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# Film

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## Zenith

An impressive sci-fi feature combines Orwell, Philip K. Dick and Kathryn Bigelow. *By Patrick Z. McGavin*



★★★★☆ Time Out Critic

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Film

**Dir. Vladan Nikolic.** 2010.  
R. 93mins. Peter Scanavino, Jason Robards III, David Thornton, Ana Asensio, Raynor Scheine.

Serbian-born Nikolic's visually imposing feature is a tightly wound and often eerily suggestive science-fiction thriller that grafts Orwell, Philip K. Dick and parts of Godard's *Alphaville* with Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days*. The story oscillates between a dystopian future of 2044 (nicely rendered in Brooklyn and Queens locations), where people are genetically hot-wired to only feel "happy," and a suitably scruffy and dank present (conjured through VHS recordings). The points converge when Jack (Scanavino), a black-market drug dealer, tries to acquire a series of underground videocassettes his father, Ed (Robards), made to validate his theories of sinister forces trying to control society.

In terms of imagery, the movie certainly impresses, as in a scene of an illicit transaction unfolding in a drained-out pool on a wintry day. Vladimir Subotic's cinematography and Brian Goodwin's production design are draped in surreal, almost offhand menace. Nikolic, who credits himself as "experiment supervisor," capably moves between the time frames, but he's better with mood and atmosphere than story and character. The women, especially Lisa (Asensio), a sex worker, are stunning but largely treated like mannequins. Despite a strong start, the movie is weighed down by its flat, somewhat repetitive middle passages. Fortunately, Nikolic recovers with a disturbing ending. It doesn't begin to answer all the questions the film poses, but it certainly announces the arrival of a credible and gifted young filmmaker.

February 16, 2011

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