



fascination. compulsion. obsession.

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Welcome to the upgraded DELETED SCENES—a bit more personal, a bit more thematic, and a bit longer, too. Every month, I'll explore a parallel motif in most of the profiled films (if not all of them...I'll have to see how well this calendar conforms). From classic to contemporary, there'll be something to recommend, and I'll even touch on what to dive into on the old telly. So, now, there's no excuse; whether television, theaters, or DVD, you'll have all the information you'll need to enjoy a month of quality cinematic (and coaxial) entertainment.

THE CLASSIC

SUNSET BOULEVARD

written by Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder and D.M. Marshman, Jr.

directed by Billy Wilder

unrated/runtime – 110 min./1950

One of the most influential noirs, and widely acclaimed as the best film ever made about Hollywood, Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* is also one of the greatest movies ever to record obsession. Norma Desmond is the personification of this continual neurosis; a woman whose entire life, environment, and purpose revolve around being a part of the film industry dream factory

Wilder created a Great Expectations for the Hollywood dream, and Desmond is its Miss Havisham, right down to her decaying mansion just off the titular boulevard. But Desmond is a more active figure than Dickens' Havisham, instrumenting her comeback rather than playing out the scenario with younger pawns. Instead of being stuck in a past where she's been left behind, Desmond dwells in a past where she's still the star, still the center of the universe. This need, this compulsion, has been ingrained in her from the moment she 'arrived', as has been the case for so many stars. But the twist of it all is that Desmond thinks Hollywood can be nothing without her, when quite the opposite is true.

While Gloria Swanson's Desmond is the distressing nucleus of the film, Wilder also refuses to spare her supporting cast. Joe Gillis (William Holden) is our window into this shattered world, a down-on-his-luck screenwriter (is there any other kind in Hollywood?) drawn, by chance, into Desmond's sphere, where his own aspirations are quashed by the 'veteran' who holds his leash. As he realizes he's leading his writing partner, the fiancée of his best friend, down the same torturous road he travels, Gillis makes a decision which can only lead to one outcome.

By far, though, the story's most tragic character is Erich von Stroheim's Max. His revelation to Gillis is the very definition of tragic obsession, a life wasted on that which will never reward persistence, loyalty, or love. If there's one lesson to be gleaned from Wilder's pitch-black Hollywood fable, it's that what we pursue will never be held accountable for our own broken dreams.

THE CONTEMPORARY

RUSHMORE

written by Wes Anderson and Owen Wilson

directed by Wes Anderson

rated 'R'/runtime – 93 min./1998

Part French New Wave homage, part screwball comedy, all masterpiece...Wes Anderson's sophomore effort is one of the best films of the '90s. Rarely can we see a portrait of desire and obsession so painfully evoked, and still feel for the characters by film's end.

The lethargic conversations that accompany most coming-of-age films — 'I'm horny, but inexperienced'; 'I love, but don't know what it is'; 'I have a damaged relationship with my parent(s)—are conspicuously absent from *Rushmore*, and it's this deletion which makes the film so tight, so strong. We're given access to characters' emotional damage, without that access being summarized or trivialized by needless banter. Anderson shows us who his characters are by their compulsions, their curious needs, and their often bizarre behavior. *Reactions* are as unpredictable as actions and, through this, the unique necessities of every character rise to the surface.

Another obsession that takes root in *Rushmore*: Anderson's now well-known stylistic flourishes—the perfect, symmetrical framing; the quirky, alt-rock soundtrack; the absurdly detailed montages. What we find, here, is that Anderson is no different than his characters, and we learn as much about the director, in these pieces, as we do about his cast. Actions speak louder than words, after all, and where *Rushmore* shines brightest is in its *visual* language.

Let's not forget story thematics, however. The very *premise* of this film is based in obsession. Max is no ordinary teenager, and he's not one to be crossed. When he loves (with what he considers to be love), he loves to the fullest, even when other things are sacrificed in the balance. And when he, and those in his life, realize the extremes of the lengths to which they've gone...they find that, sometimes, it's best to let go of what you want in favor of what you can *have*. Sometimes it's best .to make a go of it at Grover Cleveland.

The film's finest exchange encapsulates this:

"She's my Rushmore."

"I know. She was mine, too."

And, in one moment, we realize that—unlike in Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*—we need not become victims of our own obsessions...that, occasionally, all it takes is a little growing up. No matter how old we are.

THE MUST SEE

ZODIAC

March 2

based on the book by Robert Graysmith

written by James Vanderbilt

directed by David Fincher

rated 'R'/runtime – 160 min./2007

A master of obsession, himself, David Fincher delivers 2007's first great film. *Zodiac* is the director in *Se7en* and *Fight Club* form, meticulously controlling his narrative to unfold in waves of procedure, emotion, and trauma. As almost everyone knows, The Zodiac Killer—a ghost in the Northern California cities and suburbs, who sent cryptic letters and codes to local papers about his exploits—was never found. So, unlike in much of his previous work, Fincher has no whopper of an ending to reveal, no grand exit to make. If anything, it's the complete obverse of his oeuvre, thus far; the obsessions and compulsions of his prior characters always come to conclusions—no matter how bloody, violent, or emotionally exhaustive they may be. But with *Zodiac*, we, like the myriad detectives, reporters, and investigators in the film, are left to wonder about our personal fixations and the twisted roads they lead us down. This might be Fincher's most personal film yet.

LOOKING GOOD

THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARLEY

March 16 (limited)

written by Paul Laverty

directed by Ken Loach

not rated /runtime – 127 min./2006

In the Palme d'Or winner from last year's Cannes Film Festival (which, of course, takes a year to reach the States), Ken Loach continues his distinct obsession with the kitchen-sink realism perfected by *Room at the Top* and *A Taste of Honey*. A socially relevant and grittily realistic style embodies most of Loach's work, and the vein of the working class and disenfranchised continues to pump his thematic lifeblood. What's so incredible about Loach is the utterly engrossing quality of his realism; he almost never forfeits authenticity for dramatics. Instead, his dramatics *derive from* his authenticity, a rare trait for a filmmaker surrounded by the contemporary preoccupations of melodrama and meaningless action.

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OFFSIDE

March 23 (limited)

written by Jafar Panahi and Shadmehr Rastin

directed by Jafar Panahi

rated 'PG'/runtime – 93 min./2006

For some, Iranian film is *too* obsessed with reality. Films from Abbas Kiarostami and his disciples become so fixated on the mundane that we venture into nihilistic territory. I think Jafar Panahi is the exception. *Crimson Gold*, from three years back, knew when to indulge and when to step back. With an authoritative edge, Panahi dissected Iranian social castes; and yet, many times, it feels as though we're watching a documentary. The Iranian government, in fact, felt it was so realistic and dark that it forbade the film to be shown or even considered as an Iranian representative for foreign awards. Panahi's response? Where some directors might lash out with another dark or vindictive story, he takes an entirely different approach—a comedy involving gender disguise and soccer. Panahi's work, nonetheless, always has a purpose, and *Offside* surely won't be without its subtle social critiques.

CURIOUS

EXTERMINATING ANGELS

March 30 (limited)

written and directed by Scott Frank

rated 'R'/runtime – 93 min./2007

Did anyone outside of France see *Secret Things*? Possibly just me and a select few critics, but if *you* were one of the few, this is Brisseau's response to the outcry surrounding that film's sexual and professional boundaries. Some have called it 'the *real Eyes Wide Shut*', but I think they're just misanthropic writers who couldn't get past Tom Cruise's presence in a Kubrick film. *Secret Things* isn't exactly a masterpiece, but its provocative sexual nature is reminiscent of what we'd discover in a Catherine Breillat film; and there's a psychosis, beneath it all, that's definitely worth exploring. Indeed, it seems that *Exterminating Angels* is Brisseau's *Sex is Comedy*—an indirect way of dealing with the real-life situation of making a sexually explicit movie. Consider this obsessing over the making of an obsession...or the snake eating a version of itself that's fornicating with another snake. If that makes sense, Brisseau's latest is for you.

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THE LOOKOUT

March 30 (limited)

written and directed by Scott Frank

rated 'R'/runtime – 93 min./2007

Indie film is becoming obsessed with Joseph Gordon-Levitt. Or, maybe, it's the other way

around. Either way, they make a good match. From *Manic* to *Mysterious Skin* to *Brick*, the “3rd Rock from the Sun” alum has proven his talent runs far deeper than flashy sitcom laughs. With each subsequent project, Gordon-Levitt pushes closer to the masterful acting levels of Ryan Gosling, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Christian Bale; he’s an actor in touch with the subtlety of physicality and glance, intonation and intention. Theatrical skill, without the theatrics. And Scott Frank, scribe of the tricky *Out of Sight*, must have recognized this, placing the young actor at the heart of his directorial debut. Will Godron-Levitt’s talent translate to a bigger film? If Frank’s writing is as sharp as it was for Soderbergh, we could be in for a sizzling heist flick.

THE CULT PICK

THE HOST

March 9 (limited)

written by Chul-hyun Baek, Joon-ho Bong & Won-jun Ha

directed by Joon-ho Bong

not rated /runtime – 119 min./2006

If we’re going to go on about obsessions, we might as well bring up the current Asian breed involving horror films. There’s an interesting thesis and book just waiting to be written on this slew of du jour terror flicks from Japan and South Korea. What undercurrent or sentiment is this reflecting? Where do these auteurs, consumed by ghosts, mutilation, and the past, begin their journey? It could be part of a national or cultural consciousness, at this point, and *The Host* is actually a branch outward from the spirit-driven, claustrophobic thrillers that have dominated recent years. Joon-ho’s film looks like a throwback to *Godzilla*—an extreme monster movie borne out of environmental disaster, albeit with more attention paid to both special effects and acting. And how popular is this modern-day rendering? It’s now the top-grossing film *of all-time* in South Korea, and distributors at Cannes had to add screenings to appease the demand for tickets. Are giant creatures making a comeback?

THE GUILTY PLEASURE

COLOUR ME KUBRICK: A TRUE...ISH STORY

OK...it looks corny. But this is Malkovich pretending to be a guy who pretended to be Stanley Kubrick. It’s Python-esque in its ridiculousness. And, yet, it’s true (well...-ish). Malkovich has more than proven his grasp of the ironic and, if nothing else, we’ll be treated to 86 minutes of Kubrick jokes and allusions. I can think of many other ways to spend an hour-and-a-half, but my inner film geek salivates at this sui generis opportunity to indulge in one of *my* obsessions. I can’t wait for the *Barry Lyndon* reference.

AND FROM THE SMALL SCREEN...

THE RICHES

created by Dmitry Lipkin

rated TV-MA/Mondays - 10 pm/FX

Leave it to the network that gave us “Nip/Tuck”, “Rescue Me”, and “The Shield” to bring us another exercise in amoral excess. This time, perhaps, with its most searing portrayal of the American lifestyle. The tagline: ‘It’s a wonderful lie.’ If there’s a more pointed reference than that, I’d be surprised.

Eddie Izzard and Minnie Driver star as Irish gypsies, whose families sole ambition used to be the grift. But when a singular set of circumstances presents itself, it seems that things could take a turn for the better. No longer living a life of cons, the Malloy's entire existence becomes one—their days spent convincing those around them that they're a family of wealth and class. It’s quite the different spin on the American dream: Does one choose to live a life of scrapping and cheating, to get by, or choose to live a 'normal' life, facing daily reminders of its inherent dishonesty.

It, of course, makes perfect sense that the wily Izzard is one of the show’s head voices, and that a playwright would come up with a show chiefly designed around dramatic irony. Let’s just hope the topic doesn’t hit a little too close to home when it comes to the fallacy of the American dream.

“The Riches” is a concept daring enough to work, dark enough to resonate, and crazy enough to engross us week after week. Here’s to it doing all three.

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