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Silver Screen Fiend: Learning About Life From An Addiction To Film



Synopsis

New York Times best-selling author, comedian, and actor Patton Oswalt shares his entertaining memoir about coming of age as a performer and writer in the late '90s while obsessively watching classic films at the legendary New Beverly Cinema in Los Angeles. Between 1995 and 1999, Patton Oswalt lived with an unshakeable addiction. It wasn't drugs, alcohol, or sex. It was film. After moving to L.A., Oswalt became a huge film buff, absorbing classics and new releases at least three nights a week at the New Beverly Cinema. Silver screen celluloid became Patton's life schoolbook, informing his notions of acting, writing, comedy, and relationships. Set in the nascent days of the alternative comedy scene, Oswalt's memoir chronicles his journey from fledgling stand-up comedian to self-assured sitcom actor, with the colorful New Beverly collective supporting him all along the way. Ideally timed for awards season, when everyone's mind is on Hollywood, *Silver Screen Fiend* follows up on the terrific reception of Oswalt's New York Times best-selling debut, *Zombie Spaceship Wasteland*. Already a beloved fixture on the comedy stage, on television, and in film - not to mention his 1.1 million Twitter followers - Oswalt announces, with this second book, that he's also here to stay on the page.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is not unusual for a celebrity to produce a tell-all memoir about his or her embarrassing, crippling addictions, and in his new memoir actor-comedian Patton Oswalt has confessed his own. Not to drugs or alcohol. Oswalt's fine with those. No, his drug-of-choice was on 35mm film, projected on a 72-foot screen, night after night. In *Silver Screen Fiend: Learning About Life*

from an Addiction to Film, Oswald's second book, he details the four years he spent compulsively watching over 250 movies while writing for MADtv during the day and working as a standup comedian at night. Those were movies in a theater, mind you. He also watched movies on TV but those didn't count. Nor did any movie where he missed the first 5 minutes, because that's not how compulsion works. In the early 90s Oswald frequented the New Beverly theater in L.A. which featured an eclectic run of classic movies on film, as God intended. After a double-bill of Sunset Boulevard and Ace in the Hole one night he went home and looked them up in the five massive books on movies he owned, and he checked them off and added the date and the theater name and by that point it was all over. Once you start making checkmarks in a list your downward-spiralling obsession is pretty much guaranteed. Like a baseball player growing out his beard or a poker player with lucky socks, he knew, he knew that if he watched all the movies on his list and absorbed the lessons they had to teach he'd ultimately become a great director. As he wrote in the forward to the book, "This will be either the most interesting or the most boring addiction memoir you've ever read. Fortunately Oswald is funny and he nails his target -- himself -- with easy, self-effacing wit. Reading Silver Screen Fiend you really get the sense of how badly this habit screwed up his life, his job, his friendships and his love life. Racing around Los Angeles to different theaters and film festivals and indie showings, losing sleep to catch one more movie. At one point he describes making his then-girlfriend walk alone to her car at 2 a.m. because there was an all-night horror-thon at the Cinerama Dome and obviously she knew how important that was. (She did: she broke up with him.) And as he writes he also shares his encyclopedic knowledge of film. With every movie mentioned he adds a tidbit of trivia, some context as to its importance, and the barest hint of the sort of nonstop infodumps with which he used to obviously assault his friends because how can you enjoy a movie unless he first tells you every single thing to be known about it? Don't they want to talk about the movies of the newly rediscovered French crime master Jean-Pierre Melville, or the Dogme 95 movement, or the dozen or so hidden references in the latest Tarantino film?" he wrote. "Why are people so boring?" All of this was to service his desire to become a director, and that's why this book resonates with me. Not because I love film, but because I've read over 50 books on writing and my unfinished novels languish on my hard drive. For anyone who has ever spent much more time trying to learn how to do something than they've spent actually doing the thing, everything Oswald says will make perfect sense. When he's not talking about his movie-watching he also describes the culture-shock of bringing what he thought was a solid routine

to the harsh realities of the 90s L.A. comic scene, and how he and it developed over the next few years. You get great and funny stories about how he bombed, how he improved, how his friends did, and why Jerry Lewis hates him. The book careens around time and often lapses into a stream-of-consciousness riff, dropping you right into the frenetic mindset of a *Æsprocket fiend*. It's a faster read than you might think since the final sections are a list of imaginary movies that never were, part of his eulogy for New Beverly owner Sherman Torgan, who died in 2007, and the last 33 pages are the 250+ movies he watched during the course of the book. *Silver Screen Fiend* is half memoir, half cautionary tale and it's almost like hearing the current, self-deprecating Oswalt yell back over the years at his earlier, know-it-all persona.

Patton Oswalt is one of my top five all-time favorite stand-up comedians. That said, most of this book isn't funny, so don't expect this to be a few hours of belly laughs. However, all the things Patton is passionate about I am also passionate about. In that way, this was like listening to a monologue of someone I'd consider a friend because of our similar interests and because I respect his opinion and insight. Obviously, given the name of the book, he talks a lot about film, but also art "art in general and the kind hung on museum walls. And of course, comedy. I love reading about people who stick it out and ultimately make it in the arts. My favorite quote is from when he's describing a group who'd moved to LA to see if they could make it in TV and film: "We'd piss and moan ... pointing out how unfair and whimsical and chaotic the entertainment business was, how it rarely rewarded the truly talented. NONE OF US COULD SEE HOW IT NEVER REWARDED THE INERT." (Emphasis mine.) I wish he wrote more about what he did to make it on the King of Queens. Was it just an audition? Had he met Kevin James doing stand-up before that? I love the stories of failures and successes. I wished he'd included more details in that area, but this is a quick, fun read. I have some classic movies added to my must-watch (or must-watch again) list after reading this!

Patton Oswalt's second book is much like his first -- the writing is fine, there's just not enough of it to really carry the day here. The memoir-style portions of the book are interesting, particularly those that really tie into the idea of cinematic addiction and Oswalt's feeding of that addiction. Even the diversions -- such as a lengthy explanation of his use of Van Gogh's *The Night Cafe* as a euphemism for life-altering moments -- have insight or narrative heft sufficient to warrant the read. But it grinds to a sudden halt and falls into what reads like padding to keep the book from being

relegated to Kindle single territory. There's a throwaway chapter of Oswalt inventing fictional movies he would want to see followed by an "appendix" that occupies approximately a quarter of the book that consists solely of a list of movies he saw during the years. While it's interesting to learn that such an interesting comedic mind thought "hey, Double Team, I'm going to see that," it's a disappointing finish.

Patton Oswalt's book on his movie addiction--a good portion of it is also a memoir of his early years as a stand-up and movie actor--is fascinating, erudite, never boring, sometimes maybe a little pretentious, but decidedly worth your time. I'd recommend the audiobook, so that you get his vocal performance as well as the text. If you've ever shared his moviegoing jones, you'll recognize this behavior all too well. Particular highlights include his wonderful appreciation of Clint Howard's performance in "Apollo 13" & of Peter Cushing snapping "Pack! We're leaving!" in "Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed"--when he quoted the latter, I said it out loud with him, and then found myself applauding.

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