

Schadenfreude-ian Slips: “Inside Job,” “Dogtooth,” and “The Mechanic”

Written by Mike Schulz

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INSIDE JOB

You might not think that director Charles Ferguson’s *Inside Job*, the newly (and deservedly) Oscar-nominated documentary about 2008’s global economic meltdown, would offer much in the way of participatory, audience-goosing entertainment. After all, this isn’t exactly a Michael Moore doc we’re dealing with here. Employing dozens of lucid, well-reasoned interviews with financial experts and reams of statistics and graphs, Ferguson’s strong, angry, yet level-headed explanation of our current financial crisis is the polar opposite, in temperament and tone, of a *Fahrenheit 9/11*

or
Capitalism: A Love Story
. But while the experience of the impeccably photographed, sharply edited *Inside Job* is a mostly dead-serious one, *damn* but my audience appeared to have a good time at it – or, perhaps it’s more appropriate to say, a *cathartic* time.

To be sure, most of this thoughtful, hugely informative feature, narrated by Matt Damon, was

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appreciated with muted silence. Yet nearly all of the film’s revelations about the sickening greed of certain corporate executives (who, exactly, needs six private jets and a helicopter?) were met with audible groans of disgust and a hearty amount of *tsk*-ing, while the ferocious backpedaling of Ferguson’s less willing interview subjects was greeted with vociferous derision and, I’d argue, not a small measure of pleasure at the subjects’ obvious discomfort. I’d recommend catching *Inside Job*

whenever you can, but if you’re feeling the urge to share your outrage with others, I’d *highly*

recommend catching it at the cineplex during what is sure to be a short area engagement. The highlight of the screening came when, after about an hour, one of my fellow attendees reacted to the latest example of financial misappropriation with an incredulous “What a bunch of clowns!” Indeed. How heartbreaking that their antics, though, weren’t the least bit funny.



DOGTOOTH

Had I seen director/co-writer Giorgos Lanthimos’ *Dogtooth* prior to last Tuesday’s announcement of the Academy Award nominations, I would have bet all my money – literally every cent I have – that the movie would not make the lineup for Best Foreign-Language Film. Set in a spacious country estate in modern Greece, it concerns the surreally nightmarish family life of an unnamed father, mother, and three young-adult children, and I read one reviewer describe *Dogtooth* as what you’d get if David Lynch and Lars von Trier decided to team up to shoot a Greek-language sitcom. That’s exactly what it is ... though a good deal more shocking and disturbing than even *that* description suggests.

With nearly every scene pitched between hilarity and utter horror, Lanthimos presents the kids – who’ve never been allowed to leave the grounds – as not-altogether-unhappy victims of either monstrous over-parenting or some kind of grotesque societal experiment. And if you can handle the cruelty, the incestuous sex, and the murder of a kitten with a pair of gardening shears, you might still recoil from from the deliberately alienating compositions and the disquieting fear of knowing that anything – *anything* – can happen from one scene to the next. *Dogtooth*, to my

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mind, is a far, far greater endurance test than

127 Hours

. It’s also one of the most extraordinarily haunting and endlessly fascinating films I’ve seen in years, with legitimately cackle-worthy moments of high comedy and frequently terrifying bursts of unexpected violence. Available on DVD and Netflix’s streaming service, you might easily hate me for suggesting that you see it, but I’m suggesting regardless; when a movie this determinedly untraditional makes the Academy’s normally

ultra

-traditional foreign-film roster, it’s got to be doing

something

right.



THE MECHANIC

One Dwayne Johnson is probably enough, but is anyone else *this close* to wanting to see Jason Statham headline a dopey, genial kiddie comedy? Remaking Charles Bronson’s 1972 original, director Simon West’s

T

he Mechanic

casts Statham as a veteran contract killer who takes on a twitchy protégé (played by the ever-twitchy Ben Foster), and the movie’s not bad; before it degenerates into typically graceless, increasingly silly action noise, there are some smartly staged bits – none better than the opening swimming-pool execution – and even, courtesy of Donald Sutherland, some actual gravitas. But Statham looks so sadly defeated by all the grim, retrograde chasing and killing that there’s no excitement or joy to be found in the film; looking like he wants to bash no one’s skull more than his manager’s, the guy somehow manages to make George Clooney’s morose assassin in

The American

look like the life of the party. In the past, no matter how lackluster the material, Statham has proven himself an action-flick talent of genuine charm, and the possessor one of the most unexpectedly winning smiles in movies. After

The Mechanic

, I’m beginning to forget what that charm, smile, and talent even

look

like.

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For reviews of 127 Hours and The Rite, see "[Out on a Limb](#)."