way to play Pinkie, and Richard Attenborough has already done it. Andrea Riseborough, a relative newcomer, is excellent as the timid but passionate Rose. The rest of the cast are just playing out their allotted roles; except Sean Harris who bursts with his unique brand of playful malice.

There are certainly moments where the increased capabilities of filmmakers (crane and helicopter shots and HD film) add energy and power to the sulking dinginess of the original... but sulking dinginess is what *Brighton Rock* is all about! All the important moments (the skipping recording of Pinkie's voice, etc) are lifted shot for shot from the original.

Rowan Joffe is an extremely talented artist and one of the jewels in the crown of British cinema at present, but this film is pointless and uninspiring, and far from his best work.

★★★☆☆

# NEVER LET ME GO

**DIRECTED BY** MARK ROMANEK **STARRING** CAREY MULLIGAN, ANDREW GARFIELD, KEIRA KNIGHTLEY, IZZY MEIKLE-SMALL, CHARLOTTE RAMPLING & SALLY HAWKINS

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 11, 2011 (UK)**

Kathy (Mulligan), Ruth (Knightley), and Tommy (Garfield) have grown up together at Hailsham, a remote boarding school in 1970s England. The children are electronically tagged and forced to take an assortment of pills with their morning bottle of milk. The quaint picket fences are hardly cage walls, but the rumours of what happens to children that cross them are more powerful a deterrent than any physical barrier. With no access to the outside world, the children's flaws and anxieties breed uncontrollably.

Tommy is a shy and clumsy boy given to sudden fits of howling rage; Kathy is an introverted girl, too kind and open for her own good, who befriends Tommy out of pity; Kathy's 'friend' Ruth is a prissy little madam who, desperate to remain the centre of attention, decides she is in love with Tommy and begins a relationship with him that lasts into young adulthood. With nowhere to go, Kathy is forced to follow the handsome couple around like some meek and forlorn maid.

But Hailsham is no normal boarding school, and this is no normal 1970s England. Romanek's film, adapted from Kazuo Ishiguro's acclaimed novel, is set in a dystopian world where people are cloned and raised in isolated schools so that the state can use them for various barbaric procedures. As our beloved trio mature into young adults, they are transported to a farm where they can be kept, healthy and

innocent, until their time arrives. They meet youngsters from the other schools dotted around the country, and hear rumours that in certain situations, couples that can prove they are in love are granted a stay of execution. Can Kathy and Tommy come to terms with the love that they have both been skirting around for their entire lives? Can Ruth release her poisonous grasp and allow some glimmering hope to survive? Is there any future for these "poor creatures"?

Alex Garland's haunting adaptation remains faithful to Ishiguro's tense and complex source material. The film manages to weave between genres and tones, leaving the viewer with a chilling and unshakeable sense of unease. Those who are unfamiliar with the source material (and who watched the film before reading this review) will be shaken to the core by the revelation that this school is little more than a farm for human organs. The hints that Garland has placed throughout

"We all end up dying. And none of us really understand what we've lived through. Or feel we've had enough time."

the opening section reverberate back through the brain like shockwaves from a trauma, or flashbacks to a nightmare: the head teacher's propagandist speeches about how Hailsham students are "special"; phrases like "originals" and "completion"; and those damned electronic tags and pills before breakfast, it all takes on a stark and harrowing clarity.

As we have come to expect from Mark Romanek, the film is beautiful and the tone expertly conveyed – with sweeping, melancholic landscapes, twilight hues, and brooding shadows

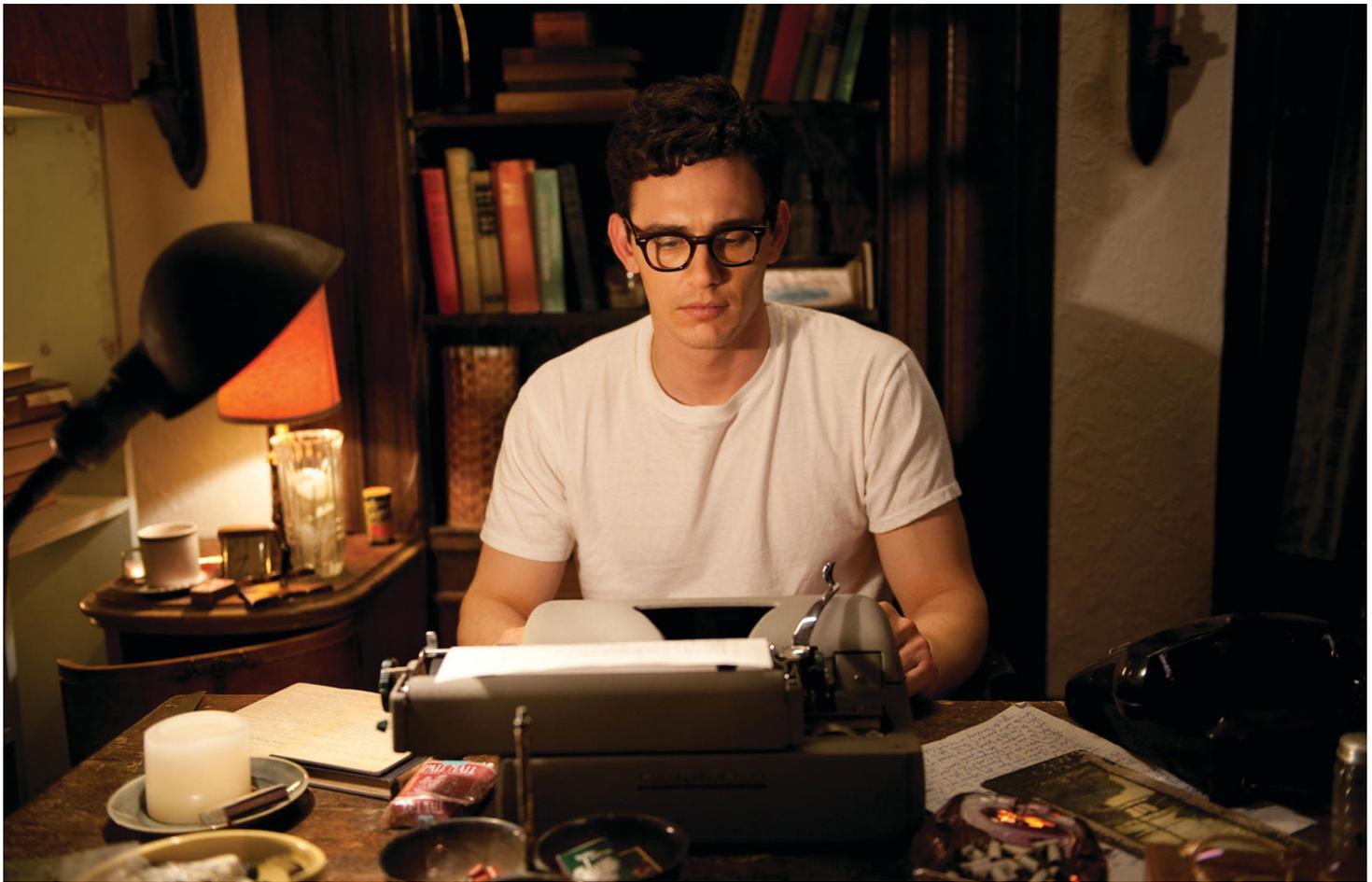
– but the attention to small visual details is what elevates this literary adaptation into the realm of superb filmmaking. The texture and aesthetic of the film perfectly reflects Kazuo's writing – elegance and truth, gentle, fragile, minimal simplicity.

Mulligan is the lynchpin of this film; her doe-eyed softness and melancholy smile perfectly encapsulating our heroine. Caring and patient characters are often inactive and dull, but Mulligan does an excellent job of imbuing Kathy with yearning purpose. Kathy's narration of the film is by no means impartial, and we hear the entire story through the lens of her lingering resentment and unsteady, helpless passion. Andrew Garfield is also excellent in the role of Tommy. He is a boy that spends his life trying not to look at the things that make him scream – it is a simple and powerful root, and Garfield grasps it firmly and elicits a stirring performance.

A criticism that has been levelled at the story is the question of why the characters don't just run away. They are allowed to live in relative freedom, even after leaving behind the picket fences of Hailsham, and could technically escape if they so wished. But this is a thoughtless and immaterial suggestion, because in real life, people rarely escape. People did not flee Nazi Germany after Kristallnacht; thousands of abused spouses remain in shivering domestic hell for their entire lives; and out-of-luck gangsters choose to fight for their meagre territory rather than fleeing town, because it is all they know. In real life, people accept their lot. We live in small worlds and we don't have the perspective needed to rebel. And after all, what would they have been escaping into? "We all end up dying. And none of us really understand what we've lived through. Or feel we've had enough time."

★★★★★





# HOWL

**DIRECTED BY** ROB EPSTEIN & JEFFREY FRIEDMAN **STAR-RING** JAMES FRANCO, AARON TVEIT, JON HAMM, DAVID STRATHAIRN, MARY-LOUISE PARKER & JON PRESCOTT

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) FEBRUARY 25, 2011 (UK)**

It is hard to work out what demographic *Howl* is aimed at. Fans of Alan Ginsberg will gawp at the obvious treatment of the court case that surrounded the publication of *Howl* in 1957; they will react with lukewarm shrugs of indifference to the 'far-too-literal' translation of the poem into tawdry animated sequences, and they will wonder why the hell the actor from *Spider-Man* has been paid to mimic Ginsberg in a series of faux-interviews. People who aren't fans of Alan Ginsberg... won't go and see this film.

Epstein and Friedman's film

seems eager to break the boundaries of the 'biopic' genre by splicing together the aforementioned elements to create a portrait of Ginsberg and his most famous work; but the devil is in the detail, and the unnecessary use of black-and-white film and the constant shots of tape-recorders during interviews suggest that the filmmakers have not stemmed the flow of clichés as successfully as they might have hoped.

Franco is perfectly capable of mimicking Ginsberg, but this is not

People who aren't fans of Alan Ginsberg... won't go and see this film.

acting. Philip Seymour Hoffman was acting when he portrayed Truman Capote, DeNiro was acting when he portrayed LaMotta, because in these instances the actors had to take the essence of a person (everything from fa-

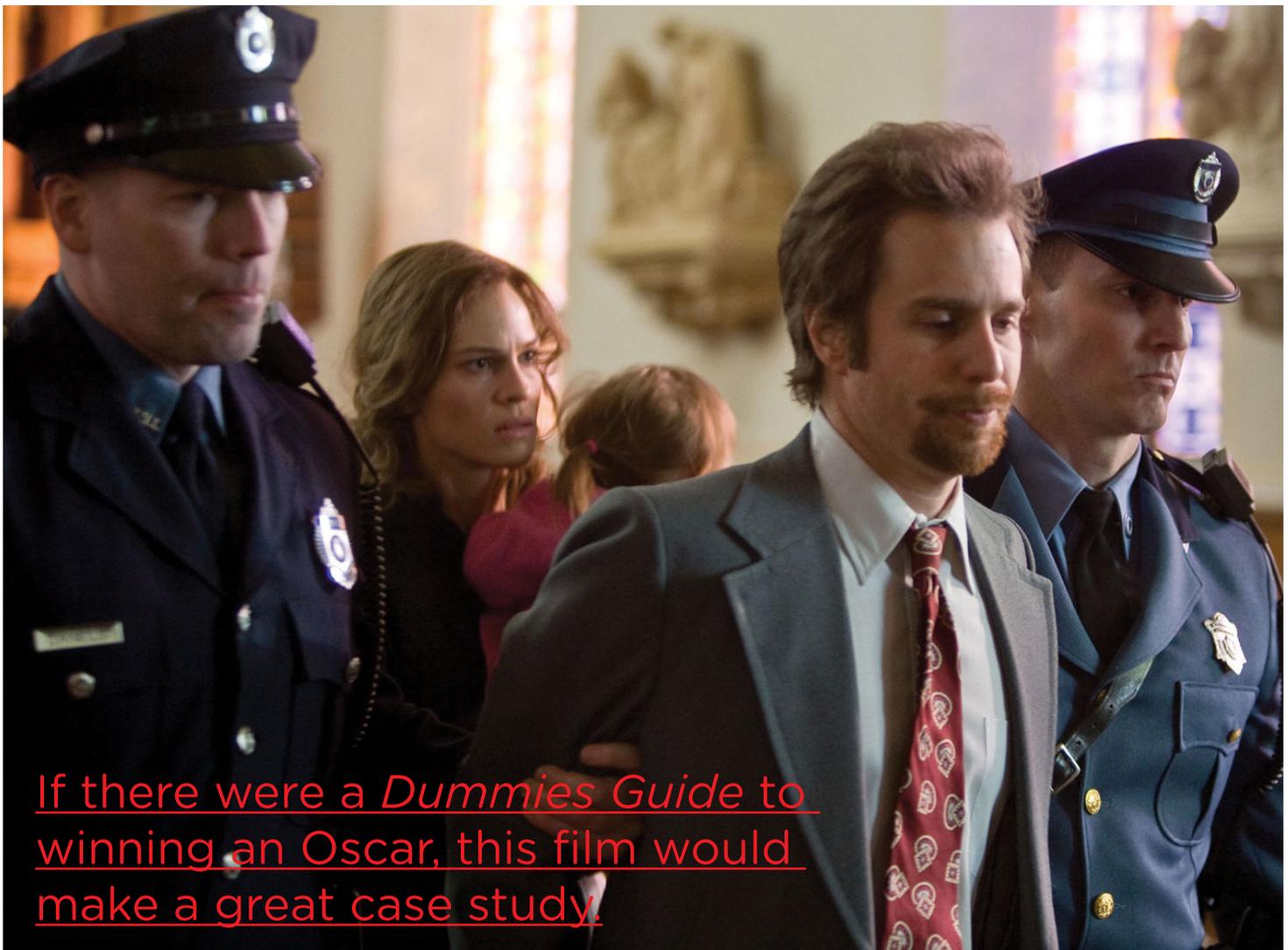
cial tics to childhood fears) and absorb them in order to portray that person in a dramatic situation. In *Howl*, Franco just has to sit on a sofa and mimic Ginsberg's hand movements and elongated syllables.

The courtroom sequences serve the dual purpose of showcasing 'the hot guy from *Mad Men*' (which might bring the producers a few dollars closer to breaking even) and providing a pretentious and didactic platform for the filmmakers to broadcast their views

on censorship... these weighty monologues on a culture of fear and censorship

remind us of a shocking fact that I'm sure we would all have forgotten were it not for this film, our governments might be trying to control what we know!!! Shock horror.

★★★★★



If there were a *Dummies Guide* to winning an Oscar, this film would make a great case study.

## CONVICTION

**DIRECTED BY TONY GOLDWYN STARRING HILARY SWANK, SAM ROCKWELL, MINNIE DRIVER, JULIETTE LEWIS, MELISSA LEO, PETER GALLAGHER & CONOR DONOVAN**

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JANUARY 14, 2011 (UK)**

One of the festival's many heart-wrenching 'true' stories, *Conviction* tells the tale of Betty Anne Waters, a wife and mother from Massachusetts who dedicated her life to becoming a lawyer so she could defend her brother Kenny, who was given life without parole for first-degree murder in 1983. As with all the other 'true stories' at this festival, the source material is compelling, and the resulting film crass and predictable. If there were a *Dummies*

*Guide* to winning an Oscar, this film would make a great case study.

It is completely inconceivable that events really transpired in the manicured order they appear onscreen – with revelations and obstacles and highs and lows arriving at the exact moment we expect them. And what value (artistic or otherwise) is there in a film that butchers and edits the truth beyond all recognition, then slaps on a moving score? Certainly not the sort of value that should be expected of a festival film.

However, given the staggering number of terrible films emerging in recent years, it is perhaps unfair to be so hard on a project that rejoices in the traditional models of Hollywood storytelling. This film effortlessly hits every note with the sort of precision that will have Clint Eastwood fearing for

his crown; and it will certainly tug at the heartstrings of audiences around the world. But it just isn't honest enough to be considered 'great', and it is hard to imagine anybody leaving the cinema determined to rally against the American justice system, they will be too busy crying and praising Hilary Swank's moving performance.

Swank plays completely against type as a feisty and determined young woman who single-handedly overcomes all the obstacles in her path to win the boxing match... I mean fly across the Pacific... wait, which Hilary Swank film is this again?

The only surprising thing about *Conviction* is the revelation that Minnie Driver is still alive and, apparently, finding employment in Los Angeles. Hooray for her.

★★★★★

# IT'S KIND OF A FUNNY STORY

**DIRECTED BY ANNA BODEN & RYAN FLECK STARRING KEIR GILCHRIST, ZACH GALIFIANAKIS, EMMA ROBERTS, VIOLA DAVIS, ZOË KRAVITZ, AASIF MANDVI & LAUREN GRAHAM**

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) MARCH 11, 2011 (UK)**

Ryan Fleck has one request of his audience before the first showing of *It's Kind Of A Funny Story* – “Anyone that has seen *Half Nelson* or *Sugar*, just wipe them out of your mind, because this is a totally different kind of film.” Those first two films from directing duo Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden were nuanced and infectious explorations of various elements of American society (drugs, class, education, and sport). Their latest film explores the world of pharmacology, psychology and mental hospitals, but this is no searing or nuanced drama, it is a teen comedy.

Craig is 16-years-old, and as such he is convinced that he is the least intelligent, least capable, and least attractive student at his uber-elite New York private school. He decides that the only way to deal with this problem is to throw himself off the Brooklyn Bridge; but when this plan fails to materialise, he settles for a visit to the psychiatric ward of a city hospital. Unfortunately the teen ward is closed for renovation, so Craig is entered into the adult ward for a minimum stay of five days. Craig's initial

panic is calmed by the presence of the cuddly, calming influence of ward veteran Bobby, and the bewitching beauty of Noelle, another troubled teen on the adult ward.

Queue a touching, whimsical coming-of-age tale that would have had John Hughes flicking through his notebooks to check no ideas had been stolen. The cast of larger-than-life extroverts help Craig to rebuild his self-confidence; he learns to focus on the important things in life, leading to the obligatory ‘getting the girl’ climax. It is his friendship with Bobby – a chronic visitor to the ward who is in danger of losing visitation rights with his beloved daughter – that ensures the film remains rooted in sincere, emotional depth.

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The film is beautifully shot. There seems to be a conscious decision to shoot the ward scenes in a shallow depth of field so that every pore and crease of the characters' faces are perfectly realised, while the backgrounds blur into a drained, messy palette of institutional beiges. It is as if the filmmakers are saying, “Forget the back-

ground and the ‘world’ of the film, just study the characters and fall in love with them”. This purposeful and affecting aesthetic is punctuated by wonderful animated sequences that seem to gel perfectly with Broken Social Scene's dazzling and eclectic bespoke score.

The costumes have been provided by Kurt&Bart; and it is when you start adding up all these friendly relationships, enjoyable collaborations, and ‘fun’ elements of this production process that a disappointing revelation rears its head; Fleck and Boden have perhaps had a bit too much fun making this film, and have fallen short of their artistic responsibility to the filmmaking process. The film is attractive and entertaining and there are some touching moments, but it pales in comparison to their earlier films.

Part of the problem is the central character, and the fact that we are following the wrong man around this hospital. Keir Gilchrist is faultless as the young lead, but the character just isn't interesting enough to carry a feature film. Bobby is a kind, hopeless man who wants desperately to find a normal life with his beloved daughter; he is the true emotional heart of this story, but we are so busy following an angst-ridden teenager through the hallways that we only ever see snippets of this fascinating, troubled, and achingly pathetic man. This is even more of a waste because Galafianakis is extraordinary in the role. His comedic capabilities are beyond doubt, but his quiet power as an actor comes across in this film, and you just want to reach through the screen and hug him.

In the end, the title of the film contains an irony that may be lost on the filmmakers: this is kind of a funny story, no more, no less.

★★★★★





Joanna Hogg is the shining light of the UK Film Industry. She has saved us from another embarrassing LFF, and she has done it all without the help of the incompetent UK Film Council.

# ARCHIPELAGO

**DIRECTED BY JOANNA HOGG STARRING TOM HIDDLESTON, KATE FAHY, LYDIA LEONARD, AMY LLOYD, CHRISTOPHER BAKER & ANDREW LAWSON**

**RELEASED MARCH 4, 2011 (UK) TBC (USA)**

Following on from her critically acclaimed debut, *Unrelated*, Joanna Hogg's second feature has all the latent, simmering power and bland, maritime settings of a John Cheever short story. Simpering matriarch Patricia (a prim and traditional woman who has been sculpted around her own name) has dragged her twenty-something offspring – the directionless Edward and sly and cutting Cynthia – to their lonely, abandoned family retreat in the Isles of Scilly. The father is noticeably absent from the trip, and so the odd family is completed by a meek cook, Rose, and Patricia's painting teacher.

As the uncomfortable family unit go through the motions of a happy holiday – picnics on the cliffs, visits to old restaurants, etc – they slowly unfurl the lingering resentment and personal disappointment they all feel towards one another.

Edward has decided to validate his existence by saving Africa, one helpless orphan at a time; Cynthia directs her scathing and surgical wit against her frater and mater in the hope that it will prevent her from turning it against herself; and Patricia is so desperate to play happy families that she seems constantly on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

The film revolves around the extraordinary improvisations and spontaneity of the actors, all rehearsed and coerced wonderfully by the unquestionable talent of Joanna Hogg. The performances are natural and quiet, refreshing and understated. The finest example of this comes when the family head for an empty restaurant. Cynthia tries to keep everybody happy by enthusiastically suggesting which table they should take and what order they should sit in. Patricia's muttering silence causes the group to move numerous times before finally settling down. When the food arrives, Cynthia's bird is apparently under-cooked and she demands that her meal be returned, but she is humiliated by her mother's decision to keep the same dish – "Mum and Ed are allergic to complaining". All this tension is sliced open by a moment of comedic genius when, after a few minutes of awkward

silence, Patricia remarks, "It's actually quite good."

There are other examples of Hogg's confidence as a filmmaker, and willingness to juggle humour and tension until the two bleed into one another, and the viewer doesn't know whether to worry for these poor souls or laugh at them. At one point, after a heated argument between the nuclear family, we cut to Rose cleaning an array of menacing blades in the kitchen. If there was any chance of the visual metaphor being overlooked, Rose suddenly emerges with an even bigger knife. We are in the palm of Hogg's hand, and she is tickling us.

The cinematography is often flat, but the filmmakers do well with the use of available light and evidently inexpensive production design to evoke the tonal qualities of the story. Sometimes the interior of the cottage feels warm and lively, at other times cold and vacuous; and the bland uninviting weather and harshness of the terrain are often beautifully rendered.

Joanna Hogg is the shining light of the UK Film Industry. She has saved us from another embarrassing LFF, and she has done it all without the help of the incompetent UK Film Council.

★★★★★



# EVERYTHING MUST GO

**DIRECTED BY DAN RUSH STARRING WILL FERRELL, REBECCA HALL, LAURA DERN, CHRISTOPHER JORDAN WALLACE, MICHAEL PEÑA, GLENN HOWERTON & SCOTT TAKEDA**

**RELEASED TBC**

When a young female employee accuses Nick of improper behaviour during a work trip, his history of drinking problems and failure to attend rehab conspire against him and he finds himself sitting in the staff parking lot, drinking cans of lager, and stabbing his personalised 'severance' pocket knife into the tyres of his boss's muscle car. When he gets home, he discovers that his wife has dumped all of his worldly possessions on the front lawn, changed the locks, frozen their bank accounts (most of it his money), and left town for a few days to give him a chance to clear out. His fall from grace is completed when

a company 'heavy' reclaims his car, and his cell phone is barred. Left with no options, Nick decides to drink the rest of his beers sitting in his favourite chair on the front lawn, and he doesn't move for a long, long time.

Nick's AA 'mentor', Frank, also happens to be a police detective and old friend who helped Nick's wife kick the habit years earlier and is saddened not to have been able to help Nick in the same way. Frank buys Nick a few days grace by telling the local cops that Nick is having a yard sale, but Nick still needs to get his act together fast. He is helped in the reconstruction of his shattered life by Kenny, a sullen and inquisitive young boy, and Samantha, a beautiful and lonely pregnant woman who has moved in across the road in advance of her salesman husband (who sounds dangerously like a young Nick).

This is not a film that takes itself too seriously, but it is also not a 'comedy' in the strictest sense.

Based on the Raymond Carver short story, 'Why Don't You Dance?' this is a shamelessly quirky, heart-warming and sometimes surreal 'indie'

movie. It combines Todd Phillips' knack for fleet-footed, economic storytelling, with a more patient tenacity that allows the sombre subject matter to really breathe. The efficiency prevents the film from becoming a pretentious 'indie' flick about the suburbs; the patience stops it feeling like *Old School: The Later Years*.

Will Ferrell's performance has received some completely undeserved criticism. *Stranger Than Fiction* proved to the world that while he might never be in the same league as Jim Carey, he is capable of starring in a drama without ruining it. His second 'serious' film is further proof that Ferrell has the dexterity and maturity to subtly tweak his characteristic brand of pompous but loveable humour into a more pathos-ridden dramatic style.

This is not a film that takes itself too seriously, but it is also not a 'comedy' in the strictest sense. The central performance had to be pitch perfect to accommodate these often conflicting atmospheres, and Ferrell does so perfectly. Apart from Carey or Zach Galifianakis, I can't think of another actor around who could provide such a disciplined yet light-hearted performance.

★★★★★



# HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

**DIRECTED BY BENT HAMER STARRING TROND FAUSA AURVAG, FRIDTJOF SAHEIM, NINA ANDRESEN BORUD, REIDAR SØRENSEN, INGUUNN BEATE ØYEN & ARIANIT BERISHA**

**RELEASED TBC**

A desperate, cuckolded man dresses up as Santa Claus, beats his wife's lover over the head with a shovel, and sneaks into his family home to give his children presents and spend time with his wife. A Serbian man holds up a doctor with a blade – it seems he is looking for drugs, but really he is desperate to find someone to deliver his wife's baby. A homeless man attempts to break into a woman's car, only to discover that she was his first childhood sweetheart. She allows him to shower and shave, before feeding him and sending him home to his family with a Christmas tree.

These are just a few of the surreal and touching vignettes that weave

their way through this bewitching, snowy tapestry. A magical time that has been lost to advertising jingles and last minute shopping sprees in most of the Western world, is here treated with a uniquely Skandinavian frosty admiration. Christmas, in this film, is a time of haunting beauty; where desperation and hope meet in equal measure.

The film is based on a series of short stories by Levi Henriksen, and this has allowed Hamer a great deal of freedom to experiment with different tones and styles of filmmaking without worrying too much about consistency

This is a world of stillness and calm, where the only warmth and movement comes from the people that live there.

or unity. In this barren and timeless landscape, the various stories could be happening hundreds of miles apart or right next door to each other, it doesn't really matter. The tone shifts constantly from melodrama to thriller, from fairytale to romance; and the film benefits from the energy and freedom

resulting from this lack of collusion.

This is not to suggest that Hamer has been given an easy ride. The film is only 85 minutes long, and his ability to carefully plot so many individual storylines, which never become muddled or clichéd, is nothing short of masterful. By the end of the film every strand has reached a fulfilling conclusion; and they all work together to create a simple, glowing synergy as the Serbian couple, holding their newborn baby, stare up at the Aurora Borealis playing out above them.

While the entire world of the film is nestled deep in snow, there are no

flurries during the film. This is a world of stillness and calm, where the only warmth and movement comes from the people that live there.

Whether the vignette concerns a bitter spinster, a depressed cuckold, or a lovelorn teen; the whole film is imbued with a tender-hearted hopefulness that makes this a must see film, especially during the festive season.

★★★★★

# AMIGO

**DIRECTOR BY** JOHN SAYLES

**STARRING** GARRET DILLAHUNT, JOEL TORRES, YUL VASQUEZ & CHRIS COOPER

John Sayles is not the most interesting or controversial of filmmakers, but he is surely one of the most consistent and unfussy. It is easy to find a common thread running through his career, from his debut *The Return Of The Secaucus Seven* (1976) through to this latest film: well-conceived characters dealing with tangible problems in normal, human ways. In the face of this beguiling simplicity, there is little room for stylised lighting, complicated camerawork, award-stealing performances, or CGI.

This time, Sayles has chosen the American-Philippines war, at the turn of the last century, as his area of study. When a band of US troops arrive in a small farming village to set up a garrison, the head of the village is stuck between obeying his new masters, appeasing his countryfolk, and dealing with the menacing presence of the guerrilla warriors (led by his brother) who lurk in the surrounding jungle.

The cast is largely unfamiliar, and the production design is straight out of a TV period drama; but the quality of the performances makes for an engaging film. The sturdiness of the storytelling and the strength of the characters are reminiscent of great studio films of the 1950s, such as *Red River* or even *The Bridge Over The River Kwai*. The story builds to its climactic crescendo with patience rather than gusto – with understated undulations of laughter and sighs, rather than fireworks and wailing.

This is by no means a Sayles masterpiece, however, and after a while the film begins to feel stretched. This is just a symptom of Sayles capacity as a filmmaker – he cares too deeply about his stories to curtail them, but he loves the art of narrative filmmaking too

much to leave the film open ended. The result is a curt and unfulfilling ending that does no justice to the story that precedes it.

★★★★★

# THE ARBOR

**DIRECTOR BY** CLIO BARNARD

**STARRING** MANJINDER VIRK, NEIL DUDGEON & MONICA DOLAN

Undoubtedly the most over-hyped and over-celebrated films of the festival; one can only assume that it was our desperation to laud a British filmmaker that allowed this hollow, meandering husk of a film to garner such critical praise. The admittedly pioneering approach to documentary filmmaking takes as its subject the equally over-hyped alcoholic playwright and ‘Paul Abbot-precursor’ Andrea Dunbar. The film takes real interview recordings with Dunbar’s children and brings them to life using lip-synching technology and a number of specially trained actors. The film also cuts in scenes from Dunbar’s first play (from which the film takes its name) that are filmed on the street where Dunbar lived as a child.

This could have been a superb one-hour TV documentary – and would have been deserving of praise in that form – but the pointless attempt to string it out into a cinematic feature has forced the filmmakers to search for subject matter that just isn’t there. All the expensive equipment and talented cameramen in the world cannot mask the fact that Andrew Dunbar is not interesting enough to be the subject of a feature film; and eventually the filmmakers reluctantly bow to this inevitability and turn to her troubled daughter, Lorraine, instead. Unfortunately, Lorraine is just a self-obsessed crackhead who hates her mum and accidentally killed her own child. They are a dime-a-dozen in the Western world, and the decision to take advan-

tage of her predicament is cheap and constitutes exploitative and insincere filmmaking of the highest order.

The only possible justification for this segway is the idea that the film constitutes the play Dunbar would have written if she were still alive today. In Robin Soans’ play *A State Affair* (2000) – in which he revisits Dunbar’s life and surroundings – there is a monologue from Lorraine explaining that if *Rita, Sue, And Bob Too* (Dunbar’s most famous play) had been written in 2000, it would have been about smackheads instead of drunks. Perhaps Barnard is suggesting that, with the continuing collapse of our nation, in 2010 Dunbar would have written about women who are addicted to crack cocaine and get imprisoned by abusive partners and accidentally kill their own infant children with methadone overdoses.

★★★★★

# BOW BELLS AND WATER-LOO SUNSETS

**DIRECTOR BY** DEREK YORK, ANTHONY YORK & MICHAEL ORROM

This delightful collection of short films quite bizarrely constitutes one of the most exciting and enjoyable entries from the British industry at this year’s festival. The three restorations are part of Boom Britain, the BFI National Archive’s reappraisal of the post-war British documentary. *Festival* is a light-hearted and magical account of a young boy’s trip to the Festival of Britain in 1951. The feisty cockney sneaks an American ‘hot dog’ and stares at the array of people, rejoicing in the opportunity to celebrate anything as London hauls itself out of the ashes of World War II. The film perfectly encapsulates the energy and vivacity of this national celebration.

*Bow Bells* is a murkier but equally fascinating exploration of East Lon-

don's markets and communities. The backdrop portrays a city still in ruins, with bombsites scarring the landscape, but the musical arrangements (using old music hall songs from the era) perfectly evokes the charming and boisterous tenacity of East Londoners. And *Portrait Of Queenie* follows the indescribable Queenie Watts, the landlady of the Ironbridge Tavern in Poplar who fell in love with music and turned the pub into a legendary venue for jazz and blues musicians. The strong minded and beautiful Queenie is behind the bar one minute, pulling pints and scrubbing worktops, but a moment later is up on stage, filling the rowdy pub with her sweet, melancholy voice.

★★★★★

## CARANCHO

**DIRECTOR BY** PABLO TRAPERO

**STARRING** RICARDO DARÍN, MARTINA GUSMAN & CARLOS WEBER

Luján is an overworked, dope-addict emergency medic who seems to spend her every waking hour chasing down traffic accidents in Buenos Aires. Such accidents in the Argentinean capital occur with horrific regularity; and while this tragic failure of the system tears families apart, it is also good news for the 'vulture' lawyers who take the insurance companies to the cleaners and hide the profits from the victims' families. Luján meets just such a lawyer at the scene of a crash that he just happens to have witnessed. Sosa has created a name for himself at his fleapit law company for literally chasing ambulances around the city, and occasionally even paying homeless people to jump in front of vehicles; but as soon as he sets eyes on Luján he seems eager to bury his embarrassing lifestyle and prove himself to this enchanting, melancholy beauty.

Unfortunately – as *Carlito's Way* taught us – escaping from a criminal

underworld is no easy task. The acting head of the law firm, realising he has been double-crossed, attacks Luján at work; and in return, Sosa slowly and methodically beats him to death. There is no turning back for Sosa and Luján, who are forced to take unspeakable measures to escape from this sordid world.

Pablo Trapero's stunning and violent film possesses that uniquely South American ability to combine searing social commentary with energetic and powerful filmmaking. As with so many great crime stories, this is a story that takes place at night, when the middle-classes are asleep and the criminals and emergency medics emerge to do battle once more. Buenos Aires appears as some crumbling, nightmare world; where flashes and eruptions punctuate the brooding darkness. Through this nightmare our heroes fight, back to back, with only their passion for one another helping them through. It is a romantic and visceral noir story that is unparalleled at the festival.

★★★★★

## CATFISH

**DIRECTOR BY** HENRY JOOST & ARIEL SCHULMAN

Nev is a 24-year-old photographer from New York, his brother Ariel and their best friend Henry are filmmakers. When Nev strikes up an online friendship with Abby, an 8-year-old girl who wants to paint his photographs, Ariel and Henry decide to document this bizarre online relationship. As the paintings start to arrive, Nev strikes up a more romantic attachment to Abby's older sister Megan, and then the cracks start to appear. When Megan sends Nev a song dedication, it only takes a few minutes of searching on YouTube to discover that she has stolen the recording and claimed it as her own. Soon after, when Abby's mother claims that Abby has a gallery exhibition, an equally simple search on Google Earth proves that the gallery

doesn't even exist. Their suspicions aroused, Nev, Ariel, and Henry head off on a road trip to uncover the deepening mystery. What they discover when they arrive on Abby's rural farm, well, is quite disturbing.

Critics are split on the issue of whether this film is genuine, but this critic is willing to take the leap of faith. The warmth and spontaneity of Joost and Schulman's filmmaking is too sincere to be a hoax. The story has obviously been edited to create a more traditional flow of revelations and moments where the tension is amped up, but messing around with the flow of time is inherent to any style of filmmaking, and doesn't mean that the events themselves are not real. Nev is an intriguing and roguish young man who knows how to work an audience, and his familiarity with the people behind the camera makes for an intimate and engaging film. The real draw of the film is obviously based around the revelations at Abby's farm; but I don't want to spoil the surprise, so just go and watch this film.

★★★★★

## COLD WEATHER

**DIRECTOR BY** AARON KATZ

**STARRING** CRIS LANKENAU, TRIESTE KELLY DUNN, RAÚL CASTILLO & ROBYN RIKOON

Aaron Katz' latest lo-fi slacker movie proves that using inexpensive equipment and cheap locations doesn't mean you have to make a mumblecore film about angst-ridden teens. Admittedly, the hero (Doug) is a college dropout, intentionally falling short of his potential, who has moved in with his sister back in his hometown of Portland, Oregon. He seems content to spend his days drinking beer and reading Arthur Conan Doyle stories; but his patient sister Gail persuades him to take a night-shift job at an Ice Factory. He meets a suitably 'real' friend in Raul, a fellow employee who is content

with his life of DJing in local bars and earning money shifting ice. When Doug's ex-girlfriend, Rachel, arrives in town, the scene seems set for a traditional slacker movie about 'growing up'. But when Rachel disappears from her motel room, Doug, Gail and Raul find themselves embroiled in a sinister mystery that even Sherlock Holmes would have struggled to untangle.

The 'slack'-er film of the first half hour becomes a taut and suspenseful crime thriller – complete with briefcases full of money, seedy underworlds, dingy motels and screeching SUVs with blacked-out windows. The film perfectly blends film noir conventions ('femmes fatale', shadowy figures, etc) with some hysterical insights into the life of a bored 'twenty-something' living with his sister in Oregon. I'm not usually one for film comparisons, but think *Garden State* meets *The Big Sleep*.

The four actors are perfect in their roles. None of them are stand out, award-worthy performances, but they perfectly capture the tight-lipped fun of the story. In one scene, Doug and Raul try to book a room at Rachel's motel in order to do some more snooping around – they seem completely unaware of the social taboos surrounding two young men taking a motel room for a few hours, and the scene is all the more hysterical for it. The production design leaves something to be desired, but where the film ditches expensive lighting set-ups, it pastes over the shortfall with charm and wit by the barrel load.

★★★★★

## THE FIRST GRADER

**DIRECTOR BY JUSTIN CHADWICK**  
**STARRING NAOMIE HARRIS & OLIVER LITONDO**

Arguably the most disappointing film of the festival, this cliché-ridden story offers absolutely nothing of merit, and can only have been included in the festival at the behest of the UK

Film Council, who co-produced the film (which may explain its dismaying lack of quality). There is no criticising the source material – the true story of an 84-year-old Kenyan, Maruge, who decided to take advantage of a government initiative to introduce free primary schooling to claim the education he always craved. Maruge is a member of the Mau-Mau tribe who fought the English occupation of their land. On receiving a letter from the liberated government thanking him for his loyalty to his country, Maruge decides he wants to be able to read it for himself. The beleaguered and uncaring school system, personified by the hotheaded Mr. Kibruto, makes things difficult for Maruge; but with the help of head teacher Jane, he manages to overcome discrimination and hostility and by the end of the film... he can read his letter.

The film does everything by the book – from the 'beautiful' sweeping desert landscapes and 'luscious' hues to the 'powerful' score and the 'weeping' performances – but it is all so predictable it makes Richard Curtis look like Salvador Dali. The story is incredibly thin; and rather than working hard to find an interesting depth to the subject matter, the filmmakers opt for the cheap and easy alternative of bolting on a 'political thriller' element which sees gangs of marauding parents attacking the school while Jane receives threatening anonymous phone calls.

A 'true story' feature film has more in common with a painting of its subject than a photograph – such a film is not a direct and detached record, it is necessarily shaped by the temperament and artistic vision of its creators. Perhaps a few parents actually threw stones at the school building, perhaps Jane received a few phone calls; but that doesn't represent the emotional heart of Maruge's journey, and the filmmakers' decision to batter this fragile story into line is irresponsible and disappointing to say the least.

★★★★★

## FOR 80 DAYS

**DIRECTOR BY JON GARANO & JOSÉ MARI GOENAGA**

**STARRING ITZIAR AIZPURU, MARIASUN PAGOAGA & JOSÉ RAMÓN ARGOITIA**

One might easily assume that a film about septuagenarian lesbian adulteresses is trying a bit too hard to shock; but Garano and Goenaga have in fact created a moving and subtle exploration into the timelessness of passion. Axun is a sullen and trampled wife who lives with her growling, childless patriarch Juan Mari. When her estranged daughter's bastard ex-husband Mikel winds up in a coma after a car accident, Axun uses this barely feasible excuse to escape her cold, agrarian farmhouse.

Axun finds little respite in the hospital, however, as she is immediately confronted by Maite – a ballsy lesbian who is throwing a birthday party for her comatose brother who shares a room with Mikel. After a few frosty encounters, Axun and Maite realise that they were best friends (and almost slightly more) as children. Maite has moved on, travelling the world, composing music, and liberating herself from her rural shackles; but it may be too late for Axun to do the same.

This beautiful and nuanced film is a stunning example of the criminally under-exposed world of Basque cinema. The film studies its subjects with patience and respect, but there is a ferocity and anger simmering beneath the surface. The film is kind and measured, but somehow always seems on the verge of erupting into madness and rage. The central performances, as a pairing, are equalled at this festival only by Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams in *Blue Valentine*. Itziar Aizpuru and Mariasun Pagoaga bring a charming vivacity and innocence to a subject matter that could have potentially been very bizarre.

★★★★★

# INFILTRATION

**DIRECTOR BY DOVER KOSASHVILI**

**STARRING GUY ADLER, OZ ZEHAVI & MICHAEL ALONI**

On the back of *Waltz With Bashir* and last year's extraordinary *Lebanon*, it is unusual to find an Israeli film documenting the country's military character with an Altman-esque sense of playfulness. This is *M\*A\*S\*H* for Israelis, the main difference being that while Altman's band of brothers were delinquents and rebels, Kosashvili's characters are just plain incompetent.

The film follows a rag-tag bunch of ill-fitting military conscripts at a military boot camp. The enlisted men are Ashkenazi Jews, new immigrants from North Africa and Europe, Holocaust survivors, as well as both secular and religious individuals. Set over a decade from the late '50s to the outbreak of the 1967 war, the film depicts a series of vignettes that represent the various disparate cultural attitudes that were piled together in the creation of the Israeli state.

There is plenty to commend this original and energetic insight into the Israeli military machine. The light-hearted approach is refreshing, and many of the anecdotes and characters are moving and amusing in equal measure. But Kosashvili lacks Altman's mastery of tone, and when the film deals with the darker side of its subject matter, there is a sense that the director is punching above his weight.

★★★★★

# LEAP YEAR

**DIRECTOR BY MICHAEL ROWE**

**STARRING MONICA DEL CARMEN, GUSTAVO SANCHEZ PARRA & MARCO ZAPATA**

These days, when a film is set in one room, this becomes the central focus for any critical discussion – *Reservoir Dogs*, *Ferret's Room*, *Saw* etc. But

Michael Rowe's stunning *Leap Year* occupies its humble space so naturally that you almost never notice you haven't left Laura's stifling Mexico City apartment. We meet Laura on the first day of a leap year February, and our attention is naturally drawn to the 29th day. Rowe is in no rush to get there, however, and the film depicts Laura's painful, monotonous life of canned food, vacant stares, and sordid, violent sex with virtual strangers.

When she meets Arturo, a man with a dark appetite for sado-masochistic roleplay, she seems to have found the perfect partner in crime. In one of the most disturbing pieces of filmmaking I have ever seen, Laura masturbates Arturo while explaining how she wants him to cut her open and strangle her and come inside her while the last breath rattles out of her body. Arturo, scared by his attraction to the idea, reluctantly agrees to return the following day (February 29th) and live out the scenario. But will he materialise?

The premise of the film could have attracted an Eli Roth or some other exploitative non-entity; but in Michael Rowe's hands it is a haunting and believable tale of desperation and lost hope. It is a film where almost nothing happens, but every moment is imbued with an agonising and cathartic hopelessness. Del Carmen and Sanchez Parra are perfectly suited to the material – understated throughout, but capable of guttural emotions that punch right out at the viewer's solar plexus.

★★★★★

# MIRAL

**DIRECTOR BY JULIAN SCHNABEL**

**STARRING HIAM ABBASS, FREIDA PINTO & YASMINE AL MASRI**

*The First Grader* might be the most predictable and unoriginal film at this year's festival, but *Miral* is a terrifying example of misplaced originality. Spanning an impossibly gargantuan time-

frame from the birth of Israel in 1948 to the Oslo Peace Talks in 1994, the film follows the life of one feisty and intelligent young Palestinian girl (Freida Pinto) as she grows up in an East Jerusalem orphanage and falls into the ideological grip of her people's struggle for freedom. The film is not lacking in power and energy, and a few of the performances are worthy of praise, but the film as a whole rambles hopelessly through its entire length, failing to ever really touch down and explore its subject. Every time it seems as though the director will have to either say something interesting or run away and cut to something completely different, with his tail between his legs he leaps for the latter option.

★★★★★

# NEDS

**DIRECTOR BY PETER MULLAN**

**STARRING CONOR MCCARRON, JOE SZULA, MHAIRI ANDERSON, GARY MILLIGAN & JOHN JOE HAY**

John McGill is a diamond-in-the-rough – a studious youngster with academic potential buried deep in Glasgow's wallowing and futile Schemes. The hope, of course, is that such a talented youngster could be plucked from obscurity – perhaps by some needy philanthropist or 'do-gooder' civil servant. But this is Britain, and the child is left to tumble hopelessly into the depraved world of gangsters, scars and cheap liquor that has swallowed previous generations of Glaswegian delinquents. When a local gang discovers that John is the younger brother of an infamous local thug, they invite him to join their ranks. John slips easily into this new lifestyle of territorial knife fights and school absence. But can he scramble back towards the light before it is too late?

Peter Mullan is a superb Scottish actor, and fast becoming one of the country's most accomplished filmmakers. This film's tangible realism

may not quite hold up to comparisons with Ken Loach, but there are certainly similarities to the punch-drunk world-weary anger of Alan Clarke; and the film is cut through with a troubling fantasy element that Lindsay Anderson would not have frowned at.

★★★★★

## OF GODS AND MEN

**DIRECTOR BY** XAVIER BEAUVOIS

**STARRING** LAMBERT WILSON, MICHAEL LONSDALE & OLIVIER RABOURDIN

Xavier Beauvois' film spent four weeks at the top of the French box office after its September release, such was the national esteem held for the director and his chosen subject – the beheading of a group of French monks in North Africa in the mid-'90s. The film is beautifully shot and masterfully sparing in what it is willing to show to its audience. Visitors arrive at the monastery with stories of road-blocks, burnt out buses, and rioting gangs, but the audience is never really allowed to leave the convent. In this way the film feels more like a stage play – there is a unity of time and space that makes the drama even more visceral and intimate.

The central performances are superb; especially those of the ageing, cuddly Michael Lonsdale and the frighteningly reasonable and saintly calm Lambert Wilson (who plays Christian, the head of the monastery). There is a synergy between the quiet and gripping performances and the spare cinematography, culminating in a spectacular scene during dinner where the camera patiently lingers on each wrinkled, resolute, monastic face as the moving score reaches its crescendo; it is quiet, patient, and thoroughly engrossing.

If there is a criticism that can be levelled against this film it is that Beauvois seems too confident of what he is trying to say, and there is little room for the sort of mystifying am-

biguity that cuts through most great European films. He knows exactly what his message is and exactly how he will express himself through the characters. In such a long and pensive film, it would have been more interesting if there were a sense of tearing at the heart of the premise, a dialectic played out by the characters. Unfortunately this is never the case, and Beauvois' control over his thoughts is as thorough and totalitarian as the control Christian has over his subordinate monks.

★★★★★

## THE PARKING LOT MOVIE

**DIRECTOR BY** MEGHAN ECKMAN

Some documentaries are valuable as essays on important social, political, and historical events and figures; the value of others lies in their ability to uncover charming glitches in our depressingly predictable modern society. *The Parking Lot Movie* examines some of the most important thinkers and strategists based on the battlefields of the Corner Parking Lot in Charlottesville, Virginia, during the war of attrition against the drunken frat boys and spoilt little rich girls that try to escape without paying for the parking of their gas-guzzling SUVs. This might not seem like a universally important war, but to the criminally over-educated and idealistic parking lot attendants, it is of terrifying existential importance.

The hairy, charming men that run the lot are all anthropology, sociology, or philosophy students (or in some cases ex-professors!) from the University of Virginia. One of them even makes the point that such intelligent and thoughtful people should not be allowed to do such a monotonous and thoughtless job; it leads to dangerous levels of existential angst. They fill their time writing poetry on the walls of the cabin, and editing newspaper cartoons to provide whimsical anecdotes on the world of a parking lot at-

tendant (for example, "imagine if Rosa Parks had owned a car!"). When they move on, they become academics or successful musicians, and leave some other hopeful and naïve American vagabond to take over their hours.

They all have one thing in common... an abject hatred for the rich kids, 'Yummie Mummies', and aloof republican shirts that argue over cents and dimes while taking up two spaces with their over-priced mastodons-on-wheels. When one quiet and unassuming philosophy major comes up against a ditzzy-blondie who recognises him from high school, she sniggers and says "I hope you're happy with your life." He replies, "Yes, I am happy. I love my life. You are driving your daddy's car and arguing over a 40c charge, so who has come further?" These are the real people living on the periphery of Generation X, and I am happy to say they are even more robust, considerate, and amiable than Douglas Copeland could have imagined.

★★★★★

## POETRY

**DIRECTOR BY** LEE CHANGDONG

**STARRING** YUN JUNGHEE, DAVID LEE, KIM HIRA, AN HAESONG & KIM YONGBAEK

Mija is a quiet and thoughtful old woman who seems out of place in Seoul's ferocious urban modernity. She has been forgotten by her family, her community, and her country; and seems resigned to living out her days caring for her sulking and selfish grandson. But when she decides to take up an evening class in poetry she slowly begins to view the world around her with new eyes, and sees the beauty and pain that abounds in the city and the natural world. When her grandson and his friends are accused of raping a girl, who subsequently committed suicide, Mija is forced to join the other boys' fathers in an attempt to contain the damage before word spreads.

Yun Junghee's performance is unmissable. She is confused and vacant, but there is a quiet power and resolution to her actions. She is forgetful and often hopeless; but some of her poetic insights are disarmingly thoughtful, and when she is backed into a corner by the manipulative gang of fathers, she is not scared to fight back.

*Poetry* is a slow-building and patient film, and its exploration of Mija as a character is fascinating. The hazy palette of colours is strangely alluring and, well, poetic, and it ensnares the viewer in a mystified dream world. However, there can be no possible justification for the filmmaker's appalling and irresponsible approach to the difficult subject matter. On a literal level, this is a story about the cover up of a horrific crime; reading between the lines, this is a story about Korea's emerging middle classes abusing their power and influence to stifle the injustice suffered by the rural working class. And yet Changdong refuses to say anything about it at all. Whether this is incompetence of malaise is beyond my comprehension, but it is an issue that prevents this film from being truly worthy of commendation.

★★★★★

## TABLOID

DIRECTOR BY ERROL MORRIS

The legendary Errol Morris arrives at the London Film Festival with the wonderfully fun and trashy *Tabloid*. In 1977 Joyce McKinney, a former Miss Wyoming, was arrested in Devon for the kidnapping, rape, and false imprisonment of a slovenly, overweight Mormon missionary, Kirk Anderson. To this day, McKinney claims that they were lovers, and that she had flown to England to help her beau escape from the powerful grasp of the Church of the Latter Day Saints. The ensuing court case was something of a farce, as the stunning and voluptuous McKinney received thousands of fan letters

from men begging her to kidnap and rape them. McKinney eventually escaped back to the USA, where she lived in obscurity for many years... until she became the first woman to have her pet dog cloned by a Korean doctor! McKinney found herself pasted across the front page of the world's tabloids once again, as baffled editors joined the dots and realised that their favourite pin-up girl had once again handed them a gift of a story.

This is not so much a documentary about tabloids as a knowing, tabloid documentary. Headlines stamp themselves across the screen to highlight painfully obvious 'hit' words such as SCANDAL, LOVE, SEX, etc. At one point this has humorous consequences when our loopy heroine struggles to describe the wooden cabinet in her hotel room with a lock on it... MINIBAR appears silently on the screen, stamping out her tiny human voice with its typographic rigour. In an age where celebrity has become a bloated and meaningless concept, McKinney is a hysterical breath of fresh air – she might be completely insane, but no one can doubt that her motives were sincere, and that she committed these acts out of passion rather than a calculated attempt to reach the front page of *The Daily Mirror*.

The tabloid investigators and journalists are not vilified for their part in the story. They conducted themselves with all the greedy, immoral, selfishness we have come to associate with this valueless industry; yet somehow we forgive them because they seem as bewildered as everyone else. They are caught up in the whirlwind of McKinney's story, and it is difficult to blame them without secretly feeling like a hypocrite.

This is not a moralistic film in any sense – Morris is far too intelligent a filmmaker to bother ascribing blame or innocence in this debauched scenario. Joyce is not portrayed as a mad woman or a martyr, but she is clearly a bit of both. And as our image of her

skips between malicious spinster, passionate romantic, meek victim, etc. we come to recognise the essential shortcoming of 'tabloid' reporting; there are no simple answers in real life, and things only seem black and white when they appear below a red banner.

★★★★★

## THE TAQWACORES

DIRECTOR BY EVAD ZAHRA

STARRING BOBBY NADERI, NOUREEN DEWULF, DOMINIC RAINS, NAV MANN & IAN TRAN

'The Taqwacores' is an adaptation of the scene-defining Muslim punk novel by American Muslim author Michael Muhammad Knight. The story follows Yusef, a bookish engineering student who arrives in Buffalo eager to study, but finds himself living in a squat house filled with bizarre, transgressive wasters with one thing in common... they are all Muslim. The group hold Friday prayer and take their religion seriously, but by night their crumbling abode is transformed into a makeshift hangout for the town's punk scene. As Yusef comes to terms with this dichotomy, he learns an enormous amount about himself, his history, and most importantly his future.

This is an interesting insight into a generation of Western Muslims who have truly fallen through the cracks. They are outcast by the American Dream and vilified by their own religious communities who consider them to be broken and poisonous sinners; but, which is worse, they are also shunned by the supposed antithesis of the American Dream – the great subculture of punks and transgressives that the enfranchised middle classes are powerless to eradicate – for being dark-skinned terrorists. Without any subculture to fall back on, they are forced to make things up as they go along, borrowing from punks, hippies, rock n' roll, Muslim thinkers, etc. There is only one rule for the group:

all are welcome. The only way they can prevent their group becoming a sect is to remain open to all. The rule is there is no rule. But when the gang decide to put on a concert and invite all the Muslim punk bands from across the country, their determination to welcome groups with conflicting interests leads to a tragic and destructive end.

The book has been referred to as a Muslim *The Catcher In The Rye*, but any similarity here can only refer to the novels' social importance. In terms of narrative, this is more like a Muslim 'The Great Gatsby', as Yusef is a quiet and empty vessel through whose eyes we witness the captivating mystery of Jehangir, the amazing Ayyub, Dee Dee Ali, and many more.

A pertinent film reference would be *My Private Idaho*, a film in which faded colours and barren locales play host to a rambunctious and fascinating crowd of hopeful misfits. Some of the acting is questionable, and some of the ideas handled in a fairly brusque manner, but surely that is the whole point of 'punk'? This film is not trying to be poetic or moving, it is a testament to the ruthless energy of the punk aesthetic and the cinema of transgression. Nick Zedd would be proud.

★★★★★

## UPSIDE DOWN: THE CREATION RECORDS STORY

DIRECTOR BY DANNY O'CONNOR

Behind every great cultural revolution there is a frenetic madman with a perfect blend of financial nous and naïve passion. In 1968, Barry Levinson sent Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda out into the countryside with a shed-load of his own cash – the resulting film was *Easy Rider*. In 1989 two mean-looking brothers from Brooklyn showed up at Sundance and, while everyone else was skiing, bought the rights to a few films from unknown

filmmakers called Quentin Tarantino and Steven Soderbergh... they became the Weinstein Brothers. Alan McGee is just such a genius.

His Creation Records offices in East London were more like a squat-cum-nightclub than a corporate headquarters, but he created one of the most sought after labels of the '90s when he dragged his friend Bobbie Gillespie (of Primal Scream) to an ecstasy party in Manchester. The resulting album, *Screamadelica*, helped create Acid House music, and it made McGee an overnight sensation. He went on to discover My Bloody Valentine, Felt, and many more 'indie' icons of the era; but it was his discovery of Oasis that catapulted him into the stratosphere. McGee found himself rubbing shoulders with politicians on Downing St and enjoying trans-Atlantic drug binges with the musical elite. Eventually McGee fell foul of his addiction and was forced to reassess his lifestyle. He sold the label to Sony for a comfortable sum, and retreated into relative seclusion.

O'Connor's film is a straight documentary using interviews, archive footage, and the obvious soundtrack choices to tell its story. If you are a fan of British 'indie' music of the 1980s/90s and want to know a bit more about one of the scene's masterminds, then this is a must see. Otherwise... you aren't missing anything important.

★★★★★

*The BFI London Film Festival will be back next year for its 55th event.* ♣



# HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART 1

**DIRECTED BY DAVID YATES STARRING DANIEL RADCLIFFE,  
EMMA WATSON, RUPERT GRINT, ALAN RICKMAN, RALPH  
FIENES, BILL NIGHY & HELENA BONAN CARTER**

**RELEASED OUT NOW**

Various things have happened to the *Harry Potter* franchise since Christopher Columbus got the ball rolling in 2001, and the absence of that same director is one of the biggest. His two entries began the *Potter* films in dramatically underwhelming style. After his departure, when Alfonso Cuarón took over the reins for *The Prisoner Of Azkaban*, the already billion-dollar series (reflecting its trio of stars' own development) began to grow up.

David Yates picked up the franchise at film five – *The Order Of The Phoenix* – and has, in the most part, done an admirable job. He is responsible for making film five comparable in quality to film three (after the lull of *Goblet Of Fire*) and should be credited for helping the series, and the cast, mature into what it is today. What a shame, then, that *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows: Part 1* is his weakest

entry in the series so far.

There are many things we should consider about this film. The first, and possibly most important, is that it is the introduction to the finale. Thus, it gets saddled with the most exposition-heavy segments of what is undoubtedly Rowling's most exposition-heavy novel. This could be seen as necessary in order to unburden *Part 2* (an artistically lazy conclusion) or as an unfortunate result of the studio's decision to split the thing in two. After all, *Order Of The Phoenix* (Yates' first entry in the series) is the longest of the novels and is structurally superior to this. Watching *Part 1*, the decision to split the films seems legitimised more by the inevitable box-office haul than for any artistic reason.

The fact that there is so much 'stuff' for Harry and his companions to do (and find) suits the screen far less than it suited Rowling's novel. In print, the story could be held together through exposition and explanations that didn't feel like what they were; here, on screen, the story flags under the weight of its own fragmented nature. Taking our three heroes out of the well-rehearsed Hogwarts is not in itself the problem (the film's more roaming nature actually gives rise to some pleasant, varied photography), but the result of splitting the film means slowing the mid-section down and lumbering the narrative with endless locations, names, MacGuffins and contrivances. One problem the film series has always faced is that the mo-

tives of the characters have been more difficult to cement: because so much is going on, the strands become tangled. Audiences who have only ever seen the films (especially with the gaps in-between) must surely struggle to nail everything down.

Radcliffe, Grint and Watson (as Harry, Ron and Hermione respectively) give their most assured performances yet. As usual, Watson appears the most comfortable, but Radcliffe and Grint have improved. This is essential to the film's success, because as things have moved along they have been required to 'act' more and more often. Those who have criticised Radcliffe in the past need to remember that he has had the hardest work to do. Also crucial are the mostly successful comic beats in the film (including an amusing polyjuice potion transformation scene at the start) which provide lights in the darkness of Yates' consistently moody picture, and the scariest and most violent *Potter* film so far. As with most of the *Potter* films, the supporting cast reads like an honours list of British thespians, and all play their roles well, even if most are only briefly on-screen, or sidelined as soon as they appear.

It looks great, has good performances and maintains a dark tone without feeling forced. There are strong set-pieces, but overall the film's pacing hampers the experience. Exposition heavy, *Potter 7: Part 1* is an entertaining but flawed prelude to the real finale, which hits July next year.

★★★★★



# UNSTOPPABLE

**DIRECTED BY TONY SCOTT STARRING CHRIS PINE, DENZEL WASHINGTON, ROSARIO DAWSON, ETHAN SUPLEE, KEVIN DUNN, KEVIN CORRIGAN, LEW TEMPLE & T.J. MILLER**

**RELEASED OUT NOW**

“Based on true events,” *Unstoppable* is the latest all-action behemoth from Tony Scott, and another involving a rampaging train after last year’s *The Taking Of Pelham 1 2 3*. Denzel Washington is back again, swapping the control centre for railroad overalls, and quickly becomes the only hope for saving the town of Stanton from near destruction. While Washington’s character Frank Barnes and rookie conductor Will Coulson (Pine) collect their day’s train and cargo for transport, across state, two careless trainyard workers let a half-mile long locomotive out of their grasp. When the driver jumps out to flick a line switch, failing to fully engage the brakes, the train starts to accelerate, quickly powering off into the distance. Accelerating every second, the runaway, it turns out, is carrying a mixed cargo of diesel fuel and hazardous chemicals, leaving few options to

reign in the speeding bullet before it causes some serious damage.

Racing to reach an inlet before the oncoming locomotive mows them down, Barnes and Coulson have the only shot of slowing the train down before it derails in Stanton into a ball of flames. Needing to catch up to it in reverse and attempt to couple at 70mph, it’s literally a race against time, but even with Barnes at the wheel, the unenviable task is still a near impossible feat, and will go down to the wire as to whether they can pull it off.

Like a lot of director Tony Scott’s recent films, *Unstoppable* has it’s moments but is fatally undone by his style and narrative misgivings. In taking so many words above to explore the plot I might have oversold it. There’s a runaway train and two hopeful heroes chase it down in an attempt to save the day. You’ll spend most of the film merely watching each train chug along at high speeds, which even over the fairly short 98-minute running time, feels stretched. The same shots of rampaging wheels and swooping helicopter pans are used time and again, the latter produced with very questionable CGI, meaning it doesn’t really feel like the film is going anywhere.

Denzel Washington and Chris

Pine do everything asked of them by the linear and wafer thin script, but they’re undermined by Tony Scott’s vision. The unsubtle soundtrack of pounding hard rock combined with quick-cuts and Scott’s very direct style of production serve to create a certain feeling of pace and impending catastrophe but without even an ounce of tension it all feels so superfluous you’ll never worry for the safety of the characters. *Unstoppable* feels like you’re watching a re-run where you already know the result, not like a live event that plays out before your eyes, which given the heavy reliance on fake TV news reports for exposition, was so obviously the intention.

As a mindless thrill-ride, *Unstoppable* entertains but it’s severely undermined by the frustrating and one-track direction. There’s no doubting Tony Scott can do much better; *Enemy Of The State* had more tension in any single scene than all of *Unstoppable* combined, while *Man On Fire* possesses the grit and tone so unforgivably lacking here. *Unstoppable* isn’t a bad film per-se, but it’s a by the numbers thriller that isn’t remotely thrilling, and will do very well indeed to make back its weighty \$100m budget.

★★★★★



# THE NEXT THREE DAYS

**DIRECTED BY PAUL HAGGIS STARRING RUSSELL CROWE, ELIZABETH BANKS, OLIVIA WILDE, MICHAEL BUIE, MORAN ATIAS, REMY NOZIK, JASON BEGHE & AISHA HINDS**

**RELEASED OUT NOW (USA) JANUARY 7, 2011 (UK)**

Paul Haggis has the impressive distinction of being the only screenwriter in history to pen two Best Picture Academy Award-winning scripts in succession; *Million Dollar Baby* followed by *Crash*. *The Next Three Days* is his first film as writer-director since 2007's *In The Valley of Elah* and stars Russell Crowe as man whose wife is convicted of and imprisoned for murder.

This leaves John Brennan (Crowe) alone at home with his son. They pay regular visits to Lara (Elizabeth Banks) but her relationships with them – particularly with her son – are beginning to fragment. When it seems that all hope is gone, Lara turns suicidal, prompting her beleaguered husband to

initiate his own amateur prison-break.

That summary of the film reeks of implausibility, admittedly, but Haggis' film plays it cool, painting a (mostly) believable picture of a man whose determination to rescue his wife from her (in his mind, false) imprisonment takes him to places most husbands would never go. Most of the film's realism comes courtesy of Crowe, who gives a good, grounded performance here, and ensures the picture never jumps the shark or flounders morally, as it might easily have done.

*The Next Three Days* is a remake of the 2007 French film *Pour Elle* (*Anything For Her* – a much better title), which I have not seen. That is probably a good thing, as reportedly this film is very close to the original, and the repetition may have dampened opinion. The original, it is worthy to note, is over half an hour shorter than Haggis' effort, and it does feel that *The Next Three Days* could have done with a bit of a trim in the editing room. That isn't to say it feels too long as such, but it does stretch its natural runtime somewhat. The film's pacing doesn't feel laborious, however, and Haggis manages to conjure up some decent tension out of his set pieces. The final

third, in particular, ramps up the excitement for a drawn out finale that is genuinely tense and involving.

John's transformation into a prison-break architect is handled generally quite well, although one scene – in which Liam Neeson cameos as an ex-con – feels a little forced. It serves the plot, and gives John his crucial checklist of prison-break essentials (which, to the film's credit, are never forgotten) but does feel a little at odds with the rest of the film. His journey from average man to embittered renegade is tempered by Crowe's performance, and we are not left with the sense that his character 'gets away with' anything from a moral perspective.

Danny Elfman's score, which gently plays the mood, is effective, descending into a well-used electronic track when things speed up towards the end. There are even a couple of good laughs to enjoy in here, coming at moments of high drama, but which don't dilute the atmosphere. The restaurant-set introduction is a little clunky, and it may be a little overlong (with too many supporting characters), but overall Haggis' film is a competent thriller, subtly directed and well acted.

★★★★★



# RARE EXPORTS: A CHRISTMAS TALE

**DIRECTED BY** JALMARI HELANDER **STARRING** TOMMI KORPELA, PER CHRISTIAN ELLEFSEN, VILLE VIRTANEN, JORMA TOMMILA, JONATHAN HUTCHINGS & ONNI TOMMILA

**RELEASED** DECEMBER 3

One of the trickiest issues arising from high-concept projects is to avoid falling into the mistaken belief (intentionally or otherwise) that the concept is in some way bigger than the film. Films like *Snakes On A Plane*, for example, believe that their concept is enough to paper over the cracks, but in reality the argument 'it's so bad it's good' rarely holds water. How pleasing, then, to find a high-concept project that is an enjoyable romp in its own right.

Believe it or not, the concept behind *Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale* (that some miners dig up the original Santa Claus, who turns out to be a malignant demon), is actually far more

outlandish than the film itself. Indeed, the first half of the picture pans out in a fairly 'normal' way, eschewing the prejudices its story might invite and simply getting on with things. It's at this point that you realise the film is going to be mostly successful, because it doesn't think it can take its audience for schmucks (take note, *Dinner For Schmucks*).

Onni Tommila as Pietari, a young boy convinced that Santa is out to get him, gives a great central performance. His credibility gives a human heart to proceedings, as does the deceptive performance of Jorma Tormilla as his father, a man who initially appears brutish and hostile but clearly cares deeply for Pietari, evidenced by a heartbreaking scene shared by the two of them over a Christmas Eve dinner.

When Jorma and his friends capture an old, savage-looking man – who Pietari believes is Santa – the film at last falls into its stride. The first half is languid and intriguing, building slowly, but is perhaps a little drawn out; evidence perhaps that the idea for this project was adapted from a series of shorts. The film is darkly comic throughout (there are some amusing

references to Finnish culture), but the final reel is where the comic gold lies, with a genuinely hilarious montage culminating in an Indiana Jones reference that justifies the occasionally baggy mid-section. But just as you begin to fear the film might be losing its way, director Jalmari Helander pulls it back together and wisely decides not to let things drag for too long.

With a beginning reminiscent of *The Thing* (the distinct lack of women in the film is also something of a nod to Carpenter's film) and that closing *Indy* reference, perhaps it won't come as much of a surprise that the mid-section feels a little like *Pan's Labyrinth* in its narrative. There are very real events going on, after all, manipulated by humans, but are the child's imaginings simply that, or is something genuinely sinister about to happen? In the end it lacks the clever ambiguity of Del Toro's film, but it does hold the imagination.

With a closing reel that will put a smile on your face, Helander's film may feel stretched and a little inconsequential at times, but *Rare Exports* is a unique take on Christmas cinema and is worthy of your time.

★★★★★



# LEGEND OF THE FIST: THE RETURN OF CHEN ZHEN

**DIRECTED BY** ANDREW LAU **STARRING** DONNIE YEN, SHU QI, ANTHONY WONG, HUANG BO, ZHOU YANG, HUO SI YAN, KOHATA RYUICHI, KURATA YASUAKI & RYU KOHATA

**RELEASED** DECEMBER 3 (UK) APRIL 11, 2011 (USA)

The latest outing legendary character Chen Zhen, and a return for Donnie Yen to the role after his portrayal in the 1995 TV series *Fist Of Fury*, *Legend Of The Fist: The Return Of Chen Zhen* is set seven years after the crusader's apparent murder, shot after discovering

who was responsible for his teacher's death. But no one can even really hold Chen Zhen back, and after secretly be-friending an influential local mob boss, and taking on the criminal underworld at night, fights against those responsible for his hero's killing and attempts to foil the Japanese as they release a lengthy assassination list of Chinese citizens

Well shot with some superb choreography, especially in the opening war-based preface, director Andrew Lau's style just about pulls the film through, and though he guides the film well to the end, it feels conflicted in its aims.

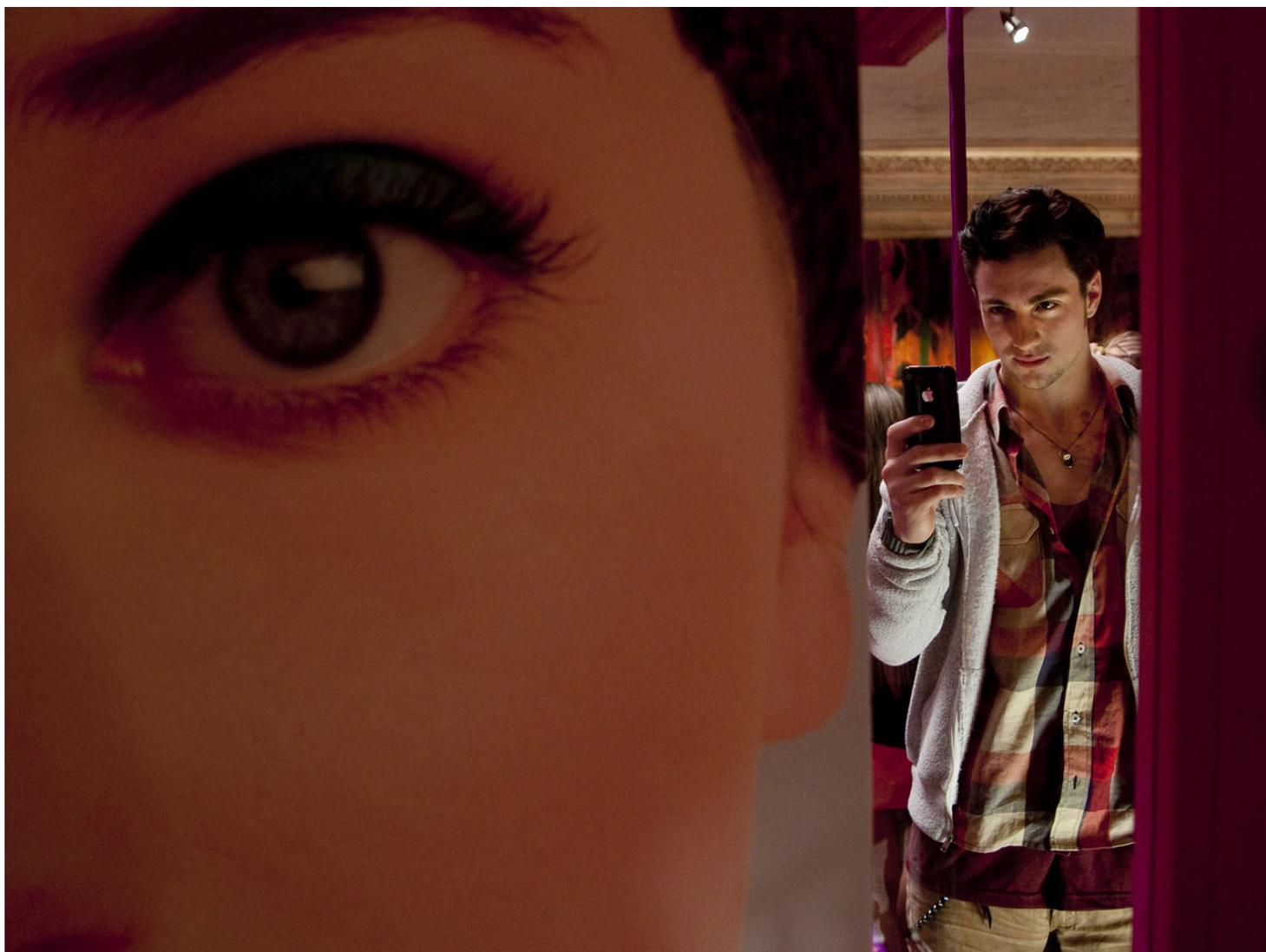
Falling awkwardly between an overly theatrical drama and an all-out martial arts film, as soon as the pace and intensity starts to build the tone switches back to flowery dialogue and ineffective character building, before again as that starts to get into swing,

it's back to the action. Frustratingly, and surprisingly given that Lau is at the helm, the narrative is very stop-start, and it's difficult to ever really settle into *Legend Of The Fist: The Return Of Chen Zhen*.

Of the dramatic side to the plot, the side-stories are often half-baked and investment in characters bar Chen Zhen leads nowhere. Donnie Yen though is captivating, and throughout both the slower and action segments, is the best thing about the film.

Almost worth seeing for the opening salvo alone, unfortunately the martial arts never reach the same heights again, and the same can be said for *Legend Of The Fist: The Return Of Chen Zhen* as a whole. It's watchable, certainly, but it lacks anything to really draw you in and certainly won't blow you away like some of Chen Zhen's previous outings might.

★★★★★



# CHATROOM

**DIRECTED BY** HIDEO NAKATA **STARRING** AARON JOHNSON, IMOGEN POOTS, MATTHEW BEARD, HANNAH MURRAY, DANIEL KALUUYA, MEGAN DODDS & MICHELLE FAIRLEY

**RELEASED** DECEMBER 22 (UK) TBC (USA)

You might not recognise the name Hideo Nakata but you'll certainly recognise the influence he's had on cinema. The director of cult Japanese horror film *Ring*, and its sequel, *Ring 2*, Nakata helped kick-start the Asian horror scene and draw the world's attention to a talented bunch of filmmakers, now plying their trade in front of millions of eyes every release. Sadly since the Asian talent breakthrough, Nakata has been all but left behind.

Making his English-language debut on *The Ring 2*, sequel to a Holly-

wood remake of his own film, it wasn't dreadful but you'd struggle to describe the film as anything better than disappointing. Five years on comes his second English foray, though it's not a Hollywood release this time around, instead a much smaller, equally high concept, British production, so maybe it's time at last for Nakata to prove his skills this side of the world.

About a group of teens that meet and socialise online, *Chatroom* attempts to explore social hierarchy and the manipulation of other individuals through deemed emotional power. After frailties in each of their personalities start to reveal themselves, and self-projected leader William toys with the insecure Jim, it's up to the rest to intervene before teasing online turns much more serious in real life.

Based on a play, and adapted by the original playwright, sadly the narrative hasn't translated at all well and

the structure feels out of place. As the characters chat online, their interactions take a physical form in fictionalised universe but the living metaphor fall flat on its face. Furthermore, the dialogue struggles and feels forced and unnatural.

Some of the scenes build up tension nicely but any character development is thoroughly under-explored. Aaron Johnson shows confidence but there's nothing really to his role, despite William's wicked side, and Imogen Poots is similarly decent, but there's nothing for her really to excel at.

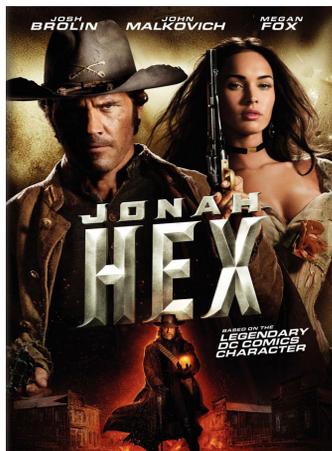
Hopefully there's more to come from Hideo Nakata in the future, but he's some way below his *Ring* heights at the moment, you wouldn't even picked the two as works by the same director, and even at just 97 minutes, you'll want it to end long before it eventually does.



## JONAH HEX

One of the first major comic book adaptations to fall flat, off a near \$50m budget, *Jonah Hex* made barely \$10m at the box office. It's pretty dreadful, and though Brodin shows some class, the narrative is nowhere to be seen.

Film ★★★★★  
Extras ★★★★★



## PIRANHA

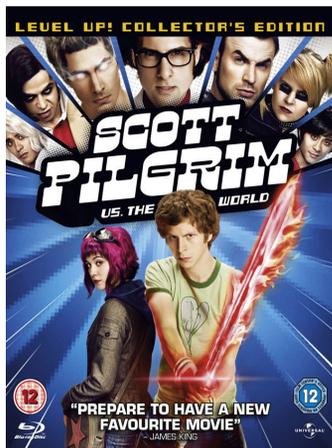
B-movie throwback from director Alexandre Aja, sadly it's his worst yet. A rare species of piranha ravage a beach-side town, and while the film borders on 'so back it's good' territory, really it's just a big waste of time.

Film ★★★★★  
Extras ★★★★★

## SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD

A little too style over substance but still an entertaining two hours as Michael Cera stars, fighting off his new girlfriend's seven evil exes. It's homage city too.

Film ★★★★★  
Extras ★★★★★



## THE LAST EXORCISM

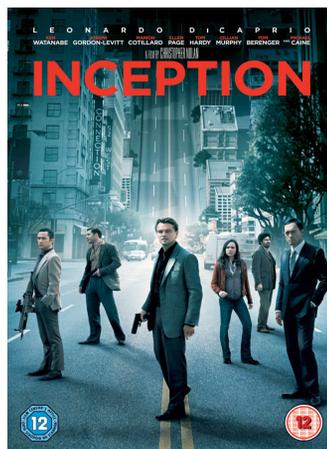
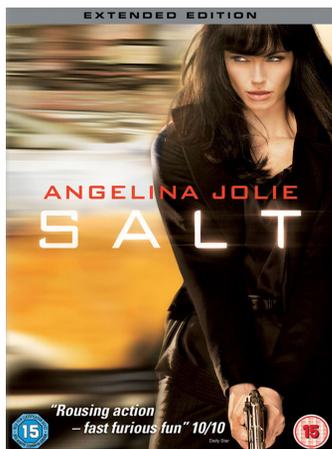
Effective horror that throws new twists on the exorcism story idea, filmed as a documentary, a pastor exposes exorcism cons only to find his final subject is really suffering from a devilish possession. Creepy until the last.

Film ★★★★★  
Extras ★★★★★

## SALT

Classically plotted conspiracy spy thriller, Angelina Jolie play a CIA officer, accused of being a KGB sleeper agent. Rewritten for Jolie after Tom Cruise turned *Salt* down, it lacks the spark of *Enemy Of The State* or the *Bourne* series.

Film ★★★★★  
Extras ★★★★★



## INCEPTION

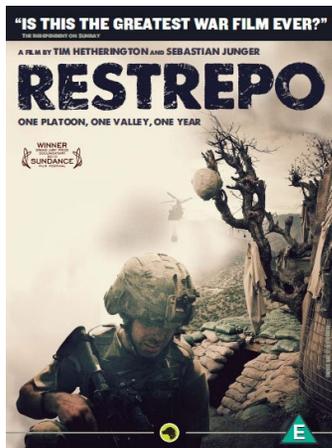
Given free reign after his work on the first two Batman films, Christopher Nolan's expansive thriller delves deep into the mind, literally, as a secret team attempt to implant a thought deep into someone else's mind.

Film ★★★★★  
Extras ★★★★★

## RESTREPO

Photographer Tim Hetherington and journalist Sebastian Junger's striking documentary about the year they spent dug in with the army in Afghanistan, on assignment for *Vanity Fair*. A striking and insight into life during war.

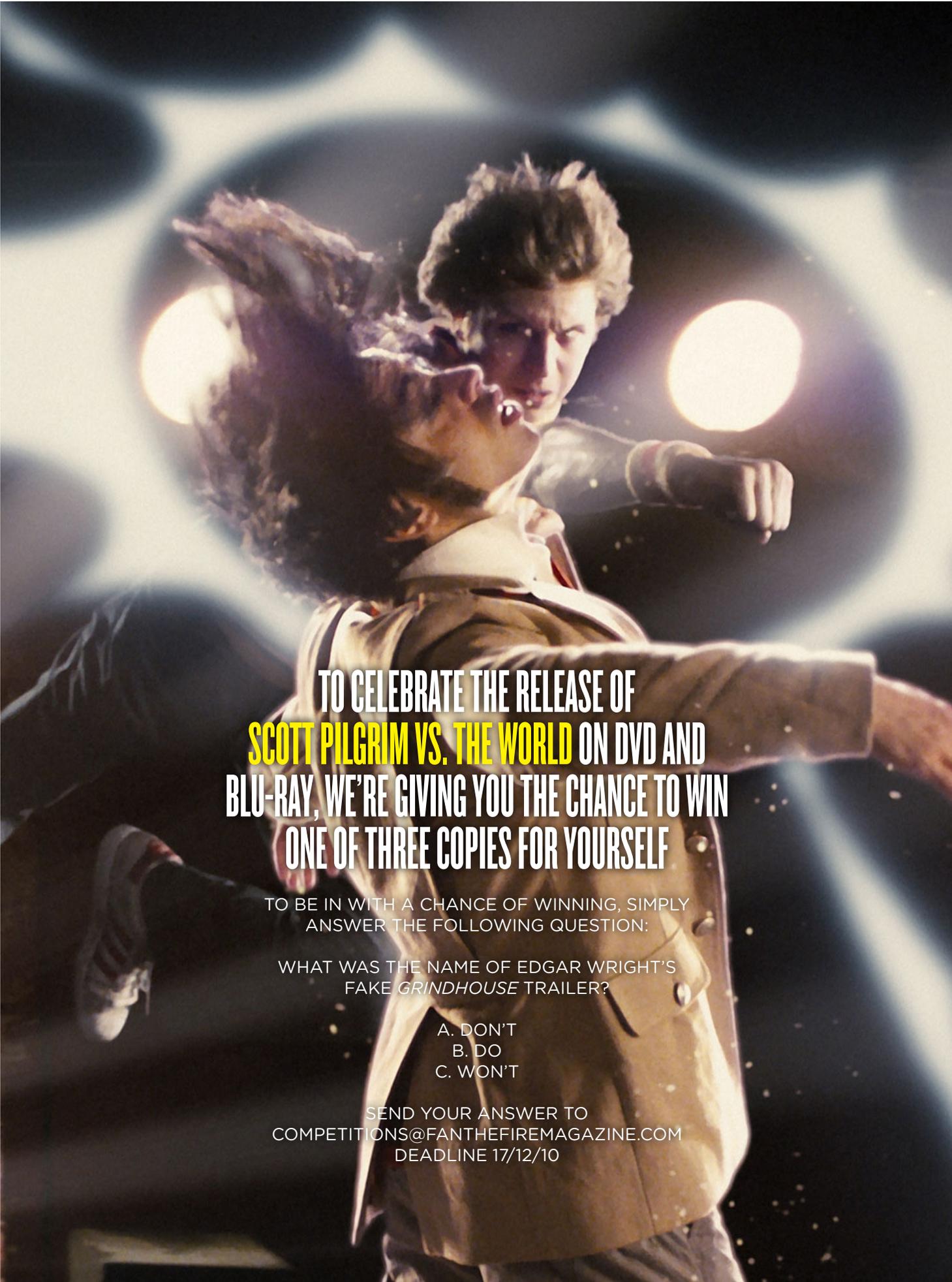
Film ★★★★★  
Extras ★★★★★



## THE LAST AIRBENDER

Dreadful adaptation of the critically acclaimed *Avatar* cartoon series, *The Last Airbender* completes writer/co-producer/director M. Night Shyamalan's fall from grace; he now sits pretty as the laughing stock of Hollywood.

Film ★★★★★  
Extras ★★★★★



TO CELEBRATE THE RELEASE OF  
**SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD** ON DVD AND  
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ART

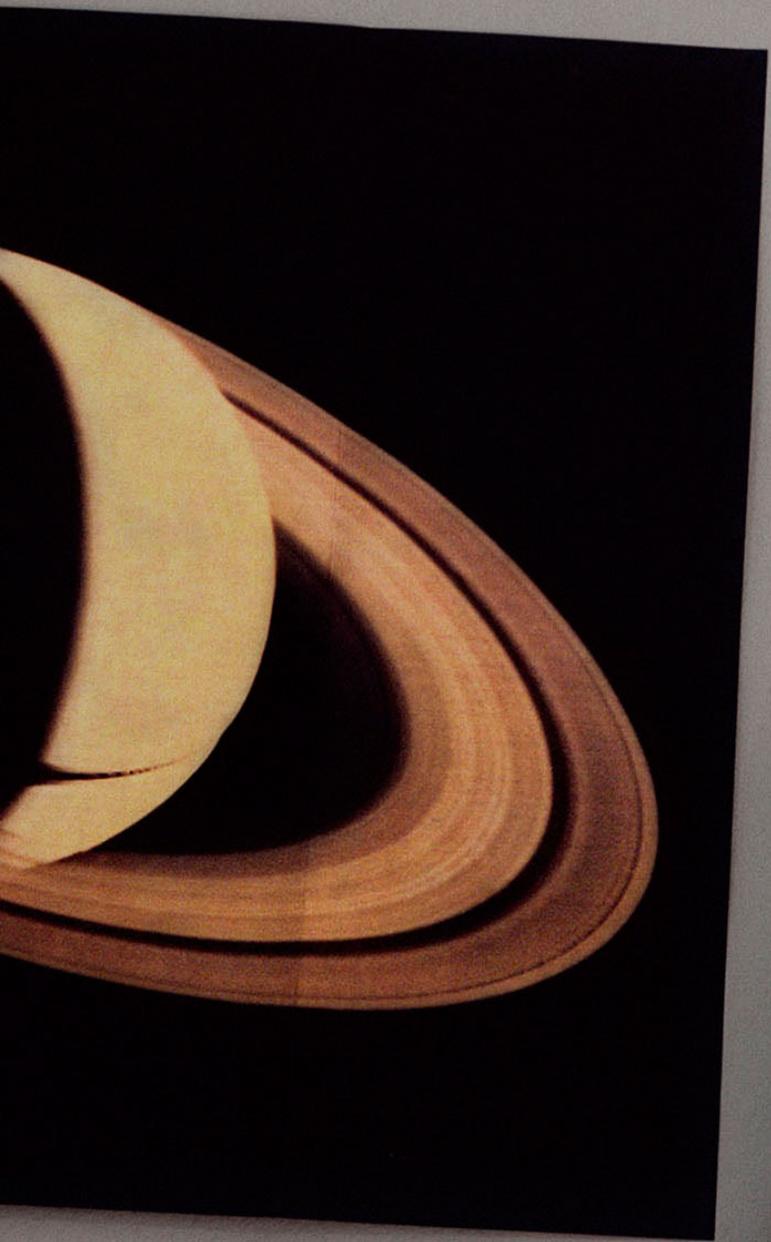




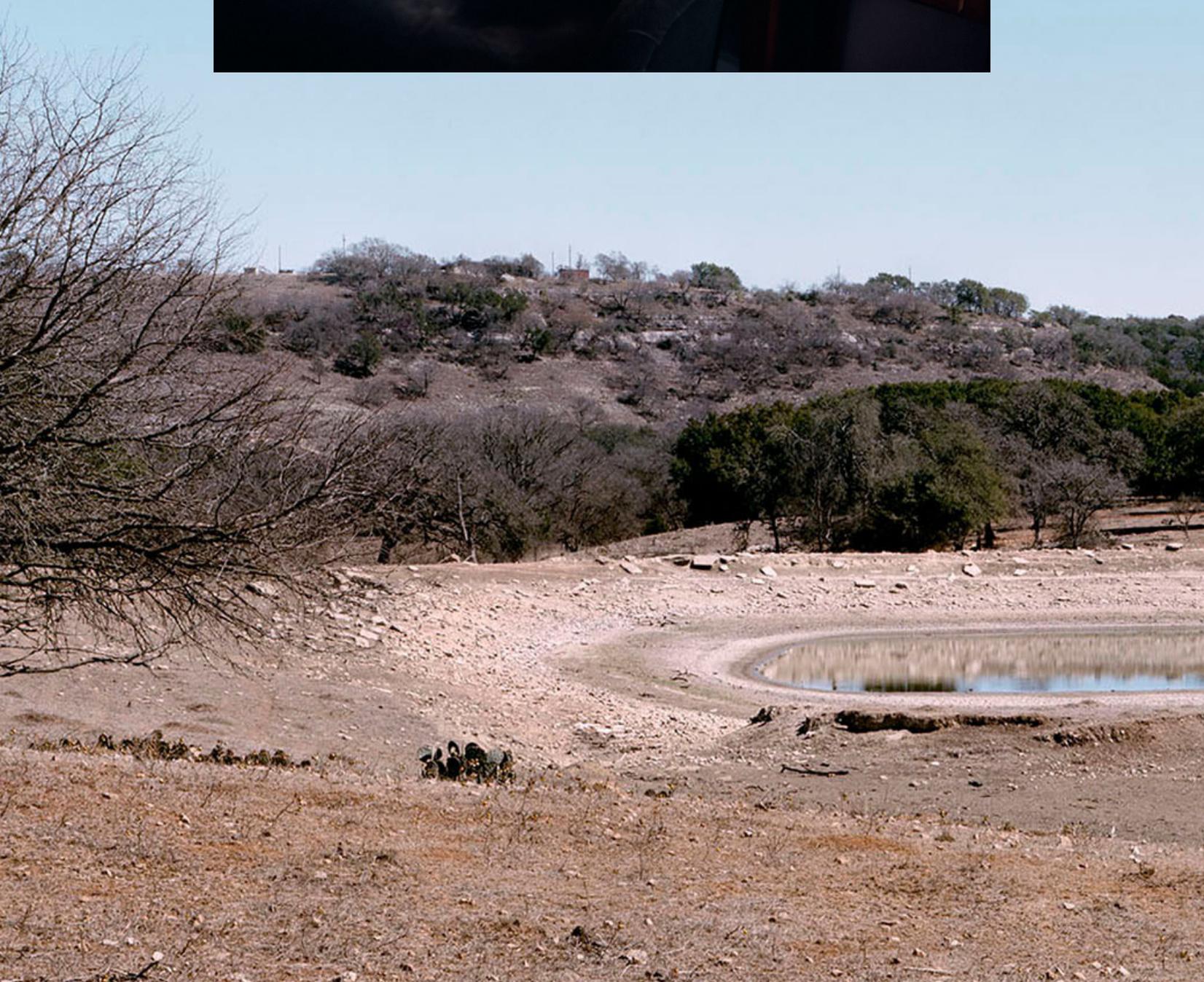
P A C K  
L I G H T

PHOTOGRAPHY REBECCA MARINO (REBECCAMARINO.COM)









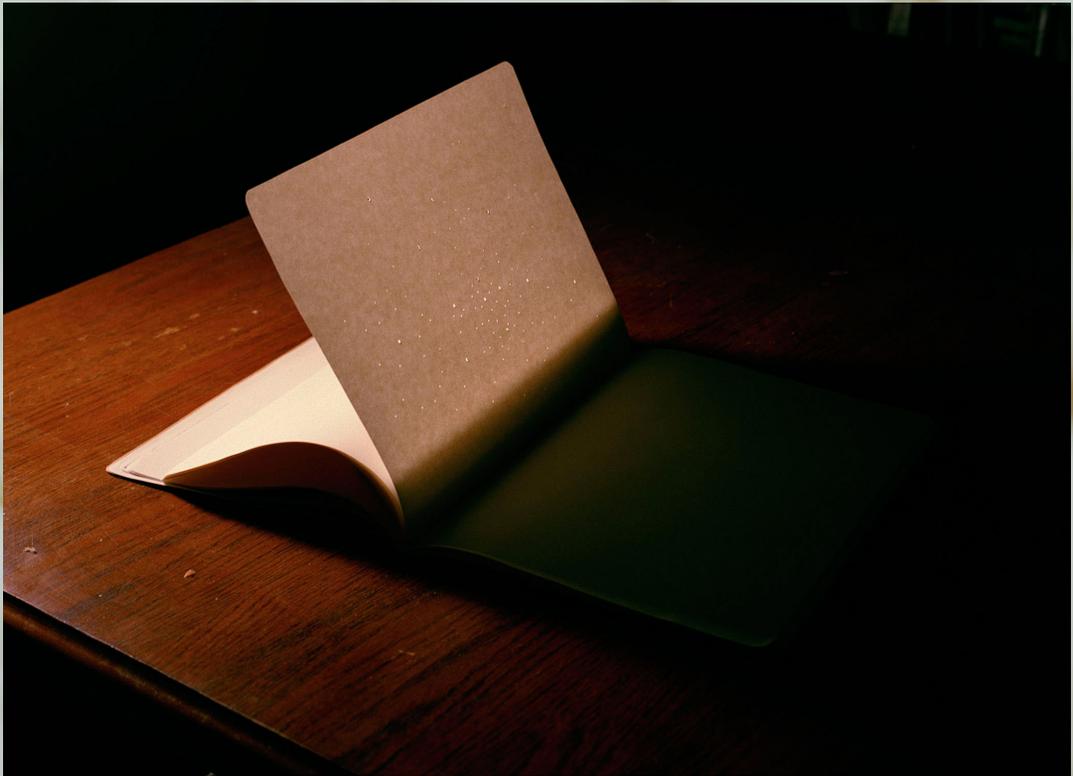








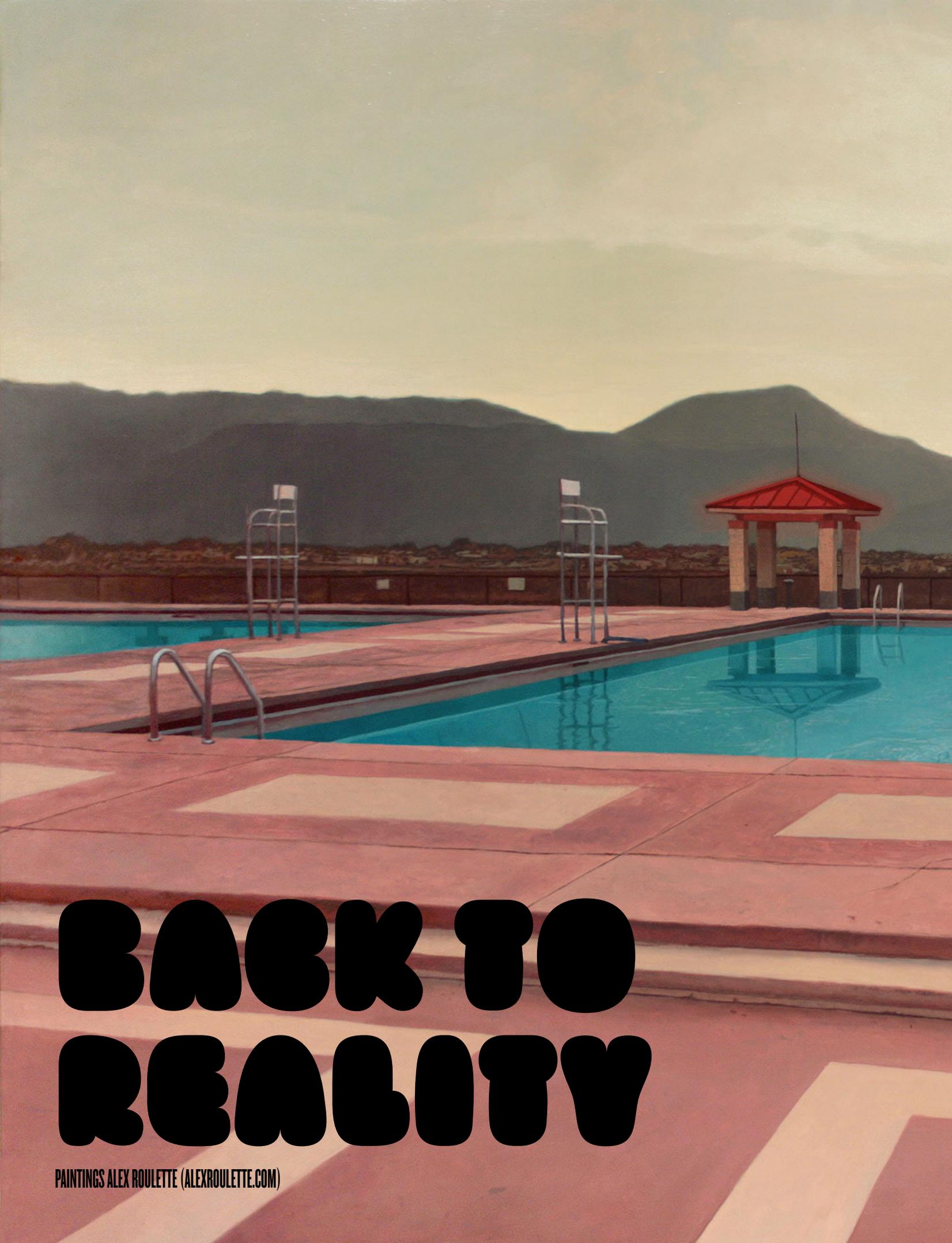












# BACK TO REALITY

PAINTINGS ALEX ROULETTE (ALEXROULETTE.COM)



























ART













ART



# PERPEN- DICULAR DREAMS

PHOTOGRAPHY JULIEN PACAUD (JULIENPACAUD.COM)





















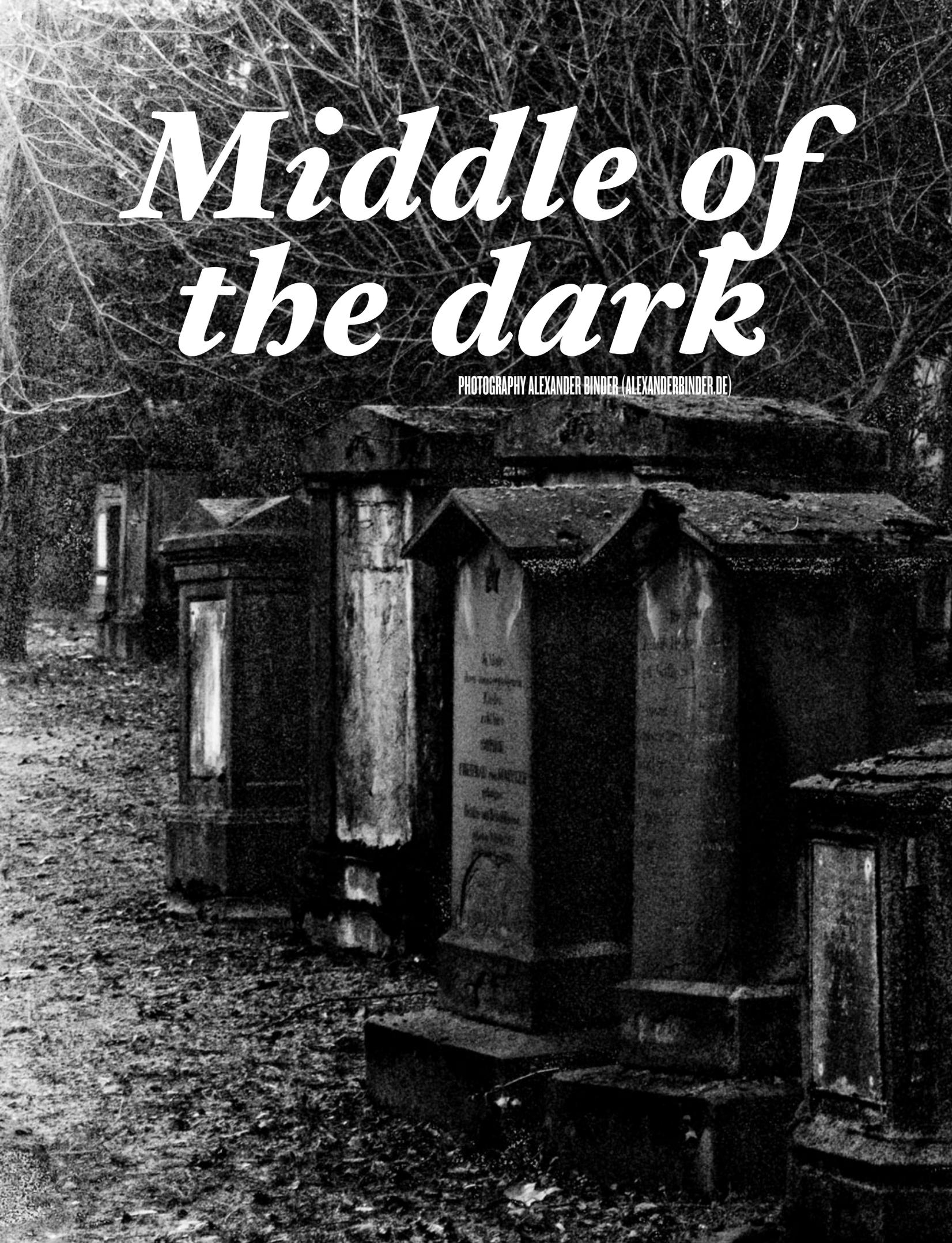






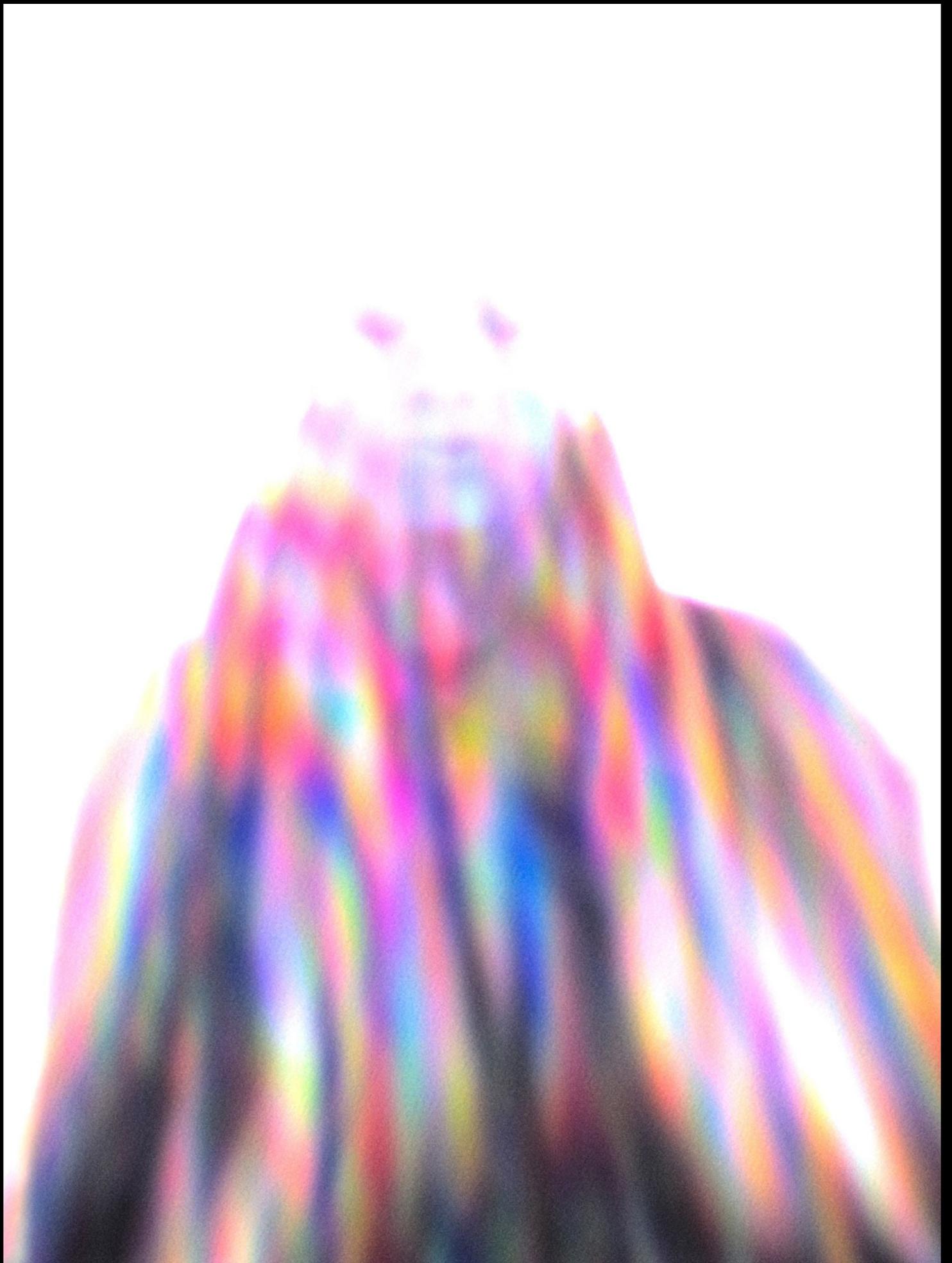
# *Middle of the dark*

PHOTOGRAPHY ALEXANDER BINDER (ALEXANDERBINDER.DE)





THE BODY OF  
MRS. MARY ANN  
WIFE OF  
JAMES ANN  
DIED  
AUGUST 18  
1850  
AGED 72

































STYLE

PHOTOGRAPHY SARA COE (SARACOE.COM)  
STYLING JULIA VENDRELL  
MAKE-UP CAROLINA GUZMAN USING M.A.C. (KASTEELAGENT.COM)  
HAIR CAROLINA GUZMAN USING TECNI.ART (KASTEELAGENT.COM)  
MODEL VIC (TRAFFICMODELS.COM)  
SPECIAL THANKS JOFRE (JOFRE.ES)

# SCHOOL DAZE



























PHOTOGRAPHY NICK SUAREZ (NICKSUAREZ.COM)

# She's hearing- ing voices







Model **Veronika Sznajder**  
Make-up **Jessika Dabrowski**



Model **Megan Henderson**



Model Jordan Mcdowell













# Summer's burning

CLOTHING THE RIVIERA CLUB AW2010 CAMPAIGN





























*Sunday  
lover*

PHOTOGRAPHY DANIEL LUXFORD (DANIELLUXFORD.COM)













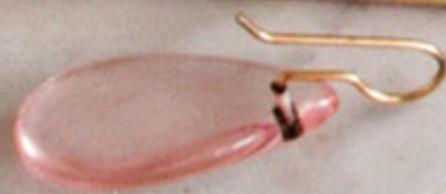












A photograph of three pink macarons on a white marble surface. One macaron in the foreground is broken, showing its filling. The background is a blurred wooden leg of a chair. The text "NEXT ISSUE AVAILABLE DECEMBER 31" is centered in the middle of the image.

NEXT ISSUE  
AVAILABLE  
DECEMBER 31

