



DRINK TANK



We're in the home stretch. 48 films into the 52 weeks. Every issue a Mo Starkey cover and it's awesome!

Speaking of art, I've been experimenting with abstracts and Photoshop. As you can tell from the above, I'm not quite a master. In fact, I'm not quite a novice, either. As always, I simply dive in and play around without trying to really understand the process. It's my way. I know I can't draw (I've tried, for decades), but it is a ton of fun to play around with imagery and the way a few of them turned out made me happy, not because they're any good, I seriously doubt anyone would say that, but because I had fun putting them together and the fact that I'm looking at them makes me happy! You can tell that I have a fondness for repeated segments. I'm including a few in this issue.

I'm back and with only 5 more 52 Weeks entry, I wanna make sure that it only takes me two total years to do 52 weeks! It's been a long, weird road since I wrote the first one sometime around Thanksgiving of 2010. Since then, The Drink Tank has won a Hugo, lost a Hugo, had writing from folks around the world, got words from the likes of Seanan McGuire, Cory Doctorow, Jay Hartlove, Charlie Jane Anders, Aidan Mohr and various awesome others! It's been a good time. And I've had an excuse to watch a lot of science fiction films! And now it's ending.

Well, there's still five more.

Next year, Mo and I have come up with a concept for a few covers, and James and I have a plan for the Eighth Annual Giant Sized Annual! It'll be fun.

So, this issue is all about Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind, and a few more thoughts from folks like Warren Buff! Let us begin!



A man with dark hair and a slight beard is wearing a futuristic, metallic helmet with several circular sensors or eyes on its surface. He has his eyes closed and a neutral expression. The background is dark and indistinct.

52 Weeks To Science Fiction Film Literacy - Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind

Perhaps this list is a bit heavy on recent years art house fare. I mean, there's *Pi*, *Donnie Darko*, and now, there's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Why is this? Well, the big reason is that the real innovation in storytelling in films had shifted to the arthouses while the big budget, top of the marquee science fiction films were mostly effect spectacles. There were a lot of them, for example, 2004 had film like *The Day After Tomorrow*, a completely mindless film that had dazzling effects, *The Stepford Wives*, a remake that managed to waste Christopher Walken, and *I, Robot*, somehow an even dumber film than either of the others despite the attractiveness of Bridget Moynahan. In art houses that year, you had beautiful foreign films like *2046* and *Casshern*, and you had *Eternal Sunshine*, perhaps the best look at how love and memory interact in dark, dangerous, damaging and delighting ways.

Let's start with the basic idea: some memories are painful. This is one of the most obvious things you gain through the time you spend in this year. There are things you are going to remember that bringing back into your thoughts are going to cause you pain. I've never met anyone who didn't have memories like that; I know my depths certainly have a number of them. *Lucuna, Inc.* was formed to combat these memories. They developed a system by which certain memories can be stripped away through a simple process.

Here's where it gets difficult: Joel is a dude who has his issues. He's played by Jim Carrey: America's greatest rubber-faced fartsmith! Here, he manages to be both subtle and slightly-off. He plays a detached and slightly troubled young gentleman who has been in a relationship with Clementine, played by the magnetic Kate Winslet. They've broken up and Joel discovers that Clementine has chosen to undergo the *Lacuna* process. She has, in effect, erased Joel from her life, gotten rid of the painful memory that he represents to her at the time.

Clem isn't the same type of troubled. Much like *Donnie Darko*, she's differently broken. She's impulsive, her emotions turning on-and-off almost with quantum speed. She is a whirling dervish of emotional intensity. Winslet plays her as if she's completely together, that is to say she's equally up-and-down, hot-and-cold. She's bipolar, or maybe manic-depressive, or just plain unhappy.

Now, Joel has chosen to get the memories of Clem wiped, which is a procedure they do over-night at the home of the patients. The technicians are Patrick, played by Elijah Wood, fresh off of his turn in the *Lord of the Rings* films, and Stan, Mark Ruffalo, who was the hip new Art House guy. Patrick has gone a step out of bounds and started dating Clementine after she erased Joel. Mary, the assistant at *Lacuna*, turns out to have had an affair with the doctor who developed the process and has had her memory erased. That's the story, basically, but the way it's told is twisty, strange, weird. The script was written by the legendary Charlie Kaufman. At this point, he was



best known for his scripts for Being John Malkovich and Adaptation. He is known for his twisted, side-wise scripts. He is, in many ways, a Phillip K. Dick sort of writer. It makes him the perfect pairing with Michel Gondry. His work first came to my eyes with his various music videos, including the amazing videos for Human Behavior by Bjork and Fell in Love With A Girl by The White Stripes. Much of his work has a dream-like quality, or perhaps it's a nightmare quality. His films Human Nature (also written by Kaufman)

and The Science of Sleep were both bold moves, and strange, while Be Kind Rewind was an absolute treat and a wonderful message to the world of Hollywood film that there is still magic left in the world of movies. He also directed The Green Hornet, which is a weak film though with some fun moments.

The key to this film is the fact that it's a film about love. It is about the nature of love. It is the failure of humans to deal with love in the past tense, and even so much more for the inability for people to let go even when they realize the pains are what keeps them alive.

Sort of.

As Joel's memories are being erased, he starts to fight back, to attempt to hold on to the memories of Clementine. Much of the story takes place in the mind of Joel as his memories of Clem are being erased. Clem, or the Clem of Joel's Mind, comes up with the idea of him hiding her in memories where she doesn't belong. This brings us to some of Jim Carrey's finest work. He has an amazing scene where he is playing the four year old Joel, hiding under the table in a memory of his childhood. Clem is a neighbor who has been asked to watch him. Carrey goes from being an adult to being a child with incredible alacrity, and more importantly, he flips between childish fear and the more existential fears that Joel is dealing with in his adulthood. It's an amazingly fleet performance, but most of all, it's not over-played. It is easy to go for laughs with a performance of an adult playing a child, but Jim is solid and does good here. While he does go a bit too heavy when he plays himself being bathed as a baby, it's the moment when he is under the table that really shows that Carrey isn't just Ace Ventura, not just another comedian trying to play dramatic, but a strong actor who gets it, who knows what he's doing.

The story's major theme about memory is so strong, and when I first watched it, well, let's just say I was in the right frame of mind for it. Genevieve and I had literally broken up just two or three days before. It was painful (though the Red Sox had just won the World Series for the first time in eighty-something years) and it was before I had The Drink Tank to work things out in. Yes, I do use this rag as a sort of cheap-and-easy therapy. And I make you all watch. SO it goes. Anyhow, Gen and I had broken up, and since we were living together at that point, I had to move, since Evelyn and Gen needed to stay in the apartment, and I went back to live with Mom. She was gone for the week (I think she was in Hawaii) and I was on my own. I got a ton of DVDs from the Blockbuster down the street. The entire first season of Arrested Development, and Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind were the first ones I got. I watched Arrested first, which is brilliant, and then I watched Eternal. It was an amazing experience, one which hurt me deeply. This was me and Gen, in a way. And it was me and Dusty, my college girlfriend. And it was me and Melissa, sort of. And it was me and M, and Jen, and Jenny, and on and on. They all had their troubles, and I had mine. Over the years, I'd managed to accumulate various painful scars in my memory, one of which was still so fresh as to be weeping. I was watching an easy way out. The characters in this film had the answer to the pain that I was in the middle of at that exact moment. And I thought about what I would erase, what I would shed. I wouldn't get rid of the times when I was most hurt, the times I discovered the betrayals or the break-ups themselves, nor would I get rid of the moments when I was just stupid. I'd get rid of the moments when I was wrathful, when I hurt someone for the sake of hurting them. I don't do that anymore,

but once, I did. Perhaps the darkest time of my life was when I realised I did that. There were times when I was mean, cruel. I know it, I think I even knew it then, but rationalized it to myself. I would get rid of the times when I was cruel. The rest, all the other hurts, I can handle without too much problem. That's what I would sweep away.

We watch Joel lose his grip on Clementine, and it's painful to watch. It's fascinating to see how Gondry whips images by you and then folds things together to make a coherent story. The way they treat the scenes where Clem and Joel conspire to try and stay together, at least in their memorial form, are clean, surreal, dream-like in their imagery, but not in their execution. They are shot without the fuzzy edges, the soft focus. It's hard reality, daylight. The shooting is solid all the way around, and a director like Gondry understands the importance of how a film is shot. Here, it's gorgeous, perfection. When we finally see that Joel has erased Clem, well, we're not sure what's actually happened, because it all seems to have started again. We jump around in time, in the narrative. I've never been sure if the first time we see them together was them meeting, re-meeting, or if the entire construct of the memory is false, a way for Joel to come to grips. The ending, we're certain, is the last thing that happens in the storyline. Mary has returned the files for each patient to them, allowing them to examine the memories they had erased. This leads Clem to freak out, and Carrey is playing so wounded in the final scenes that it's hard to believe that he didn't get an Oscar nomination. They examine the possibility of it all going exactly as it did, that neither of them have actually changed, the only things that have changed are their memories of things. Does that change who they are? Are we our memories? Will we rebuild them if we just have them altered? My Dad lost a good part of his memory after getting hit by a car, and he had to re-build his world. Was he the same guy both before and after his accident? Yes, he was after a while, but there was a period where he was living in a world where he didn't remember what was what. That was the trouble. He couldn't remember his place in a world that still existed but he couldn't build his version of it in his head. This made him angry, and it largely cleared up after a year or so.

He didn't remember that he and my Mom had separated, that he had been living with a woman who would end up being the mother of my half-sister Bailey. He lost all that, some of which, he would later tell me, was a terrible mistake. He didn't have much of the memory of the year before his accident back by the time he died, but the snippets he had were typically of the hard stuff. He fought for them, actually. He had them taken away and tried to bring them back, and actually celebrated when he got something new back. My Dad had lived the



opposite of the film. He chose to be Joel, in a way, by figuring out how to unerase some of his memories, which might have brought him pain, but they allowed him to re-build his world better and better.

That's a visual theme in the film. At times we see images like bedroom furniture on the beach, a world that is obviously un-real, but neither part of it is unreal at all. It is only when they are in collision that they become dream-like, unreal. This is one of the tenets of Surrealism, where you see images set against one another to form a disquieting sense of displacement. It's also a concept of post-modernism, where we are given things that are typically separated by time or place being put together to give an idea of universality. This is a post-modernist film, at the heart of it, but the way it is shot is markedly surrealistic.

And it is certainly post-modern. It is the story of how we can manipulate memory to fit our needs. It is the story of how man has become able to manipulate the things which most define us. IN a way, we are messing with our collective memory. It's a much longer piece that deals with that concept...

One thing that I want to make sure I get across is that this is a love story. Read one way, it's about the inevitability of love making it happen no matter what you put in its way. You erase all memory of them, and you still end up back together. It's the inevitable, that fate has put you together, this is the heart of romantic comedy and drama. That's a beautiful thing, except for the Chris who watched it immediately after a break-up realising that I felt like that at one point, that this was ordained, and it didn't happen. Then again, I've found the love of my life in *The Lovely & Talented Linda*, and I wouldn't change the memories I have.

Read another way, I'd say that this is a trap. It leads you thinking that this is what must be, that love will always out, but they're no different than they were before hand, in fact, they're more what they were at the start than they were when it all ended. Once they are told that they had each other erased, they walk knowingly into it, which is the worst way possible to go into something. I've gone into relationships after we've already done things once and it's always turned out for the worst. I've learned, never do the break-up make-up thing, and *Eternal Sunshine* is the ultimate example of that. They've not only broke up with each other, they're broken up with teh memory of it. There is no more sincere form of criticism.





Letter Graded Mail Sent to garcia@computerhistory.org by Our Gentle Readers

Let us begin with my Fannish Hero, the Man with the Hat, Mr. Warren Buff!

I had a similarly strong reaction to seeing Donnie Darko. I was still double majoring in Physics and Philosophy at the time, and the film was built for my interests of that moment. See, in my metaphysics class, we had a professor (John Carroll) who decided that he would approach a lot of the issues of metaphysics through time travel (which is an awesome way to teach that course). To start us off, though, he made us read through a primer on the physics of time travel. Watching the film, I was acutely aware of what, in physical terms, the time travel scene must be -- and I'm remembering this through the haze of nearly a decade, so forgive me if I botch it -- a black hole. This would mean that the final scene of the film occurs in a different universe entirely (which prevents any sort of causality paradoxes, so the film is good on that count).

Exactly the right way to teach metaphysics! Also, this film was obviously made for you!

Upon seeing the final look exchanged between Gretchen and Donnie's mom, the girl whose house we were watching it at, Margaux, said, "They share each other's loss." The bile of my nerd rage rose, but I held it back until I was in the car with Zack and Jameson (I forget which of them was dating her at the time), where I could rant without making her feel bad. The film was beautifully poignant to me, in that Donnie's world literally did end, but that he could in some way make a sacrifice to save another world and its versions of the people he cared about. Margaux's analysis felt trite to me in the face of all that. Gretchen couldn't share Donnie's mom's loss, because she wasn't the same Gretchen who had known and cared about Donnie. Gretchen's whole gaze was still one of someone who was profoundly broken empathizing with someone else who had lost a family member, but it had nothing to do with her relationship to Donnie, because in her world, that never existed.

Now, maybe my take on the physics was wrong, or the screenwriters didn't really understand the subject and were making stuff up to make their point, and maybe Margaux had it right. But I couldn't imagine a film so big and beautiful hinging on something as trite as "they share each other's loss." In any case, some magical shit was going on, and there's not a purely physical explanation to the film (I mean, Frank can't make sense without some spooky action at a distance, nor can the sacrifice).

Even I think that is COMPLETELY missing the point. The thing that speaks against it is that both Gretchen and the kid wave, indicating that it's a general human response in that 'verse.

And recognizing the magical shit contributes to my understanding of the film. Donnie is a messianic figure, and is as profoundly broken as those need to be. He's messed up enough to go off following the weird shit in his head, to question his reality in ways that make his teachers uncomfortable, to use an act of violence to expose Jim Cunningham, and to consider his own life worth laying down as a sacrifice -- looks pretty messianic to me.

I refuse to use the term messianic because it naturally makes me want to !

Anyways, I'm glad you picked this as one of the 52 weeks. How many more do we have? Any hints at to what's coming up?

-Warre

