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MOVIE REVIEW

Zenith (2010)



Solo Films/Cinema Purgatorio

Peter Scanavino plays Jack, an epileptic drug dealer, in Vladan Nikolic's "Zenith."

His Dad Left a Conspiracy; You're Invited to the Hunt

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS Published: January 18, 2011

Watching "Zenith," a self-described "retro-futuristic steampunk thriller," can make you feel like the confused hero of "Memento" — that is, someone unable to form new memories. Skittering back and forth between two time periods and a small group of nut cases, this bewildering collision of noir narration and purple paranoia may be long on atmosphere but is woefully short on sense.

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This is probably by design, as viewers are encouraged to supplement the pitted story through a number of Web sites for a putative "transmedia experience."

Those of us who prefer to enjoy one medium at a time must make do with a skeletal tale of brave-new-world dystopia, where the eradication of human suffering has given rise to a black market in agony-inducing drugs. Exploiting this, an epileptic dealer (Peter Scanavino) peddles expired pharmaceuticals — until mysterious videotapes from his deceased father persuade him that conspiracy hunting is much more fun.

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With a creator, Vladan Nikolic, who bills himself as “Experiment Supervisor” and lards the screen with denials of responsibility should you be harmed by “illegal material” and stroboscopic lighting, “Zenith” comes across as oppressively gimmicky. But as the dealer navigates a plot dense with incest, bioengineering and a heart-of-gold hooker, the cinematographer, Vladimir Subotic, transforms sections of Brooklyn and Queens into a gritty wasteland. Whether or not you choose to visit the film’s online hub, Mr. Subotic works hard to ensure that you won’t regret visiting the theater.

### Zenith

Opens on Wednesday in Manhattan. Written and directed by Vladan Nikolic; director of photography, Vladimir Subotic; edited by Milica Zec; music by Luigi Colarullo; production design by Brian Goodwin; costumes by Vera Chow; produced by Mr. Nikolic, George Lekovic and Jason Robards III; released by Cinema Purgatorio. At the Kraine Theater, 85 East Fourth Street, East Village. Running time: 1 hour 33 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Jason Robards III (Ed A. Crowley), Peter Scanavino (Jack), Ana Asensio (Lisa), David Thornton (Berger), Raynor Scheine (Dale), Jay O. Sanders (Oberts), Zohra Lampert (Ms. Minor), Bernie Rachele (Schleimann) and Didier Flamand (Rich Man).

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