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Rarely does Hollywood wish to challenge your perceptions of reality. Hidden behind the popcorn schilling blockbusters are stories meant to sell complacency under the guise of entertainment. **Zenith**, the new film from Cinema Purgatorio and creator Vladan Nikolic, offers a complex thriller and multi-layered story of our subconscious obedience to authority and those who still struggle against it. Issued with a warning, this is billed as the film "they don't want you to see."

The heroes of our tale are Ed Crowlely, an unappreciated priest who learns of a vast conspiracy to control world government known as Zenith and his son Jack, an epileptic street pusher of expired pharmaceuticals 40 years into the future. Jack's existence consists of selling old prescription medicines on the black market. His clients are looking to feel pain from the side effects of these drugs due to the genetic modification that has become so common place in the future. The rich and privileged of the future are conditioned to feel nothing but happiness that is coupled with their extended life expectancy. All this

happiness leads to vast numbness, and this is where Jack flourishes in his trade. Jack soon discovers a series of VHS tapes from his father who documented his investigation into Zenith with a camcorder. Soon Jack becomes compelled to begin his own investigation into who his father really was and what happened to cause Ed's absence in Jack's life. Jack soon uncovers a cadre of characters that influence his (mis)adventure.

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PODCAST



Jack is joined in his efforts by Nimble, a mute sidekick, and Mateo, an elderly black man who shares in Jack's passion for remembering the past. Gone are the standard authorities of today, replaced by private thugs, clean shaven and uniformed, that serve the rich. Certain words, ideas and beliefs have been outlawed, and Jack's hobby is to document it all lest it be forgotten forever. Jack's pursuits and dreams are fragmented, broken each time he ventures into the netherworld of his clients. His purpose is to find a worthy unspoken momentum for his efforts. Soon Jack meets Vito, a bookstore owner who offers another connection to Jack's past. Romance blossoms between Jack and Lisa, an indifferent denizen who feeds her need to feel alive through prostitution. Ultimately, it's the search to decode the mysteries whispered among the rumors of the Illuminati and the Free Masons at any cost.

The cast is formidable, scurrying about as pawns would on a chessboard, unaware of the endgame. Each delivers a performance that hinges on the interactions of the other players involved, and yet their constricted movements allow for a larger plot to unfold. Actor Peter Scanavino portrays his character Jack with all the enchantment of disenfranchised youth. Peter's brooding and collective drive



delivers an anti-hero of layered complexity. He holds onto the history of the past in a world of tomorrow that holds no place for him. Skilled, yet unchallenged is the pitfall of Jack's duplicity when compared to his father's questionable faith and zeal. The fates of father and son play out as one. Ed and Jack are both failed potential, individually tested to see which one has more to lose. Though never sharing a frame of screen time together, Jason Robards III as Ed Crowley, walks a tightrope strung over the precipice of credibility and complete insanity. A fallen priest with an apathetic congregation, Ed becomes a shepherd of a different sort as he seeks to herd his flock towards the truth about Zenith and uncover those who perpetuate its conspiracy. This is requited with a trail of VHS tapes that bridge 40 years in the hopes of healing the wounds that only deep seeded daddy issues can brandish. An intriguing father figure if there ever was one, almost something you'd expect from a Fox Mulder family reunion. Ana Asensioas as Lisa dances on the heads of the needles you sit on as this tale unfurls. Lisa, a spin on the archetype of the hooker with a heart of gold, takes Jack into her home, a sanctuary that offers no salvation. She and Jack connect over their shared passion for words. Jack tries to justify his feelings for Lisa as anthropological, a study in forgotten linguistics, another unchained link to the past, but this is the genesis of something more to come. Lisa's romantic entanglement with Jack becomes another string in the web of misdeeds spun around the true motives that Jack must wiggle free not knowing which way the spiders will attack.



The cinematography from DP Vladimir Subotic is steady and even keeled. The look of our contemporary and jaded circumstances blends a consistent and well balanced depiction of the dystopian future. The fall from grace isn't a jarring drop, but rather a slippery slide greased with the loss of liberty and true happiness. This consistency fuels the energetic editing of the film. The story wallows in a hyper-realized

sense of altruism, kicking at the 4th wall, but never breaking it. Allusions are made to the cinematic narrative and the techniques used to tell a story through film, but more so in a way that captures and records information rather than entertain through story alone. Muddled with the kinetic style of pacing reserved for music videos, the film models the allure of a retro-futuristic documentary, but instead bares itself as foreboding propaganda spotlit in scotophobic lighting. Fans of *Jacob's Ladder* will relish the influence. It's *Blade Runner* before the Replicants, *Strange Days* without the "jacking in" and "wire tripping", *Dark City* sans the Strangers, *Videodrome* minus the body horror, *12 Monkeys* devoid of time travel. It means to feel like a story that's been told before, but purposely hidden until now. *Zenith* is marketable surrealism for the masses, dosed with action and nihilism that makes its consumption a welcomed conflict of flavor compared to the status quo. Its structured narrative shifts between past and



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present, a parallel of industrialized alienation between father and son, serving as an exploration of what is and what will come to be. The future illuminated within is a bleak place, and the struggle to make it a better place is clouded with lies and self-preservation. Reality and fantasy are simply different paradigms that are reinforced through control and manipulation.

An interesting aspect to the marketing of the film is the expansion of its storyline onto the World Wide Web. The plot of the film is expanded and perpetuated by several forums that are meant to illicit a deeper interaction among those who partake in this unique movie going experience. Transmedia includes the websites [Z-Search.org](#), [Eradicate Zenith](#), [Hunt Down Zenith.net](#), [Unmask Zenith](#), [Am I Being Watched.com](#), [Follow Zenith](#), [Project Zenith.org](#), and more including FaceBook and Twitter feeds. From here the theories of conspiracy and the Crowley's investigation continues into the mysteries and truth behind Zenith as users uncover tapes and other information that can be reconstructed to fill the void of 40 years between Ed's world of awakening to Jack's world of catharsis .

Zenith screens in New York City Wednesday, January 19th, at the [Kraine Theatre](#). [Click here](#) for more information about other screenings in your area.

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