

SOUR GRAPES
--A Critical Review of Market Offerings

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Week of June 30, 2008
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Film Reviews of:
The Lost Weekend, Strangers on a Train, and The Last Temptation of Christ
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THE LOST WEEKEND

(1945)

A film by Billy Wilder. Screenplay by Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett, based on the novel by Charles R. Jackson.

Review by Paul Lambrecht.

This was the 1945 version of *Leaving Las Vegas*, where Nick Cage's character drinks himself to death. In this film, Don Birnam is a writer who has failed at everything since dropping out of college ten years before. Now he lives off the generosity of his Manhattan-dweller brother--and enjoys the caring solicitude of his girlfriend, who is way too good for his unemployed ass. Don is a skilled and entrenched alcoholic who steals, lies, romances, and hocks his valued possessions--anything to get enough money for a couple o' bottles of rye at the liquor store or whiskey shots at the local pub.

The movie takes you through an epic binge where Don goes from somewhat charming and eruditely sauced in the beginning to near the end, experiencing a bout of hallucinations similar to someone going through the DT's.

And like in *Leaving Las Vegas*, the love of a good woman might not be enough to keep him going, either...

STRANGERS ON A TRAIN

(1951)

A film by Alfred Hitchcock. Screenplay by Raymond Chandler and Czenzi Ormonde.

Review by Paul Lambrecht.

Probably the favorite Hitchcock film I've seen. Bruno Anthony and Guy Haines meet each other on the train and Bruno initiates a seemingly idle conversation about how each of them could commit a murder which would benefit the other person, and in so doing ("criss-cross'ing" the murders) neither of them would be caught because they have no known relationship with each other, nor do they have motives to kill their victims. The twist is, however, that one man's idle chatter might be another's earnest intention and he may carry out the hypothetical crime regardless of the other's participation. And this in turn, leads to further complications. Very tight plot up until the end when excessive police force leads to an unconventional high-speed chase sequence on a merry-go-round.

THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

(1988)

A film by Martin Scorsese. Screenplay by Paul Schrader, based on the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis.

Review by Paul Lambrecht.

This was a somewhat interesting film. With the conspicuous exception of Jesus removing his own beating heart to impress his disciples, this film follows the gospels fairly faithfully until the final forty minutes, where like the title suggests, it veers away dramatically into bizarre speculation. The line in Mark where Jesus

is on the cross and asks God, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" sets up an alternate timeline for Jesus with kind of a good twist at the end, before returning to the more familiar bible account. Very beautifully shot, too.