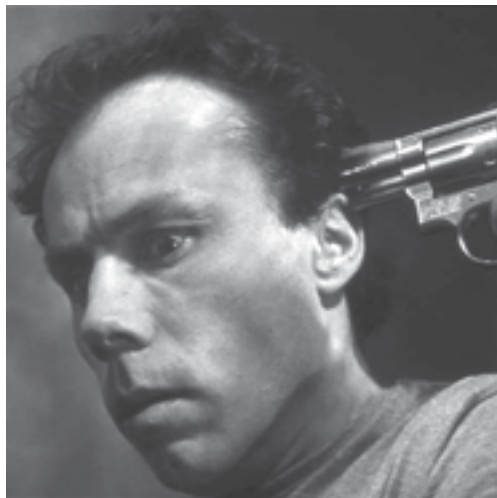


FILMCLIPS

13 TZAMETI

Filmed in arresting widescreen black and white, *13 Tzameti* can be enjoyed on the simplest level as an arthouse thriller. Sebastien (Georges Babluani), an impoverished young immigrant from Georgia working as a roofer in rural France, overhears his employer speaking about a letter he has received. This letter contains instructions that will guide him to a lucrative job, albeit one with an undefined sense of danger. When Sebastien is not paid the money he desperately needs, he steals the letter and sets off on the path it details. As he is drawn deeper to his final destination, both our curiosity and our dread increase: We lack Sebastien's hope that something may come out of whatever awaits him.



Arthouse buffs may suspect that Sebastien will never reach his goal, but this isn't that kind of movie. I won't describe what he finds other than to say that the film then switches into a different kind of intensity that would seem impossible for director Gela Babluani to sustain—but he does.

Only 26 years old (though with the benefit of having a renowned Georgian filmmaker for a father), Babluani's debut is impressively taut and controlled. You might find yourself comparing parts of it to the work of Bresson, Polanski, Antonioni or Wenders, yet it never seems to be copying any of them. Rather, Babluani seems to have succeed in capturing a droning nightmare that must surely have metaphorical roots in his own history of watching the collapse of Communism, so applauded by the western world, reduce his homeland to civil war and a swamp of chaos, greed and corruption.

Winner of the Best First Feature Film at the 2005 Venice Festival and the Grand Jury Prize for World Cinema at Sundance this year, *13 Tzameti* will be remade as an American feature. It's highly unlikely that the result will be nearly as impressive as this. See it now before you have to worry about your perception being diluted by an inferior copy.

—m. faust



ROOM

In a month filled with extravagantly simple-minded jock movies, a film like *Room* goes so far in the opposite direction as to almost even out the balance all by itself. Just as an indication of what you're in for, Austin filmmaker Kyle Henry lists among his influences Don DeLillo, Aldous Huxley, Carl Jung, and filmmakers like Michael Snow, Stanley Kubrick, Robert Altman, Andrei Tarkovsky, Chantal Akerman, Nicolas Roeg and Ken Russell. In other words, there aren't many of you who will be choosing between this and, say, *Gridiron Gang*.

Room begins as a study of middle American desperation. Laura is a working-class mother whose life is starting to get

the better of her. She is overworked, abused by a boss who knows she can't afford to quit her shitty job, unable to get enough sleep or pay the bills and frustrated by the indifference of her children. She's played by Cyndi Williams, a non-svelte actress who embodies the character almost too well in a performance that is at times painful to watch.

Laura begins to suffer what she thinks are migraines, severe enough to leave her unconscious. But these spells come with visions, apparently of a large, industrial room. After she awakes from one so bad it causes her to crash her car, she robs a safe and takes an airplane to New York City. We don't know what she's doing, but she doesn't seem to know either: She seems to pick the destination at random, and once there takes a cheap motel room and waits to see what will happen next.

What happens to her is the kind of thing that will frustrate audiences who like tidy resolutions in their movies. Is it *2001: A Space Odyssey* by way of Luis Bunuel's *Simon of the Desert*? Only director Henry knows. In interviews he hints at a portrait of America's ongoing angsts exacerbated by fears of a terrorist-infested world. It is at any rate a disturbing experience not recommended for the faint of heart or weak of spirit.

—m. faust

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