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## Reviews - Specialty Releases

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### Film Review: Zenith

Two men—one in the present and a second in the not-too-distant future—try to unravel the threads of a vast conspiracy in Vlado Nikolic's paranoid thriller, whose ingenuity belies its low budget. Not everyone likes having to think while watching a movie, but viewers who do will find plenty to ponder in this twisty maze of facts that sound like fiction just a hair stranger than the truth.

Jan 19, 2011

-By Maitland McDonagh

For movie details, please [click here](#).

By the year 2044, mankind has been genetically engineered to be happy. Like all good intentions, this one led straight to hell, in this case a hell of numbness that's created a thriving black market for vintage pharmaceuticals whose unpleasant side effects make users feel alive. Former doctor "Dumb Jack" Crowley (Peter Scanavino) is now a dealer, a lucrative but demanding gig in that he

has to try out the product and has become intimately familiar with a wide spectrum of pain, from mild discomfort to outright agony.

But there's more to Jack than meets the eye: He's discovered that language is going the way of natural pain—people are forgetting words en masse, and every missing word makes it harder to formulate complex thoughts. Only Jack, who suffers from a rare and untreatable form of epilepsy that produces brain-altering seizures, remembers and understands these lost words, and he's undertaken the task of creating a permanent record. He keeps this project on the QT, since his vocabulary is sufficiently rich to allow him to conceive of conspiracies—that's why he dubbed himself "Dumb Jack." If there's a cabal behind the gradual extinction of sophisticated language, he doesn't want to be the tall sunflower.

Enter Mateo (Arthur French), a stranger who turns up at Jack's door holding the match that will light Jack's paranoid fire: a videotape made by Jack's father, who vanished without a trace years earlier. What Mateo knows about Ed Alexander Crowley (Jason Robards III) puts what little Jack has gleaned from scraps of memory and a handful of papers inherited from the mother who abandoned him as a child into a whole new light.

Ed was a preacher, but at the beginning of the 21st century his waning faith was snuffed out completely by a penitent's startling confession. The man claims to have uncovered a vast, centuries-old conspiracy by high-ranking religious leaders to consolidate the world's wealth and power for themselves while distracting the masses—up to and including the power brokers and money makers whose strings they pull behind the scenes—with messages of peace, love and the superiority of the spiritual over the material. Their history and methods are detailed in a book called *Zenith*.

Ed's growing obsession with the Zenith conspiracy destroyed his life: His rants alienated parishioners, drove away Jack's mother, sparked fights that got him arrested and generally made him look like a nut job. But Ed wasn't insane, says Mateo, and he made ten tapes that will tell Jack everything he needs to know about how things came to their current sorry state and who's responsible. But Mateo only has the first tape, and Jack's quest to find the others leads straight down the rabbit hole.

Writer-director Vlado Nikolic (credited onscreen as "Experiment Supervisor") weaves together classic conspiracy theories (the Illuminati loom large, as they always seem to), ominous science (like

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#### REVIEWS



#### Film Review: The Adjustment Bureau

Call it the kinder,

gentler *Matrix*: A disgraced politician accidentally discovers a vast bureaucracy working behind the scenes to make sure that people's lives go according to plan—whose plan isn't entirely clear, but it's not theirs. His decision to buck the Adjustment Bureau and pursue the dancer he believes is his soulmate drives this light, surprisingly charming sci-fi romance. [More »](#)



#### Film Review: Rango

An animated homage to western movies—

from classic to revisionist, old-fashioned to postmodern—*Rango* plumbs existential depths and hits movie-lover highs. [More »](#)

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the Yale University-based Milgram Experiment, which demonstrated the frightening ease with which an authority could persuade ordinary, psychologically sound students to torture strangers) and dystopian visions of a desensitized, crumbling future a la Philip K. Dick and J.G. Ballard, in which ubiquitous techno-distractions, dispassionate sex and dependence on artificial sensation are gradually leaching the humanity from the human race. And while shot on the cheap, Vladimir Subotic's subtle and resourceful cinematography turns a series of Brooklyn and Queens locations into a depressingly convincing vision of the dystopia next time.

*Zenith* can be viewed as a standalone or as part of a "transmedia experience" that interpolates material spread across more than a dozen websites, including Ed Crowley's blog and various sites that purport to explore or debunk the *Zenith* conspiracy. The transmedia-enhanced *Zenith* will probably play best to home viewers, who can alternate watching the movie and accessing the supplemental material without incurring the wrath of luddites who deplore the glow of smart-phone screens in movie theatres.



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### Film Review: I Saw the Devil

Korean art-house shocker about a grieving man's brutal revenge on his fiancée's murderer is a strictly a specialty item. But for the right audience—horror buffs both accustomed to extreme violence and willing to read subtitles—it delivers the bloody goods. [More »](#)



### Film Review:

### happythankyoumoreplease

Josh Radnor populates his irritatingly self-satisfied film with lonely romantics, as well as a wealth of clichés and abysmal aesthetic choices. It's definitely more a case of unhappynothankyoumoreplease. [More »](#)



### Film Review: Kill the Irishman

True-life crime drama about the rise and fall of '70s Cleveland mobster kingpin Danny Greene proves there's life in one of cinema's most venerable genres. Performances, pacing, production design, etc. make for gripping entertainment well beyond the intermittent loud blasts of bullets and bombs. [More »](#)



### Film Review: Bereavement

In this deliberately paced horror movie, a big-city teen homes in on the darkness at the edge of a small Pennsylvania town, with grim results. Though unusually character-oriented for a genre movie, writer-director Stevan Mena's follow-up to his 2004 *Malevolence* is also disturbingly violent; its ideal audience is adventurous horror buffs, not fans of glossy, mainstream thrillers or gore-hounds looking for a rollercoaster ride like any of the *Final Destination* series. [More »](#)

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