

*teen reviewers
and critics

*FILM TRaC**

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REVIEWS

La Chimera

(2023, dir. Alice Rohrwacher)

Rooted in Josh O'Connor's serene performance, *La Chimera* is a daydreamy and surrealist archaeology adventure that makes the audience question what lies underneath its strange soil.

After being released from jail, Arthur, a scrappy Englishman with a gift for archaeology seeks an old Italian village where his dead fiancé's grandmother lives and where his grave-digging buddies are ecstatic to see him. At first cold and aloof (Arthur is a dirty guy, to say the least—he's wearing a beige suit for almost the entirety of the film), you wonder if he's grieving someone and stuck in a depressive episode, which makes sense for someone who just got out of jail.

Nonetheless, Arthur has layers that are slowly peeled back to reveal more mystery as the plot becomes more erratic. Near the beginning of the film, we're introduced to Beniamina, Arthur's fiancé, who haunts the narrative: in a sequence, Arthur dreams of a red string constantly leading him back to his loving Beniamina, in her white virginal dress, like a typical Ophelia.

His character is turbulent in morality, especially about the preservation of art, a major theme of the film. He has this internal debate—"Does it belong in a museum?"—but the film isn't all about him. There is Italia, a quirky love interest who is in her world but grounded in the morals of this one; she shows Arthur that his life isn't in the dirt and that he needs to put his energy into better (legal) things. Arthur never really listens, instead seeking a divining rod to find a tomb to dig up.

Arthur is one with the ground, reflected in a cinematography which inverts and reflects at certain angles while he points a stick at the ground. In these scenes, we see his desperation to find his lost love, constantly looking to the soil for answers.

Arthur's makeshift crew of archaeologists is a wondrous little ensemble that provides comic relief to the quieter or slower parts of the film. They are having a fun time, like buddies doing their favorite (illegal) pastime. A scene in which they encounter a temple, with the absence of score, is almost thrilling.

Director Alice Rohrwacher's inspired direction uses different filming media; alternating between 35mm and 16mm formats, along with dabbling in aspect ratios as well. One scene is shot normally until it is sped up like in a Charlie Chaplin film. This inconsistency drives the surrealist aspect of the film, making you doubt what is to be taken as reality or as an elaborate hallucination.

La Chimera has an amazing range of colors, a variety of palettes that deepen and reflect the emotions of what the characters are feeling. When alone with Arthur, it is cold and musty like an isolated, shivering white man. When we are with his friends, however, it is a colorful and citrusy Italian summer: vivid warm tones and deep blues reflect the inherent Mediterranean beauty.

La Chimera is a transportive experience of life and death and what lives on hidden in the earth away from the eyes of others: a truly unique film in this day and age. It tackles mystery, drama, thrills, and comedy in an inspired and creative way and poses questions about archaeology, morality, and what lies in the afterlife that can only be understood if you watch it yourself.

Erlinda Z

■

A breath of fresh air, *La Chimera* by Alice Rohrwacher is a puzzle where all the pieces come perfectly together in the end. It's the type of film you try to figure out the whole time. What is it saying? What is it doing? What's going on? What's the point? It's only after that you truly understand the beauty and skill of the story.

The film takes place in Tuscany in

the 1960s, and manages an incredibly breathtaking setting while not losing the plot within the stunning nature and architecture. The cinematography and color palette consists of soft and warm colors, which also works well.

With many things to say, *La Chimera* is a movie with many layers, and, most importantly, many themes which can be interpreted in numerous ways. The one that stuck out was the idea of art preservation. However, the story revolves around the loss of someone and how the main character copes with it. This definitely connects to the theme of grief as well.

Malka L



Eyimofe (This is My Desire)

(2020, dirs. Arie and Chuko Esiri)

Eyimofe (This is My Desire), directed by Arie and Chuko Esiri, is a quiet, thoughtful, and compassionate movie that follows the trials and tribulations of a middle-aged electrician and a young woman in Lagos.

Mofe, the electrician, and Rosa, the woman, are strangers. Subverting the expectations of dual-narrative films, their connectedness is solely spatial and

temporal; their parallel lives are united by the lower-middle-class neighborhood they occupy in all its bustling, lively chaos. Their paths never converge.

Rosa takes care of her pregnant teenage sister and struggles to make ends meet while paying for her medical treatment. She conspires with an older woman who agrees to move Rosa and her sister to Italy in exchange for the unborn baby.

During the pregnancy, Rosa is presented with what could be a "golden ticket"—a relationship with a wealthy foreigner—yet she is unable to communicate with him, unwilling to appear desperate, and he is wary, hesitant to give handouts.

Concurrently, Mofe wants to go to Spain and attempts to get a passport. There is little momentum in this endeavor. He lacks adequate funds, and is up against a Kafkaesque bureaucracy. His dream stagnates. Both characters encounter financial hardship and, for Mofe, personal tragedy.

Eyimofe is a film of unrealized potentials and diverted aspirations. What was striking was the way in which the film

does not exploit the objective melodrama of the plot, the characters simply endure, and move on.

The fly-on-the-wall style of filming produces a documentary-like feel, lending credibility and evading the overwrought quality that poses a foil to drama. Tragedy is not dwelt on, and hardship is not wallowed in.

Perhaps this is merely realism. Time to grieve, and flounder in sadness, is a privilege.

Sophie G

⊠

Eyimofe tells the story of an electrical engineer (Mofe) and a young hairdresser (Rosa) attempting to get passports. Both live in Lagos, Nigeria. While there were parts that dragged out a little, I appreciated the writing and cinematography. There are many notable moments from the film, but the most unique part of the movie was its usage of contrasting colors. The colors blue and red are shown throughout the entire film, always clashing with each other in a cinematic and beautiful way. Perhaps the set is a house constructed with red walls, and the characters wear extravagant blue clothes. Maybe just an object in the scene was blue and the set was all red (or vice versa.)

Cy F



Problemista

(2023, dir. Julio Torres)

Problemista is about a toy designer navigating the brutal path of obtaining a sponsor for his work visa and getting his dream job at Hasbro.

After getting fired from his job at a cryogenics company, Alejandro Martinez finds himself working with an unhinged woman named Elizabeth. They find commonality through her husband's work and soon set off to accomplish her husband's dream to have a gallery showcase his 13 paintings about eggs.

Elizabeth promises to sponsor Alejandro once they have set up the showcase. Until then, Alejandro has to pay his lawyer fees through other means because he can't accept any payments until Elizabeth officially becomes his sponsor. Soon Alejandro's life takes a turn, doing whatever for money and to get that work visa, or else he will be deported.

This film is the most real yet comedic piece of cinema I have ever watched. It was like drinking a refreshing nice cold glass of cranberry lemonade with the hit of bitterness from the aftertaste.

The themes this film explored were dark and hit a little too close to home yet made me laugh throughout. We perceive everything through Alejandro's eyes which makes the world in the film much more

lively and vibrant.

The comedy was on point, plus the small details in characters were just *mwah*, chef's kiss. The monotone yet sassy voice that Julio Torres plays for Alejandro was just perfect. The craziness in Elizabeth's character was also spectacular. The film is an 8/10 in my books, everything just works so well.

Ryan V

⊠

Through a fresh new creative lens, *Problemista* portrays Alejandro, an aspiring toy designer. After immigrating to the US, he struggles to keep his work visa



and through his journey he comes across a lot of unusual jobs.

Problemista is strong with visual elements, specifically color and really captures viewers and brings them into this artistic and creative world. This movie is unusual in a positive way because of how this film thrived off of its creativity and humor. If the story didn't have those aspects, I don't think the plot itself would be enough to make this as enjoyable. I wouldn't recommend this film if you don't enjoy magical realism, but if you really enjoy creative films that are unique, this is definitely the movie.

Kylie B

Love Lies Bleeding

(2024, dir. Rose Glass)

Love Lies Bleeding is a movie that is hard to place into a single genre. It's comedy, horror, romance, suspense, or just absolute insanity: it's a "love-is-a-drug" movie done right.

The film takes place in the eighties and follows a gym manager, Lou, who falls for a bodybuilder, Jackie, who starts coming to her gym. When they get tangled up in Lou's dad's criminal business, their deep and lustful love becomes complicated and violent.

Love Lies Bleeding takes its time letting you into its characters' minds. Jackie

appears sweet and determined at the beginning of the film, but, as she deals with different issues, we see her become more haunting and terrifying to watch. Lou is compelling the whole way through, even when taking a supporting role to Jackie in the second half of the film.

Kristen Stewart seems like she's been waiting her whole life to play this role, building up with films where her acting was unappreciated like *Twilight*. You can tell that she's found herself after struggling with her identity the last decade, and that this is where she feels safe and comfortable, enough for her to absolutely kill the

character, in a good way.

Something that makes this film so effective is its unpredictability. When you think you know where it's going, you don't: it throws you something so unexpected you double over in your seat. Sometimes things appear to be for shock factor, or overdone, but in my opinion it's well-done camp. While ridiculous and goofy on the surface, some of the things that occur are emotional and thought-provoking.

The film certainly knows its aesthetic and cinematography. It's clear that it's set in the eighties, but it doesn't throw it in your face like some films do. It doesn't just show rollerskating rinks and colorful aerobics and big hair. It's a realistic depiction, with ugly wallpapers and a certain type of mustache on men: subtle things that immerse you into the world much better than a forced stereotypical image of the eighties would.

The film's driving color seems to be red, with the most vital scenes being covered in it. That's the right choice and the perfect color to guide this film, as red is attractive, but also the color of blood.

Love Lies Bleeding brings numerous themes and ideas to the table. It explores obsession by easing you into it, allowing you to understand their yearning and addiction. It also depicts themes of abuse, homophobia, family trauma, and, for lack of better words, "daddy issues". It doesn't tell you what to think of these things, it just gives you an understanding of them through the eyes of our main characters in a thought provoking way.

The thing I appreciated most about *Love Lies Bleeding* is its queer representation. I am grateful for the recent spike in lesbian and sapphic movies making it to the mainstream: *Bottoms*, *Crush*, *The Half of It*, *Bodies Bodies Bodies*, *Booksmart*, etc. But this one was the most special to me. It was unapologetic, authentic, and raw with its lesbianism, unafraid to show true queer experiences and sex. It didn't need to incorporate a man in the relationship, or in

the plot at all: queerness does not come at a price.

Obviously it's wonderful to see lighthearted comedy lesbian movies where the love is pure and simple, but movies where lesbian love is complicated and a little toxic is just as important because, just like straight relationships, they can be toxic yet compelling.

This film may not be for everyone. It has some truly disgusting scenes, and I would not recommend seeing it on a full stomach. However, it provides the representation and craft I look for, and I definitely felt like a new person walking out of the cinema. I'm grateful this movie exists, and I hope it sets a standard for more insane violent lesbian dramas in the future.

Malka L

Black Girl

(1966, dir. Ousmane Sembène)

A quiet, understated black-and-white film clocking in at less than an hour, *Black Girl*, the 1966 magnum opus of Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène, tells the story of Diouana (Mbissine Thérèse Diop), a young Senegalese woman who works for a French family.

The plot is fairly simple and the camerawork is subtle; many scenes read like moments from a staged play rather than a film. Yet every piece of dialogue is packed with significance, and Diop delivers each line with a nuance and restraint that packs a greater emotional punch than shouts or screams.

Perhaps the most



impressive aspect of the film is how it strikes a balance in communicating Diouana's experience as unmistakably degrading while simultaneously offering her dignity and agency as the subject of the film.

In one scene, the French woman who employs her admonishes Diouana for wearing a dress and heels, telling her, "Remember that you are a maid." Through one long take, the audience then watches Diouana change into a simple maid's clothing and slippers.

The cruelty of her restriction is palpable, but the film skillfully avoids self-indulgence—her body is turned away from



the unmoving camera, and the audience hears her voiceover as she undresses. The black-and-white visuals leave it up to the audience to imagine Diouana's vibrancy, suppressed in our eyes just as in her life.

Black Girl's subtlety is instrumental to its poignancy, portraying the intricacies of Diouana's life with sensitivity and nuance. In 1998, cultural theorist Leela Gandhi wrote that "postcoloniality derives its genealogy from both the seductive narrative of power, and alongside that, the counter-narrative of the colonized—politely but firmly declining the come-on of colonialism." *Black Girl* delicately unpacks the anxieties, hopes, and impossibilities embedded in the textures and experiences of this postcolonial condition, and, as the film draws to a close with a chilling final turn, Sembène's masterful film viscerally forces the audience to contend with the complex legacy of colonialism.

Olive E

12 Angry Men

(1957, dir. Sidney Lumet)

12 Angry Men opens with a room of jurors. Stuck working on a case that they wish to ignore and leave behind, most of them agree with the common opinion: the defendant is guilty. After all, they are sick of jury duty and want to go home.

The men raise their hands signifying their agreement that the defendant is guilty of murder. Then, one member, confidently unconfident raises the point of curiosity, uncertainty, and consideration. He decides to stand out from the crowd and continue the discussion by saying the defendant is not guilty.

This leads them to consider what's at stake; a man's life. The men argue with each other and themselves, challenging their views. Many of

the men choose to stay close-minded and stick with their initial thoughts. Their stubbornness comes from many factors: laziness, boredom, and prejudice. However, after long thought, the men realize that there is more to the story than presumably seen, and that is worth being investigated. Slowly, as characters develop, so does the vote of “guilty vs. innocent”.

I have always loved good murder mysteries. Usually, they include multiple perspectives to tell a story: flashbacks, non diegetic sounds, dialogue, and private conversation. The camera in *12 Angry Men* rarely left the jury room. The murder case was illustrated solely through the unreliable words of the jurors and the hearsay received from the witnesses.

Yet even though we never got to see the suspect, or anyone else for that matter, we were given the ability to illustrate it in our mind. By putting yourself in the shoes of the supposed murderer and some of the witnesses, playing out events, you can determine whether their story really added up. These men were able to use personal experiences to find the truth. This showed to be great plot development and helped create suspense towards whether the defendant is really guilty.

Although this takes time out of their day, these men learn that with great power comes great responsibility, and they are all uncertain, curious, and just aren't sure, therefore rushing into a life-changing

opinion is not a possibility.

We tend to form our opinions in a close-minded, selfish and false view. While that may be a strong opinion, if *12 Angry Men* taught me anything, we are all susceptible to change—and new stances on events.

12 Angry Men shows a colorful story through a black-and-white lens, in a way that is imaginative, thought-provoking and undoubtedly necessary. It opens one's mind up to change and uncertainty.

This movie gave me a message that I will remember for a while, and I enjoyed every aspect of the story. This 65-year-old film is absolutely relevant and timeless, and that can be said “without a reasonable doubt.”

Zack L

■

Sarraounia

(1986, dir. Med Hondo)

Sarraounia is based on real events that occurred during 1899 in Africa. French generals have taken men from Sudan farther West, promising to give riches and women if they help kill Sarraounia, the leader of her village. The citizens in Sarraounia's neighboring villages contemplated if they should help Sarraounia and how it would impact them. The film keeps you on your toes waiting to see her fate.

Sarraounia is unusual in the sense that Sarraounia was not physically present as



much as the French men were, as if her lack of physical presence emphasizes her importance to her community.

One of the strongest pieces of the story was the French men and how dramatic the acting was. The movie clearly sets them as the bad ones and the overemphasis of badness leave the viewers unable to empathize with them.

The colors yellow, orange, and blue were often seen in this movie and the costume designs seemed accurate based on where people were from.

Kylie B

■

Powerful in its way to create a distrustful yet truthful depiction of human nature, the movie *Sarraounia* focuses on the role of a female tribe leader during the Scramble for Africa.

Violence is an element of the movie that is well-played, but grueling in its reality. The amount of times violence was implemented made it seem like a normality.

Sarraounia, the main focus of the film, is perceived as a witch by other African tribes because of how she rejected the Islamic tradition. In addition, Sarraounia was a female leader, which wasn't common at the time. Despite being set apart, Sarraounia represented the strength of being a divine feminine in a world where men are full of corruption.

Her inspirational impact also translates to the perspective of other women in the film, who were subject to sexual assault.

Sam C

■

American Mary

(2013, dirs. Jen and Sylvia Soska)

An aspiring surgeon driven mainly by money gets sucked into the world of body modification. It ends up leaving more marks on her than “freakish” patients.

Mary, a financially struggling med student who's desperate to find money, is appointed to do a surgery for cash. This sends her down a rabbit-hole of body modification surgeries she can't escape.

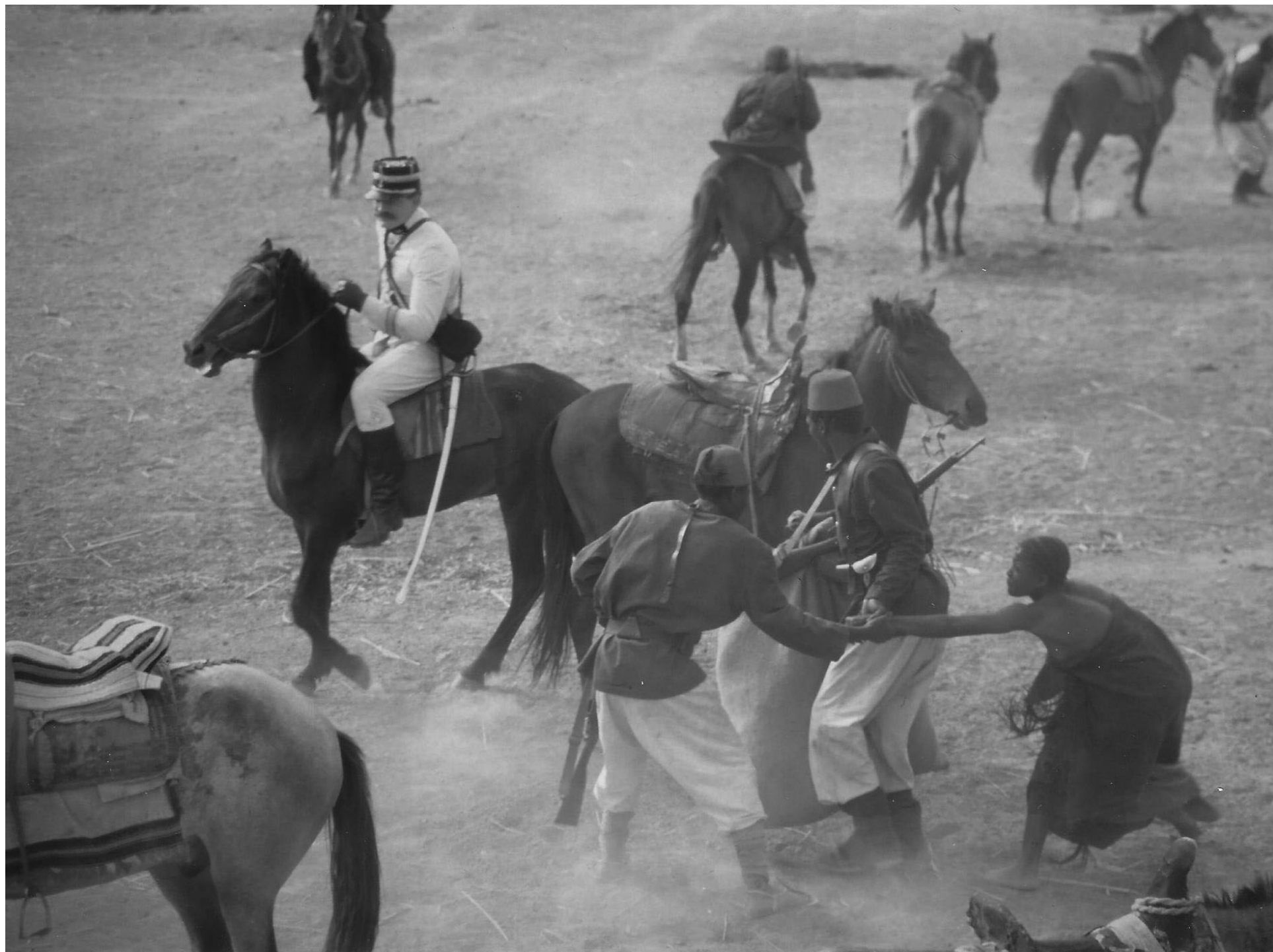


At the beginning of the film we see Mary is not content, and feels disgusted with the surgeries she's performing, but, as she does the surgeries for money, her attitude and behavior become increasingly aggressive and violent.

These surgeries end up causing more problems for Mary as the viewers see her internal problems slowly start to rise to the surface. Although this movie often depicts scenes with blood and violence, Mary's character is the most compelling part to the story.

Mary isn't being aggressive towards her patients, but as she does more and more body modification surgeries, she gets less and less repulsed to violence and starts enacting it on people who gave her tremendous pain.

Mary's desire for revenge leads her down



this rabbit-hole of violence and aggression that starts warping her self-perception.

(Despite the negative stigma of people who have body modification surgeries, this film does not speak or show them as malicious or evil, which is how they're usually portrayed in the media. The film demonstrates these people as harmless and unafraid to express themselves in a way that isn't accepted in society.)

Throughout the film, the viewers are constantly trying to figure Mary out and look for the reasons for the things she does since the reason isn't always directly shown. This movie likes to not fully answer scenes and one of its flaws is that it leaves it up to the viewer to determine what occurred; it creates an unclear storyline and is confusing at times.

Kylie B

■

We're All Going to the World's Fair
(2021, dir. Jane Schoenbrun)

The opposite of a whirlwind adventure, *We're All Going to the World's Fair* is probably best enjoyed sped up twice as fast to minimize the time spent with it.

In search of danger, adventure, and anything interesting, Midwestern teenager Casey involves herself in the internet's darkest and most spine-chilling online challenge, supposed to be unbeatable. As the movie progresses, Casey becomes more and more involved in the online challenge as it takes over her life.

From the beginning, *We're All Going to the World's Fair* establishes itself with specific and distinctive artistic principles: bleak lighting, dark scenes only lit by a glowing electronic device, and grainy shots taken directly from Casey's computer camera.

We're All Going to the World's Fair shines not only with these visual aspects but also with sound design that perfectly

matches the denuded setting. It boasts a score and soundtrack from independent musical artist, Alex G, whose offbeat and reverberating signature sound set the mood of the movie and enhance the generational message.

However, all of these positive aspects about the movie are ruined by its lethargic and glacial pace. Even with the strikingly short runtime of 86 minutes, *We're All Going to the World's Fair* drags. With a lack of action or real moments of terror, the



story falls flat.

Even with devastating pacing, faulty writing, and lack of substance, *We're All Going to the World's Fair's* artistic vision, messages about Gen-Z, and chilling soundtrack from indie musician Alex G provide reasons for it to become a cult classic.

Gus P Z

■

I Saw the TV Glow
(2024, dir. Jane Schoenbrun)

In a random suburban town in 1996, Owen is introduced to "The Pink Opaque", a cheesy and chillin' T.V. show, by Maddy, whom he meets in a random dark room at school.

He is immediately intrigued, and, without him noticing, "The Pink Opaque"

slowly consumes his life.

Truly a film I did not expect to love, *I Saw the TV Glow* tells an enriching message through its bewildering and psychedelic narrative.

The early 2000s aesthetic that it pulls off with beautiful vibrant colors and scenes just feels great to watch; all the sci-fi-ish concepts as well.

While it may be categorized as horror, it falls more into a coming-of-age with the "hero," Owen, getting an ending that many may not expect.

At times it felt so surreal and made you question what exactly you were watching. While others may say it's overly complex, I like films that leave you wondering, and that's exactly what *I Saw the TV Glow* left me when I left the theater. The soundtrack is phenomenal.

I Saw the TV Glow was innovative and inspiring. I feel as if I lived through a dream and nightmare.

Ryan V

■

The Boy and the Heron
(2023, dir. Hayao Miyazaki)

Following the sudden death of his mother, 12-year-old Mahito leaves Tokyo and moves in with his aunt, who is also his new stepmother.

Mahito struggles to adjust but finds comfort in the tranquil beauty of her rural estate. The appearance of a talking heron who informs Mahito that his mother is still alive sends him on a quest to another world.

The Boy and the Heron marks the bittersweet advent of Miyazaki's retirement. The film is bursting with dazzling visuals and an enigmatic creativity that only secures the reputation of his genius.

Lacking the ease and serenity that



enchanted viewers of *My Neighbor Totoro*, the pathos of this movie is borne of the exact opposite impulse. The chaotic, overwhelming visuals contained in the parallel universe capture the bewilderment and liberation of realizing the end is near. The blind panic of grasping for what we hold dear is palpable in Mahito.



Admittedly, this film is a bombardment of images and concepts—but while the story may lack the cohesion of *Spirited Away*, the dizzying sequences and disordered motifs of this film are almost entirely synthesized by the end: *The Boy and the Heron* aptly captures the dissonance between bitter loss, destruction, and fear, and moments of

purity and love.

In a moment characteristic of Miyazaki which reconciles mortality, childlike whimsy, and even absurdist philosophy, it is revealed that the fabric of the universe is upheld by an incredibly precarious block tower. As the block tower crumbles in the closing sequence, one can't help but feel acutely alive—Miyazaki's career flashes before the viewer's eyes just as much as Mahito's adventure does.

Sophie G

■

A Cure for Wellness

(2017, dir. Gore Verbinski)

Lockhart, played by Dane DeHaan, is sent by his Wall Street higher-ups to retrieve a patient, Pembroke (Harry Groener) in a health facility in the Alps. Dr. Heinrich (Jason Isaacs), the man who runs the facility, manipulates patients into staying, and Pembroke is unwilling to return to New York because he feels unwell.

Since Lockhart compels himself to stay at the facility, he realizes things that fall out of line, such as the strange satisfaction that almost every patient has, and the constant involvement of water Dr. Heinrich believes is an essential element for the cure. (Water adds to the cinematography of the film: hues of dark green, gray, and blue reflected the feelings of illness and depression that the characters had experienced.)

Hannah (Mia Goth), a young woman whose reasons for being at the facility



are left unknown—especially because the majority of the patients who reside at the facility are old in age—is often caught singing a mysterious tune and walking on the roof of the building barefoot. Despite having the body of a woman, Hannah acts like a child, which is a probable outcome of being locked up for most of her lifetime, and the lack of social experiences she had growing up.

A Cure for Wellness is a psychological thriller that depicts the mysteries of being mentally trapped.

The plot of the movie evolves quite slowly, so that a unique feeling develops for each character. Whether it comes to addiction or family issues, the unresolvability of their trauma shows up in their obsession with being unwell. This makes it easy for people like Dr. Heinrich to take advantage of them.

Combining the perspectives of various types of people, such as stockbrokers, villagers, and rich people who believe that they are ill, *A Cure for Wellness* captures how an insane mental state puts people into their own realities.

In this way, the movie is able to inflict contrasting feelings of desperation and acceptance because of the way “normal” people are able to coexist with their trauma.

Overall, the movie does a phenomenal job at making its audience feel disturbed, but also seen.

Sam C



Anatomy of a Fall

(2023, dir. Justine Triet)

After her husband's fatal fall from their attic window, celebrated writer Sandra Voter is suspected of murder and put on trial. The couple's blind son, Daniel, faces a moral dilemma as the sole witness. As the story unfolds, family secrets and tensions are revealed in this courtroom drama.

As the ambiguity of a complex relationship is forced into the binary of legal resolvability, justice feels agonizingly out of reach, each revelation near-comically obtuse. The intense scrutiny placed upon Sandra's flawed marriage is painful—one realizes very few of us could endure such a microscope upon our character and relationships.

This film succeeds as both an excellent courtroom drama and a delicate character study of mother and son. *Anatomy of a Fall* manages to enliven the saturated murder-mystery concept with a consciousness of its own theatrics.

Its characters are oddly compelling: an aloof, alienated mother and her perceptive, blind son in the icy French Alps.

There is a heartbreaking cruelty in how their grief is insulted with the injury of having to recount their experience before the unyielding, cold judgment of the court.

Snoop, their dog, perhaps represents the emotional height of this film; his crucial role in contextual evidence for the case, presented by Daniel, is one of the most poignant cinematic moments I've seen in a while.

Despite my admittedly poor attention span, *Anatomy of a Fall* held my rapt attention for its entire two-hour-32-minute run time. The narrow focus of the film proves to be an advantage: airtight and with a purpose to every scene, it is sharp and satisfying.

Sophie G



Possession

(1981, dir. Andrzej Żuławski)

Set in divided West Berlin, *Possession* follows a argumentative couple struggling to end their relationship after realizing that they aren't in love with each other anymore.

Mark (Sam Neill) has been absent from his home life and comes home to Anna (Isabelle Adjani) begging him for a divorce. Anna's loathsome behavior is all the reasoning she gives.

This leads Mark to investigate. He finds out she is in an affair with a man named Heinrich. Anna's attitude towards Mark becomes increasingly more bizarre as the once clear, emotional, and realistic tone of the film turns twisted, surreal, and utterly monstrous.

Mark desperately obsesses over Anna's affair with Heinrich and thinks about the great sex they must be having. He is fascinated with why Anna's romantic interest in their relationship has disappeared. Neill uses his eyes as if in a trance-like state when in a scene, and you can see complete desperation with beads of sweat rolling down his temples.

Adjani is undoubtedly the highlight of the film, and the spirit of its madness. She has the physicality of a madwoman and uses an insane vocal range to grunt, yell, moan, and scream.

A haunting depiction of insanity and disgust, Andrzej Żuławski's film is marvelous in its surface-level absurdity, but as things get tense for the characters,

we see how oddity, conveyed with the physicality and passion of Isabelle Adjani, takes on a whole new meaning. It is surrealistically authentic in its horror and does not rely on cheap jump scares to spook the audience.

Possession is, at its core, a break-up film. The extravagant performances of Sam Neill and Isabelle Adjani portray the intense feelings between a man and woman in a messy break-up. Andrzej Żuławski's film is a wondrous landscape of twists and turns, of tension and slow spiraling, a must-see wonder of storytelling that leaves the audience with questions about morality, religion, relationships, and reality.

Erlinda Z

■

Past Lives

(2023, dir. Celine Song)

Nora, a Korean immigrant living in New York City who moved to the United States as a child, is comfortable in her American life when her childhood sweetheart Hae Sung unexpectedly shows up, hoping to catch up with her. Dating Arthur, a white New Yorker, and building her theater career, Nora suddenly finds herself questioning her life path and unstable sense of self.

Past Lives works as both a love story and a metaphorical bildungsroman; Song gives significant attention to both sensitive Arthur and heartthrob Hae Sung, allowing viewers to consider them both as people and larger paths for Nora.

Yet the film is far from tragic: it simply subverts the conventions of love-triangle narratives, injecting the genre with an ounce of realism and optimism.

Both modes of storytelling converge in the powerful ending, when we watch Nora



cry for what feels like hours.

A touching and subversive character study that tenderly plays with the viewer's heartstrings, *Past Lives*, an autobiographical film, marks playwright Celine Song's feature debut. Its emotional authenticity shines particularly in its expert portrayal of Nora's internal turmoil as she grapples with her dueling cultural identities and delayed adolescence.

Specific and contemporary in its subject matter but universal and compelling in its emotionality, *Past Lives* will move audiences and show Song as a promising director for the future.

Olive E



Monster

(2023, dir. Hirokazu Kore-eda)

Fifth-grader Minato's mother grows suspicious of his unusual behavior. After Minato tells her that his teacher Mr. Hori is bullying him, she implores the school administration for solutions and is met with bureaucratic insensitivity. A mysterious

classmate named Yori complicates the situation. Minato is mysteriously troubled, an unease aggravated further by the dysfunction of adults.

Each of the three acts tell the same story from the perspective of Minato's mother, Mr. Hori, and finally, Minato; unexpected truths are revealed. The triptych-style narrative demonstrates the subjectivity of a narrative in a credible manner—with each revelation, characters simply become more complex, never completely vindicated or villainized.

Monster caught me off guard with how moving it was. An atmospheric film, capturing the extremes of fire and torrential downpour over the Japanese landscape, *Monster* does not sacrifice substance for style. Kore-eda handles the characters of Minato and Yori with incredible sensitivity and grace, capturing the emotional sincerity unique to childhood and the alienation that pervades their naive minds.

While the multi-perspective format does come at the cost of continuity and accessibility, it would be a shame to overlook this film—rewatch it if necessary. *Monster* deftly weaves themes of isolation and conflict with the ephemera of childhood bliss, evading cliché with a creative plot and layers of nuance.

Sophie G

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La La Land

(2016, dir. Damien Chazelle)

Lights, camera, action!

La La Land by Damien Chazelle is *the* romantic musical film about two artistic love birds pursuing their dreams. We follow the lives of two fools pursuing their dreams in the great and wide city of Los Angeles: Sebastian, a stubborn jazz musician, and Mia, an aspiring actress. They start off down on their luck, struggling to get a steady job or

any small-time gig. It's only when they find each other that everything starts to change in their lives. The once doubtful Mia turns ambitious and the single-minded Sebastian willing to take risks. Their magnetic love can't be stopped. But with every romantic film and love story, there must be tension. Cracks start to form as their dreams start to become closer and closer.

La La Land is a blast of color, from its clothes to its scenery. Mia's dresses correspond with what is going on and add depth to the screen: everywhere there is color and in all the small details. It's one of the best films that uses color to its full potential.

One of my favorite films, I love how vibrant it is, the cinematography, the characters, and the message. Even if the story is simple, it's the best simple story for the way it uses color, comedy, characters, time skips, and music. I love-love-love this film. It's always gonna be a 10/10 in my books.

Ryan V

■



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