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In Film: When happiness is a commodity, pain is beautiful

 October 11, 2010 By [Troy Janisch](#)  [1 Comment](#)



The film Zenith begins in theaters and ends online. (Literally.) It introduces a futuristic world without pain, or hope that is driven by conspiracy, drug abuse, murder, and incest.

I don't blog about a lot of movies, but as a voracious reader of authors such as [John Twelve Hawks](#), [S.M. Stirling](#), and [Richard Morgan](#), I was pumped to get a preview of [Zenith](#), and independent feature film from Vladan Nikolic.

Forty years from now, in a desolate and indefinite post-industrial future, the population has been genetically altered to live in a constant state of happiness. But what they soon discover is that without contrasting it to sorrow, happiness dissipates, leaving only a feeling of never-ending numbness. Only pain can now make people feel alive. Added to the backdrop of this biological nightmare, this new world has been robbed of its language, and in its place is a bland, simplistic type of speech: "For" as one character puts it "what you cannot express in language, does not exist in human minds."

Enter Jack, a young man and former doctor, who has been disillusioned by this blighted world and has abandoned his profession.

"That's me. Jack. Or, Dumb Jack if you will," the story begins. "In my world, there's no police. Well, there's private police..but that's not the same. The companies and the rich have their own cops, but that's just another name for thugs... Someone knows about Zenith. Someone knows about me."

Jack is a peddler of substances that induce pain — a pain-dealer. Jack has his own medical condition: he suffers from complex-partial seizures, a rare form of epilepsy, which often makes his life intolerable, but has the strange power to enable him to understand words that no one else can understand any more. Hiding this secret from the world, Jack goes by the name "Dumb Jack," selling drugs and living a sordid life, surviving in this bleak underground world of the "pain trade."

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The film offers poetic dialog in an emotionless world. And, for those viewers who don't get a large enough dose of conspiracy on screen, Nikolic offers a 'transmedia' experience allowing individuals to search online for additional clues related to the Zenith conspiracy. Through a variety of websites, explorers can find, download and collect pieces of the narrative (the "tapes"), and re-construct them through active groups on social media sites.

Sites include:

- <http://z-search.org>
- <http://www.amibeingwatched.com>
- <http://www.projectzenith.org>
- <http://www.zenithisinourhead.com>
- <http://www.huntdownzenith.net>
- <http://www.eradicatezenith.com>
- <http://www.unmaskzenith.com>
- <http://www.abovetopsecret.com>

While some of these sites are an interesting companion to the movie – I'm not convinced that the time I spent exploring sites was as rewarding as the movie itself. I enjoyed the movie... but found online exploits to be exhausting and (ultimately) unsatisfying.

Credits:

No rating, 93 minutes

Opened: Oct. 1

Production: Solo Films

Cast: Peter Scanavino, Jason Robards III, David Thornton, Ana Asensio, Raynor Scheine, Jay O.

Sanders, Bernie Rachele, Arthur French, Zohra Lampert

Director: Vladan Nikolic

Producers: Vladan Nikolic, George Lekovic, Jason Robards III

Executive producers: Eric Werthman, Tim Biancalana, Duke Greenhill

Editor: Milica Zec

No Pain, No Gain

The Milgram experiment on 'obedience to authority' provided context and inspiration for the film Zenith. The experiment, conducted by Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram, measured the willingness of study participants to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts that conflicted with their personal conscience.

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About Troy Janisch

Troy Janisch, Publisher of Social Meteor, is a digital marketing professional and social media beatnik. He is a contributor to SmartBrief on Social Media.

Troy leads the social media team at American Family Insurance, but don't let that scare you. He rarely talks about insurance in mixed company [grin]. Like a good social media program, SocialMeteor.com is all about content. It's not a consulting company or marketing agency.

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