

GOOD NEWS!
Up to 90% off local eats



GROUPON

See Today's Deal

HOME FILM MUSIC TV DVD GAMES BLOG FEATURES

LOG IN REGISTER



GO

FILM ► MOVIE REVIEW



A scene from Vladan Nikolic's *Zenith*. [PHOTO: CINEMA PURGATORIO]

Zenith 

BY GLENN HEATH JR. ON JANUARY 16, 2011 [JUMP TO COMMENTS \(0\)](#) OR [ADD YOUR OWN](#)

"SOMETIMES THE ABSENCE OF PAIN IS MORE DANGEROUS than the pain itself," says a doctor during the final sequence in the futuristic conspiracy thriller *Zenith*, a loony cinematic experience that envisions a world where complex language is extinct and self-inflicted hurt remains a pastime of choice. This particular future houses a civilization grown collectively mute by biological warfare and genetic purification, with those who remember the meaning of words wielding great power. As a result, writer-director Vladan Nikolic's low-budget mind game uses specific prose to incite conflict and deception, following ex-doctor turned drug dealer Jack (Peter Scanavino) as he investigates his missing father's quest to unearth a secret society and its controlling doctrine called "Zenith." Structured by a fluctuating, rambling voiceover narration that calls attention to the aesthetics of screenwriting while reinforcing a disjointed sense of place, *Zenith* often feels most dynamic when language fails to contain the increasingly ambitious narrative concerns.

As a hero, Jack is a typical lone wolf searching for an ideological place to call home, cynical because of life's unfair twists yet honorable enough to see the potential hope glimmering on the droll horizon. His loyal sidekick, Nimble (Al Nazemian), like most of the citizenry populating the film, is too devolved to utter a word, making Jack's life incredibly isolated and quiet. In between selling drugs to an underground populace yearning for pain, Jack makes one-man videotapes where he defines vast amounts of vocabulary so he won't forget their meanings. When Jack rediscovers an outlandish series of tapes his father made decades previous about a global conspiracy to control the world through passivity, *Zenith* jettisons its hero into a fractured noirish underbelly of seedy strip clubs, posh mansions, and rain-drenched alleys. Nikolic juxtaposes Jack's present quest with the footage of Ed's exploits, each growing more layered as information unfolds.

Despite its rough production edges, including some terrible handheld cinematography and shoddy performances, *Zenith* captures the dying pulse of a uniquely confined nationalized state silenced by growing corruption and decadence. Rotting walls, blown-out windows, and boarded-up doors make up the film's crumbling infrastructure, and Nikolic manages to infer a burgeoning sense of panic, at least in those still able to understand the implications of their actions. When

 3

[Tweet](#)

BUY ON AMAZON:

[VIDEO](#)

 Like

FEATURES



Juliette Binoche Interview

She came across as she does on screen: intelligent, engaged, self-confident, and prone to joyful bursts of laughter.

BY ELISE NAKHNIKIAN

- [Alex Cox Interview](#)
- [Matt Porterfield Interview](#)
- [Live Review: OFWGKTA](#)
- [Best Albums of the '90s](#)

FOLLOW US:



MOST POPULAR

VIEWED

EMAILED

COMMENTED

1. [Best of 2010: Film](#)
2. [Rango](#)
3. [The Adjustment Bureau](#)
4. [Alex Cox Interview](#)
5. [I Saw the Devil](#)
6. [Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives](#)
7. [Drive Angry 3D](#)
8. [Gnomeo & Juliet](#)
9. [Beastly](#)
10. [Hall Pass](#)

Jack meets a Spanish stripper named Lisa (Ana Asensio), the film delves headfirst into erotic tangents infused with long sessions of sex and camaraderie that distract the characters from their overarching concerns. Contrast Jack's gullibility with Ed's growing paranoia and you've got a strange template for generational traumas permeating a special brand of menace. But flashbacks, voiceover, and slow motion represent an authoritarian distrust, aesthetics meant to manipulate Jack's grip on reality. This constant battle between form and function makes *Zenith* a foggy window into a haunting potential future bursting with uncertainty.

Jake's hallucinatory self-realization process becomes more important than the film's attempt at twisty ambiguity, making *Zenith* rife with trap doors and reversals, hidden corridors and dark corners holding potentially devastating information. Jack comes to understand how an idea spreads from one personality to the next, not in the same vein as *Inception*, but through a viral approach to human interaction. During the strange third act, derangement seems to spread from one character to the next like a plague, infecting not only the players but also the film itself. Images grow shakier, while the audio often overlaps classical music, pop songs, and ambient noise as if to fill any potential voids in Jack's point of view. The film's messy pacing ultimately undermines the frequently enthralling themes at play, and the indescribably odd ending only sends the viewer off more confused.

Still, *Zenith* shoots for the moon and accomplishes a lot of complexity with very little money or professionalism. "The most dangerous people are idealists," Lisa says after another roll in the hay with Jack. Our hero smiles to himself, unaware that her words will have ramifications far beyond their surface romance. The clues to Jack and Ed's complimentary mania are hidden in the details, and even though *Zenith* fails to make these clear to even the audience at some points, there's plenty of worthwhile paradoxes making this grim psychology session worth watching.

DIRECTOR(S): Vladan Nikolic SCREENPLAY: Vladan Nikolic CAST: Peter Scanavino, Jason Robards III, David Thornton, Ana Asensio, Raynor Scheine, Jay O. Sanders, Al Nazemian DISTRIBUTOR: Cinema Purgatorio
 RUNTIME: 93 min. RATING: NR YEAR: 2010



Related Articles:

- [Lilo & Stitch](#) FILM REVIEW
- [Hair High](#) FILM REVIEW
- [Friday Night Lights](#) FILM REVIEW
- [How to Train Your Dragon](#) FILM REVIEW
- [Everybody Wants to Be Italian](#) FILM REVIEW

It's a whole lot of simple, and it's for you.

PRIORITY MAIL
FLAT RATE™ SHIPPING

GET FREE SHIPPING KIT

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE®
©2011 USPS®. All Rights Reserved. Restrictions apply. Details within.

COMMENTS

ADD YOUR OWN

LOGIN TO POST COMMENT
 USERNAME

PASSWORD

GIVEAWAY



Rent *Iron Man 2* today!

NETFLIX [Click here](#)

NEWSLETTER

Sign up for our newsletter and stay up to date on all of the latest news, reviews, features, and giveaways!