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## South by Southwest 2009: 10 Films (Plus) To Put On Your Schedule

by Erik Childress

Anyone who hasn't attended the South by Southwest Film Festival by now is truly missing out on some of the most fun you will have all year. Especially if you're flying in from the waning days of winter like I am from Chicago. The 70-degree plus weather of Austin, Texas is almost worth the trip alone. If you're a film fan though, boy are you in luck, even if it means spending most of the sunny days inside of a theater. But once you get inside one of the Alamo Drafthouses to order up some tasty goodness during a film premiere or experience the community feel of the Austin Convention Center or soak in the glory of an old school moviehouse like the Paramount Theatre, you might be asking if you're in Iowa. The average journalist at the festival trying to support some indie features and documentaries is probably seeing 4-5 movies a day. But what about the average ticket buyer or passholder? How many do you see? Well, that's really your business. Maybe I can help though. For I have a list of flicks to help narrow down that schedule for you. We would all like to see every one of the 100-plus films playing the fest this year, but time isn't on our side. At least you will have this as a starting point though. So come on out to SXSW and show that even you will see more festival features than Ben Lyons.

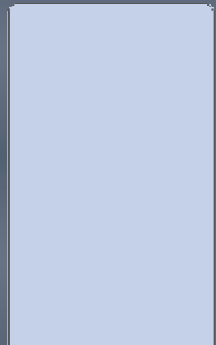


### Latest Features in the South by Southwest Film Festival 2009 Series

- [SXSW '09 Interview: "Strongman" Director Zachary Levy](#)
- [SXSW '09 Interview: "Best Worst Movie" Director & Actor Michael Paul Stephenson](#)
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South by Southwest  
2009: 10 Films  
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## Latest Reviews

[Died Young, Stayed Pretty](#) by David Cornelius

[Monsters from the Id](#) by Jay Seaver

[Last House on the Left, The \(2009\)](#) by David Cornelius

## "500 DAYS OF SUMMER"

Director: **Marc Webb**  
Starring: **Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Zoëy Deschanel, Geoffrey Arend, Clark Gregg, Matthew Gray Gubler**



It seems there's one film I see at a film festival every year that I immediately begin e-mailing people about and telling them to stamp in the date of its opening so a group outing can occur.

In the past it's been **Garden State** and **Knocked Up**, ta films that know a little something about the relationship game and ones I know I can get my married and single friends alike into with a minimal amount of fuss. After seeing it at Sundance this year I immediately began texting friends to set a weekend aside in July, because we're going to see **500 Days of Summer**.

We're told right from the get-go (*in easily one of the funniest pre-title scrawls you'll ever see*) that this is not a film destined for happy endings. It's the tale of a break-up that takes us back and forth between various points of time during the 500 days (give or take a few) that **Joseph Gordon-Levitt's** Tom spends with **Zoëy Deschanel's** Summer. He works at a greeting card company, delivering the catchy pre-packaged poetry bought for loved ones around the world and he instantly takes a shine to the new secretary on the block. She has a bit of reluctance jumping into another relationship and he's a bit nervous on making the first move. But once they commit to each other it's all sunshine and Hall-and-Oates tunes. Only there's a stark contrast between those glorious beginnings and a year later as they find themselves slowly growing apart, but not because of the standard plot contrivances we're used to in nine out of every ten romantic comedies to hit theaters.

What debuting director **Marc Webb** and screenwriters **Scott Neustadter & Michael H. Weber** (*ignore their Pink Panther 2 credit*) have done is given this generation probably about as close to their *Annie Hall* as they're going to get. They are genuinely interested in these character's feelings and the tough choices involved in giving into those emotions. No pre-rehearsed *Bachelor* confessions here. No, this is actual reality for any number of young couples with true love striking one and the doubt of being able to convince themselves hitting the other (*and us*) hard. Don't be scared, we're not talking *Shoot the Moon* or *Ordinary People* here. *500 Days of Summer* is a romantic *comedy* and occasionally a gut-busting one that has the potential to shoot a rib directly into your heart. It's honest and is identifiable to both sexes, despite a forewarned male perspective. Joseph Gordon-Levitt, after headlining little seen gems like *Brick* and *The Lookout*, is going to be receiving a lot of love after this comes out and deservingly so, and it's great to see Zoëy Deschanel return to the world of doomed relationships. The first film I ever saw at a film festival was David Gordon Green's *All the Real Girls* (Netflix it now) and after a bad year that saw her waste her charm in *Yes Man* and give one of the most stupefyingly head-scratching performances in M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening*, Zoëy has finally come full circle as the heartbreaker every guy would hope to hold a hand with. Most people will have to wait until July to see *500 Days of Summer*. If you're in Austin for SXSW, you'll just have to wait until the end of the festival. It's worth the stay.

## SCREENING TIMES

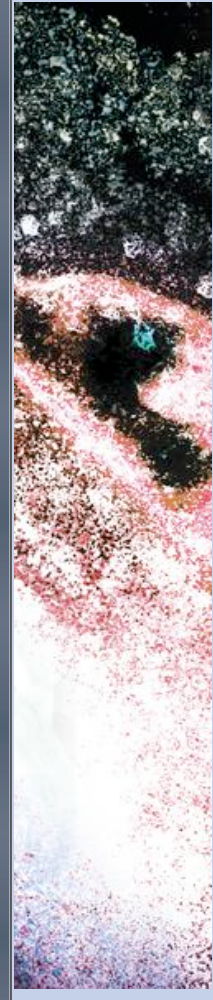
**March 21 – 7:30 PM – Paramount Theatre**



## OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT

If you want a little warm-up to the way the festival ends, you will have three opportunities to catch **Daryl Wein's** [Breaking Upwards](#). It's also a break-up story but one with a unique concept. Wein and **Zoe Lister-Jones** play a couple who have been together a bit longer than Joseph & Zoëy and at the tail-end of their relationship, they are going to take their break-up slow and experiment with actually planning it out. Think the reverse of Jerry and Elaine's "deal" to sleep

together and still be friends. It's a thought-provoking idea to see if pain can be micro-managed while supplementing it with other potential suitors and trying to maintain the positives in a limited capacity. Wein was here at SXSW last year with the AIDS documentary, *Sex Positive* (*which I also recommended*) and he makes a nice transition here to narrative as both a storyteller as well as an actor. Zoe Lister-Jones I expect to be seeing more and more of on the indie scene the next few years and *Breaking Upwards* takes a universal situation and spins some life into a story that is also a cross-check to society's insistence that it's moirés on being together remain the one and only path. You can catch it **Saturday, March 14 (9:30 PM)** at the Alamo Ritz as well as **Monday, March 16 (4:30 PM)** at the Alamo Lamar and again at the Ritz on **Friday, March 20 (11:30 AM)**. Visit the [website](#) and read our [interview](#) with Daryl Wein.





[Monsters from the Id](#) by David Cornelius

[Secret of the Grain, The](#) by Jay Seaver

[Last House on the Left, The \(2009\)](#) by brianorndorf

[Sunshine Cleaning](#) by brianorndorf

[Race to Witch Mountain](#) by brianorndorf

[Miss March](#) by brianorndorf

[Edge of Love, The](#) by brianorndorf

[Race to Witch Mountain](#) by Mel Valentin

[Crossing Over](#) by Peter Sobczynski

[Miss March](#) by David Cornelius

[Last House on the Left, The \(2009\)](#) by Peter Sobczynski

[Race to Witch Mountain](#) by Peter Sobczynski

[Last House on the Left, The \(2009\)](#) by Erik Childress

[RIP: A Remix Manifesto](#) by Jason Whyte

[Marathon Man](#) by Mel Valentin

[Phoebe In Wonderland](#) by Jay Seaver

[Rachel Getting Married](#) by Rob Gonsalves

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### **"ANVIL!: THE STORY OF ANVIL!"**

**Director:** Sacha Gervasi

**Starring:** Steven "Lips" Kudlow, Robb Reiner

For over a year since its premiere at the Sundance film festival in 2008, I've heard colleagues sing the praises of this music documentary. I missed it at the Chicago fest last year and just assumed it was one more mockumentary in a long line of the genre that has been blurring lines left and right on the festival circuit. And as I finally put it on and began to watch its goofy sincerity, I quickly realized that this was not a mockumentary at all. Anvil was a real band and this was a real story. All my metal cred – down the drain in a heartbeat. Of course, aside from the metal bands that made it into the mainstream, I couldn't distinguish a Ratt from a Cinderella. Which is why taking the journey with "Lips" and Robb, the frontmen of Anvil and "demi-gods of Canadian metal", was such a joyful experience.

Not that everything about their story is exactly joyful. The film does begin with a European fan organizing a little comeback tour for the group only to see it devolve into the kind of Spinal Tap-esque frustrations that are impossible not to laugh at. (*Honestly, how perfect is it that the drummer's name is Robb Reiner?*) But then the film turns into an honest confessional about lost dreams and the lives they now lead out of the spotlight while pushing fifty. And what you end up having is a dual comeback story as the guys attempt to record their 13th album and fight through the resistance of the record industry and their own tempered egos. While you're certain to find enough doom and gloom on the documentary scene (*and this festival alone*), Anvil is certainly one of the more flat-out enjoyable tales you're going to see, scripted or otherwise. Don't just take my word for it though, read [Collin Souter's review](#) here at the site.

### **SCREENING TIMES**

**Sunday, March 15 – 10:00 PM – Alamo Lamar**

**Wednesday, March 18 – 9:00 PM – Alamo Ritz**



### **OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT**

While it may not entirely be a film about the process of improv, it certainly is a film about the end result. **Alex Karpovsky** who was here with his pseudo-documentary *Woodpecker* a few years ago is back with an actual document of **David Pasquesi** and TJ Jagodowski's freeform improv show in [Trust Us, This Is All Made Up](#). Each of their shows is like a fresh, one-act play every night and this is your chance to see one of their hilarious, totally original creations. Not even Mamet or LaBute have done as much

for audiences as TJ and David have, so go check this one out as there is a promise to have a full-length bonus performance on the DVD. You can catch three showings of the film at the Alamo Ritz, including the world premiere see the world premiere on **Friday, March 13 (9:15 PM)**, **Tuesday, March 17 (6:30 PM)** and **Friday, March 20 (8:00 PM)**. Visit the [website](#) and read our [interview](#) with Alex Karpovsky.

## **"BEST WORST MOVIE"**

**Director: Michael Paul Stephenson**

**Starring: George Hardy, Claudio Fragasso**



Some people remember the first time they ever saw *Star Wars* or *Titanic*. They would also remember seeing *Troll 2* if they ever saw it. Anyone who may ever have come across it on cable would have been transfixed by its holy awfulness, a film which one fan in **Best Worst Movie** comments manage to screw up every conceivable aspect of the filmmaking process. Never mind that it's a troll movie without any trolls in it. (It was originally scripted as "Goblin" and later tied-in by title alone to the Noah Hathaway/Sonny Bono '80s non-classic.) This is a film involving turning people into plants, seduction by corn-on-the-cob and, of course, pissing on hospitality. Oh yes, you will remember. Of course not every bad movie finds the sort of cult audience that *Troll 2* has inspired. Screenings pop up across the country. People make homemade replicas of the bad goblin masks. They repeat their favorite lines, often with more skill than the poor actors who had to see their effort become a major joke. But the good thing is, most of them are now in on the joke, and this wholly entertaining documentary invites you to be in on it too.

Created by **Michael Paul Stephenson**, who played the terrorized little boy in the film, **Best Worst Movie** is equal parts celebration of the love of bad cinema and a sharp contrast between the lines of fame and infamy. **George Hardy** becomes the unofficial star of the film, a most pleasant small town dentist who had his 15 minutes as an actor and has now found second life riffing on himself and enjoying the company of people who admire him for all the wrong reasons. Hardy is his own star though, beloved by the community that knows him. Compare that to the makers behind *Troll 2*, director **Claudio Fragasso** and his screenwriter wife, who mount the kind of slack-jawed, irony-lacked defense of the film (and its *themes*, no less) that makes Uwe Boll sound like he has a clue. *Best Worst Movie* is a true success on so many facets. It's very funny, at times sad (*and not in an ironic way*) and whether you've seen *Troll 2* or not you will immediately feel the need to go out and buy it. Or if you're able to stay after its world premiere screening, SXSW will be mounting a special presentation of **Troll 2** for your viewing pleasure. Visit the [website](#)

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## **SCREENING TIMES**

**Saturday, March 14 – 9:30 PM – Alamo Lamar (followed by Troll 2 at 11:30 pm)**

**Monday, March 16 – 4:00 PM – Paramount**

**Friday, March 20 – 9:30 PM – Austin Convention Center**



## **OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT**

So after you've spent time in a room full of people passing judgment on a film for being the worst film of all time, perhaps you might want to spend time with some professional movie critics. The kind that you normally dismiss and spit on when they don't like *Watchmen*. Actually we're not all bad and you can see for yourself with **Gerald Peary's** well-rounded **For the Love of Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism**.

**Criticism**. It might sound like a dry topic, but Peary wisely just doesn't go with one talking head after another and mixes in movie clips and archived interviews to not merely mount some kind of defense for the profession on the ropes making its eventual transition to the web. Instead he charts the history (sans the hieroglyphic defacing from Mel Brooks' *History of the World Part I*) and especially the periods of criticism when the culture and the movies were changing. Peary even charts the quote whose phenomenon and the current rise of the web through the words of several well-respected critics. (*Yours truly was cut out, but obviously no hard feelings.*) Informative but never pompous or dull, get in there and check it out. You may change your opinions about critics. At least some of us. It screens on **Monday, March 16 (8:00 PM)** as well as on **Wednesday, March 18 (12:00 PM)** at the Alamo Ritz and then on **Saturday, March 21 (4:00 pm)** at the Alamo Lamar. Visit the [website](#) ([www.fortheloveofmovies.net](http://www.fortheloveofmovies.net)) and read our [interview](#) with Gerald Peary. You can also see a panel moderated by Peary on the subject entitled "**The Incredible Shrinking (Expanding?) Film Critic Profession**" featuring my astute colleagues **Scott Weinberg, Shawn Levy** and **Karina Longworth**.

## **"THE HORSEMAN"**

**Director: Steven Kastrissios**

**Starring: Peter Marshall, Caroline Marohasy, Brad McMurray, Jack Henry, Christopher Sommers, Steven Tandy, Bryan Proberts, Chris Betts**



Since the end of January this year, movie audiences have been treated to Liam Neeson and all the throat-punchin' glory that is *Taken*. If you haven't seen it yet, why would you see anything else out in theaters right now? Even for a PG-13 flick, it was a pretty brutal revenge flick. But if you want to see it done Australian-style, get your butt in the seat for **Steven Kastrissios' *The Horseman***. Most people haven't had the pleasure of seeing a great documentary touring fests called Not Quite Hollywood, which focused on the Aussie film industry and often on the extremes of violence that would make soft stomachs a little uneasy. *The Horseman* is very much within those parameters but does so through a story where the violence isn't just brutal, but absolutely justified.

**Peter Marshall** plays a father who discovers his murdered daughter was part of an underground amateur porn film. Drugged, taken advantage of and eventually left for dead, her dad is now on a road trip of vengeance. And God help them. Along the way he is joined by a teenage runaway, but this is not a film to be remembered for tearful parallels and remorse. In pure grindhouse fashion this is revenge served ice cold. One by one he tracks down another member responsible. Neither filmmaker, actor or distributor is spared from his anger. (*Thankfully they didn't make Troll 2.*) This is not a film about grey areas or the consequences of becoming like your enemy. No, these guys deserve what they get and if you want to question what it says about yourself for enjoying it, that's your business. But enjoy it I did very much and if your stomach is in a better place than your heart, I think you will too. Visit the [website](#).

### **SCREENING TIMES**

**Monday, March 16 – 11:30 PM – Alamo Lamar**

**Tuesday, March 17 – 11:30 PM – Alamo Lamar**



### **OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT**

Even though it's a film featuring a zombie and has violence right there in the title, **The Deagol Brothers' *Make-Out With Violence*** is a unique twist on the expectations you might have when you first hear what its about. It's the story of brothers during that summer between high school and the rest of their lives who discover that their beautiful and popular galpal hasn't just disappeared, but now reappeared as a somewhat active living corpse. Unaware of how to proceed, they take her back to the house they are sitting for and do their best to somehow coax her body away from death. If she responds a little better to fresh blood, then so be it.

Except this is not just another *Little Shop of Horrors* with the pair finding new victims for their pet object. The zombie of the film awakens more within them, inspiring both the courage to act now on a crush before its too late as well as the deep sorrow of doing everything you can for someone and still desperately trying to get them to notice you. Don't mistake this for an instance with the ineptly-executed and vile piece of trash called *Dead Girl*. This is a far more complex and thoughtful examination of the transition to

adulthood and how we deal with death rather than just another zombie flick. **Shellie Marie Shartzner** deserves special praise for her physical performance as the reanimated, but the filmmakers (*a collective*)



who only go under a brotherly moniker) are truly a group to watch and I eagerly look forward to their next project. *Make-Out with Violence* could be described as *Let the Right One In* meets *Lars and the Real Girl*, but that's just a label. Like *Let the Right One In* it brings a fresh twist to a genre that has nearly run its course, but is far more than just another genre piece. Check it out on **Saturday, March 14 (8:00 PM)** at the Alamo Ritz and then on **Tuesday, March 17 (9:00 PM)** and **Saturday, March 21 (9:30 PM)**, both at the Alamo Lamar. Visit the [website](#) and read our [interview](#) with the Deagol Bros.

### "HUMPDAY"

**Director:** Lynn Shelton  
**Starring:** Mark Duplass, Joshua Leonard, Alycia Delmore, Lynn Shelton, Trina Willard



One of my favorite films at this year's Sundance Film Festival was this combination of rediscovering male bonding and amateur porn. That's a hand-in-hand (or something-in-something else) combo that may have those with squeamish sensibilities headed for the comfort of *The Horseman*. Don't be so quick to dismiss though since first and foremost this is a comedy. And a great one. Secondly, director **Lynn Shelton** only goes so far to shock with the premise involving two platonic mates who psych themselves into filming a not-that-there's-anything-wrong-with-that act of love for a local porn festival. Even all you homo-lovin' commies out there should be able to appreciate the potential social disaster of two straight men going all the way in the name of art. **Mark Duplass** and **Joshua Leonard** couldn't be better as the friends who feel the need to prove they're not just giving into society's suburban rulebook. And one scene after another is a little master class in comic timing amidst the uncomfortable silences. You can read my full review [here](#).

### SCREENING TIMES

**Sunday, March 15 – 7:00 PM – Alamo Ritz**  
**Thursday, March 19 – 12:00 PM – Paramount**



### OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT

It takes a little warming up to **John Bryant's [The Overbrook Brothers](#)** which begins with a *Meet the Parents*-like scenario only one you expect to devolve into the end of *Godfather II* soon enough. That's how off-putting **Mark Reeb's** half of the title is when we first meet him. When **Nathan Harlan's** Jason comes home to introduce his fiancé, Reeb's constant-needling Todd drops a bombshell on him. Jason was adopted. As Jason seeks to learn the truth,

further info sends Todd trailing him on a road trip and bringing his winning personality with him. It's not easy to like this guy and by all means the movie makes no bones that we should, but the more we settle into Reeb's performance and the stupefyingly selfish, no-off-button behavior of his character the more we end up laughing at his impudent nature. You can test your own limits though. If you haven't started guffawing by the car-freeze-out battle of wills, it may be too late. That's where I knew I was enjoying the interplay and I'm glad I stuck around until the end, for if you think you might be a little squinty at what may be happening with genitalia in *Humpday*, believe me, you've literally seen nothing yet. *The Overbrook Brothers* has its world premiere on **Sunday, March 15 (4:15 PM)** at the Alamo Ritz, then over at the Alamo Lamar on Monday, **March 16 (9:30 PM)** and back over to the Paramount Theatre on **Saturday, March 21 (10:00 PM)**. Visit the [website](#).

## "LUCKEY"

Director: **Laura**

**Longsworth**

Starring: **Tom Luckey,**  
**Spencer Luckey**

**Tom Luckey** made his living as a sculptor, creating unusual works of art (even as part of the structure of his own home) that went against the norm of "the code." When he turned his attention to creating complex children's climbing structures, he had truly found his calling. Then he fell out of a window

and was left in the body of a quadriplegic. As Tom's family readjusts to his condition, one already estranged through a remarriage, he wants to finish what he started – a three-story tall mountain of a climber. You know, for kids. Tom's architect son, **Spencer**, once inseparable from his father now his own child on the way and sees an opportunity to possibly recapture the close relationship they once had. Stubbornness knows no estrangement though and their everyday proximity dedicated to conflicting ideas about the final product may actually draw them further apart.



The sculpture at the center of Tom's story becomes its own metaphor for the struggles of the Luckey family, building a foundation that looks unnatural but is climbable if you can just fit inside of it. **Laura Longsworth's** document of this quest is a multi-layered examination of family dynamics, partnership and egos. But, most importantly at the center of it all is a fascinating combination of creating art and the rebuilding of a father/son relationship that maintains the contentious impatience that can arise from maintaining Tom's condition. Spencer is going to get his share of hisses for the way he treats his father from time to time even when we understand the difficulties inherent in staying a few steps ahead of his dad. By the end of *Luckey* though, the tears were flowing. Even if everything wasn't all sunshines and rainbows, the looks on the faces of the children is only a warm-up to Tom & Spencer seeing at least one of their dreams fully realized. Visit the [website](#) and read our [interview](#) with Laura Longsworth.

## SCREENING TIMES

**Saturday, March 14 – 2:30 PM – Alamo Lamar**

**Monday, March 16 – 7:00 PM – Austin Convention Center**

**Saturday, March 21 – 12:30 PM – Alamo Ritz**



## OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT

For something a little lighter in the true story department, but even more tragic, I urge you to take 70 minutes out of your day to see [Drunken Angel: The Legend of Blaze Foley](#). SXSW has debuted a number of great music documentaries over the years include *Before the Music Dies* and last year's *Of All The Things* about songwriter Dennis Lambert. Like them, we are introduced to a musician we may not be familiar with by name but either know his songs or looking forward to knowing them real soon. So the story goes with any forgotten

musician, most of their problems were brought on by themselves and found the verge of stardom alluding them due to their own rotten habits. Blaze Foley was no different, so why should we care about another hard-to-like musician (a la *The Doors*, *Control*, *Notorious*)? Because this one isn't just so entertaining the time flies, but it also presents a nice twist on the format by documenting it in various styles. It's "five parts" opens with a trailer, becomes its own "Behind the Music" style show and is bridged by some mocked-up commercials for Blaze's unreleased music that are as funny as anything you will see at SXSW this year. You should have no problems fitting this one into your schedule and even if you're cutting it close in-between screenings, be sure not to leave once the credits start rolling. Remember, I said 70 minutes. Not 60. Your one chance to see *Drunken Angel: The Legend of Blaze Foley* will be on **Wednesday, March 18 (7:00 PM)** at the Austin Convention Center. Visit the [website](#)

## "MINE"

**Director: Geralyn Pezanoski**

Documentaries on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina are becoming as commonplace as ones about the Holocaust and the current Iraq War. Spike Lee's four hour *When the Levees Broke* is about as complete as you get when it comes to the topic and every film in its wake seems lacking in comparison. None of us should dismiss any of the personal stories when it came to that tragedy, even if the story is generally the same. But what about those that had no voice, except maybe that of a bark or a meow? **Geralyn Pezanoski's Mine** gives their story a chance to be heard.



Imagine you're told evacuation is happening in your town but you have to leave your beloved pet behind. No room in the Superdome apparently. That's what occurred in the city of New Orleans as the rains were coming. Once the damage had been done and Dubya's cronies finally moved in, the search began for the members of the families that had been, in some cases, left for dead. If it wasn't for the recovery efforts of pet organizations who came to assist, many of them would be. But the final chapter had yet to be penned for the animals and their owners, thrilled to hear their doggies survived through websites such as PetFinder and specially setup shelters, but dismayed to discover they were adopted by someone else. Their tales of trying to get them back, at times, have a touch of Solomon to it. Be happy they're safe and being loved, some would say. But the ill-prepared prevention combined with a class prejudice sought to create a further struggle for a number of survivors and their tales are heartbreaking even amidst the reassurance that the spirit of aiding the helpless still exists in this country. Animal lovers will be equally moved and have a lot to confer about afterwards. Hopefully beginning with where their local pound can be found. Visit the [website](#) and read our [interview](#).

## **SCREENING TIMES**

**Monday, March 16 – 2:00 PM – Austin Convention Center**

**Tuesday, March 17 – 4:00 PM – Alamo Lamar**

**Saturday, March 21 – 4:30 PM – Austin Convention Center**



## **OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT**

I wasn't all that enthusiastic about the documentary, *The Yes Men*. Hardly because I disagreed with the exploits of its satirical activists. I just felt the filmmaking (*despite the presence of American Movie's Chris Smith*) had an amateurish sensibility that strained to do justice to its subjects' motivations or keep us interested whenever we weren't directly connecting to their pranks. Six years later the follow-up, [The Yes Men Fix the World](#) (directed by **Andy Bichlbaum & Mike**

**Bonnano**, *The Yes Men* themselves), is more polished, much funnier and certainly most timely. What couldn't these guys do with five more years of the Bush administration under their belts? They have their own spin on the Katrina disaster, but also take on those responsible for the little known environmental tragedy in Bhopal, India. Their stunts are equally audacious but a little more streamlined than the giant golden penis cam they once tried to sell corporate managers on. Like any good prankster though, the more they operate, the greater the chance people will be in on the joke quicker. A huge reason why this second film works much better are the myriad of other social elements that are woven into the proceedings. How can these guys continue duping the media when information moves faster than ever? While its funny to see bigwigs scramble to clean up a fake mess for a change, what of the forgotten people who believe they are benefiting from the Yes Men's call for bogus action? Does false hope sink them further or does it depend on who is delivering it? The sequel is a great improvement over 2003's first chapter and arrives right on time in the climate of change. You can see [The Yes Men Fix the World](#) on **Monday, March 16 (1:30 PM)** at the Paramount Theater, then over at the Austin Convention Center on **Wednesday, March 18 (9:30 PM)** and at the Alamo Ritz on **Thursday, March 19 (9:00 PM)**. Visit their [website](#).



## "MOON"

**Director:** Duncan Jones  
**Starring:** Sam Rockwell,  
Kevin Spacey

Science fiction is one of those genres that seems to have no middle ground when created on film. Either you have a large enough budget to produce endless special effects or less than two pennies to rub up against a grand idea. Normally you have too much of one and not enough of the other. Sci-Fi has become a lost art over the years and so few true films have been branded under the moniker that we've become comfortable labeling comic book adaptations and anything just a wee bit out of the ordinary in the same mold famously repped by classics like *2001* and *Metropolis*. **Duncan Jones** though has staked a claim to that middle ground though. Basically a one-man show for **Sam Rockwell**, Jones takes what could have been just another failed attempt to extend a *Twilight Zone* episode and creates a simple, elegant and at times encapsulating work of science fiction.

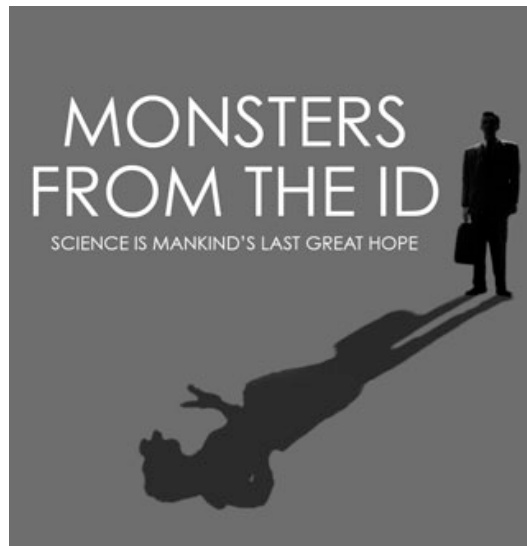


Sam Bell (**Rockwell**) is the lone astronaut contracted to do a three-year stretch on Earth's moon to harvest solar energy for a planet that has squandered most of its resources. It's a daily routine of checking gauges, drill monitoring and exercise. (We all saw what happened to the lie-abouts in *WALL-E*.) Assisting Sam in his duties is the reliable piece of programmed intelligence known as Gerty (voiced by **Kevin Spacey**) and the only human contact he has is from the videotapes he receives from his wife and child back home. It's enough to make a cubicle job seem like a tightrope walker. Sam does see a little action one day out on the surface though when he gets into a wreck and winds up severely injured. Did he really see what he thought he saw or is his mind on its last cells just as he's on the verge of finishing his shift and returning to Earth?

Again, simple and elegant but far from being content to just rely on the same old tricks to mess with an audience. The details of what is actually occurring on screen from this moment on shouldn't be spoiled, but are never far away from the questions that come with the territory of an isolated state of mind. Tom Hanks may have had Wilson, Bruce Dern had his plants and Sam certainly has Gerty, but neither can replace the element of human connection that seems further and further away even when it appears so close. *Moon* asks you to pay close attention to those details though and doesn't stoop to spelling out or retracing every dot that's connected by the end. Whether it be the ironic use of the theme from *Doc Hollywood* (of all films) or the social argument implied by the film's final line of dialogue, *Moon* is more than just another spooky ghost story in futuristic clothing. It's a reminder that science fiction can still be about ideas as well as imagination. And you've got precisely one chance to catch it on South by Southwest before it gets a limited release in theaters beginning June 12.

### SCREENING TIMES

**Saturday, March 14 – 7:30 PM – Paramount**



### OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT

When Joe Dante made his wonderful tribute to 1950s science-fiction, *Matinee*, he helped poke a little fun at the science elements that were often overexplained for the dummies in the audience. Or, at least, the little kids whose ears were the only thing not covered while tales of mutant monsters and world destruction were playing out on screen. Well, David Gargani is taking the science back in a fun new documentary called **Monsters From The Id** (a reference to one of the greatest of all sci-fi films, *Forbidden Planet*.) What he shows is that some of those kids who lived through the Atomic Age of cinema actually had their eyes open and became inspired to bridge the gap between our technology and that of cinema's wild imagination. One of them, **Homer Hickam**, even went on to have a film made about him (*October Sky*). Film lovers will get a kick out of the connections between

the films that Gargani interweaves throughout and the scientists on display discussing the probable and the impossible involved. If *Them* and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* were enough to inspire a few from one generation, maybe this can help inspire the current. Then we won't have to wait to buy our flying hybrid vehicles when we're 90. Unlike *Moon*, you will have three chances to catch Monsters from the Id

starting on **Friday, March 13 (9:45 PM)** at the Alamo Lamar. Then again at the Austin Convention Center on **Wednesday, March 18 (11:30 AM)** and back at the Alamo Lamar on **Saturday, March 21 (2:00 PM)**. Visit the [website](#) and read our [interview](#) with David Gargani.

### **"PULLING JOHN"**

**Director: Vassiliki**

**Khonsari & Sevan**

**Matossian**

**Starring: John Brzenk,**

**Travis Bagent, Alexy**

**Voevoda**



We've had some pretty darn entertaining documentaries over the years stemming from the unlikeliest of subject matter. Think of the list. Spelling bees, Scrabble, Crossword Puzzles, Donkey Kong, hell we had one

at CineVegas last year about Beer Pong. South by Southwest has certainly been no exception to debuting some of my favorite docs of this ilk over the years. *A League of Extraordinary Gentleman* touched upon a sport close to my Thursday Night heart, bowling. There was also the premiere of the stuntwoman documentary, *Double Dare*, featuring a little lady named Zoe Bell who went from doubling for Xena to being thrown around on the hood of a car by Kurt Russell in Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof*. 2009 finds another film joining these ranks and this time it's all about the arm wrestling.

The last time we saw such a seemingly uncinematic sport given the full big screen treatment, it was Sylvester Stallone putting it front and center in 1987's *Over The Top*. Never before and probably never again will you hear that film discussed with such a loving remembrance. But it brought a lot of attention to the world of arm wrestling and it even featured the most respected champion the sport had ever seen. (No, not Bob "Bull" Hurley.) That would be **John Brzenk**, a guy who has broken so many records and stayed on top for so long that it's impossible for up and comers not to have some modicum of respect for the guy not far from my neck of the woods in Elgin, IL. He is also equally the white whale and the proverbial father that must be cut down for West Virginia's **Travis Bagent** and Russia's **Alexy Voevoda** to be number one.

Films like these are determined to have their heroes and villains or just enough of a slant to provide audiences with their rooting interest. The truth of the matter though is that you may find yourself torn on whom to ultimately turn against. It's easy to hiss at Travis since he possesses the kind of self-aggrandizing arrogance that we tend to hate in our athletes. But that's mostly with the adrenaline running in the heat of competition. Away from the moment he's just another guy bred to be a winner and trying to capture his American dream. So maybe you'll go with him over the big Russian in true Stallone fashion. Only you want to talk about humble? Brzenk is an honest-to-God hero to Alexy Voevoda and you get the sense that even *HE* is torn on his feelings towards a possible match with his idol. Finally we have Brzenk himself, pushing 40 now and wondering how far he can stretch his legend – and if he's even still interested in doing just that. If only all our sports champions were as down to earth as he. *Pulling John* presents a sport that is cinematically the equivalent of a Thai meal aftermath. And save for Jeff Goldblum ripping a bone through an arm, you may not think there is enough to sustain even a 70-minute film such as this. Only you would be wrong. Not only are the characters interesting and their feats of strength awe-striking, but the matches themselves become of great interest because of them. You may hear audiences at screenings slowly ratchet up the decibel meter in amazement during one of Brzenk's climactic battles. So make all the Kenny Loggins jokes you want, but you will kick yourself if you don't meet the film all the way. Or just kick me for making that pun.

### **SCREENING TIMES**

**Saturday, March 14 – 3:00 PM – Austin Convention Center**

**Tuesday, March 17 – 5:00 PM – Alamo Ritz**

**Friday, March 20 – 10:00 PM – Alamo Lamar**



#### **OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT**

Also in the spirit of competition, the festival doesn't just offer arm wrestling but rodeo. In *Prison. With WOMEN!* **Bradley Beesley's Sweethearts of the Prison Rodeo** takes us to Oklahoma, home of the country's largest group of female inmates. Once a year the penitentiary puts on a rodeo show on the grounds and invites its prisoners to compete. Thankfully this isn't *Death Race* or *The Running Man*, nor are there any promises of freedom coming from victory. But its no less dangerous and the rodeo footage that makes up the final half hour will have you covering various body parts as you watch some of these men and women mess with the bulls and nearly take the horns. As the title indicates though, the stars of the film are mostly the female inmates, many of whom have been locked up for non-violent drug offenses or simply being a part of the

wrong relationship and we experience their struggles with the parole boards, the harsh technicalities some are punished for and even a tearful reunion or two with their families. And remember guys, just because it's a women's prison movie and many of them are real lookers, they are probably tougher than any of you not involved in arm wrestling. Sweethearts of the Prison Rodeo has its world premiere on **Saturday, March 14 (11:00 AM)** at the Paramount Theatre. It screens again on **Tuesday, March 17 (1:30 PM)** at the Alamo Ritz as well as on **Friday, March 20 (4:30 PM)** at the Austin Convention Center.

#### **"THE WAY WE GET BY"**

**Director:** Aron Gaudet  
**Starring:** Bill Knight, Joan Gaudet, Jerry Mundy

As I alluded to earlier, someday video stores and online rental sites may have their own sections dedicated to films about the current conflict in Iraq. Hopefully the veterans of this current quagmire will be able to find happier memories and things to look forward to on their DVD shelves rather than just another reminder of where they've been. Unless that movie happens to be **Aron Gaudet's The Way We Get By** as its just the kind of reminder our men and women over there could use.



It's the story of a group of senior citizens from Bangor, Maine who spend many mornings and evenings going to the airport to shake the hands of the departing and returning soldiers from Iraq. Bangor's airway serves as our main passageway between the U.S. and Middle East and these well-wishers keep track of every one of them and do whatever they can to provide a little bit of homespun hope on their long journey. **Bill Knight, Joan Gaudet** and **Jerry Mundy** are just three of the subjects that should be given immediate sainthood by the time the credits roll; seniors who are far from their own problems involving foreclosure, health and, in the case of Miss Gaudet, a granddaughter facing her own trip into this mess.

Can it possibly be selfish to provide a little bit of good cheer to those who mostly remain nameless to anyone outside their circle of friends and family unless they return with an American flag draped over them? Every selfless act is going to make someone feel good, but where *The Way We Get By* becomes more than just a meet-and-greet for self-gratification is within the contrast of its subjects against the finality we hope is coming later rather than sooner. Just as our service folk unfortunately become, the elderly are another group of people that society and even our government would just as easily forget about if they weren't reminded of their struggles. Bill Knight is not just another lonely greeter but also a veteran of war himself. Joan faces the unnerving fear of her granddaughter not having a chance to be welcomed back. Jerry Mundy has already seen his son die tragically and may be facing death again soon. These remarkable individuals contribute to a story that is not just indescribably moving but is a timeless metaphor for our country. I absolutely loved this film and I'm hoping that when you're done wiping away the tears and the Q&A has finished, each of you will have a chance to see some of these people on the way out and shake their hands. Visit the [website](#) and read our [interview](#) with Aron Gaudet.

#### **SCREENING TIMES**

**Sunday, March 15 – 11:30 AM – Austin Convention Center**



**Monday, March 16 – 5:00 PM – Alamo Lamar**  
**Thursday, March 19 – 7:00 PM – Austin Convention Center**



**OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT**

Over the years we've seen some actors get that one big role late in their careers. Henry Fonda in *On Golden Pond*, Paul Newman in *Nobody's Fool*, Richard Farnsworth in *The Straight Story*, Peter O'Toole in *Venus* and James Cromwell in *Babe*, Oscar nominees one and all. And some may consider **Hal Holbrook's** nominated turn in Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* to be that role for him. Certainly the best thing in that film, but director Scott Teems has gone a step further and done for Holbrook what Thomas McCarthy did for Richard Jenkins last

year in *The Visitor* – given one of our great character actors a chance to shine in a lead role. And shine Holbrook does in ***That Evening Sun***, as an aging farmer who leaves the nursing home his son (*The Shield's* **Walton Goggins**) has sent him to and returns to his Tennessee farm. Once there he now finds it populated, leased by his son, to a man (**Ray McKinnon**) he once refused to rent his guest house to. Never one to back off, Holbrook's Abner Meecham moves into that guest house and decides to wait until the farm is rightly returned, a task that is going to involve annoyances, threats and potentially even a little violence. It's a little *House of Sand and Fog* and a little *Gran Torino*, but towering above is Holbrook's terrific work as Abner, carrying the film with a mix of stubbornness, guardianship and regret. Not often do you get to see a performance that an actor has earned after decades in the business and often less that you see them live up to it. Some studio would be mad not to want to pick this up just in the hopes of mounting another awards campaign for Mr. Holbrook. Until it ends up in theaters though you will have three chances to catch it at SXSW. ***That Evening Sun*** has its world premiere on **Monday, March 16 (7:00 PM)** at the Alamo Ritz, then over to the Alamo Lamar on **Tuesday, March 17 (4:00 PM)** and back to the Ritz on **Saturday, March 21 (7:30 PM)**. Visit the [website](#).

Normally the article would end here. You have my ten choices plus a number of very worthy titles that would be more than enough for any festival passholder to fill their schedule with. Except I would be ashamed of myself if I didn't find room to give you two more choices. Hey, if American Idol can turn their Top 12 into a Top 13 a few minutes past everyone's allotted Tivo times I can certainly turn my Top 10 up to 11.

**"SEVERE CLEAR"**

**Director:** Kristian Fraga  
**Starring:** Mike Scotti

Films about the Iraq war and the lack of interest at the box office has been well-documented. Aside from Paul Haggis' excellent, but overlooked *In the Valley of Elah*, films like *Grace Is Gone*, *Stop-Loss*, *Home of the Brave* and *The Lucky Ones* have been poorly executed and flat-out sloppy exercises that have done no justice to the soldiers who have made it back or the families waiting for their return. You may be tired of hearing about the topic just in the few times I've mentioned it in this very article. I have to admit, even I have been inundated with enough narrative and documentary features in the past five years that I couldn't bring myself to watch HBO's acclaimed *Generation Kill* miniseries. But was I glad that I wasn't tired enough to sit through **Kristian Fraga's** ***Severe Clear***, which we may look back as one of the best.



Based partially on a memoir but mostly collected from first-hand footage, *Severe Clear* is the story of First Lieutenant **Michael T. Scotti** and his tour with Charlie Company 1st Marines during the first wave of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Culled from God knows how many hours of video by Scotti, this is the real deal that makes Brian DePalma's *Redacted* look amateurish by comparison. Beginning with the gung-ho days when Scotti's battalion were excited to exact the revenge no one openly discussed for 9/11, *Severe Clear* instantly reminds us of Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* and how our soldiers had to keep things light in the face of a situation they haven't yet begun to grasp. Coupled with readings from his journal and an almost satiric commentary from BBC news reports, the arc of *Severe Clear* is as striking as any war narrative you can imagine. Neither Republican nor Democrat in nature, it would be interesting to hear a member of the former party defend Donald Rumsfeld's response to how things were playing out at the

time.

*Apocalypse Now* is actually invoked by one of the soldiers during one of the many firefights they endure during the film, but it was already well on my mind as another portrait of one man's journey to decipher where his mission was headed. Scotti's footage never shies away from the thick of battle and the harsh aftermath, some of which will be hard even for fans of *The Horseman* to endure. It's so encapsulating that we, at times, wonder if his commanding officers ever told him to put the camera and pick up his weapon. Fraga's editing is a masterstroke of information and he knows just when to let the visceral rush and terror of the video speak for itself. *Severe Clear* is more than just another collection of moments and memories; presenting just how quickly war can change a person. We understand Scotti's disposition getting off the plane and the retribution we were seeking. There was no big switch to change his attitude towards the mission overnight. He wasn't delivered the smoking gun about the failure to discover WMD's that turned America's pulse. His company actually discovered a few and he was still way ahead of the curve than what was being reported to us back safe at home. The version I saw was still in rough cut form, a few shots missing here and there layering it with its own redacted irony, but it was more than complete enough to recommend it as strongly as I possibly can. And when you see the full version at SXSW, I suspect you will spreading the word as well. Visit the [website](#)

### **SCREENING TIMES**

**Monday, March 16 – 4:30 PM – Austin Convention Center**

**Tuesday, March 17 – 1:30 PM – Alamo Lamar**

**Friday, March 20 – 2:00 PM – Austin Convention Center**



### **OTHER SCREENINGS TO CHECK OUT**

Now that you've seen the real deal, maybe **Kathryn Bigelow's [The Hurt Locker](#)** will seem like a cheap knockoff, reducing the conflict to a series of adrenaline-fueled set pieces that will have you chewing your nails down to your knuckles. Sold yet? Bigelow does not make message movies, or at least she shouldn't if *The Weight of Water* was any indication. No, she makes action movies. One of her films boasted the tagline "100% Pure Adrenaline" for Pete's sake. So it's fitting that the film she would make about Iraq would be about the fix for adrenaline – even if it comes in the form of bomb disposal.

**Jeremy Renner**, a terrific actor who got noticed playing Jeffrey Dahmer and then went on to play assorted scumbags in *North Country* and the big-screen version of *S.W.A.T.*, has been easing over to the other side recently. First in *28 Weeks Later* and now as Bigelow's expert bomb defuser who may enjoy his job a little too much. Through the course of no less than six expertly-staged sequences, Bigelow rarely rests us as we watch Renner's squad (accompanied by **Anthony Mackie** and **Brian Geraghty** as the

more cautious members) get into one scrape after another where the potential *BOOM* is never as simple as red wire/blue wire. I saw *The Hurt Locker* back at the Toronto Film Festival last September and am eagerly looking forward to seeing it again. True, it's little more than an excuse to mount some exceptional action, but where Peter Berg's *The Kingdom* made you wait for its kick-ass ending, Bigelow gives it to us every 15 minutes proving that when in her element, she's one of the best pure action directors in the business. [The Hurt Locker](#) is getting a limited release in theaters this June, but if you're in Austin you will get your chance on **Tuesday, March 17 (6:30 PM)** at the Paramount Theatre.

And that will do it for now. Surely with a number of films already under my belt I will have the opportunity to see some premieres and the presentations by filmmakers who didn't send advance copies. Who knows? They may have warranted a mention here. Maybe next time.

I'm personally looking forward to more comic goodness from **Paul Rudd**, **Jason Segal**, **Seth Rogen** and **Anna Faris** (all of whom will be in attendance for panel discussions) in [I Love You, Man](#) and [Observe and Report](#), **Tony Jaa** punching more throats in [Ong Bak 2](#), **Broken Lizard's** latest collaboration, [The Slammin' Salmon](#) and especially a live presentation by **Joe Dante** of [TrailersFromHell.com](#) and **Sam Raimi** showing a work-in-progress of his summer offering, [Drag Me To Hell](#).

Until then, you South by Southwest attendees have a head start on ticket buying. I hope to have steered you in the right direction. Feel free to find me at the festival to tell me if I helped spend your money well and I'll be happy to pass those sentiments along to the filmmakers, all of whom I hope to get a chance to meet in-between screenings and all the great food and parties that the festival has to offer.



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