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Moscow TV Round-Up: The Edge, The Big Lebowski and More

By Mark H. Teeter

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"The Big Lebowski" (1998) **The Big Lebowski**

It's October at last, and Moscow TV offers just what autumn viewers need: good reasons to stay warm and dry on comfy sofas and timely reminders that the month will end with a fright: Halloween! This week tune in for some Russian history that should've happened but didn't, a blockbuster of a train ride, a scary American serial killer and more. Here's your what and when:

Monday gets the week off to a slam-bang start with ***"The Edge"*** (2010), Alexei Uchitel's colorful, high-volume feature about a Red Army engineer relegated to an edge-of-nowhere Siberian outpost after World War II. Engineer Ignat's job is to get the local rail line up and running across the tundra again. His labor force is a group of hapless "collaborators" who have been detained in Gulag Lite custody for the crime of living through the German occupation any way they could. The charismatic Vladimir Mashkov leads an outstanding cast

in a drama that helped de-standardize Russia's World War II-related cinema, presenting a trio of victorious Russians who are all flawed and one defeated German who is not. Get on board for this one, the most engrossing locomotive drama since Andrei Konchalovsky's "Runaway Train" rolled out in 1985.

The Edge Край. TV 1000 Russkoye Kino, Monday at 6:20 a.m. and Thursday at 4:10 p.m.

Does the Who's Who channel watch Kultura? Probably, and viewers are certainly the better for it. Last week Kultura re-aired Christian Delage's excellent documentary on the Nuremburg trials — a film which has made more than a few local viewers ask why trials weren't held after the collapse of the Soviet Union to expose and condemn the large-scale crimes committed here between 1917 and 1991. Late Tuesday night Who's Who offers one answer to this question with the Igor Kholodkov documentary ***"The Nuremburg That Wasn't"*** (2009). The documentary explores a period when "a Russian Nuremberg" could have taken place, initiated by Gulag veteran Olga Shatunovskaya and a group of ex-prisoners who had considerable influence on post-Stalin premier Nikita Khrushchev. Tune in for a saddening but enlightening bit of history you will not see recounted any time soon on the major state channels.

The Nuremburg That Wasn't Нюрнберг, которого не было. Who's Who, Wednesday at 1:30 a.m.

Wednesday is World Teachers' Day, which Kultura cheekily honors with Aleksandr Veledinsky's ***"The Geography Teacher Drank His Globe Away"*** (2013). Just kidding! While the Veledinsky feature is actually an interesting and provocative film, Kultura's real honoree here is Boris Frumin's ***"Diary of a School Principal"*** (1975), an earnest and well-realized account of a Soviet-era educator doing an impossible job very well. Principal Sveshnikov (Oleg Borisov) wants the faculty to respect students' individuality and stop teaching in monologues, an approach the school's head teacher (Iya Savvina) sees as "conniving liberalism." If the He says/She says conflict now seems a bit dated, consider the contrast of school management issues today: last month's student-teacher scandal at Moscow School 47 is almost certainly not the anomaly we'd like to pretend it is, and Veledinsky's dissolute "Geography Teacher" offers a good illustration why. At all events, almost everybody fondly remembers a favorite teacher from the old days, so tune in and see how the sober and "liberal" Principal Sveshnikov compares with yours.

Diary of a School Principal Двеник директора школы. Kultura, Wednesday at 11:15 a.m.

If you're one of those rare Muscovites who's just too happy and well-adjusted for your own good, Thursday offers a couple of features guaranteed to render you anxious, discouraged and paranoid like the rest of us. Start with ***"The Pyrammmid"*** (2011), a luridly fictionalized account of the MMM Ponzi scheme of Russia's Wild '90s. The movie is a self-serving cine-autobiography of bespectacled con artist Sergei Mavrodi, who craftily sets up his nationwide "investment" scam — but then refuses to sell it for $50 billion to Russia-loathing American financiers. Why does Sergei hold out? Because, as the patriotic huckster puts it, "I don't bargain with the fate of Russia." If that sounds funnier than it is depressing, consider how many Russians actually believe Barack Obama is the source of their problems.

Follow this mesmerizing downer with a genuinely good and scary thriller late Thursday night: ***"Zodiac"*** (2007), David Fincher's nail-biting account of the all-too-real serial killer who haunted the San Francisco area in the 1970s and was never caught. After that you'll definitely be ready for a late-evening stroll through Sokolniki Park.

The Pyramммid Пирамммида. Kinomiks, Thursday at 9:40 a.m.
Zodiac Зодиак. TV 1000, Thursday at 11:25 p.m.

Every once in a while Channel 1, the state's flagship purveyor of malevolent fraudulence, simply stuns everybody by airing something, well, really cool. Friday evening is such a blue-moon occasion, as the Coen Bros. sleeper hit "***The Big Lebowski***" (1998) comes on after midnight — a buoyant happy ending to everybody's TV week. Originally dismissed by both critics and public, this offbeat serio-comic tale of early '90s kidnappers, pornographers and, most importantly, ten-pin bowlers in greater Los Angeles steadily acquired such a following in the U.S. and abroad that the film lost its cult niche and became a bona fide classic. Jeff Bridges is incomparable as The Dude (Чувак) and he's ably assisted by one of the great casts of the decade. Relax, tune in, break out your favorite controlled substance and enjoy — or re-enjoy: The Dude & Co. only get better with age.

The Big Lebowski Большой Лебовски. Channel 1, Saturday at 1:40 a.m.

Mark H. Teeter is the editor of **Moscow TV Tonite** *on* Facebook

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