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REVIEW

# “Usually the Eyes Rest When We Look Far Into the Distance.”

## Danielius Minkevičius’ *Oblivion* (*Užmarštis*, 2026)

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In Danielius Minkevičius’ debut feature, after the death of her mother, a disconsolate young sex worker named Marija embarks on a journey in search of her estranged father. Set in the seedy underbelly of Vilnius, Marija is led down a crooked path that will question the very nature of her self and uncover some unwanted, harrowing home truths. Entangled by her own world of fantasy, she must decipher family secrets and her own self-deceit. *Oblivion* is a cautionary tale of how dirty one must be prepared to get when digging up the past.

The film leans heavily into the detective noir genre, albeit with a more daring and risqué execution that blurs the typically discrete character archetypes into one. On the one hand, Marija adopts the role of the chief investigator where she treats finding her father like a missing person’s case. Refusing to reveal her personal connection to the manhunt, she acts with an air of suspicion, questioning leads as if gathering evidence against the wishes of her secretive aunt. However, not unlike traditional iterations of the femme fatale, she also uses her sexuality to gather information about her father’s whereabouts. Clad in leather underwear and fishnet stockings, she lures a docile client into a private room at the strip club. The clueless patron – who has a penchant for pain – is both literally and metaphorically walked over as Marija interrogates him. Similarly, in exchange for sexual favors, she gains access to the local CCTV records of the neighborhood in order to find her father’s car and place of work. Marija, at this stage, appears calculated, assured, and dangerous, but as we will later discover, some things are best left forgotten.

Marija (played by Gabija Bargailaitė) traces her father Andrius (Dainius Gavenonis) back to an art class that he teaches. After a day of surveilling (or stalking) she joins his class and there is an immediate sense of intimacy between them. Their flirtatious interactions seem harmless at first, but as they continue to share each other’s company, it is clear there is a sexual tension

between the two. What started out as furtive glances develops into something deeper as they challenge each other's energy with lingering, unbroken eye contact. Their relationship is further romanticized by the noir aesthetic and hard-boiled dialogue. Sharing a cigarette in the pouring rain, their silhouettes are illuminated by the fiery amber of the ash glowing against the dark. The sultry live music is muffled in the quiet bar behind them as passing car headlights and flickering street lamps temporarily turn night into day. Marija asks Andrius the loaded question whether he gets lonely, to which he charmingly replies: "A person with a soul is never truly lonely." But how long will Marija pursue this pseudo-affair? Why is she trying to entice her biological father? Perhaps the charismatic Andrius knows more than he is willing to admit?

Back at her apartment, Marija is visited by her aunt (Aušra Pukelytė), who explains how abusive the alcoholic Andrius was to her sister, before he abandoned the family. His actions led her mother to slit both her wrists, the casts of which Marija will later wear when cleaning out her mother's house. Her aunt leaves a DVD of a childhood home video with Marija, in which her mother takes her to a motel, her father's "secret place." A distraught voice-over asks the innocent Marija if she remembers the bedroom, the picture on the wall, the bathroom. The young girl is then forced to explain what her father used to do during bathtime and reveal on her doll where her father used to violate her and the perverse things he said. Her aunt explains that Andrius was never charged with rape because the prosecutor did not have enough evidence against him and Marija had often fabricated lies. Ironically, Marija's journey of rediscovery has led her to remember the very thing she tried so hard to forget. Her compelling need to know results in losing the protection she made for herself, a fantasy world where she could escape such trauma by omitting it from her memory. This devastating reveal also undermines Marija's perspective as the protagonist calls into question her validity as a reliable narrator. The film's fragmentary conclusion is befittingly disconcerting precisely because of its deficiency in closure.

In this way, *Oblivion* can be read as a commentary on human nature's predisposition to fill in the gaps and the oftentimes perilous consequences such endeavors bring. The film also explores the mutability of memory and how our alleged truths have the potential to be more heavily influenced by our imagination than we think. By attempting to rebuild her relationship with her father and forge a stronger sense of her own identity, Marija proves how futile this gesture really is by unearthing just how quickly she can forget her past. Is it easier to believe a lie when the truth is too hard to face?