



Photo courtesy of amazon.com

# ‘Downtown Owl’ gives a unique view on life in a small town

By Annie Murray

Welcome to Owl, a one traffic-light town in the nether regions of North Dakota, miles from anything, including ordinary. It is the early 1980s, and kids and adults alike have little to do. Farming is big. So is high school football. The Gordon Kahl (you’ll want to read for this plot anecdote alone) incident has everyone talking.

In this outpost, likely based on the author, Chuck Klosterman’s, hometown of Windmere, N.D., there are three drastically different people salvaging life in this seemingly nondescript town.

There’s Mitch Hrlicka, a cynical high schooler who can’t comprehend rock music, the appeal of his football coach or anything else that seems to be popular.

There’s Julia Rabia, a transplant from Madison, Wisc., freshly graduated, who finds herself seduced by libations and a local buffalo farmer.

Then there’s Horace Jenkins, an old timer who’s decent (at best) at cards and can’t quite keep up with the coffee shop gossip.

It’s with Horace that Klosterman

hits a home run. Delicately written and portrayed, Horace isn’t the sympathetic character you would expect from a writer whose previous works included comparing various girlfriends to KISS members, sailing the seas with Journey, dissecting the

*Klosterman manages to weave an entertaining story loaded with familiar topics... and literary devices.*

poetry of Val Kilmer and a reference to Marilyn Manson as “consciously outrageous.”

Horace, for a lack of a better cliché, tugs at your heartstrings. He has hopelessly watched his wife slip into dementia, eventually dying in his arms. He feels destiny passed him by when he was too young to serve in World War I, and then too old to serve in ensuing campaigns. He was

hustled by a smooth-talking sympathizer at his wife’s wake. He has little to add to his daily roundtable talks with his cronies.

Klosterman could make anyone a little misty while narrating the travails of Horace, who feels as though he could be your kindly, lonely old neighbor on the porch rocker, or even grandpa. Old man empathy aside, Klosterman manages to weave an entertaining story loaded with familiar topics (the rise of 1980s heavy metal, people who love their dogs too much) and literary devices, including one delicious translation between what Julia and her buffalo wrangler are discussing, and what they’re actually meaning.

There’s an event that links all three characters, and further certifies that Klosterman is not some ranter-and-raver with a gift for words. There’s emotion and worth it. It is not a conventional novel. It’s a story that’s likely relatable to a lot of people in a lot of ways, and deserves a chance on the nightstand.

# Turns out there is some logic behind “The Female Brain”

By Megan Huey

Louann Brizendine’s “The Female Brain” is a brilliant read about how the female brain thinks, responds and transforms due to different hormone and chemical level changes based on the point of where a woman is in her life and genetics.

Starting from the womb and ending with the mature woman, Brizendine takes the reader on a roller coaster of the life experiences of her patients and herself, explaining the effects of chemicals on the brain. She also highlights the immense differences between a male brain and a female brain, which not too long ago was thought to be a smaller version of the male brain.

The book explains so much in just 187 pages. It explains what an average woman would be feeling and how they deal with different situations that she faces from day

to day. Women handle various circumstances differently than men do. Love is an example; Brizendine analyzes multiple relationships at different stages. Her findings show that men don’t pick up on a women’s attempt to hint at a sore subject.

Another section in her book includes the teenage girl mind. She talks about the hormone surges and lows during these rocky years of confusion. During a girl’s “time of the month,” a chemical, androgen, has the potential to skyrocket two to three times higher during the week and even the week before which a girl to become more irritable, less empathetic and lower her need for social connection. Brizendine calls Androgen (androstenedione) the “mother of testosterone” which supplies sassiness and is only present during the years of menstrual cycles.

Brizendine continues about with how we choose our significant others for the short and long run. She talks on the scientific and mental purposes of sex, and later about menopause and the effects it has on how a woman nurtures and cares for her children as well as her husband. In the end of the book she adds a couple of chapters about depression after having a child.

Brizendine has created a wonderful book of science and stories that is fun to read for both sexes. It is a guide for girls and women to help them understand their sometimes confusing thoughts and feelings. It also gives boys and men a little insight on the complexities of the opposite gender. And girls and women are able to identify themselves in or relate to at least one chapter.



# Remake continues the legacy of gossip, wealth and beauty in the new ‘90210’

By Fayola Perry

A spin-off of the original “Beverly Hills, 90201,” “90210” is already shaping up to be a pretty controversial and edgy television show. Featuring some of the original cast members of “BH,” “90210” looks at the life of this generation of students at West Beverly High.

This time, the show centers on the Wilson family, who move to Beverly Hills from Kansas, because the father, Harry, (Rob Estes of “Melrose Place”), has become the new principal of West Beverly High. His wife, Debbie (Lori Loughlin of the classic “Full House” sitcom and the shortly aired “Summerland”), is a photographer who is trying her best to support her husband and adjust to the move.

Most importantly, their children, two of the show’s most prominent characters, are Annie (Shanae Grimes of the Canadian hit teen drama “Degrassi: The Next

Generation”) and her brother Dixon, (Tristan Wilds of the critically acclaimed HBO series “The Wire”).

In the first episode, Annie is whisked away on a private jet to San Francisco on a lunch date and Dixon is involved in a prank against the rival school. The family soon begins realizing that they’re not in Kansas anymore.

From her experience on “Degrassi,” one would think that Grimes would be an expert at playing the quintessential high school girl, but instead she delivers a slightly mediocre and bland performance in the first two episodes. Her character is a bit too naive and lacking depth, but overall Annie is sweet and likeable.

Wilds is slightly more convincing, but it is still hard to separate him from his character Michael on “The Wire.” He does not do a good

enough job to make you forget whom he previously portrayed and remember whom he is portraying. For those who have never seen “The Wire,” one could just classify his work in “90210,” as average.

The faculty members, some of whom are members of the original cast, are the most interesting. Within this faculty there are some sparks flying which adds some more excitement. Jennie Garth’s character Kelly Taylor, the “it” girl on the original “90210,” returns as a guidance counselor with a four-year-old son. In episode three it is revealed that her child’s father is none other than bad boy Dylan McKay, also of the original “90210.” Along for the ride in the new show is Shannen Dougherty (Brenda), whose comeback shakes

*Quite possibly, as the show progresses, and the characters develop some more, the show will really be the hottest drama on television.*

things up a bit for Garth’s budding romance with a fellow faculty member, English teacher Ryan Matthew (Ryan Eggold).

The subplots also add another element to the show by giving viewers so many relatable topics such as the archetypal on again off again relationships, including the one between Ethan (Dustin Milligan of the movie “Into The Land Of Women”) and Naomi (AnnaLynn McCord of Nip Tuck) that are typical between high school students, the adulterous and substance abusing parents, and the combative teammates.

It must be said though, that the show has promise and potential. The attractive stars and even more enticing hookups, gossip, scandals and controversies, can draw the viewers in. Quite possibly, as the show progresses, and the characters develop some more, the show will really be the hottest drama on television. For right now, it is just at par.



Photo courtesy of Samantha Vaughan

## Zeytini's rustic, charming exterior fails to make up for its disappointing food

By Monica Lee

"There are three things that every Greek woman must do in life: marry Greek boys, make Greek babies, and feed everyone. Greeks are always together, just eating, eating, eating!" According to the mother in the comedy, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," besides family, food is the soul of life especially in the Greek culture. Zeytini, a new Greek and Mediterranean restaurant located in the Town Centre, captures the essence of family but fails when it comes to its food. Although several dishes are decently pleasing, this "hit and miss" restaurant is all over the place scoring more "misses" than "hits."

The slightly upscale restaurant with its quintessential outdoor patio, nicely presented bar and friendly staff definitely gives off a good first impression. After an affable greeting from the hostess, customers are quickly welcomed with a basket of warm delicious bread alongside a Greek tradition of olive oil mixed with diced olives. Ready to order, the staff is quick on their feet and open to any input

necessary when it comes to menu questions.

However, once the order is in the rest is all downhill, depending on the dish. When it comes to the appetizers, the Meze Platter gives diners a sampling of three Greek and Mediterranean foods: hummus, house marinated mixed olives and babaganoush, a mixture of roasted eggplant, tomato and red bell pepper, all served with grilled pita bread. Both the hummus and marinated olives meet the standard qualities satisfactory to the pallet. The babaganoush is decently enjoyable, although a little bit on the bland side.

With the entrees, the wild mushroom ravioli is by far one of the better options. With the pasta being cooked just right, not too soft and not too chewy, stuffed with a variety of mushrooms and topped with a creamy wine sauce, this dish leaves the diner wanting more long after all the little pockets are gone. For the side the traditional Greek salad is lightly wonderful, a good dish to either cleanse the pallet or simply satisfy those with a smaller appetite.

While the ravioli serves as a more

delicate dish for the lighter side, warning to all hefty meat eaters: Zeytini will not satisfy you. The ribeye steak falls short at mediocre, being tasteless and lacking flavor. The portion is reasonable, however, during this reporter's encounter what looked like two medium sized steaks turned out to be one with a big side of fat. The chicken souvlaki, simply a chicken skewer served with tomato pasta sauce, although flavorful, is dry and overcooked. Although not a meat dish, the gnocchi is a rather disappointing dish. Supposed to be a light pasta plate, the combination of spinach dumplings and cheese was extremely heavy. Even though gnocchi is theoretically a somewhat soft kind of pasta, this restaurant cooked it a little too mushy in addition to over drenching it in gorgonzola cheese sauce, making the dish unappetizing almost to the point of being inedible.

Everything else seems to fall at decent, neither a hit nor a miss, pleasing but missing the "wow factor" that makes a dish memorable. Being one of the Greek's most traditional and famous

dishes, the Moussaka, a casserole of eggplant, potato and ground lamb with béchamel sauce, is tasty to a certain extent but lacks the addiction of wanting more. It is the same with the grilled chicken sandwich and calamari. Both dishes are well prepared, however the quality can easily be found at other restaurants.

Although Zeytini has a few mishaps, one has to take account the fact that this restaurant is a huge culinary step for our small town. With the usual Chinese, Mexican and Japanese restaurants lined up, a Greek and Mediterranean place is a great addition. The upscale presentation is also something one cannot normally find in Alameda. Painting the walls with imaginary windows overlooking natural scenes of the country, the atmosphere is quite cozy and charming capturing the warm and rustic essence of Greece. With its high ceilings, round pillars and overall chic yet classic structure, Zeytini gives residents even more hope for a new, "big town," renovated Alameda.



Photo courtesy of Samantha Vaughan



Mint Leaf's mint and jicama rolls

courtesy of mintleafvr.com

This summer, Alameda experienced an onslaught of new eateries. In addition to the ones reviewed, here are some other new options for dining:

The Alameda Wine Company  
Aquacotta  
Blue Dot Cafe  
Chipotle  
Daphne's Greek Cafe  
Fire Den Bar & Grill  
Mint Leaf  
Yogurt  
Jamba Juice  
Tutti Melon

New Locations:  
Barceluna  
Everett and Jones



Photo courtesy of Samantha Vaughan

## Burger Meister provides a fun night on the town for Alameda hipsters with enough money to spare

By Daniela Myovich

Along with all the other changes it is making, Alameda finally has decided to get an upscale burger place. BurgerMeister has delicious, high quality food but is a bit pricey for just a burger and fries.

This new restaurant is conveniently located right next door to the movie theater. So when you get out of a movie and 10, and the rest of Alameda is closed, BurgerMeister is a great place to go. The outdoor seating is very cute with the umbrellas, jazz music and twinkling lights at night. There is also a nice atmosphere indoors with a family-style restaurant on one side of the divider and a bustling bar on the other.

There are eight different "Meister Favorite" burgers ranging from \$8.75-12.75. This includes the Tropical burger with grilled pineapple and mango salsa. This is an unusual choice, but it is shockingly juicy and exotic.

Another "Meister Favorite" is the Western Burger, which has onion rings, apple bacon, cheddar cheese and a signature barbeque sauce. The onion rings are very tall and make the burger extremely difficult to eat. On top of that, they lack seasoning and are not fried enough. The signature MeisterBurger has bacon, double cheese, avocado, grilled onions and mushrooms. This traditional combination of toppings is very good, but there are so many toppings that it is also challenging to eat. The buns are not toasted so all the toppings make the bottom bun of the burger soggy.

If you are feeling creative (or picky) you can also choose to customize your burger with a starting price of \$8.75. First, you can choose from a regular Pattie, a turkey burger, a garlic chicken burger or from various vegetarian burgers including mushroom and bocca burgers. All the meat is from Niman Ranch and is very high

quality.

The toppings include both the typical and the unusual; some standouts are grilled pineapple and onion rings (\$.75) and chili con carne and avocado (\$1.50). BurgerMeister is very generous

*Burger Meister is very generous with their toppings, making the burger delicious and ridiculously filling.*

with their toppings, making the burger delicious and ridiculously filling. When you order avocado it's not just a few slices, they literally put half an avocado on your burger. The bacon is crispy and the mushrooms are cooked perfectly.

Even with all the toppings, you

will want to save room for the sides. For \$1.75 you can upgrade your fries to garlic fries, chili fries, curly fries or onion rings. The upgrades are definitely worth the extra \$1.75. The curly fries are crunchy and well seasoned. The garlic fries have enough garlic so you can really enjoy the flavor, but not so much that your breath will smell for days afterward.

BurgerMeister also offers four "All-American Favorite" hot dog choices, including Chicago style (pickle relish, tomatoes, Jalapeños and dill pickle) and Coney Island (chili con carne, red onions and cheddar cheese). These range from \$7.40 to \$8.20. The regular hot dogs are one half pound, so if that is a little to hearty for you you should get the Meister Junior Dog which is one quarter pound. Or if you are feeling adventurous and the regular dog just isn't cutting it, you should try the Spicy Hot Link (one third pound). All the hot dogs and cut in half and served on a huge,

toasted sesame seed roll, making them almost sandwich-like. Like the burgers, you can customize the hot dogs with all the same toppings but for only \$.40 each.

The shakes are all very thick and creamy, but the chocolate is especially good. It is smooth, rich and has the perfect amount of chocolate syrup.

The waiting time is very random, so it is not recommended that you go for school lunch unless you don't care if you are late to your 5<sup>th</sup> period. If you go on a weekday or evening you may be seated right away and only have to wait 10-15 minutes for your food. However, on weekends you may have to wait to be seated and wait up to 45 minutes for your food. Unfortunately, BurgerMeister does not take reservations.

Overall BurgerMeister's nice atmosphere and tasty food make it a great addition to the nightlife (or lack thereof) in Alameda, but prices may be

# New Thai restaurant is not yet the King of the rest

By Michelle Loo

Located on the outskirts of Park Street, King of Thai Noodle offers an explosion of flavor that Alameda so desperately craves.

Adorned with flashing Christmas lights on the outside and Easter egg lavender paint around the walls of the small chain restaurant, King of Thai Noodle resembles a quaint Chinese family-owned restaurant in the heart of Chinatown. As one steps foot through the welcoming entrance, the aroma of the infusion of sweet and spicy teleports the customer away to the sandy shores on the tropical Thailand coast.

The core of the restaurant is never far from the seated customers, for only a wall partition separates the kitchen and the dining area. Located near the Park Street Bridge and is right next door to the music store Starland, the restaurant always has its wooden tables occupied with hungry customers despite the parking challenge.

With its capacity around only 40 people, King of Thai Noodle's cramped quarters literally have customers back to back with

neighboring tables. No more than six to a party would be able to completely enjoy the restaurant's small atmosphere. Due to the restaurant's thin walls and petite size, customers are forced to bellow over the noise from other tables. The flat screen t.v. adds more clamor to the already obnoxiously earsplitting atmosphere. Although the wait staff is very friendly and attentive to one's needs, the restaurant possesses an eerie, almost spooky ambiance at nighttime. In addition, I found it ironic that the dish that arrived last on my table was the appetizer.

Open from 11 a.m. to 1 a.m., King of Thai Noodle offers a wide range of hours directed for late-night munchers who crave spicy-hot noodles. In addition to serving fairly large portions, the friendly service also delivers takeout orders for no charge. Although reasonably priced with no dish costing over \$10, this Thai restaurant only accepts cash and takeout has a customer waiting for at least 20 minutes.

One of the most popular dishes, the everlastingly spicy Thai curry, is exquisite for one who enjoys both spice and sweetness. The yellow curry's fusion of spiciness and a

dash of sweetness from the coconut juice lingers on the tip of the tongue.

Although the yellow curry explodes with a union of these two opposite flavors, the pumpkin curry (also known as "Golden Pumpkin") offers a unique taste for the stomachs of Thai-loving customers. Floating in the delicious concoction are chunks of actual pumpkin, as well as bell-

*Although King of Thai Noodle offers over 50 different food items, it fails to include a variety of vegetables and other ingredients in the actual dishes.*

peppers and savory basil leaves. All red, green, and yellow curries come with steamed rice as well as a variety of ingredient choices: chicken, pork, beef, seafood, or vegetables.

Despite the fact that their curries are some of the best on the island, the fried rice is a bland ordinary dish found in practically any Asian restaurant. A spoonful of fried rice can make a customer want to call an

ambulance for sodium overdose. Along with the rice appearing somewhat burnt in complexion, one can immediately taste the oils from the greasy frying pan seeping out from the rice.

In addition to the not-so-ravishing fried rice, the Emerald Salmon fails to live up to its category of "Chef's Special." Made with salmon, zucchini, bell peppers, krachai, sweet basil, and carrots, this dish does not impress curry lovers. Possessing a deep hatred for the medicinal flavor of ginger, I almost gagged from the gingery spice of the putrid green curry sauce.

King of Thai Noodle essentially nails the traditional authentic dish of Pad Thai. Topped with a layer of ground peanuts and bean sprouts, the Pad Thai consists of shrimp, green onions, fried tofu, and fried egg bits over a bed of rice noodles. Prepared from lime juice and red paprika powder, the sauce has a refreshing sour and tangy zest.

Another flavor that absolutely erupts in one's mouth is the peanut sauce. The Pra-Rarm dish consists of one's choice of meat, spinach, napa and broccoli, along

with a mountain of rice. The fusion of crunchy peanuts and a pep of spiciness in the peanut curry sauce provides a unique savor for any customer. The Tao Hoo Tod (also known as deep fried tofu) also is a scrumptious dish to taste.

Although King of Thai Noodle offers over 50 different food items, it fails to include a variety of vegetables and other ingredients in the actual dishes. The fried rice essentially only contains rice, egg, onions and tomatoes while the yellow curry only consists of one's choice of meat, onions and potatoes. Compared to the abundantly flavorful Toomie's, King of Thai Noodle is deficient in the ingredient variety department and overall taste.

Milky in texture and taste, the Thai iced tea was adequate but nothing remarkable. It definitely needed a sprinkle of sugar for someone to even imagine oneself relaxing in a hammock on a hot summer day.

Though lacking size and a variety of ingredients, King of Thai Noodle is a unique environment for people who desire a flavorful experience.



Photo courtesy of Samantha Vaughan

## Food at Zen could use some more excitement

### Most dishes stop at good at the new Asian-fusion tapas restaurant

Photo courtesy of Samantha Vaughan



By Janelle Bitker

There always seems to be something just a little lacking in the food at Zen. Their Asian inspired dishes can usually benefit from some pizzazz, some excitement, something unusual. Isn't that what being a trendy Asian-fusion tapas restaurant is all about? Delivering the unexpected?

Perhaps Zen plays the restaurant game a tad too safe. Instead of adding some punch to the more expected dishes, they are choosing to be, well, Zen.

That is not to say that Zen's small plates are flavorless. On the contrary, most are quite tasty.

The highlight of the menu could be the playful and delicious Asian fries. Sweet potatoes and taro are deep fried in a thin tempura-like batter, resulting in an amazingly light and airy crisp about a creamy center. The accompanying spicy

aioli is perfect in both texture and its slight heat.

Meanwhile the Mentaiko Spaghetti is a great example of Zen's simplicity, rendering itself to surprisingly nice flavors. Similar to classic garlic noodles, the spaghetti makes an excellent, salty side dish to other, meatier plates. Its savory taste comes from enoki mushrooms, garlic, onions, fish roe and Parmesan cheese.

The most exciting and creative item available, by far, is the Sushi Pizza. Thinly sliced pieces of seared ahi and a wasabi spread are placed atop flat bread. Crisp red onions and halved cherry tomatoes provide an alternative texture and burst of color. While the "pizza" is beautiful and intriguing, the first bite is unimpressive. The wasabi sauce weighs down the flat bread and overpowers the delicate ahi. The idea of a sushi pizza is strong, and if correctly proportioned, the flavors

could work together very nicely.

With the exception of these three dishes, the majority of Zen's menu is fairly predictable, providing solid Asian-fusion fare to Alameda diners. The obscure dishes are ones that vastly stray from Asian cuisine and seem extremely out of place, like the traditionally Italian Linguine with Clams.

Zen's menu offers several options for raw-bar lovers, including a ceviche and a tuna tartar. The ceviche provides a bounty of seafood, of which the scallops particularly stand out, in a sweet soy-based sauce. The typically citrus infused dish is given a new style with the soy, and instead of being served with a sort of chip on the side, is served simply in a bowl with a spoon. Eat up!

The tuna tartar, however, is overly simple and disappointing. The cubes of tuna and onion are lightly dressed in sesame oil and not much else; it needs more, it needs acid. Lemon juice

would be beneficial if Zen wants to go for a more French fusion style, or even just soy sauce, which they seem to use a lot of in other dishes, would be great for the more traditional Asian tartar.

Other dishes like Wagyu Beef Salad, Shoyu Chicken and the steamed mussels are all good, but, *just* good. The salad has a spicy dressing but is otherwise plain. The shoyu chicken is braised and amazingly tender, but otherwise is just chicken in an intense soy sauce. And the mussels, while they are tasty in a basil lemongrass broth, are nothing one can't find elsewhere.

Considering the fact that these are tapas, and therefore very small, it might seem like the dishes are overly pricey. But as far as Alameda goes, this is "fine dining," and for a fine dining experience with multiple plates on

the table, it is not too expensive at all.

Walking into Zen for the first time is an exciting experience. It's new with a chic, moody interior, obviously looking to attract the 30-something hipsters of Alameda. One burnt red wall is lined with a couch which is paired up with sleek black chairs and tables. It's modern. It's cool. The new wave jazz flows with the mood perfectly.

Dishes are served creatively in abstract, asymmetrical ware, but upon further examination, the place almost begins to reek Pier One: random, unnecessary wall fixtures, large red and white paper lanterns adorned from the ceiling, mirrors, candles and a serene Buddha.

Nonetheless, a spot so trendy in Alameda serving trendy cuisine should be able to survive, and maybe even thrive, so long as there is enough on the menu worth returning for.



Photo courtesy of Samantha Vaughan



Courtesy of latimes.com

## Newest Coen brothers' movie leaves too many burning questions

By Maggie Mei

From the unsettling beginning to the puzzling end, the much-anticipated film "Burn After Reading" leaves many unanswered burning questions. Overall this refreshing film offers a comedic, albeit brilliant, view of the crazy, confused, chaotic information overloaded world we live in today.

The film has a star-studded cast with George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Tilda Swinton, John Malkovich and J.K. Simmons, and is complete with two award-winning directors, the Coen brothers. The movie starts off with a broad, epic view of the world from space, then sharpens to the quick footsteps of an unidentified man. We quickly learn that the name of the man is Osborne Cox (Malkovich), or Ozzy for short. He is a bald man who appears to be in his late fifties and is a C.I.A. agent who is fired due to his drinking problem. His wife Katie Cox (Swinton) is a demanding British woman who has an iron will. She is having an affair with Harry Pfarrer (Clooney) who works for the treasury, is a self-claimed exercise addict and lactose intolerant.

The unsuspecting Ozzy is too wrapped up in his problems to notice the ongoing affair between his wife and Pfarrer, and focuses his attention on writing a memoir of his C.I.A. days.

The parallel story is that of Linda Litzke (Frances McDormand) who first appears as her body is being pinched and marked by a plastic surgeon. Linda is obsessed with reforming her life, and is

determined that plastic surgery is the answer to all her problems. She works at the Hardbodies gym with gum-smacking bimbo Chad Feldheimer (Brad Pitt), who is certainly no Einstein. Chad finds a disc concerning information about Ozzy's memoir, and he and Linda are determined to get money from Ozzy to pay for Linda's cosmetic operations.

In the meantime, Linda is soul searching on a dating website, convinced that her bodily imperfections are the cause of her lack of soul mate. Her attempts to meet her other half include pathetic rendezvous with strange men in parks. The dates and the men that she meets eventually blur into a montage of watching cheesy movies with balding, midlife crisis stricken men, always failing to meet her romantic expectations.

Clooney is entertaining as the neurotic Harry; he seems to put much effort into this role. His paranoia is very convincing, and he executes one of the funniest scenes of the movie perfectly.

Pitt plays a memorable but secondary role of the idiot, who exercises every part of his body except his brain. He gets some of the funniest lines in the movie, and although some of them sound quite dumb, it's hard not to laugh.

Tilda Swinton brilliantly portrays ice queen Katie. She is ruthless and can be described simply as an iron fist in a velvet glove, which is a great contrast to wimpy Linda. Although her cold demeanor is chilling, one can't help but admire her strong character and blasé

attitude. This is a well-cast film, and perhaps with more amateur actors, the film would not achieve the meaning it does.

The movie is a candid snapshot of today's modern society, and shows that the overloading of information means nothing. In the end, nothing is resolved and nothing makes sense. Although the C.I.A. gathers all the facts, they are unable to make anything of it. The echoing question in this movie is, "Who are you?"

One criticism about the film is that the ending leaves *too* much unanswered. The end leaves most of the audience confused and perturbed. It's disconcerting that it seems to be cut off, without hinting towards a definite ending. Most films start unraveling towards the climax, however this film unravels at the end.

Contrary to its title, there is no actual burning involved in the film. Instead it has much dark humor with many burning questions. This is a movie that offers a modern perspective of the lack of privacy in today's overly paranoid world, where one's personal information can be obtained by a click of a button. It offers a unique perspective that depicts the impersonal ways of our modern society that include quite a bit of raw humor. Overall, fans of Coen brother's comedies such as "The Big Lebowski" will enjoy the same quirky and unforgettable lines that the Coen brothers deliver. However, those expecting an action movie that is all car chases and blood may not enjoy this film.



Courtesy of impawards.com

## While it's still fun, fans of 'Choke' might want to stick to the book

By Annie Murray

From maverick author Chuck Palahniuk ("Fight Club") and breakout new writer-director Clark Gregg comes the subversively comedic tale, "Choke" which follows the life of Victor Mancini, con artist, sex addict, Colonial village re-enactor, angst-filled son, serial restaurant choker . . . and unsuspecting romantic antihero for our unsettling times.

Victor (Sam Rockwell), in an effort to pay for his once radical, now demented mother's (Anjelica Huston) expensive care in a private hospital, engages in a brazen scam. While dining in upscale restaurants, he deliberately chokes on his food, allowing himself to be "saved" by good Samaritans who grow so close to him in the wake of their heroic Heimlich Maneuvers, they lavish him with checks. His day job is no more conventional: he portrays an indentured Irish servant in full 18th Century garb at a historical theme park. And when he isn't busy being a put upon pilgrim, gagging violently or visiting the mother who doesn't recognize him, Victor is attending sexaholic recovery meetings.

It's no wonder Victor feels adrift. But when his declining mother hints that she might be ready to spill the secret identity of his long lost father, Victor hopes it can finally provide the answers he has been searching for. With the help of his fellow sex addict Denny (Brad William Henke), Victor befriends his mother's alluring young physician (Kelly Macdonald), who leads him

to believe his origins may be far more shockingly divine than he ever could have imagined. So is Victor Mancini still the no-good loser he has always thought he would be for the rest of his life or could he possibly be . . . some crazy kind of savior?

Without Rockwell in the lead role, this film might have suffered greatly. Not only is he one of the best under-the-radar actors working today, but he perfectly captures Victor's sleazy, self-deprecating charm. The adaptation itself isn't as good as "Fight Club," but it's definitely not bad. The supporting performances are decent enough, with Angelica Huston being one notable exception: as always, she's pretty brilliant in her role as Vincent's messy mother.

"Choke," which ran away with the Special July Prize for Best Work by an Ensemble Cast at this year's Sundance Film Festival, is not only a cathartic and romantic satire about uncontrolled lust, lost faith, childhood trauma, mad addictions, bizarre fantasies and blockages both emotionally and literally, but also about second chances, redemptive moments and true love – that is, it's about modern life.

A small percentage of the movie going audience will probably love what Gregg has done with "Choke", but the majority won't have the patience for it. It does appear, however, that this will have a long future as a midnight movie. My advice: just stick with the book, nothing can beat Palahniuk's extraordinarily bizarre narration.



Dennings and Cera's chemistry is adorably awkward.

## 'Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist' strums a sweet tune

Backdrop of the trendy indie music scene matches film's mood



Photos courtesy of exclaim.ca

By Samantha Vaughan

Peter Sollet's comedy "Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist" is a feel-good film for the ever-growing alternative-indie generation. Based on the novel by Rachel Cohn and David Levithan, the film follows recently-dumped Nick O'Leary, played by Michael Cera, and cynical and sarcastic Norah Silverberg, played by Kat Dennings, around all of New York City.

Prior to their first encounter,

Norah has a collection of mixed CDs that Nick had created for his ex-girlfriend in the past. Nick and Norah share the same taste in alternative-indie tunes, so it is no surprise to learn that they're both in love with the same band: Where's Fluffy. After losing Norah's intoxicated friend, and discovering that Where's Fluffy is playing a secret show somewhere in the city, the two spend their night wandering the streets of New York in search of love, a lost friend and good music.

First as Evan in "Superbad," then Paulie Bleeker in "Juno," Cera pulls

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off yet another effortless and hilarious performance as Nick.

Dennings seems quite effortless as well onscreen, which is a big step up from the last movie she appeared in: "The House Bunny." Both Cera and Dennings act and react in such a way that makes the film awkward yet entertaining. The dynamism created between their two characters is unmistakably wry and charming.

The highlight of "Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist" is in fact its infinite playlist. The album features tracks from some of indie-rock's best and brightest, including

Vampire Weekend, We Are Scientists, Devendra Banhart and Band of Horses. While some might criticize the "wannabe-Juno" nature of the film's soundtrack, the filmmakers did an excellent job of compiling cutesy well-known indie-rock songs to accompany the storyline.

With its eclectic soundtracked and off-beat plotline, "Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist" hits a high note.