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UO Cultural Forum

April 8



Friday Night Flicks
The Big Lebowski
 "Dude" Lebowski, mistaken for a millionaire Lebowski, seeks restitution for his ruined rug and enlists his bowling buddies to help get it.

PLC 180, 9pm, FREE

Square Dance
 with Government Issue Orchestra
 7:30pm workshop, dance at 8pm
 \$3 students, \$5 general
 Agate Hall (18th and Agate)

April 9



Trashy Fashion Show at 8pm
The Carolines at 8:30pm
Samba Ja at 9:30pm
AAA Lawrence Hall Courtyard
 All ages free • Drinks and food provided

April 12

Buzz Café Art Opening Reception
 Kids art from EMU Child Care Development Center • 4pm, FREE

<http://culturalforum.uoregon.edu>

Film review

Distinct graphics, absurd fantasy make sinful film one of year's best

Director Robert Rodriguez pours audiences an adrenaline-laced visual cocktail with his film, 'Sin City'

BY RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

The best crime stories always have a certain kind of dark poetry to them. From Dashiell Hammett to Raymond Chandler to James Ellroy to a hundred 1950s film noirs, tales of evil deeds and rotting societies have been told with verbal grace and dark wit. "Sin City" is a distillation of these tales, an absurdly exaggerated romp through a dark fantasy world of crime, corruption and violence. It is one of the best films of the year so far and one of the most visually distinct and engaging cinema experiences of the decade.

Based on the comic book series by Frank Miller (who is given co-director credit along with Robert Rodriguez, with a small piece from Quentin Tarantino), the film takes place in Basin City and tells a series of interlocking tales concerning cruel, violent anti-heroes. In any other movie, these stories would hardly add up to more than a stack of B-movie rehashes with stilted dialog. But the look of the film brings the twisted plot screaming to life.

Filmed in black and white with color splattered across it like spilled paint, the characters come off drawn in broad strokes, larger-than-life images

that fill the screen. Bruce Willis plays a straight-line cop jailed for a crime he did not commit, Clive Owen plays a killer in hiding and Mickey Rourke gives a powerhouse performance as a nearly psychotic street fighter out to avenge a murdered prostitute he hardly knew.

The film's obvious absurdities become simple shading under the weight of its storytelling power. The characters take an ungodly amount of physical abuse and walk away looking only more hardened. The laws of physics are disregarded with cheerful glee as people crash through windows, leap from cars and land on their feet every time. It doesn't matter. The film is one giant head rush, the pure definition of suspended disbelief.

The highlight of the film is Rourke's tale. His character hunts down those who framed him for the death of a woman who showed him kindness before she was murdered. He tears through every scene he's in, almost literally chewing the scenery apart. Make-up transforms his face to look as if it were carved in stone, covered in layers of scar tissue and fractures. His story ends as almost all of the film's

stories end: With a cynical form of justice and an ending that even the most bright-eyed optimist would be stretched to call happy.

It could be said that this film has pretty much redeemed Rodriguez for his past failures. His "Spy Kids" movies sunk into drivel and "Once Upon a Time in Mexico" was a horrid piece of crap, its only saving grace a particularly lunatic Johnny Depp performance. But by drawing from such original material, Rodriguez seems to have found some lost muse.

Much of the look of the film comes from its incorporation of the look and feel of the comic books. Everything is in dark noir shadows and seems to take place in a world that has never seen sunlight. Shot against green screens, the film is an almost entirely digital creation. Unlike previous attempts at this particular technique, it actually works here, in part because the unreality of the digital backdrops only strengthens the sense of this being a fantasy world.

This visual look also plays a hand in the violence of the film, which is considerable. But with its glaring colors and intended cartoonishness, nothing in the film is too hard to swallow. What remains is pure visceral filmmaking, and one intense film-going experience.

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Nyburg: A bizarre animation apocalypse

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feasting on the only snack food I could afford, i.e. water.

"Spike & Mike" seemed like just the thing for me. A collection of cynical, depraved cartoons created by nerdy, disgusting little people in dark rooms. I could so relate. I laughed, cheered and cringed along with the rest of the late night audience through the festival. And then at the very end, something came on the screen that I could not have seen coming. Opening with a title card that labeled the work "Rejected," the film detailed the life and mental breakdown of one Don Hertzfeldt, an animator trying to get his work aired on a number of commercial cable stations. His work is a series of stick figure animations that have little if anything to do with the products they are supposedly advertising. The absurdly minimalist characters come on screen, utter twisted non sequiturs and walk off, followed by a picture of the product (complete with labels such as "Now with lard.")

Finally, as the animator suffers a complete mental deterioration (including a stint where he begins drawing with his left hand instead of his right) the cartoons become even more violent and absurd. As he slips into total madness, the cartoons go down with him and a complete animated apocalypse takes place. In

one oddly disturbing moment, a stick figure bangs helplessly on the frame, crinkling the paper with its small black fist as it tries to escape.

This cartoon was a revelation. Here was an artist as bitterly cynical, as wonderfully imaginative and as hopelessly untalented as any I have ever encountered. This was Dada. This was punk rock. In short, this cartoon was the Boss.

Since this first introduction, I have seen a number of Hertzfeldt's other pieces. While none of them are the equal of "Rejected," which has so far remained his masterpiece, they each are brilliant in their own way. The deeply cynical "Ah, L'Amour" is the story of a man attempting to woo various women he is passing by. Each woman meets his greetings (which range from compliments about their hair to queries about what time it is) with rage and violent retribution. Its closing punch line is a wonderful kick in the gut. Though the film could easily be taken as misogynist, its self-effacing humor and depressed world view move it a step beyond such categorization.

Another great work from Hertzfeldt is "Billy's Balloon," which depicts a young boy mercilessly attacked by the balloon wrapped around his wrist. The terror slowly spreads into an ending much like the

lunatic Armageddon's of 1970s horror films. The timing and camera placement of the short is some of the best Hertzfeldt has done to date. The film is funny the same way watching your grandma falling down a flight of stairs is funny.

Also in the Hertzfeldt canon is a trilogy of shorts done for the first entry in "The Animation Show," a touring festival Hertzfeldt put together with Mike Judge. If nothing else, the festival is worth it for these shorts alone. I have yet to see two of Hertzfeldt's earlier shorts, "Genre" and "Lily and Jim." I have also not seen his most recent work, "The Meaning of Life," though these are all on my to-do list. Currently I am waiting for "Bitter Films Volume One," a collection of Hertzfeldt's work which comes out sometime later this year.

What I enjoy about Hertzfeldt's work is both the absolute minimalism and the personality that is conveyed through it. His cartoons are existential in their approach to reality, creating a bizarre mental state that is simple yet unique. He is the Samuel Beckett of animation, and if you get a chance to see anything by him, take it immediately.

This column has been brought to you by our friend, Caffeine.

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