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Days of the Eclipse

Snegovoy
played by
Vladimir
Zamansky

Dmitri Malyanov
(Alexei
Ananishnov)

The Boy (Sergei
Krylov)





thing. He pounds at his type-writer, from time to time pushing aside the telephone with an air of annoyance... While in the previous feature film, *Mournful Unconcern*, all the characters were equally alien to the director Alexander Sokurov (although he did not try to emphasize the shortcomings of his non-professional actors) in *The Days of the Eclipse*, directed from a story by the brothers Strugatsky called *A Billion Years Before the End of the World*, Sokurov is obviously enchanted with his main character.

Dmitry Malyanov (played by Alexei Ananishnov) is a handsome young man by all accounts. He is handsome and lonely, a smashing beginning for a film. It promises action but... Sokurov has a disappointing "no" for those who expect suspense, thrills, cliff-hanging situations and melodrama. But then such people are unlikely to go to see Sokurov's film in the first place. For he has

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Days of the Eclipse

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already acquired a reputation as an elitist director, "not everybody's cup of tea". In *The Days of the Eclipse*, however, he takes a step towards making the film visually attractive. While it is not pure entertainment it is spectacular, because he has placed his hero in an exotic setting where the faces are as unusual as the environment: deserts, sandstorms, wilderness, majestic canyons, the red setting sun. There are signs of the social world here and there but in the wild landscape somewhere in Central Asia they are like signs of a Martian civilization. These signs only make you more aware of the terrible loneliness of our hero who is like a spaceman marooned on an unknown planet. He has survived but he has no hope of returning home.

Time stands still for our hero. He was a youth when he left home and he remains a youth although everything around him ages and decays. His home has some features of his native planet Earth. There is a fan and a fridge, a typewriter and a telephone, cardiograms are suspended from the ceiling reminding us of film stock which used to be dried in this way in the old days. The cardiograms are not there by chance. The young man is a doctor who devotes his life to an impossible project: he wants to prove that health depends on morality. The nature of his pursuits becomes important to us later on in the film when the director casts mystical nets of good and evil for our hero. In the meantime we see a young man who pounds away at his typewriter, talks to his friends, rides a bicycle on a Martian road, gazes at the red sun and communicates with strange savage-looking people who want something from him. At times it appears as if all they want is to be

close to him, to admire him. But invariably they have to pay for this by their lives.

While this does not lend coherence to the film it certainly lends extra charm to the hero. Colonel Snegovoi shoots himself, the deserter Gubar is executed by firing squad... Who is next? As soon as Malyanov leaves the home of his friend Vecherovsky, the wiring in the house catches fire. This is enough of a warning to induce Vecherovsky to leave the small town and go to the Pamirs or some other faraway place.

Symbols... symbols... The presence of mystical forces is in the air. This effect is created partly by the way the camera loses sight of the hero from time to time and fixes its gaze on one spot or scrutinizes the body of the young man who takes off his T-shirt. The director has set out to prove the unprovable — that the very presence of Malyanov on the decaying planet is a challenge to some spirits ruling this scorched land. These spirits try to confine all life to circle of births and deaths but this youth is eternal and they can do nothing about it. He is immortal because the director is inspired by an immortal idea. What is that idea?

It is a longing for an individual that is beautiful in all respects. To have such a hero act means to destroy him. And to confine the hero to self-imposed solitude means to undermine sympathy for him. These two extremes provide the tension of the film. In the final scene the director generously gives our hero the smile of Cabiria, as if he has experienced searing passions and has summoned up strength to regain his faith in life.

The hero does not, however, appear to have experienced stormy passions. Rather the director has experienced them. The rich palette of the director's feelings about the hero constitutes an engross-

(*Dni Zatmeniya*)

In colour, 2711 m

Screenplay: Yuri Arabov in collaboration with Arkady Strugatsky, Boris Strugatsky, Pyotr Kadochnikov

Direction: Alexander Sokurov

Photography: Sergei Yurizditsky

Design: Yelena Amshinskaya

Music: Yuri Khanin

Cast: Alexei Ananishnov, Eskender Umarov, Vladimir Zamansky, Irina Sokolova, Viktor Belovolsky, Sergei Krylov

Production: Lenfilm Studios

ing spectacle. For the first time I see the camera convey the finest shades of emotions: from fear to exultation, from jubilation to sadness. We have never seen such cinema before. Undoubtedly, it is cinema d'auteur.

SERGEI SHOLOKHOV



DIRECTOR
ALEXANDER
SOKUROV

Born in 1951. Graduated from the Gorky State University (Degree in History), from the National Cinema Institute (VGIK), (1979, direction department, workshop of Alexander Zguridi), worked as director for television in Gorky. Won the special Andrei Tarkovsky Award at the 1987 International Film Festival in Moscow, USSR. *A Man's Lonely Voice* (1978, restored in 1987, his diploma work, The Bronze Leopard Prize at the 1987 International Film Festival in Locarno, Switzerland). *Reduced to the Ranks* (1980), short film. *"Viola Sonata". Dmitry Shostakovich*, (1981, 1987 in collaboration with Semyon Aranovich, documentary *Composer Shostakovich* (1981), documentary *Allies* (1982) documentary *And Nothing Else* (1983, 1987), documentary *Patterns On the Ice* (1985), documentary *Patience. Hard Work* (1985, 1987), documentary *Mournful Unconcern* (1983, 1987) *Elegy* (1985, 1986), documentary. FIPRESCI Prize at the 1986 International Film Festival in Tampere, Finland. *The Evening Offering* (1984, 1987), documentary *The Ampire Style* (1987), short film *Moscow Elegy* (1987), documentary *Maria* (1988), documentary *The Days of the Eclipse* (1988)