

+ SPLINTER REVIEWS (VI)

+ SPLINTER REVIEWS VII

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OSCAR?

***The Aviator* (2004)**

11 nominations including Best Picture

Yes, *The Aviator* bursts onto the silver screen, a brazen biopic on that debonair millionaire king-of-the-air, Howard Hughes. What's that, Mr. Hughes? You think there are germs everywhere? Not to worry, because your silly strangeness has been exploited for big box office! This boffo blockbuster, starring Leo DiCaprio and just about every other star in tinseltown, is sure to catch the attention of a little gold fellow named Oscar... This is truly the Hollywood that Hollywood

wants, with bold strokes of colour, scintillating styles, steamy sex, sentimental Scorsese, and most importantly, a hopeless obsession with the memory of itself. Bravo!
-Owen Livermore

***Les Choristes* (2004)**

2 nominations

You will feel a strong sense of déjà vu watching *Les Choristes*. There is little original here. While this film is not unpleasant and is, in all honesty, quite charming, it really doesn't offer us much of anything. They could have called it Dead Chorus Society.

-Collin Smith

***Hotel Rwanda* (2004)**

3 nominations

A powerful film for what it is: a heavy handed history lesson that drives its message home with a hammer and a "History for Dummies" approach. Still, it's an important film for mainstream audiences to see. However, if you go into this film not knowing much about the situation you deserve to feel shame. Get off your ass and search out multiple sources of news. Then do something about what you see!

-Collin Smith

***Sideways* (2004)**

5 nominations including Best Picture

The film seems to be full of emblematic images: Miles (Paul Giamatti) lives his life as one summation after another. The blunt camera work helps out: the images

are so dead center that you want to switch off your peripheral vision. Which is appropriate: everything coming in from the sides is almost too—in the language of a stoner—unbearably relevant. Unlike *About Schmidt* (Alexander Payne's last road-and-a-wedding-flick), *Sideways* is much less generous with simple pleasures. It starts hung-over, in the late morning, under heavy summer weather, and is accompanied by a faux-ironic jazz score that seems composed to remind us of the way Miles bangs the wine around in his glass before he gargles it. His anxious glass swirling is much too passive-aggressive for Epicureanism, and Miles' car is much too rattly for a road trip. This movie can be very funny, but I found myself wincing at the bright lights. It is working away to wear down your expectations, and at that it succeeds remarkably.

-Adam Rosadiuk

HOLLYWOOD

***Alone In The Dark* (2005)**

The genre of this film is somewhat hard to define. Is it a tech-noir film, a sci-fi flick, a horror flick, a monsters-that-invade-the-earth-and-kill-us-all film? It's all over the place! In the first few minutes, already the movie tries to include too many things at once and the story (a razor-thin plot) simply doesn't hold up. Surprisingly (or maybe not), this film is currently ranked #8 on the IMDB bottom 100 films. Not that I worship IMDB's rating system in any way, but such a rating has to mean something. It doesn't mean there won't be a remake. Geez, I can't wait to see that!

-P-A Despatis D.

***Assault On Precinct 13* (2005)**

Basically the film fails due to a script that just never takes off. The dialogue is always a bit clunky and the characters speak like their lines were written to explain their motivations. The actors do their best with this material but no one ever seems quite real enough. No character ever feels three-dimensional enough. Plus there are too many clues that the story feels a little too obvious and convenient.

-Collin Smith

***Beyond The Sea* (2004)**

Karaoke dynamo Kevin Spacey plays an aging postmodern waxworks caricature who lays siege on the bio-pic, the musical and the life of Bobby Darin. Also,

features the most obnoxiously self-satisfied child actor outside of cereal commercials. That's only the first 15 minutes.

-Gareth Hedges

***Beyond The Sea* (2004)**

Spacey throws away any semblance of authenticity. This is a construction and Spacey throws it in our face time and again. He sets up the film as if it is being made by Darin himself, like an autobiography from beyond the grave. This gets around the film trying to be anything more than it is; a loving tribute from a fan to his idol. Darin's flaws are never insurmountable (except perhaps his premature death) and neither are those of his wife, Sandra Dee. This is a charmed life of a man who never got to express how deep and creative he could really be. At least, that's what his ghost wants us to think.

-Collin Smith

***The Forgotten* (2004)**

Warning, this review contains spoilers. Though it is hard to imagine spoiling such a terrifically terrible movie.

The premise of this film is that experimenting aliens hovering above the earth discover that, "The bond between a mother and child is like a tissue. It has an energy that can be measured." The bond is breakable unless you are Julianne Moore's character. Her maternal instinct is so strong that she cannot forget that she had life inside of her. The alien does not realize that motherhood begins in utero, so he is never able to adequately erase her child from her memory. This film is a pro-lifers dream come true!

Now, can we all join in a round of gagging to express our disgust?

-Shanna Plischke

***Hide And Seek* (2005)**

Fox has been making a big deal about the film's twist ending. All this would lead one to believe that this thriller's finale would be shocking, surprising and terrifying. That's why it was a big disappointment when I figured out the twist in the opening credits. Good idea, but it's been done before. In the hands of a good director this tale could have been disturbing and real. Alfred Hitchcock and David Lynch have both told this story to much more terrifyingly wonderful effect. However, in the hands of the director of *Swimfan*, the story becomes predictable and obvious.

-Collin Smith

Hide And Seek (2005)

Well, not that I want to spoil the film, but the killer is him!! It's him! HIM!! I mean, come on! This concept has been used ad-nauseam in the past few years; we don't need anymore of those schizophrenic killer film. The film isn't all bad; there's plenty of suspense and spooky ambiance, but the ending spoils it all.

-P-A Despatis D.

The Life Aquatic (2004)

A natural extension of Wes Anderson's aesthetic/thematic preoccupations. Another gentle tale of flawed people reluctantly living down these flaws, concocted with the expected off-kilter humour, self-conscious beauty, surprising poignancy that sneaks up on you, and general mild good-naturedness. As for the fantastical, blatantly artificial aquatic adventure theme, the bluntly stagy (but somehow convincing) character interactions, and the goofy-naïve, clumsy action sequences: just think of the film as a collaboration between Wes and his RUSHMORE creation, the precocious, over-achieving oddball Max Fischer, and it'll all make perfect sense.

-Jodi Ramer

National Treasure (2004)

Like a videogame daydreamed by a teenage boy drifting in and out of sleep in an American history class, except not as good.

-Gareth Hedges

White Noise (2005)

I am ashamed to admit that I jumped out of my skin during one loud oomph attempt to scare viewers in this lame excuse for a horror film. I am equally ashamed to admit that I flocked to the cinema to see Michael Keaton back in action because I have not appreciated his presence on screen since Batman (1989)... 1989, has it been so long? The most worthwhile scene is a montage sequence that foregrounds Keaton's acting skills: shot after shot, Jonathan Rivers (Keaton) stares at a blank television screen with the great intensity of Bruce Wayne; he is obsessed to find his dead wife within the white noise. And so on, and so forth, until the out-of-nowhere 'twist' ending emerges. Now if I say, 'Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice' perhaps Tim Burton will make a sequel emerge. (We can only hope so, for Keaton's sake).

-Andrea Ariano

ART HOUSE (INDIE & FOREIGN)

Bad Education (La Mala Educación, Spain, 2004)

A film for film-lovers to love. It's all representations (of representations (of representations (...)))

But how disappointing. When François Ozon plays at Hitchcock, I feel like he's achieved something. When Almodòvar does, I feel cheated. There's beauty here to be sure; but by the end, the cinema-game hollows out all the substance. That might be the point; but coming from Almodòvar at this point in his career, it's a lazy one.

Perhaps, Pedro, this (and not any funny business with the Spanish Academy's voting system) is why you didn't win any Goyas.

-Brian Crane

Bad Education (La Mala Educación, Spain, 2004)

Dear Mr. Almodovar,

Your epilogues are ruining your movies. Please stop.

-Janos Sitar

PS—There is a point at which you just have to let go. Tacking on details is just pointless. The attention has been paid. The information has been received. A graceful exit rather than a shove out the door. We're making the connections.

Breaking News (Dai Si Gein, Hong Kong, 2004)

Comme John Woo et Ang Lee, Johnnie To s'impose de plus en plus comme une des figures importantes du cinéma asiatique d'action en Amérique du nord et en occident. Fidèle à ses habitudes, Johnnie To nous présente ici un thriller très bien ficelé digne des grands festivals de cinéma (le film a été présenté à Cannes, rien de moins). En plus des séquences d'actions impressionnantes, To réussit à incorporer un très fort message social dans le film. Bien que ce message tourne surtout autour des média de Hong Kong qui sont reconnu pour être très vorace, le film est des plus intéressant pour un public Nord-américain où le rôle de divers média dans plusieurs dossiers est de plus en plus critiqué!

-P-A Despatis D.

Casshern (Japan, 2004)

The future of cinema, today!

This film is one of the films in this new trend of CGI films that use real actors in computer generated sets — *Immortel*, *Sky Captain And The World Of Tomorrow* and the upcoming *Sin-City*. So far so good. *Casshern* is one of the best sci-fi flicks I've ever seen and it's a pure visual feast. Borrowing on aspects from Oshi's *Avalon* (2001), *Casshern's* cyberpunk dark-noir retro future will certainly redefine the aesthetics of the genre.

Kiriya's use of religious and philosophical discourses throughout the film is not as effective as it could be but the narrative successfully holds up in this complete mayhem of complex montage sequences and ultra-stylish cinematography. Like *Immortel* and *Sky Captain* and many other excessive movies for that matter, *Casshern's* reviews were a mixed-bag. Maybe the world isn't ready for this new trend of filmmaking. The movie geek that I am is ready: bring it on!

-P-A Despatis D.

Ghost In The Shell 2: Innocence (Kôkaku Kidôtai 2: Inosensu, Japan, 2004)

Quotiest anime ever!

-Janos Sitar

Infernal Affairs (Wu Jian Dao, Hong Kong, 2002)

Hong Kong's new wave of action cinema isn't as new as it may seem to a Montréal audience. Many great Asian action films never make it to Montréal unfortunately. Almost four years after it's making, *Internal Affairs* has finally been released in Montréal. The limited release is not likely to pick up much at the box office, as most Hong Kong cinema enthusiasts have already found a way to see the film on video. I'm glad the film finally made it to theatres, perhaps it will increase the quality of American action films, which look rather weak compared to *Internal Affairs*.

Needless to say it's a very strong film worth watching. It's not a fun film to watch though; the suspense of this film makes it very stressful to watch. By the end of the film you feel somewhat relieved that it's all over, although the excellent nerve-racking climactic ending might be quite frustrating. That relief will be short-lived though; two sequels have been made since the release of the film in Asia. It's only the beginning...

-P-A Despatis D.

Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior (Thailand, 2004)

This film is not a great film by any means. The action sequences are 'cool' and 'hip' but the story is rather bleak. I worry that after fans see this negative comment about the film they will send me tons of hate mail claiming that *Ong-Bak* is a great film and that it's a revolution of the genre. The same thing happened with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Those films lack an innovative visual style; it's just that the better, earlier films were simply never released in America. *Heaven's Seven (7 Pra-Jan-Bar)*, (2002) and *The Bodyguard* (2004) are just two similar films with a much more interesting story and visual aesthetic than *Ong-Bak*. While, the Thai movie connoisseurs (i.e.: geeks) might not appreciate this film as much as a neophyte audience it's still worth watching ... although sadly, there are no songs, a la *The Adventures Of The Iron Pussy* or *Monrak Transistor*.

-P-A Despatis D.

Quill (Japan, 2004)

This melodramatic tearjerker revolves around the highs and lows in the life of a dog. Don't be mistaken though; the film is not as silly as it sounds, and it turns out to be quite touching. Visually rather bland, still, the film as a whole is quite enjoyable. A movie about a cute dog ... what else can we ask for? (A movie about a cute talking dog, but that's a different story).

-P-A Despatis D.

Tarnation (2004)

Jonathan Caouette's self-portrait is fun to watch with all its kaleidoscope effects but by the time the credits roll one wonders why one sat through this self-indulgent piece. It's like looking at family photos; actually it is looking at family photos. While it may be meaningful for him and his loved ones, for the rest of us it falls flat.

-Collin Smith

The Woodsman (US, 2004)

Traitant d'un sujet très difficile et tabou, le film réussit très bien à représenter la difficulté que le personnage a à se retrouver une place dans la société après sa longue peine de prison pour pédophilie. Le cinéaste, sans nous imposer son choix personnel laisse très habilement les spectateurs faire leur propre opinion du personnage principal. Tout au long du film, malgré que l'on veuille tant le prendre en pitié et être de son côté, l'on se demande sans cesse s'il va récidiver et nous décevoir— surtout au nombre de fois qu'il semble copiner le diable.

Cette sensation est très particulière et rend le film très intéressant au niveau psychologique. Contrairement à plusieurs films indépendants qui reposent sur une psychologie des personnages plutôt boiteuse, le tout est très bien assemblé dans *The Woodsman* et le film nous montre d'une façon très intéressante comment une personne dans une telle situation tente de reprendre sa place dans la société avec toutes les difficultés que cela encours.

-P-A Despatis D.

***The Woodsman* (US, 2004)**

So, all that a pedophile needs to keep him from re-offending is sex with Kyra Sedgwick. Good to know.

-Gareth Hedges

DVD

***The Black Hole* (1979; DVD 2004)**

My example of the film whose parts add up to more than the whole that constitutes them. This film, Disney's sci-fi rendering of *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*, is "the last studio sci-fi film," to paraphrase the featurette, and therefore a relic from an earlier age. Every aspect of the production was done 'in-house,' with visual effects departments working alongside set designers and the cinematographer to solve all the problems in ways that only a "department" system could. From the spooky aircraft carrier-like ship sitting on the lip of a black hole to a washed-up Anthony Perkin's hammy-horror line delivery to John Barry's all-too-Bond-like score (a word of advice: don't hum it to yourself or your mind will be spinning to the tune for days!) to the mock-profound 2001 climax (a perfect metaphor for the film itself—what does this jumbled montage add up to, anyway?), this is Camp at its very, very best. Highly Recommended.

-Colin Burnett

***Coffee And Cigarettes* (2003)**

At the video store:

I say: Dad, how 'bout *Anchorman* (2004)? I heard it was funny.

Dad says: Hey look, this movie has Bill Murray, Iggy Pop, Steve Buscemi, Tom Waits, and did I mention Bill Murray? It'll be way funnier.

I say: yeah, but dad, it's a Jim Jarmusch movie...

Dad says: Bill Murray. It's got to be funny.

Later that Night:

Dad says: What the hell? I thought you said this director

was famous? How did he make such an unfunny movie with Bill Murray. What a waste of talent... who'd have thought Bill Murray could be in such a boring movie.

I say: yeah, but dad, it's a Jim Jarmusch movie...

-Shawna Plischke

***Garden State* (2004)**

"Sometimes I want to go to sleep and merge with the foggy world of dreams and not return to this, our real world. Sometimes I look back on my life and am surprised at the lack of kind things I have done. Sometimes I just feel that there must be another road that can be walked—away from this person I became—either against my will or by default" (313).

"I slept soundly and all through the night, the concentration of yellow pills in my blood diminished, milligram by milligram, like decaying uranium" (322). ~ from Douglas Coupland's *Life After God*.

-Janos Sitar

***John Cassavetes: Five Films* (2004)**

[8-disc box set, includes *Shadows*, *Faces*, *A Woman Under The Influence*, *The Killing Of A Chinese Bookie*, and *Opening Night*] Criterion releases a DVD and we jump like dogs in a circus: What transfers! What sound re-mixing! What thoughtful and thought-provoking extras! How discriminating we are to notice! Yapyapyapyap!

Well, I have nothing to say about Criterion.

...but these movies ...these movies get under your skin and make you think Prozac is cheating ...and now I can watch them over and over again.

Can I get a Ba-Ba?

-Brian Crane

***Little Black Book* (2004)**

Am I a romantic comedy? Am I a serious commentary on exploitative talk shows?

Sigh, I am failed genre transgression.

PS—For proper use of Carly Simon in a romantic comedy soundtrack see *Working Girl* (1988) or *How To Lose A Guy In 10 Days* (2003).

-Shawna Plischke

***Martin* (1977; DVD 2004)**

George A. Romero's non-zombie masterpiece is finally on DVD. Every trope of vampire lore is reworked into a contemporary context: the lumbering ruins of a Pennsylvania industrial town replace the castles and decaying aristocratic order of yore; a razor blade and syringe take the place of fangs; and the vampire himself is reborn as a kind an older—much, much older—teenage misfit (the troubled young man of the title). The DVD adds a short featurette, commentary and more, with emphasis on the film's production (a marvel in and of itself).

-Gareth Hedges

Oldboy (2003)

1:05:18 : Here you will find the first and last sign that this movie wasn't made by a talented robot auteur.

-Zoë Constantinides

Short Cuts (1993, DVD 2004)

It's past the deadline, and my editor is bugging me to do another Splinter:

"Anything for *Short Cuts* ? I could use a Criterion *Short Cuts* review. Write it like Carver, blunt and brief. Carver had a healthy relationship with his editor, why don't you?"

Okay, fine. I thought it would be a good idea to talk about the Criterion release of Altman's *Short Cuts*, because it includes Raymond Carver's short stories. I haven't seen that before. Maybe that's why I bought the DVD in the first place, though I can't really afford it. Or maybe I just liked the packaging.

-Owen Livermore

Ten (2002; DVD 2005)

Cramped, clipped, patchy, unsettled, slightly naïve—this is Kiarostami at his most beautiful. But wait, "Kiarostami"? By what deficient conventions of movie understanding can we possibly allow ourselves to believe that it is he whom we see through this film and not the people in it? I suppose that they are the very conventions that make *10 On Ten* virtually unbearable to watch (save perhaps for number 10).

-Colin Burnett

Wonderland (2003)

Finally, a movie about the enormity of John Holmes' loathing for humanity instead of the enormity of

his member. Despite being very much a product 21st Century Hollywood—with its sitcom stars (Lisa Kudrow) and pedestrian cameos (Carrie Fisher, Paris Hilton)—there is something hateful and inescapably bleak lurking beneath the tinted frame. This effect is bettered by the limited two-disc edition DVD which includes the cheaply-made but absorbing documentary *Wadd: The Life And Times Of John C Holmes*, which despite its overall veneration of the pornstar makes an effort towards addressing his addiction and the depths of his pathological coldness. Other extras include actual crime scene footage, deleted scenes (at least one of them funny), commentary, etc.

-Gareth Hedges

WEB

Tfn Fanfilms

À une époque où le CGI est maintenant à la portée de tous, il est possible de voir apparaître une nouvelle forme de participation vis-à-vis un film. Un court métrage tourné en 1997 par deux fans, *Pink Five*, illustra la possibilité au grand public de créer des films de *Star Wars* en utilisant leur ordinateur personnel. L'évolution rapide de la technologie de l'audio-visuel ainsi que d'Internet a permis en 2000 la création de Tfn FanFilms, une fusion de FanFilms.com et de TheForce.net. 5ans plus tard, on retrouve près de 50 courts métrages reprenant le mythe de Lucas et l'adaptant par moment avec une qualité impressionnante. On y trouve également des informations et tutoriaux démontrant comment arriver à un tel résultat ainsi que d'autres films de fiction «non-Star Wars». Pour les intéressés, sachez qu'il y a un concours annuel en collaboration avec StarWars.com récompensant le meilleur film où *Pink Five* récolta plusieurs honneurs.

"Fan Films at The Force.net": <http://www.theforce.net/fanfilms>

"Pink Five": <http://atomfilms.shockwave.com/af/content/pink5>

et pour la suite des aventures de Pink Five:

"Pink Five Strikes Back": http://atomfilms.shockwave.com/af/content/pink5_strikes

-Steve Murray