

+ SPLINTER REVIEWS (V)

This Month, featuring: *After The Sunset*, *Alexander*, *Alien Vs. Predator*, *Beautiful Boxer*, *Birth*, *Bridget Jones: The Edge Of Reason*, *Les Choristes*, *Closer*, *Cremaster 3*, *Cremaster 5*, *Exorcist: The Beginning*, *Ghost In The Shell 2: Innocence*, *House Of Flying Daggers*, *I ♥ Huckabees*, *Immortel (Ad Vitam)*, *The Incredibles*, *Kinsey*, *Ma Vie En Cinémascope*, *The Machinist*, *Mariages, Mensonges Et Trahisons Et Plus Si Affinités*, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, *Nouvelle France*, *The Sea Inside*, *Searching For The Wrongeyed Jesus*, *Sideways*, *Some Things That Stay*, *Stander*, *Tarnation*, *Underton*, and *The Village*.

After The Sunset (2004)

This could be the worst American movie of the year. Ratner proves he's a hack by throwing out so many hooks and reeling none of them in. This whole film is cleavage. Worse, he expects us to laugh at his leads being caught in homosexually compromising positions. He thinks homophobia and the objectification of women is funny? Superman fans everywhere are rejoicing that he was dropped from that project and we will never have to endure his take on our hero.

-Collin Smith

After The Sunset (Complot Au Crépuscule, 2004)

Ce film n'est certainement pas un film innovateur qui révolutionnera le genre, ce film n'est certainement pas un film avec un scénario original, ce film n'est pas un film avec une réalisation hors du commun, mais pour ce qu'il est (un film commercial typique), il est très bien réussi. La simplicité de l'histoire ne m'a pas dérangé outre mesure. Cependant, l'insistance à montrer les

seins de Salma Hayek à chaque cinq minutes du film est quelque peu troublante. Mais bon, puisqu'il y a apparemment une règle non écrite qui veut que les films de voleurs soient tous sans exception sexy, je suppose qu'on ne peut reprocher à *Complot Au Crépuscule* de faire de même. * Soupir *.

-P-A Despatis D.

Alexander (2004)

Harry Knowles said it well in his review of Oliver Stone's *Alexander*: "the critics are wrong, Alexander is great." Okay, maybe "great" is overstating it, but it is pretty damn good. *Alexander*, like the best of Stone's movies, is a film that its audience isn't ready for. Many films get unfairly maligned in their own time before audiences come around. Movies as diverse as *The Wizard Of Oz* and *Fight Club* were only recognized years later for the achievements that they are. While it may be popular to bash this film today, in a few years people will begin to see that Stone has made the first good film about Alexander the Great and one of the few good 'sword and sandal' epics of the past decade.

-Collin Smith

Alien Vs. Predator (2004)

Maybe Paul W.S. Anderson will be remembered in history along the likes of Ed Wood, as one of the worst film directors of all time. However, I doubt he will reach even those lofty heights as there will be little nostalgia for his completely forgettable output. In this example of corporate synergy, he has sapped all of the socio-political analysis and all the claustrophobic goose bumps from the *Alien* series and even managed to betray the spirit of the purely B-movie *Predator* series

to produce the lowest level of filmmaking scum. This is designed to appeal to 14 year old boys and there is no intention for the memory of the film to last longer than it takes for the target audience to buy a tie-in video game.

-Collin Smith

Beautiful Boxer (2004)

While not all Thai films are successful, Thailand is probably the home of the best national cinema worldwide. Being a sucker for Thai film (and Thai music!), I went to see this film without reading much about it and I was expecting to see a good (but light) and funny queer/sport flick along the lines of *Iron Ladies* or *Saving Private Tootsie*. After all, Thailand's film culture has a certain predilection for cheesiness (in a good way, though) and the depiction of gays as slapstick characters—like in *Heaven's Seven*. *Beautiful Boxer*, however, is a rather accomplished drama with amazing cinematography—head-over-heels above all commercial Thai cinema. Unlike *Iron Ladies*, *Beautiful Boxer* takes a more compassionate approach to the subject; the film is both touching and intimate. This is not your average sport flick.

-P-A Despatis D.

Birth (2004)

I really wanted to like this film. But guess what? The boy's not the dead husband, and the film makes sure we know it from the very first sequence. So for the next two hours I'm left wondering how these people could be so stupid as to believe that he is. The only suspense—is Kidman going to fuck the boy?—what about now?—is tedious and pretentious. No, she's not going to fuck him. (Thank God.) And no, despite the camera's continual slow creeping toward “Miss Thang,” the boy's not going to give up the full monty. (Thank God.)

In short, not worth the time.

(Why couldn't they have told me that in the first shots?)

-Brian Crane

Bridget Jones: The Edge Of Reason (2004)

11:29:07 pm

have just come from bridget jones. crap film full of not funny recycled jokes from rather successful first film.

am buzzing on caffeine from too many cappuccinos consumed to fight boredom during dumb movie. perhaps will never sleep again due to said cappuccinos. instead, will spend hours gazing at ceiling as punishment for going to crap film that i should have known enough

to avoid.

11:29:32 pm

Les Choristes (2004)

La campagne de publicité massive a fait de ce film français un hit du box office Québécois cette année. Bien que le film soit très réussi, il est malheureusement plutôt vide; l'histoire n'est aucunement originale et stylistiquement le film ne l'est guère non plus. Il ne fait aucun doute qu'il est très beau d'entendre des voix de jeunes chanter dans une telle chorale, mais le film ne fait rien que le CD du film ne fait pas.

-P-A Despatis D.

Closer (2004)

Pseudo-psychoanalysis
Stalwart self-obsession
Yearningly young
Cleverly charismatic
Helplessly hopeless
Orgiastic ogling
Punishing pessimism
Adolescent adults
Trashy treachery
Handsome hardship
Sexy suffering

-Zoë Constantinides

Closer (2004)

Mike Nichols has become a master of understanding how to preserve a strong work of live theatre through the process of transforming it to the screen. From his first feature, *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf*, to his latest masterpiece, *Angels In America*, Nichols has demonstrated a gift for transforming theatre pieces into fully realized cinematic experiences that maintain the integrity of the original vision while coming alive as motion pictures. He is still in top form in this, his latest triumph.

-Collin Smith

Cremaster 3 (2002)

I am terrifically unqualified to review this film. Not only did I buy tickets to a single installment of the 5 feature length films that make up Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* cycle, but I left *Cremaster 3* at the intermission.

So why do I bother? To put it simply, because this film revealed to me a sentiment I often felt but never expressed: there are some films that I really wish could be consumed like novels. At my own pace. *Cremaster 3* was stunning. It overwhelmed me, and I found myself leaving the theatre an hour and half into the film with

an hour and half to go because I desperately needed to go home and reflect on what I had seen.

Unfortunately, unlike a novel that I leave on my nightstand for a few days, this film is going to be a little harder to locate and finish.

-*Shawna Plischke*

Cremaster 5 (1997)

Any doctor who has ever prescribed Viagra should be forced to sit and watch the final installment of Barney's *Cremaster* cycle, for only Barney would have enough balls to propose such a productively radical solution to erectile dysfunction as this: simply attach several long ribbons to your penis, secure the other ends to the legs of some highly trained pigeons, then send the birds skyward and witness the glory. Nothing like a good bell-ringing to boost the spirit, I always say.

-*Randolph Jordan*

Exorcist: The Beginning (2004)

1973's *The Exorcist* should have been a film with great sequel and prequel potential, however there has yet to be a worthy follow up to William Friedkin's classic. While the story laid out by William Wisler Jr. and Caleb Carr is a decent one, the execution of the film is all gloss and no depth. Harlin relies on extremely gruesome images and plenty of fake outs—loud noises that turn out to be nothing—instead of nursing any real sense of horror. The devil, or some sort of source of evil, is about the scariest idea that exists yet there is little to be fearful of here. The film scrapes the surface of examining the nature of evil by referencing Nazi insanity but then a plight of high school level, post-colonial morality shows the limits of analysis that the filmmakers are willing to embrace. This turn is purely for those who like to be grossed out, those who startle easily or those who like to giggle at sexual references but not for anyone who wants to leave the cinema with any real sense of dread.

-*Collin Smith*

Ghost In The Shell 2: Innocence (2004)

This highly acclaimed film has received a great deal of attention even outside of traditional animé circles. However, excitement over adult related animation may have overshadowed the limitations of the film. The problem is that the story just doesn't offer enough to carry us through the total running time. While this may have made a wonderful short film, as a feature *Innocence* leaves a great deal to be desired. While this film addresses its clichéd plot a bit more interestingly than in a film like *I, Robot*, for example, it still doesn't offer any revolutionary insights. It's only for die hard fans.

-*Collin Smith*

House Of Flying Daggers (Le Secret Des Poignards Volant, 2004)

Alors que le visionnement de *The Phantom Of The Opera* que j'allais voir a été annulé, je suis allé voir une autre sorte de comédie musicale. Alors que plusieurs comparent les comédies musicales aux films d'arts martiaux en raison de leur construction narrative similaire, ce film en est un très bon exemple. De plus, comme la protagoniste principale est aveugle, un accent très important à la musique et à l'ambiance sonore a été apporté aux combats.

Ce genre de scénario, très typique du genre, tient malgré tout la route et emmène les spectateurs dans les entrailles de la Chine de la fin des années 850—période où les Chinois avaient encore l'habileté de voler. Les scènes de combats sont très intéressantes et très bien chorégraphiées. La finale du film qui se déroule lors d'une tempête de neige est sublime et vaut à elle seule le détour.

-*P-A Despatis D.*

I Heart Huckabees (2004)

But it's actually *I Love Huckabees*, right?

At least we can agree on that.

-*Adam Rosadiuk*

Immortel (Ad Vitam) (2004)

Q : Why was I there?

Why didn't I leave?

Why am I writing this splinter?

A: Stupidity

Cowardice

Penance

-*Brian Crane*

Immortel (Ad Vitam) (2004)

Q : Why was I there?

Why didn't I leave?

Why am I writing this splinter?

A: Because the trailer of the film was awesome.

Because I liked the film, a lot.

Because someone had to set Mr. Crane straight.

-*P-A Despatis D.*

THE INCREDIBLES (2004)

This film is a good argument to prove that you can judge a film by its title. It's easily the most incredible film of the year. See it for yourself on the big screen. You will be thankful you did.

-*Collin Smith*

***The Incredibles* (2004)**

Someone at Pixar likes making movies, and we should pass legislation to make sure they don't stop. A strong but simple story that looks great. (Added bonus claim to good-ness: If the theatre had burned down before the film but after the incredible (!) short-film-slash-poetry-recitation, I could have gone home satisfied.)

-Brian Crane

***Kinsey* (2004)**

While this film might deify the researcher somewhat, it doesn't do so without being somewhat critical about his inability to allow himself to see past his work and his fears of true intimacy. However, this film is thankfully less interested in being a biopic than a strong argument against the "forces of chastity" that unfortunately are massing once again. It fights this fight differently than the good doctor had by focusing on what is entirely human about us all—our diversity—and how that gives us all something in common.

-Collin Smith

***Ma Vie En Cinémascope* (2004)**

The saddest music in the world. Alors que l'affiche du film et son titre laisse entrevoir un film très « glamour », il n'en est rien! Dès les premières minutes du film, il devient très triste et mélodramatique. Malgré quelques imperfections au niveau du montage, *Ma Vie En Cinémascope* reste très intéressant du début à la fin et dresse un portrait honnête de la chanteuse au passé peu reluisant. N'ayant personnellement pas connu Alys Robi durant la période de ses grand succès étant donné mon jeune âge, le film dresse un portrait très complet de la vedette pour le néophyte que je suis, en plus de donner un aperçu très captivant du Québec des années trente et quarante. Après avoir réalisé l'infâme mais drôle *La Merveilleuse Odyssée D'alice Tremblay*, Filiatrault revient en force avec ce long métrage qui tombe à pic pour nous faire oublier l'horreur qu'est *Nouvelle France*.

-P-A Despatis D.

***The Machinist* (2004)**

Much has been made of Christian Bale's weight loss; he has been compared to Robert DeNiro and Renée Zellweger—although both of them famously *put on* weight—and this extreme measure risks overshadowing the articulated performance. He may be emaciated physically, but he creates a truly emaciated character to match. It is almost as if the audience can see Trevor's soul wasting away along with his body. This film is about selfdestruction but it's not all as bleak as the grainy, black and white, *Matrix*-like color pallet suggests. There is a sort of hope to the film, the kind of hope you have

when you have bottomed out and the only way to go is back up again.

-Collin Smith

***Mariages* (2004)**

À l'opposé du très intelligent *Mensonges Et Trahisons*, *Mariages* tombe dans l'empirisme du cinéma commercial français, hélas. Le film n'est pas un échec à proprement dit, mais il ne s'élève aucunement au-dessus des films commerciaux sans âme que la France s'entête à nous envoyer. Alors que les conflits interpersonnels dans le film *Comme Une Image* d'Agnès Jaouie sont très bien ficelés, il n'en est rien dans *Mariages*. L'histoire est tout aussi boiteuse que la réalisation qui nous force à nous demander pourquoi un tel film a été fait.

-P-A Despatis

***Mensonges Et Trahisons, Et Plus Si Affinités* (2004)**

Venue tout droit de la France, cette comédie sentimentale vaut bien le détour. La narration hors champ est des plus savoureuse, toute comme la performance de notre protégée Québécoise Marie-Josée Croze. Quelques quarantes ans après que la rédaction des *Cahiers du cinéma* se soit attaquée à la réalisation de films, quatre rédacteurs de *Studio Magazine* ont réitéré l'expérience en faisant de *Mensonges Et Trahisons* leur premier film. Quoique plus commercial que les films de leurs confrères, ce film est très bien écrit et est innovateur de par sa forme. Une nouvelle Nouvelle Vague ne sera sûrement pas créée, mais l'expérience fût fort prolifique.

-P-A Despatis D.

***The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004)**

If Che smiled with the same broad-faced innocence as Gael Garcia Bernal when he stood amongst the lepers and looked down at his birthday candles, then I too would have signed up for the revolution. Here's hoping Almodovar keeps M. Bernal under his wing and exhausts his considerable talents. On a serious note: who would have thought future guerrillas could be such fun-loving crack-ups?

-Brian Crane

***Nouvelle France* (2004)**

I feel really bad for saying this considering this film had the biggest budget in the history of Quebec cinema: this is a catastrophic failure. It is, it really is.

-P-A Despatis D.

***Nouvelle France* (2004)**

Overblown, pompous and somewhat ethnocentric, *Nouvelle-France* is the epitome of bad movie making.

This film makes every mistake an ‘historical epic’ can. It trivializes historical events by reducing them to culturally ‘meaningful’ moments of melodrama; it limits sociological analysis using a ‘history for dummies’ approach; it inserts inappropriate modernist values to force sympathy; and worst of all, it bores by being predictable and obvious. The romance makes *Titanic* look subtle. There is even a Celine Dion song to play over the credits. It is embarrassing that this film was made here. I really thought only Americans made movies this bad.

-Collin Smith

***The Sea Inside* (2004)**

Amenábar véritable homme accordéon qui passe non seulement allègrement du cinéma commercial américain (*The Others*) à un film de répertoire a écrit, réalisé, monté, coproduit et composé la musique de *Mar Adentro!* Le film raconte l’histoire vraie d’un quadraplégique joué par Javier Bardem qui demande le droit à l’euthanasie. Alors que le sujet du film peut sembler très dur et difficile, la luminance du personnage principal et les nombreuses scènes tirées tout droit de son imaginaire font de ce film un qui est à la fois magique et très émouvant.

-P-A Despatis D.

***The Sea Inside* (2004)**

The promising combination of Alejandro Amenábar and Javier Bardem unfortunately only adds up to a well made but run of the mill ‘dying man’ biopic. The film doesn’t pander to the genre but doesn’t rise above it either. It also doesn’t add a great deal to the right-to-die debate either. In the end it’s pleasant but forgettable.

-Collin Smith

***Searching For The Wrong-Eyed Jesus* (2003)**

Beware the ethnographic gaze! Filmmaker Andrew Douglas, and Virgilian guide Jim White, take a documentary road trip through the American dirty South of juke joints and Pentecostalism to uncover the secrets of the strange and “primitive” region. White declares himself an expatriate of the area who never really understood the spirit of his homeland. Theatrically staged roadside encounters with a cast of colourful characters are cinematically interesting, but reveal the inherent xenophobia of the film’s us-and-them construction. People you might really want to get to know are “examined” at arm’s length, abstracted through the camera’s slick lens and White’s patronizing discourse. Thankfully, in the end, the filmmaker explicitly admits the failure of his quest to crack the complexities of the South. The film is gorgeously shot on 16mm, and takes a truly innovative approach to a

new (?) genre, the musical road documentary. The soundtrack, featuring local Alt-Country and rockabilly artists, is killer.

-Zoë Constantinides

***Sideways* (2004)**

Believe the hype: each of Payne’s films has been better than the last, and this one’s no exception. Here, the writing, direction, and acting all deserve a screening of their own, so see this movie three times. You won’t get bored.

-Brian Crane

***Sideways* (2004)**

This movie is a surprising gem. It’s best that you don’t know what it’s about before you see it. Just let the story tell itself. But permit me to say this and this alone: it’s about adult characters in real situations reacting with true emotions in all its messy forms. A real treat for grown-up movie lovers. Whatever else is playing, skip it until you have seen this.

-Collin Smith

***Sideways* (2004)**

I don’t know if movies can change lives but they can certainly change days. Three film students go to a 10AM press screening of *Sideways* and, inspired by the film’s excessive wine-drinking, skip class and spend the entire afternoon in a Montreal park engaged in some heavy wine drinking of their own. Alexander Payne (*Citizen Ruth*, *Election*, *About Schmidt*) has been labeled a cynical satirist. This may be true, but in *Sideways* he demonstrates a genuine affection for his characters, one that’s powerful enough to inspire this film student to miss a 35mm print of *Jaws* and emulate those characters. Good films cause discussion, great films cause hangovers.

-Jonathan Doyle

***Sideways* (2004)**

Alexander Payne’s film is the latest in a cavalcade of backhandedly optimistic movies in which a tortured Paul Giamatti brings bad things upon himself. Like *American Splendor*, it asks, can Paul Giamatti ever be happy, or moreover, can he ever be happy in a starring role? *Sideways* ends on a hopeful maybe, which is better than his fate in *Big Fat Liar*. Despite this and it being a self-consciously literary literary adaptation, there is a lot to like; for example, that the film’s premise—two friends vowing to get laid—is a middle-aged version of a convention borrowed from teen-sex comedies.

-Gareth Hedges

***Some Things That Stay* (2004)**

Le jeu des acteurs est sans doute l'une des seules choses qui fonctionne bien dans ce film. Tout le reste laisse grandement à désirer. Le roman hyponyme sur lequel le film est basé est très bon et a eu une très bonne réception. Cependant, la réalisatrice n'a pas été en mesure de le transposer de façon intéressante à l'écran et le tout dérape très vite. Un trop grand nombre de thèmes ont été inclus (premier amour, religion, amitié, mort d'un enfant, maladie, ...) et aucun n'est adéquatement développés. Cela donne un film très éparpiller. La réalisation et la mise en scènes sont toutes deux maladroites par moment et par dessus tout, comment expliquer les nombreux plans hors foyer? Le film *Falling Angels* reste sans doute une meilleure alternative.

-P-A Despatis D.

***Stander* (2004)**

André La Mitraille is back! Basé sur une histoire vraie tout comme l'adaptation cinématographique de la vie de notre Monica nationale, *Stander* se veut lui aussi un film très noir sur les agissements d'un voleur de banque notoire. *Stander* apporte un nouveau regard sur ce type de films et montre bien qu'en dehors des assises Hollywoodiennes (ie. : *Ocean's 11* et cie.), les cinéma nationaux peuvent eux aussi produire de bons films de genre.

-P-A Despatis D.

***Tarnation* (2004)**

In a peculiar turn, I saw this film only a few days before I saw *Gummo* on TV. Both films share a very similar approach, and since Caouette said in an interview that *Gummo* inspired him to do this film, a comparison between the two is unavoidable. However, while *Gummo* was something of a fiction film, *Tarnation* is entirely made of real home video footage that Caouette filmed himself. I'm not sure which one is better, and in fact, I'm not even sure that it matters. That said, emotionally, *Gummo* works much better. Sometimes fiction is better than reality, right? *Tarnation* just seems like *America's Funniest Home Videos* with a twist; *America's Saddest Home Videos*. Don't get me wrong; I actually enjoyed this film. However, there's gotta be something more that just putting together a series of sad events together to make a great film. Mike Hoolboom's *Public Lighting*, which uses similar techniques, is a much better example of this type of cinema and successfully manages to present an intimate personal story.

-P-A Despatis D.

***Undertow* (2004)**

A truly amazing amalgam of *The Night Of The Hunter*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *Badlands*— whose genius auteur, Terrence Malick, produced this—full of beautiful moments and odd, oblique characterizations (when was the last time you saw a character organize his books by smell?). In only three films, David Gordon Green (*George Washington*, *All The Real Girls*) has established himself as one of the most important (and ignored) directors of his generation. This 70s throwback uses every trick in that decade's formal playbook—freeze frames, zooms, the 70s United Artists logo—to illustrate the story of troubled, Southern brothers on the run from a crazed, ex-con uncle. In spite of the film's genre narrative, there are sequences (including its wonderfully ambiguous conclusion) that communicate almost entirely through cinematic language, foregrounding style to the point where it becomes the film's subject. Not all of the stylistic excess works, but when Green gets it right, he's as good as any filmmaker working today.

-Jonathan Doyle

***The Village* (2004)**

The true substance of the Shyamalan's genius lies in his adaptability to the realities of difficult working conditions. The clearest example of this is apparent from the fact that, having arrived on set to find his cast hopelessly inept at delivering period dialogue, he spontaneously writes in the "surprise" ending to render this ineptitude a plausible function of the narrative. Nice save. Perhaps he should have been a goaltender.

-Randolph Jordan