

# Out of the Past

Old tales and new in archaeological film

**T**his year, The Archaeology Channel International Film and Video Festival has a new home in The Shedd's Jaqua Concert Hall. But as usual, the festival encompasses more than just movie screenings; a guided tour of Cascadia Cave with Tony Farque and a free symposium on heritage film at the Downtown Library, both on Friday, are among the additional events.

The chosen films for the May 1-5 festival span an ever-changing world of archaeological findings, from newly discovered writings from the Middle Ages to now-vanished native cultures in Utah, and appear in a range of formats, from glossily produced TV series to labor-of-love shorts such as the Oregon-set *Echo of Water Against Rocks: Remembering Celilo Falls*. From France comes *Unearthing the Lost Kingdom of Aratta*, a fascinating exploration of a recently discovered site in Iran that predates anything found in Mesopotamia. The hour-long documentary is precise and affecting as it shows how every tiny piece of evidence from the site tells a story. Fossilized seeds, fish bones, shards of pottery and pieces of brick come together to build a full picture of a 5000-year-old civilization. (*Celilo*, 11:54 am Saturday; *Aratta*, 7:20 pm Friday)

Two entertaining selections come via television: In BBC Four's *Journeys into the Ring of Fire: Peru*, the camera follows chipper Scottish geologist Iain Stewart as he explores the kingdom of the Incas, with special focus on how they built such an expansive empire in such hostile terrain. Stewart's a jovial host who gamely pokes at a cooked guinea pig (but notably never eats it on camera) and occasionally makes a limp joke as he tours through Peru, explaining how Incas grew and stored food, traveled from city to city and built structures that could withstand the

region's earthquakes. (6:30 pm Thursday, May 3)

The History Channel's *Secrets of Stonehenge Revealed*, from the "Digging for the Truth" series, is hosted by a cheery

American, Josh Bernstein, who's prone to wearing a rather Indiana Jones-ish hat. Bernstein gets down to business with the experts he meets, using a flint axe to fell a small tree, an antler pick to dig at chalk and strips of nettles to make rope. *Stonehenge* is written with an eye to keeping your interest. Pieces of information follow one another smoothly; when one expert mentions a large amount of flint near the Stonehenge

site, it's mere minutes before Bernstein is investigating why flint would have been important in ancient times. The program takes viewers through Stonehenge's every fascinating phase — right up to a recent summer solstice celebration — offering an entertaining example of how archaeology, though it explores the stories of the past, ultimately tells us something about our modern selves. (12:15 pm Saturday) **EW**

## Brushes With Greatness

**AVENUE MONTAIGNE:** Directed by Danièle Thompson. Written by Danièle Thompson and Christopher Thompson. Starring Cécile de France, Valérie Lemercier, Claude Brasseur, Albert Dupontel, Laura Morante, Sydney Pollack and Christopher Thompson. THINKFilm, 2007. PG-13. 100 minutes. In French and English with English subtitles. ★★☆☆☆

**O**nce upon a time, maybe, more romantic comedies were like *Avenue Montaigne*. The film's humor is a gentle thing, built more in small moments than belly laughs and pratfalls. As for romance, *Avenue Montaigne* take a wonderful and welcome tack: It gives nearly as much weight to an established relationship under strain as it does a new one just begun to bloom.

The film's center is Jessica (Cécile de France), a pixieish young woman who charms her way into a waitressing job at a café on the titular avenue. The café sits in a cultural nexus, near a theater, a concert hall and an auction house. Jessica's a small-town girl with a woe-is-me story that doesn't seem to bring her any woe. Smiling brightly, innocently inserting herself into any nearby conversation, Jessica winds up crossing paths with some of the café's most celebrated patrons: an actress and the director she hopes will hire her; an art aficionado selling his life's collection; the collector's son; and a concert pianist, tired of the classical grind, whose changing priorities are driving his wife batty.

Jessica befriends some of these folks; others, she meets only a few times in the three days during which *Avenue Montaigne* takes place — three days leading up to a cluster of meaningful events for everyone involved. De France is the heart of the film, the naïve connector whose untrained eye gives each privileged character a glimpse of what his or her world looks like from the outside. But she's bumped aside for the film's three-part climax, which brings other pairs together, saving Jessica's own romance for the very end. *Montaigne*'s chief flaw is that it dances around the difficult parts of forming connections, too often showing us the moments just before or after two people truly click — resulting in a few romantic clichés, as when our heroine falls for someone she appears to barely know. But the film carefully and intriguingly rubs up against questions of art and life, love and desire, and the cast's deft performances (particularly by de France and Valérie Lemercier as the mercurial actress) bring charm and depth to the most well-off, seemingly enviable characters. *Avenue Montaigne* walks a delicate path between slight and thoughtful, funny and sweet. It's a welcome break from American "rom-coms" that are, well, neither. — Molly Templeton



Cécile de France and Christopher Thompson in *Avenue Montaigne*

## Chocolate Chip Cookie



A baking mistake made famous by Ruth Wakefield of the Toll House Inn. In exchange for sharing her recipe with the Nestle Company she was given a lifetime supply of chocolate! Crispy, chewy, cakey, raw or hot from the oven with a glass of cold milk, it is arguably the best dessert ever.

Sweet Life 755 Monroe St. 683-5676 open till 11 pm



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