

## Reviews, reviews and more reviews

(part 1): Our critics rate TIFF flicks from The Dog Problem to Fido, from Shortbus to I Don't Want to Sleep Alone, from Babel to Volver

**J. Kelly Nestruck, Chris Knight, Vanessa Farquharson**

National Post

*Saturday, September 09, 2006*

2:37

Australia, directed by Murali K. Thalluri

STARRING Teresa Palmer, Frank Sweet, Sam Harris, Charles Baird

- A suicide mystery: A day in the life of six troubled teenagers that will end in a suicide. Like a condensed season of Degrassi, each teen is dealing with an "issue" that gets exacerbated during the course of the day: a drug problem, homosexuality, an eating disorder, incest, and, uh, having two urethras. While it all gets a little overwrought, there's no doubt that Thalluri -- who wrote, directed and produced 2:37 at age 20 -- is a talented, tenacious up-and-comer. And you can't denigrate his motivation: Dedicated to a friend of his who committed suicide, 2:37's message is simply to pay attention to those around you. The sound design by Leslie Shatz is masterful. Rating two 1/2 J. Kelly Nestruck



CREDIT: Kagan McLeod, National Post  
Spike Lee & Michael Moore.



CREDIT: Kagan McLeod, National Post  
Borat Sagdiyev.

THE PITCH Degr-Aussie High

SCREENINGS Sept. 8, 2:30 p.m.,  
Paramount 1; Sept. 10, 8:00 p.m.,  
Royal Ontario Museum

- - -

ACTS OF IMAGINATION

Canada, directed by Carolyn Combs

STARRING Stephanie Hayes, Billy Marchenski

- Ukrainian brother and sister Katya and Jaroslaw are recent immigrants to

Canada, where the maple trees run rich with ... ennui. Katya spends her days playing Ophelia by a polluted river, while Jaroslaw works in a warehouse -- until his place of work is turned into condos. (He remarks that he lost his job "because the times are good." More awkward sociopolitical commentary ensues.) Katya takes a Pakistani socialist lover, who she acts all crazy around; Jaroslaw treats his Korean single-mother girlfriend bizarrely. Confusing and not a little patronizing to new Canadians -- but Marchenski has charisma. Rating one 1/2 J.K.N.

THE PITCH A Clockwork Orange Revolution

SCREENINGS Sept. 13, 6:15 p.m., Cumberland 1; Sept. 15, 3:15 p.m., Varsity 3

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ALL THE KING'S MEN

United States, directed by Steve Zaillian

STARRING Sean Penn, Jude Law, Kate Winslet

- Law frames the story as a journalist who winds up working for populist, idealistic Louisiana governor Willie Stark (Penn), who eventually admits he makes up his idealism as he goes along. (He tells his adoring public that yes, he employs crooks, but his crooks are less crooked than the other guys'.) Stark, a self-identified hick, has nothing to lose in his climb to power, but Law's journalist has friends and relations in high places, and they're no friend of the little man. Rating three 1/2 Chris Knight

THE PITCH Huey P. Long, by any other name.

SCREENINGS Sept. 10, 9:30 p.m., Roy Thomson Hall; Sept. 11. 9:30 a.m., Ryerson

- - -

AS THE SHADOW

Italy, directed by Marina Spada

STARRING Anita Kravos, Karolina Dafne Porcari, Paolo Pierobon

- You meet a nice Russian professor and are hitting it off when bam: "Can my cousin crash with you for a few days?" The good news: She's a hot blonde. The bad news: You're a straight woman who just wants her to leave so you can start your vacation in Greece. The worse news: She disappears, leaving her bags, money and passport in your living room. How can you go to Santorini now? Kravos plays the put-upon host, living in one of those cheap tenements (in Milan, but still) where the trains rattle past the window at all hours. Spada has an eye for Europe's deserted August streets and empty cityscapes that seem perfectly capable of swallowing up one visiting Ukrainian. Beautiful but slow. Rating two C.K.

THE PITCH Come lose yourself in Milan this summer!

SCREENINGS Sept. 13, 8:30 p.m., Cumberland 2; Sept. 15, noon, Cumberland 2

- - -

## BABEL

United States, directed by Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu

STARRING Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett, Gael Garcia Bernal

- A fine examination of global culture in which every shot has the potential to be heard 'round the world. Pitt and Blanchett are utterly believable as Susan and Richard, a well-off American couple on a tour through dusty Morocco when a stray bullet pierces the bus -- and Blanchett. The kids who did it are cornered by a Moroccan cop who's been watching too much C.S.I. Meanwhile, Susan and Richard's kids are in the care of a Mexican nanny with a hotheaded relative (Bernal). Another thread follows a deaf Japanese girl and slowly but surely proves a vital connection. Misunderstandings abound, and the creaky machinery of global communication and diplomacy works just well enough for characters to expect better. Rating three 1/2 C.K.

THE PITCH You, Me and Everyone We Don't Know

SCREENINGS Sept. 9, 9:30 p.m., Roy Thomson Hall; Sept. 10, 11:30 a.m., Visa Screening Room

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## BLINDSIGHT

United Kingdom, directed by Lucy Walker

STARRING Sabriye Tenberken, Erik Weihenmayer

- Weihenmayer was the first blind man to climb Mount Everest. Tenberken established the first school for the blind in Lhasa, Tibet. Together, they unite to lead six blind teenagers up the Lhakpa Ri peak on the North side of Everest. As the ascent becomes more treacherous, questions emerge as to what exactly they are trying to prove. And what is height to kids who can't see, anyway? While the documentary suffers from a slight lack of focus, the sidetracks into the stories of the individual kids -- particular that of Tashi, a street kid who was sold and abused before ending up at the school -- are the most inspiring and fascinating parts of this doc. Rating three J.K.N.

THE PITCH Nova meets Born into Brothels meets Scent of a Woman

SCREENINGS Sept. 11, 3:15 p.m., Varsity 8; Sept. 13, 12:30 p.m., Cumberland 2; Sept. 14, 5:30 p.m., Varsity 3

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## CASHBACK

United Kingdom, directed by Sean Ellis

STARRING Sean Biggerstaff, Emilia Fox, Shaun Evans, Michelle Ryan

- This unabashedly heartfelt tale of young love originally began as an 18-minute short film, which got nominated for an Oscar. The director has expanded it to a full-length feature -- a risky endeavour that might have led to a lot of yawns, but it works, thanks to a compelling cast, sharp wit and a slight touch of fantasy. Ben is an adorable art student who dumps his girlfriend, then immediately regrets it, develops insomnia and combats this

by taking up the late-night shift at the local Sainsbury's. He's prone to daydreaming -- in which he's able to stop time -- and we go along with him as he explores the fourth dimension with poetic imagination. Some may find all the close-ups and "Do you trust me?" stuff too schmaltzy but it sure as heck beats Serendipity. Rating three Vanessa Farquharson

THE PITCH Proof that the date movie can survive without John Cusack

SCREENINGS Sept 10, 8:45 p.m., Varsity 1, 6; Sept 12, 2 p.m., Paramount 4; Sept 16, 12:45 p.m., Varsity 5

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CHEECH

Canada, directed by Patrice Sauve

STARRING Patrice Robitaille, Anick Lemay

- Robitaille plays a small-time Montreal pimp with an LED digital watch and a collection of self-help tapes he listens to -- "picture yourself on the beach ... ride with the whale" -- while driving, even during a high-speed chase in a perpetual snowstorm. His unseen arch-enemy is Cheech, whose brothel has a frequent-flyer program and a two-page ad in the yellow pages. The women in this film noir (since it's already in French, maybe it should be called a dark movie?) range from existential to non-existent, the men are mostly bumblers (Francois Letourneau is a French-Canadian Matthew Broderick) and the mood seesaws between comedy and horror. Is it any wonder this stylish melange of depression and urbane wit takes place in the dark, dreary days before Christmas? Rating three C.K.

THE PITCH Opens with a dead guy, gets darker

SCREENINGS Sept. 10, 8:30 p.m., Paramount 4; Sept. 12, 12:30 p.m., Cumberland 2

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CITIZEN DUANE

Canada, directed by Michael Mabbott

STARRING Douglas Smith, Donal Logue, Devon Bostick

- Don't tell Duane Balfour (Smith) that politics is the art of the possible. After losing the student council presidency to Chad, a yahoo who promises a kegger, the plucky (and sometimes violently misguided) teenager sets his sights on the mayoralty of his small Canadian town. This involves running against Chad's mom, the six-time incumbent, whom he tries to defeat by comparing her to Hitler. Helped by his younger brother (Bostick) and his hapless uncle Bingo (Logue), he's also trying to win back his girlfriend and maybe a pinch of respect for his family, living under a cloud since his dad's mysterious death. Smith falls a little flat in a tricky role, but when the humour works (e.g., Duane's quixotic tilting at Chad's SUV with a weapon-studded bicycle) it's hilarious. Rating two 1/2 C.K.

THE PITCH Vote for me or I'll be grounded

SCREENINGS Sept. 8, 8:45 p.m., Paramount 3; Sept. 10, 3:30 p.m., Paramount 3

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## CONGORAMA

Canada, directed by Phillippe Falardeau

STARRING Olivier Gourmet, Jean-Pierre Cassel

- Gourmet, Belgium's answer to Paul Giamatti, is a hapless inventor whose best work is an autonomous, solar-power lawnmower called the Turtle Trotter -- well-named, since if it flips over it's helpless. When he learns he was adopted, he heads to Canada to find his birth family, drunkenly proclaiming "Ich bin ein Quebecker!" After a bizarre car crash (imagine if the last words you heard were "An ostrich!"), he returns home with an idea for a new vehicle that will put Belgium on the map as a country of "more than just French fries." But is the idea really his? An adoption wrapped in a mystery inside an electric engine. Falardeau's *The Left-Hand Side of the Fridge* was a festival favourite in 2000. Rating three C.K.

THE PITCH Who gave birth to the electric car?

SCREENINGS Sept. 11, 9:30 p.m., Paramount 1; Sept. 13, 11:45 a.m., Paramount 2

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## LA COUPURE

Canada, directed by Jean Chateauvert

STARRING Valerie Cantin, Marc Marans

- We could always blame the parents: The adult siblings in *Torn Apart* (the film's English title) are Christine (Cantin) and Christophe (Marans), so maybe that nominative closeness pushed them together. In any case, they're lovers, and everyone in the family knows it -- her husband, her two kids, his ex-girlfriend, their mom -- but no one wants to talk about it. So we get dark looks across dinner tables, circular discussions between the sibs and a bizarre scene in which Christine's teenage daughter makes a pass at her uncle. Shot in claustrophobic close-ups, the film has more than enough passion but lacks resolution. Rating one 1/2 C.K.

THE PITCH Incessant incest threatens to explode nuclear family

SCREENINGS Sept. 13, 8:45 p.m., Cumberland 1; Sept. 15, 3:15 p.m., Cumberland 1

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## DANS LES VILLES

Canada, directed by Catherine Martin

STARRING Helene Florent, Robert Lepage

- Fanny (Florent) is a City of Montreal arborist and book-on-tape reader who spends her nights crying for those who cannot. She crosses paths with three such tearless people: the blind Jean-Luc (Lepage), the elderly Josephine and the clinically depressed Carole. The film has many quietly beautiful moments that are adept at evoking the sense of touch. For instance, a group of blind

people describing a statue with their hands or Fanny sussing out a tree's health by feeling its bark. There is artful composition -- a coffee mug on a table turns into a beautiful abstract painting -- but for every inspired tableau, there is a tedious one. And the bleakness is unrelenting to the point of absurdity. Carole's utterly unmoving, blank stare elicits giggles rather than sympathy after a few scenes. Rating two J.K.N.

THE PITCH Shuffle Lola Shuffle

SCREENINGS Sept. 12, 6:15p.m., Cumberland 2; Sept. 14, 12:15p.m., Cumberland 1

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UN DIMANCHE A KIGALI

Canada, directed by Robert Favreau

STARRING Luc Picard, Fatou N'Diaye

- Bernard Valcourt (Picard) is making a documentary about AIDS in Rwanda when he encounters a far more malevolent pandemic -- the genocidal violence that swept through the country like a brush fire in 1994. The film, based on a novel but incorporating real people and events, shifts between the early days of the conflict and its aftermath. Bernard falls for a waitress at the Hotel des Mille Collines (the setting of Hotel Rwanda, which premiered at TIFF two years ago) but can't get her out of the country; later, he returns to look for her. Equal parts romance and social commentary, it's proof this holocaust continues to inspire powerful tales. Picard and N'Diaye are riveting as they slowly realize that, against all convention, they're falling in love. Rating three 1/2 C.K.

THE PITCH Hotel Rwanda meets The Constant Gardener

SCREENINGS Sept. 12, 6:45 p.m., Paramount 4; Sept. 14, 3:45 p.m., Cumberland 2

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THE DOG PROBLEM

United States, directed by Scott Caan

STARRING Giovanni Ribisi, Lynn Collins, Jimmy the Dog

- When your psychiatrist is played by Don Cheadle and suggests a pet, you listen. So Solo (Ribisi) buys a blank-faced, oh-so-cute puppy (Jimmy) from the mall and life gets more interesting. A rich acquaintance wants the dog in her collection ("What does he go with?" she asks); a loan shark wants him as

collateral; a kindly stripper named Lola (her friend is Candy; go figure) bonds with him and then with Solo. Director Caan plays Solo's buddy Casper with the same libidinous childishness as Thomas Haden Church in Sideways. The humour is augmented by a foot-tapping score by Mark Mothersbaugh (The Life Aquatic) and a lost-dog montage set to the '80s pop hit Walking in L.A., with Jimmy's pawsteps matching the beat. Cute doesn't even begin to describe it. Rating three C.K.

THE PITCH Must Love Dogs but with schadenfreude analysis

SCREENINGS Sept. 11, 8:30 p.m., Ryerson; Sept. 13, noon, Ryerson; Sept. 16, 8:45 a.m., Paramount 2

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## ELECTION 1 & 2

Hong Kong, directed by Johnny To

STARRING Simon Yam, Tony Leung Ka-fai, Louis Koo

- Hong Kong helmer To, who brought *Breaking News* and *Throw Down* to the festival in 2004, unleashes another one-two punch in this pair of noirish flicks about the election of Triad gang leaders. The first film follows two rivals, the steely Lok (Yam) and the maniacal Big D (Ka-fai), as they compete for the title of Chairman of the Wo Sing society, a venerable Triad sect; the second picks up two years later, when a new set of gangsters is vying for command. Despite its lack of violent action, *Election* is the more frenzied of the two, featuring a scenery-chomping turn from Ka-fai. *Election 2* adds some lurid gore, but maintains a more elegiac tone. Both are top-notch crime films that also function as a penetrating look at the corruption of honour and etiquette in Hong Kong society. Rating three 1/2

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## JOEL MCCONVEY

THE PITCH *The Godfather* meets *Infernal Affairs*

SCREENINGS (Parts 1 and 2 screen back-to-back): Sept. 12, 6 p.m., Al Green Theatre; Sept. 16, 3:45 p.m., Varsity

## EMPZ 4 LIFE

Canada, directed by Allan King

- The very existence of *EMPz 4 Life* gives one hope. It's almost impossible to fathom a 76-year-old white male caring enough about Toronto's poor black youth to make a film about their struggles, let alone one that requires said male to travel with them through a season of violence that most observers just shook their heads at. Yet here it is. Septuagenarian King's "actuality drama" follows social worker Brian Henry as he tries to help four young men from Malvern deal with racism, police harassment and teenage angst in the summer of 2005. Expertly shot and assembled, this is a vitally important exercise in empathy. Rating four J.M.

THE PITCH The real Real Toronto

SCREENINGS Sept. 9, 11:45 a.m., Varsity; Sept. 11, 5:45 p.m., Varsity

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## EVERYTHING'S GONE GREEN

Canada, Paul Fox (written by Douglas Coupland)

STARRING Paulo Costanzo, Steph Song, JR Bourne

- The Generation X author's first screenplay, about a 29-year-old Vancouverite who escapes dreary cubicle life by investing in a lottery scam is

handled with utmost care by director Paul Fox. While some elements of the film are trademark Coupland -- such as Ryan's apartment decorated with a wall of Kraft Dinner boxes and a random row of multicoloured bottles of laundry detergent -- other aspects feel more original. Easy humour bubbles up, for instance, as Ryan discovers his parents running a grow-op out of the basement, but it's balanced with heavier ruminations and third-life crises. In all, a nice easy-going dramedy, and especially good for the younger set. Rating three V.F.

THE PITCH An all-Canadian Garden State

SCREENINGS Sept 10, 9:30 p.m., Paramount 2; Sept 12, 11:30 a.m., Paramount 3

- - -

FALKENBERG FAREWELL

Sweden/Denmark, directed by Jesper Ganslandt

STARRING David Johnson, Holger Eriksson, John Axel Eriksson

- Finishing high school seems to be the same the world over. Five young men in a small Swedish town spend a summer eating greasy food, getting mildly wasted and casually naked, treating their parents' homes like convenience stores and discussing whether to stay in Falkenberg or move to the big city. Very like Gus Van Sant's recent work in its meandering style and sudden shock. (True fact: Falkenberg's Web site says "few municipalities in Sweden can compete with Falkenberg when it comes to the number of museums per inhabitant," guaranteed not to endear it to listless youth.) Rating two 1/2 C.K.

THE PITCH Last Days minus the Kurt Cobain angle

SCREENINGS Sept. 10, 6:16 p.m., Cumberland 2; Sept. 12, 4:15 p.m., Paramount 4; Sept. 15, 10 a.m., Varsity 4

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FIDO

Canada, directed by Andrew Currie

STARRING K'Sun Ray, Carrie-Anne Moss, Billy Connolly

- Currie's crazy comic first feature is set in an idyllic 1950s America threatened not by a Red menace but a dead one. Zombie hordes have risen up and been defeated, but the victors live in an uneasy peace in which old people are just zombies waiting to happen, and funeral directors promise grieving relatives "a burial they won't come back from." When the Robinsons get their first domesticated zombie domestic, dad (Dylan Baker) is scared, mom (Moss) is oddly attracted and little Timmy (Ray) names it Fido. Connolly plays the zombie, and it must have pained the loquacious comedian to have nothing to say but "uuurrgh," but he does great work with his eyes. This is killer satire, drop-dead (and get back up again) funny.

Rating four C.K.

THE PITCH It's Shaun of the Dead meets Lassie



SCREENINGS Sept. 7, 9:15 p.m., Ryerson; Sept. 9, 3:45 p.m., Paramount 2

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## FLANDERS

France, directed by Bruno Dumont

STARRING Samuel Boidin, Adelaide Leroux

- The title brings to mind the horrific battles of the Great War, but in this case Flanders is where soldiers are drafted into an unnamed Middle Eastern conflict. Demester (Boidin) has been mucking about on his farm and rutting (there's no better word for their animalistic behaviour) with his girlfriend. Shipped off to the desert, he kills and is almost killed with equal impassivity; Dumont seems to be saying that our energies (or at least those of young men) can be turned to one endeavour as easily as another. Dark and nihilistic, Flandres (the French title) nonetheless won the Grand Prix in Cannes this year, the same prize won by Dumont's 1999 TIFF film, L'Humanite. Rating one 1/2 C.K.

THE PITCH Farm farm farm, fight fight fight, fornicate

SCREENINGS Sept. 14, 7 p.m., Isabel Bader Theatre; Sept. 16, 11:45 a.m., Isabel Bader Theatre

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## THE HOST

South Korea, directed by Bong Joon-ho

STARRING Song Kang-ho, Byun Hee-bong, Park Hae-il

- All good monster movies are allegories, but this Midnight Madness offering is more ingenious than most. Squeezing everything he can from the device of a giant, mean, sewer-dwelling tadpole created by three top-notch visual effects firms, director Bong takes aim at pollution, media manipulation and especially U.S. interventionism -- a touchy subject in a country still crawling with American soldiers. Of course, if you want, you can forget the cerebral stuff and simply enjoy the story, which centres on a harassed family trying to retrieve their youngest member from the creature's clutches. The scares are balanced with ample humour, and the excellent sound design helps make the monster a fully realized nightmare. Rating three 1/2 J.M.

THE PITCH Tremors meets Outbreak and goes down the drain, literally.

SCREENINGS Sept. 8, 11:59 p.m., Ryerson; Sept. 10, 3:45 p.m., Paramount

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## I DON'T WANT TO SLEEP ALONE

Taiwan/France/Austria, Tsai Ming-liang

STARRING Lee Kang-sheng, Chen Siang-chyi, Norman Bin Atun, Pearly Chua

- Tsai's eighth film opens with a man comatose in a hospital bed, then jolts audiences awake with a sudden scene change to the loud streets of Kuala Lumpur, where the gambling taking place will end up being one of the few

instances of dialogue in the entire production. Shortly after, we see a group of men carrying a dirty mattress across town to an abandoned, flooded high-rise. But ultimately, Tsai wants to show us the flip side of this -- all the love, sickness, beauty and turmoil that one mattress can support. This is a filmmaker who takes his time, which may put some audiences off, but others will devour his quiet 30-second shots of nothing but a meticulously framed stairwell with a lone man standing at the bottom, or of a caregiver placing a neon-green slushee on the forehead of his patient. Rating three V.F.

THE PITCH What every film student wishes he had the budget to make.

SCREENINGS Sept 11, 9 p.m., Isabel Bader; Sept 13, noon, Paramount 1; Sept 16, 10 p.m., Varsity 3

- - -

## INDIGENES

France/Morocco/Algeria, directed by Rachid Bouchareb

STARRING Jamel Debbouze

- Also known as Days of Glory, Indigenes opens in 1943 Algeria with the odd (to modern eyes) image of Muslims rallying to defend the honour of France. Their reasons are not always completely altruistic, but Bouchareb makes a strong statement as these soldiers face prejudice and discrimination from the very people they are fighting to protect in the name of egalite. He also creates powerful images of combat at a time when it seems warfare has been done to death. Rating two 1/2 C.K.

THE PITCH Band of Brothers, but they're Algerian Muslims

SCREENINGS Sept. 9, 6:15 p.m., Varsity 1; Sept. 12, 11:15 a.m., Paramount 4

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## THE ITALIAN

Russia, directed by Andrei Kravchuk

STARRING Kolya Spiridonov, Maria Kuznetsova, Yuri Itskov

- This charming piece of Dickensian social realism follows Vanya (Spiridonov), a young boy living in a bleak orphanage in rural Russia, as he sets off on a quest to find his birth mother and escape adoption by a couple from Italy. Rookie filmmaker Kravchuck renders the orphanage as a microcosm of Russian society; "Madam," the overfed directress of the institution, treats her orphans as currency, and the real power lies in the hands of a few teenage delinquents who alternately help and exploit the younger residents. The film succeeds because of Spiridonov, whose puppy-dog spunk enlivens the last act's fugitive-in-miniature chase plot. Rating three J.M.

THE PITCH Oliver Twist meets Ferris Bueller's Day Off

SCREENINGS Sept. 8, 9:45 a.m., Paramount; Sept. 10, 7:30 p.m., Varsity

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## JINDABYNE

Australia, Ray Lawrence

STARRING Laura Linney, Gabriel Byrne, Deborra-Lee Furness, John Howard, Leah Purcell

- Festival co-director Noah Cowan calls this film "an ambitious hybrid of family melodrama and post-colonial cautionary tale" -- simply put, it's about people trying not to hate one other so much. Based on a short story by Raymond Carver, it takes place in New South Wales in a small town where people put up "Gone Fishing" signs and they've actually gone fishing; where the welcome sign reads "Welcome to Jindabyne -- a Tidy Town." This is the Australian Outback at its eeriest; underneath perfectly crafted surface tension, thanks to Linney and Byrne, there's a potent layer of guilt and animosity between white settlers and the native community. The plot -- about some friends who go camping, find a dead body and decide to tether it to a tree while they continue with their trip -- is nowhere near as interesting as the characters, but because it takes centre stage audiences may wish Paul Hogan was there to save the day. Rating two V.F.

THE PITCH A believable Deliverance, Aussie-style

SCREENINGS Sept 13, 9 p.m., Ryerson; Sept 15, 3 p.m., Ryerson.

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## THE JOURNALS OF KNUD RASMUSSEN

Canada/Denmark, Zacharias Kunuk, Norman Cohn

STARRING Leah Angutimarik, Pakak Innuksuk, Neeve Irngaut Uttak

- From the director and cinematographer of Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner), this artful but at times almost lethargically paced story about the first encounters between European explorers and Inuit people in 1922 is told with great humour and heart. Set in the stunning, crisp expanse of the Arctic Circle, the opening-night film at TIFF centres on the quiet tension between a shaman and his daughter, the earthly world and the spiritual one, the past and the present. Audiences' patience might be tested with subtitles that randomly stop for periods of time but they'll be rewarded with amazing shots of a young child succumbing to sleep on the nape of her mother's neck or the quiet construction of an igloo. Rating three V.F.

THE PITCH The Fast Runner, but slower

SCREENINGS Sept 7, 6:30 p.m., VISA Screening Room; Sept 7, 8 p.m., Roy Thomson Hall; Sept 8, 9:30 a.m., Ryerson

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## KABUL EXPRESS

India, Kabir Khan

STARRING John Abraham, Arshad Warsi, Salman Shahid, Hanif Hum Ghum, Linda Arsenio

- It sounds like a classic recipe for cheeky, action-packed adventure: Two Indian journalists fall out of a helicopter shortly after 9/11, stumble upon an

Afghan driver and an American photographer, then trek around the desert in a beat-up SUV while an elderly Pakistani -- and member of the Taliban -- hides underneath a burqa and takes them all hostage. Unfortunately, Kabul Express plays out more like a bad joke. Although it has a few comedic gems and some stunning cinematography, Khan's first feature is set to some acutely annoying music and stars one of the worst actresses ever -- seriously, ever. Lines like, "I'm hoping publishers will line up for my book when I write about this" certainly don't help much, but you'll need something stronger than the Golden Gate Bridge to suspend your disbelief in this case. Rating one 1/2 V.F.

THE PITCH Worst. Actress. Ever.

SCREENINGS Sept 15, 6 p.m., VISA Screening Room; Sept 16, 9:30 a.m., Paramount 1

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KHADAK

Belgium/Germany/The Netherlands, Peter Brosens, Jessica Woodworth

STARRING Batzul Khayankhyarvaa, Tsetsegee Byamba

- No one would be surprised if, while watching Khadak, Bjork suddenly made a cameo. It's a film that, much like the Icelandic singer and her avian fashion statements, stands out. Be prepared for something that's overwhelming in its beauty, underwhelming in its abstract performance art and, well, maybe just whelming in its final impact. Set in a remote Mongolian town, the story revolves around Bagi, a teenage boy who may have a shamanic touch. Just when you start thinking how awesome it would be to live in a yurt, a plague hits and everyone, including Bagi's family and his herd of sheep, is forced to move to a desolate mining town where every meal consists of cold boiled potatoes, eaten out of Mason jars. This film has a lot to say, but it can also provoke the cinematic equivalent of an ice-cream headache. Rating two 1/2 V.F.

THE PITCH The Story of the Weeping Camel, minus the camel, plus a lot of Mongolian subtext

SCREENINGS Sept 8, 6:30 p.m., Cumberland 3; Sept 11, 12:30 p.m., Varsity 8; Sept 15, 8:30 p.m., Cumberland 1

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THE KILLER WITHIN

United States, directed by Macky Alston

STARRING Bob Bechtel

- Bechtel says school bullying creates "killer and victims," but it's not clear if the mild-mannered septuagenarian places himself in the first group or the second. In 1955, he killed a fellow college student after what he says was a long period of harassment. He spent five years in an insane asylum and then got on with his life, telling his wife but not his stepdaughter, daughter, co-workers or friends. Now he's coming clean, and in doing so raises more questions than he answers. Still, it's hard to take your eyes off Bechtel's unassuming smile, or to ignore the fact that his freedom resulted in a new

life, his daughter. Rating two 1/2 C.K.

THE PITCH Is there a past tense for "killer"?

SCREENINGS Sept. 10, 6:15 p.m., Paramount 3; Sept. 12, noon, ROM;  
Sept. 16, 3:15, Paramount 3

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LAKE OF FIRE

United States, directed by Tony Kaye

- Sure to be controversial, Tony Kaye's near three-hour documentary about the abortion debate in the U.S. has serious flaws, but remains highly impressive. The key is Kaye's thorough commitment to the piece. He spent 15 years collecting footage, which means he was there for some historic events and was able to interview hundreds of people -- notably Norma McCorvey, a.k.a. Jane Roe, the first woman to win the right to a legal abortion in the States, who has since become an anti-abortion advocate. Kaye's black-and-white cinematography and heavy-handed use of music will alienate some, as will the unflinching scenes of abortions and their aftermath. But this is undeniably powerful stuff, and as timely as it gets. Rating three J.M.

THE PITCH Abortion: The Movie

SCREENINGS Sept. 9, 5:30 p.m., Varsity; Sept. 11, 9 a.m., Varsity; Sept. 16, 4:30 p.m., Cumberland

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