

TIFF 2009 Capsule Reviews:

ALL FALL DOWN (Canada 2009) \*\*\*

Directed by Philip Hoffman

Director Philip Hoffman's meticulously directed experimental documentary is a juxtaposition of two stories. One is that of the life of writer George Lachlan Brown settling in the Normandy Township that takes a devastating course of poverty and the other of an equally tragic historical native who loses her rights after marrying a white man. Told through visuals using archive footage, home movies, paintings, photographs and heritage films and through the words of telephone messages, poems, quotations (George Orwell and Wallace Stevens) and songs, Hoffman's film is an intricate maze of storytelling that often fascinates as well as mesmerizes. It demands concentration though it can be quite trying at times to figure what Hoffman's message is. The only humor is the running joke of the money Hoffman has saved in the calculation of the number of frames in his heritage movie.

ANTICHRIST (Denmark/Fr/Ger/Swe/It/Pol 2009) \*\*

Directed by Lars Von Trier

ANTICHRIST is the Lars Von Trier's horror feature that unexpectedly got the most laughs at the Cannes Film Festival when the words 'dedicated to Andrei Tarkovsky' was splashed on the screen at its conclusion. Though the film shares a few characteristics with the great Russian director's films, ANTICHRIST is foremost ponderously paced and filled with both eerie landscapes and symbols that might mean more or less depending on one's interpretation. Von Trier's film, divided into four chapters – the first three called grief, pain and despair with the final one called the three beggars as grief, pain and despair converge on the main characters. This is Von Trier's vision of hell as if nature turned bad. But the nature Von Trier is observing is the inner nature of human beings that can turn against mankind as it does in this film. Blood, screaming, torture and other unbearable sexual and graphic acts fill this movie. ANTICHRIST the film is appropriately named for the director's depiction of hell on film.

BROKEN EMBRACES (Spain 2009) \*\*\*

Directed by Pedro Almodovar

Spanish director Pedro Almodovar's BROKEN EMBRACES bears quite a number of similarities with his last movie VOLVER. For one, both are effectively made melodramas besides starring the excellent Penelope Cruz. Both also contain a lengthy explanation of what is going on by an older actress. As in VOLVER, BAD EDUCATION and BROKEN EMBRACES, the passion of film is the heart of the plot. Here, the protagonist is a blind screenwriter and former director (Lluís Homar) who had abandoned his real name, Mateo Blanco, for a pseudonym, Harry Caine. But Harry and a brash young man both fall in love with Lena played by Cruz. What is in an Almodovar film are all present – the bright coloured scenes, the naughtiness of the characters and the campy humour. A slight problem with BROKEN EMBRACES is that once Cruz is out

of the picture, Almodovar's film fails to hold the same interest. The result is a film that clearly lacks the punch of his other works.

CAIRO TIME (Canada 2009) \*\*

Directed by Rubba Nada

CAIRO TIME works if one would believe what is happening on screen could be true. In Nada's (SABAH) film which she also wrote, a diplomat's (Tom McCamus) wife Juliette (Patricia Clarkson) lands at the airport in Cairo, Egypt where she is met by their long time friend Tareq (Alexander Siddig). As Mark the husband is indisposed for some reason or other, Juliette eventually succumbs to the charm of Tareq and the Arab world. She reaches the point of having an affair or to change her belief in the American way. But Nada's script gives nothing concrete that would otherwise convert Juliette, she being the strong-willed person she is. For one, Juliette seems very set in her ways upon arriving at the airport and she has been hassled non-stop from her arrival at the hotel to no end. The fact that Nada's film moves along at a snail's pace allows one to assume that Juliette is offered the time to consider a change. Apart from the solid musical score and fine camerawork, and yes - the pyramids beckon at the end - CAIRO TIME still remains unconvincing for the most part.

CARCASSES (Canada 2009) \*\*

Directed by Denis Cote

Quebec indie director Denis Cote presents a story of an elderly man (Jean-Paul Colmor) who suffers collectionitis. He has collected junk all his life living on his land in Saint-Amable near Montreal. Living the life of almost a hermit most of the days of the week, he survives by selling spare auto parts, but does the odd traveling to the town or meet the occasional girl. But when visited by a group of somewhat backward youths, he is forced to decide how to react to the intruders. Cote moves his film at a snail's pace. He often sets his camera still and films his subjects from a distance. There is nothing really wrong with a director taking his time to tell a story but in this case there is not much of a story to tell nor is there any interest generated by him. The one senseless scene with him sitting down in the kitchen listening to a lesson on speaking Spanish says it all.

COOKING WITH STELLA (Canada 2009) \*\*

Directed by Dilip Mehta

Carefully crafted family dramedy about Stella (Seema Biswas), the household head who is as crooked as she is nice on the outside with her bosses! A diplomat (Lisa Ray) arrives in New Delhi from Canada with her spouse, a cook (Don McKellar). Stella starts up her usual nonsense stealing and selling her employers' household belongings till she is pitted against an honest nanny (Shriya Saran). There is nothing really wrong with COOKING WITH STELLA the movie, except that it plays like a predictable TV serial. Typical in such co-productions, everything foreign is exotic and anything white is plain

boring. So, as expected, all the Indian foods are on fine display here with Canadian fare looked down upon. (Squeezing pomegranates and lemons is supposed to be Canadian upper cuisine.) Biswas is good as the crafty Stella, but one wonders why a diplomat's spouse is allowed to carry on throughout his stay with his unkempt beard.

THE DAMNED UNITED (UK 2009) \*\*\*1/2  
Directed by Tom Hooper

THE DAMNED UNITED opened in the U.K. last spring without much hullabaloo. I myself gave it a miss after reading mediocre reviews when I visited London then. But this above average football (or soccer) pic is given a big boost as a gala this TIFF and rightly so. THE DAMNED UNITED is a period sports piece, set in 1974 with an excellent central performance by Michael Sheen (he played Frost in FROST/NIXON and Tony Blair THE QUEEN) and supported by a superb Brit/Irish cast that includes Oscar winner Jim Broadbent (the latest HARRY POTTER), Timothy Spall (the Leigh films) and Colm Meaney (the Stephen Frears films). Basically a character study of football manager Brian Clough who rose through the ranks to finally head Leeds United, this is a root-for-the-hero story with all heart. The film shifts between two periods – 1974 and the years before Clough made it big. Never mind if you are not a sports fan for the plot is easy to follow. And director Hooper captures the spirit and excitement of the sport as well.

DAYBREAKERS (Australia/USA 2009) \*\*\*  
Directed by the Spierig Brothers

Life is a bitch and then you don't die! Thus quotes the character Elvis (Willem Dafoe) as a human turned vampire turned human again. The Spierig Brothers (THE UNDEAD) push the vampire genre one step further with the vamps ruling the planet where human are hunted for their blood. Only one sympathetic vampire (Ethan Hawke) sides the humans while hunting a cure or substitute for the dwindling plasma supplies. The Brothers handle the action segments with great skill and excitement. This is a horror film with more story than expected. The Brothers pull it off with a polished climatic finish in which the human race, of course, triumphs. Well, in their way, of course!

DEFENDOR (Canada 2009) \*\*\*  
Directed by Peter Stebbings

Everybody wants to be a superhero. DEFENDOR is the story of a simple man, Arthur Poppington (Woody Harrelson), a construction company worker who dresses up at night to become DEFENDOR, a vigilante who has his way (marbles, wasps and a huge truncheon) with the bad guys. But when he beats up an undercover cop Chuck (Eli Koteas), the law steps in. Poppington has to convince the court-appointed psychiatrist (Sandra Oh) that he is sane to stay out of prison. Though DEFENDOR is a first film,

Stebbing has created a remarkably dark (even the lighting) and humorous tale of a man fighting the system at all odds. He is aided by hooker with a heart, Kat (Kat Dennings). DEFENDOR is more drama than action flick. DEFENDOR's message is not thrown straight in the audience's face which is a very good thing. The biggest surprise of this movie is Sandra Oh's moving performance. One only wishes there is much more of her. Stebbings' film actually contains quite a number of superheroes.

FIVE HOURS FROM PARIS (Israel 2009) \*\*  
Directed by Leon Prudovsky

This is a very strange love story about a divorced bald cab driver, Yigal (Dror Keren) who is sexually attracted to a very beautiful lady, Lina (Elena Yaralova). Yigal keeps making his moves, as he sees her daily, she being his son's music teacher. Never mind Lina is already married waiting for her husband's immigration papers so that they can move to Canada. Prudovsky's film is full of clichés – couple cliquing as they both love the same songs; husband's surprise return, etc. Strangely enough, the film works less well when director Prudovsky tries something different – the strange second half and the non-happy ending. But the basic problem of the film is the fact that it is difficult for an audience to root for a romantic lead who is a complete loser. Loser Romeo must own at least a dozen colored polo shirts, judging from the number of times he changes his wardrobe.

HADEWIJCH (France 2009) \*\*  
Directed by Bruno Dumont

HADEWIJCH is the film that all other film festival rejected except TIFF, probably for the reason that TIFF had screened all of Dumont's past films (LA VIE DE JESUS, L'HUMANITE). The first 10 minutes is the best part of Dumont's film. Within that slotted time, Dumont shows how religious Hadewijch is rejected from the monastery and forced to return home. HADEWIJCH is the story of a girl who loves God not only blindly but too much. The trouble with Dumont's film is that his film leads nowhere. The heroine wanders around, meets and falls for a street troublemaker (though sex, is out of the question for her). With no message in the film and with a character that has no sexual desires and logic, Dumont's film makes no sense at all. The character Yassine says at one point in the film: "I don't get it!" Apparently he is not the only one.

LES HERBES FOLLES (France/Italy 2009) \*\*\*  
Directed by Alain Resnais

What is wrong with Georges (Andre Dussolier)? What has he done wrong in the past? From Master director Alain Resnais comes a romance with a difference. Resnais uses lots of voiceover with the images of his actors to both tell the story and relate the emotions of his characters. When a woman thanks Georges for returning her lost wallet, Georges starts pursuing her (Sabine Azema). Getting no results, he slashes her tires so that she cannot get away. But this fatal attraction story is done in all bright colors with beautiful people. Though the narrative does not really make any sense, Resnais' filming is the star of his film. In the first sequence for example when the woman buys shoes and loses her wallet, her face is never seen till it appears out of the water in her bath tub. Resnais' film has an excellent cast that includes Anne Consigny, Emmanuelle Devos and Mathieu Amalric as a cop.

HOTEL ATLANTICO (Brazil 2009) \*\*  
Directed by Suzana Amaral

Lots of patience is required in viewing director Amaral's seemingly directionless account of an equally directionless drifter known to a few of his acquaintances as the artist (Julio Andrade). Though death often accompanies him on his travails, he is still a devil-may-care person, often doing people a good deed, like screwing an obese lady putting out her laundry. Though the misadventures are relatively intriguing, they get tiresome since Amaral shows no purpose for her hero or message to the audience. The surprising thing of HOTEL ATLANTICO is that the most shocking scenes like the leg amputation and the popcorn sex scene comes across as just ordinary.

THE IMAGINARIUM OF DOCTOR PARNASSUS (UK/Canada 2009)  
Directed by Terry Gilliam

What would probably intrigue audiences most about THE IMAGINARIUM OF DOCTOR PARNASSUS is Heath Ledger's character which is also played by Jude Law, Johnny Depp and Colin Farrell in three separate transformations. Set in present day London, England, Dr. Parnassus' travelling show has audience enter a magic mirror where they get to experience the unforgettable imaginarium of the doctor's. His daughter Valentina (Lily Cole), and toupe Percy (Verne Troyer) and Anton (Andrew Garfield) help him along till a stranger Tony (Heath Ledger and trio) appears. The story concerns a deal with the devil Dr. Nick (Tom Waits) who will gain Valentina as his property unless the good doctor wins another bet. Gilliam's mostly fascinating film is a wonder to watch for all of the director's great imagination. This is the imaginarium of director Gilliam, no doubt!

KELIN (Kazakhstan 2009) \*\*\*1/2  
Directed by Ermek Tursunov

KELIN is a beautifully poetic love story set in 2 A.D. that ends up as a tale of survival. Told with no dialogue but visually, KELIN is a complex tale of relationships and how fate and circumstances can affect one's lives. Kelin (Gulsharat) is auctioned by her father to the highest bidder. She is sold and marries Baktashi (Erzhan Nurymbet) who is eventually murdered by the other bidder, who was Kelin's true love. Tursunov weaves his tale with great emotional power in a barren wintry mountainous landscape of ice and snow. KELIN is a compelling film about love, betrayal and altering loyalties that is as strange as it is fascinating.

LIFE ACCORDING TO AGFA (Israel 1992) \*

Directed by Assi Dayan

In the bar called Barbie in the volatile city of Tel Aviv, not only can anything happen but does and reaches boiling point. A chauvinist police officer has an affair with a suicidal young woman; the owner picks up young customers; a waitress seeks to flee to America et al. Then drug junkies enter the bar creating more trouble. Director Dayan lets incident after incident occur without paying much attention to credibility or logic. When the film ends in a climatic scene that has to be seen to be believed (or disbelieved), one can only wonder what Dayan is thinking in his take on humanity. LIFE ACCORDING TO AGFA swept the 1992's Israel awards. The paradox of such a terrible film winning prizes is probably the reason this 1992 film took so long to reach here. Pessimistic and ridiculous!

MAX MANUS (Nor/Den/Ger 2008) \*\*\*

Directed by Joachim Ronning and Espen Sandberg

The first Norwegian film and most expensive production to date to be chosen as a TIFF gala, MAX MANUS is a Hollywood-style account of Norway's most celebrated World War II resistance fighter. Excellent production values exist throughout as the film recounts Manus' (Aksel Hennie) fight against the Russians in Finland right up to the organized raids on the German ships in the Oslo harbor. But Manus' greatest struggle is himself as he sees his other good friends and fighters in the so-termed the 'Oslo Gang' victimized by the war. The last portion shows the down side of the glorified resistance fighter with Manus in super-depressed mode with no job, no money and no girlfriend. One wonders at the directors' decision to film in bright saturated colors.

ONG BAK 2: THE BEGINNING (Thailand 2009) \*\*

Directed by Tony Jaa and Panna Rittikrai

ONG BAK 2, following the footsteps of the trend of Hollywood blockbusters is a prequel i.e. 'the beginning' or 'origin' of ONG BAK. ONG BAK 1 was a monster martial-arts hit and the filmmakers are out to ensure that the second follows suit in monetary terms. ONG BAK 2 begins with a shot history lesson of a Thai kingdom that is

lost with which Lord is conquering whom. Not that it matters but that young Tien (Natdanai Kongthong) escapes from slave traders after his parents are assassinated. No point relating the rest of the plot, and countless fights with kicks, punches and body breaking whacks occur whatever excuse there is for a fight. Directors Jaa and martial-arts choreographer Rittikrai include a lot of close-up and slow-motioned shots for audiences to 'enjoy' their work. The best staged fight scene is between Tien and a giant crocodile. But the lack of characters, character development, real villain or genuine suspense results in another dull ONG BAK venture.

PARTIR (LEAVING) (France 2009) \*\*\*  
Directed by Catherine Corsini

PARTIR begins with Suzanne (Kristin Scott Thomas) leaving the bedroom with gunshot heard. It is assumed that she has shot her husband Samuel (Yvan Attal) in the bedroom. Director Corsini flashes her film back '6 mois plus tot' to reveal the circumstances leading to this sad state of affairs. It all turns out to be due to Suzanne's sexual awakening to love, catalysed by the hiring of a builder Ivan (Sergi Lopez for their home. Unable to control her emotions, she abandons her husband, who in turn, because of his connections in the medical field cuts her off from all finances. Can one survive with love and no money? Suzanne and Ivan resort to all means including robbery as a last resort. Corsini makes her point relating the reasoning and circumstances for the shooting. PARTIR succeeds in this way but one can hardly sympathize with a woman who has abandoned her husband and 2 children of an over 10-year marriage for whatever reason.

PHANTOM PAIN (Germany 2009) \*\*\*  
Directed by Matthias Emcke

Director Matthias Emcke's predictable but nevertheless compelling tale of a passionate cyclist Marc (Til Schweiger, the German hunk last seen on INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS) whose life gets turned around after a vehicle accident. Emcke's film is divided into two parts. The first shows Marc's slacker devil-may-care lifestyle. He is only interested in cycling though his love for his daughter plays a big role in his intentions. The second part deals with his recuperation after his accident which requires him to rehabilitate with an artificial leg and of course, a change in his life for the better. The second half is all sentimental and moving to a point of sappiness. But it is actor Schweiger that makes the film work. This is the kind of foreign film (man fighting back from disaster) that Academy Award members love and PHANTOM PAIN may very well be next year's Best Foreign Film Oscar winner.

PRECIOUS: BASED ON THE NOVEL "PUSH" BY SAPPHIRE (USA 2009) \*  
Directed by Lee Daniels

Set in Harlem and based on Sapphire's experiences in teaching, director Lee Daniels' PRECIOUS concentrates on the life of abused fat 16-year old African American, Claireece 'Precious' Jones (Gabby Sidibe). Precious has everything 'not' going on for her. Twice impregnated by her father, abused by her mother (Mon'Nique), mother of a Mongoloid then of an h.i.v. positive baby, kicked out of school, what more can one imagine could happen to her. Only good things then! The audience is then led to believe that Precious will pull herself out of the s...hole to read and write with the aid of one unbelievable goody-two-shoes teacher (Paula Patton) who is in the picture because she just loves to teach. But Daniel (producer of films as MONSTER BALL and THE WOODSMAN which deals with nasty topics) throws subtlety out the window. His film is downright blatant with foul language, vomit and other nasties splashed right at your face, in case you did not get the point. His camerawork is awful, camera placement questionable and whenever he does get a good shot (tone with the teacher first meeting Precious), he overdoes it by doing two segments with it (the same shot). Lenny Kravitz and Mariah Carey also embarrass themselves in this film with minor roles. And what is it with one scene in which Precious cannot read the phrase 'A Day at the Shore' and the other, not long after attending classes when she is confidently reading aloud a fairy tale from a book? Oprah produced this movie and will be attending TIFF to promote the film's 'message'.

UN PROPHETE (France 2009) \*\*\*\*\* Top 10

Directed by Jacques Audiard

UN PROPHETE (THE PROPHET) is a powerful and moving portrait of Malik (Tahar Rahim), a nobody serving 6-year imprisonment for the beating up of a cop. Though the story is basically grim (Malik is beaten up countless times; humiliated throughout most of the film), yet Audiard lifts his film to new heights. As this pariah rises to power, Malik realizes his potential and executes the most deviant acts to satisfy his basic needs of food, sex and ultimately power. But Audiard is brilliant enough to work the emotions of his audience, often creating a feel-good movie at various points of Malik's journey to freedom. The audience feels Malik's elation of being the best at what he is good at. But the film's best performance belongs to Neils Arestrup as Cesar Luciano, the psychopathic Corsican kingpin who lives a Godfather-like existence in the cells. Audiard's last film which also co-starred Neils Arestrup DE BATTRE MON COUER S'EST ARRETE won the Cesar for Best Film and the BAFTA award for best foreign film. That film never got a release in Canada except for one showing, courtesy of Cinefranco. Perhaps UN PROPHETE will put this brilliant director on the map in North America.

REEL INJUN (Canada 2009) \*\*\*1/2

Directed by Neil Diamond

What begins as an ordinary documentary of how native Indians in Hollywood films were incorrectly portrayed eventually ends on an unexpected upbeat note with clips from one of the best native films ever made – ATANARJUAT, THE FAST RUNNER. Director Neil Diamond takes his audience on a kind of educational road trip. As he travels to Hollywood to make sense of the politically incorrect depiction of natives in movies, the audience is given entertaining and insightful information through clips from old movies, interviews and voiceover. Though most cineastes are familiar with films like native politically correct Hollywood films as LITTLE BIG MAN, ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST and the first nation films (POWWOW HIGHWAY, SMOKE SIGNALS), Diamond has assembled an impressive load of footage from which he has constructed quite an argument. The last few minutes of screen time devoted to ATANARJUAT proves that natives (as in other prejudiced minorities like Blacks and gays) have come a long way and finally succeeded as Diamond's film has. Diamond has also craftily incorporated Clint Eastwood in the interviews so that he is on the side of the REEL INJUNS. That way, John Wayne can be singled out as the main baddie of this movie.

A SHINE OF RAINBOWS (Ireland/Canada 2009) \*\*\*  
Directed by Vic Sarin

A bullied boy, 8-year old Tomas (John Bell) is adopted from the local orphanage by a charming young woman Maire O'Donnell (Connie Neilson) unable to bear a child. The woman is all smiles but the boy has to win the heart of her hardened husband (a scruffy Aidan Quinn) as well as the village children to stay in the home. As the film progresses, Tomas adopts an abandoned baby seal while mother Maire falls ill and eventually dies. If the story does not already spell tearjerker, director Vic Sarin shows no mercy at pulling at the heartstrings. Bring lots (and lots) of Kleenex. A SHINE OF RAINBOWS, set in the picturesque Irish wind-swept Corrie Island allows Sarin, who is also cinematographer to also show his prowess in this field. Very Irish, with lots of folk tunes Irish dancing and Celtic charm!

A SERIOUS MAN (USA 2009) \*\*\*\*  
Directed by Ethan and Joel Coen

A SERIOUS MAN plays very much like the Coen Brothers last two movies, from the abrupt ending (NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN) to the sequence of unrelated life events that make no sense in the realm of things (BURN AFTER READING). In A SERIOUS MAN, the protagonist is one, trying to make sense of the craziness that is going on around him. The most important element in his life right then is his tenure professorship. Never mind his wife is having an affair with his good friend, his brother is getting into trouble with the law or his children sidetracked from school. A SERIOUS MAN reminds one of Quentin Tarantino's INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS in which the director makes the movie he wants and everyone else who disagrees can just f\*\*\* off. A SERIOUS MAN is absolutely absorbing, terribly funny in the Coen Brothers sort of way

and incredibly imaginative. The fact the characters (most of whom are played by relative unknowns) speak Hebrew and Yiddish illustrate, as in the Tarantino movie, that great directors put a lot of detail and research into the language of their movies.

SOAP (Canada 2009) \*\*\* (Short)  
Directed by Dusty Mancinelli

Director Mancinelli's third short is a professional (in terms of production values) looking short that has all the elements of a neat little black thriller. Housewife/mother Eileen has her daily routine laid out for her. She has the customary sexual intercourse with her husband, cooks, cleans, looks after the baby and has a hunky lover who visits during the day. A slip on the SOAP during his shower leaves the hunk dead and Eileen with a problem on her hands. Suspense, keen observations of life in the suburbs and wry and black humour keep SOAP moving along. Mancinelli films most of his action pieces with a steady camera with his subject(s) moving in and out of the frame. It would be curious to see what he can achieve with a few tracking shots. SOAP plays with the Canada Shorts Programme 3.

UNDER THE MOUNTAIN (NZ 2009) \*\*\*\*  
Directed by Jonathan King

At one point in the film, fraternal twins who can telepathically communicate with each other are stopped from saving the world because their uncle and aunt will not let them leave the house. Based on the novel of the same name by Maurice Gee and on an earlier TV-series, UNDER THE MOUNTAIN follows the adventures of Theo and Rachel Matheson, who with the help of Mr. Jones (Sam Neill) battle slimy aliens called the Wilberforces who can take the shape of human form. This inventive, amusing and totally compelling tale with teens as the leads may very well be the sleeper hit of the festival. Set in Auckland, New Zealand, director Jonathan King's (BLACK SHEEP) film makes full use of the island's beautiful locations from the volcanic crater lake that inhabits beautiful black swans to its brackish waters that often smells of rotten cabbage. Grand special effects, great camera work, lots of volcanic pyrotechnics combined together with good old-fashioned heroics and adventure lift UNDER THE MOUNTAIN way above the horror genre.

VINCERE (WIN) (Italy 2009) \*\*\*  
Directed by Marco Bellocchio

One cannot complain about director Bellocchio not making his point felt in his very angry film of the early life of Dictator Mussolini. Besides titles often flashing across the screen twice (and at certain times, more than that), the film contains steamy

love-making scenes as well as the trials and mental torture undergone by his characters. For example, Bellocchio juxtaposes the screening of Chaplin's tear-jerking *THE KID* with the face of Mussolini's wife's face as she herself is heart wrenched after losing her son. *VINCERE* tells the story of Ida Dalser, the woman Mussolini abandoned after she bore him a son. Ida was sent to a mental asylum and the son taken away by authorities. But Ida strives on till demanding recognition for herself and her son till her very last breath. *VINCERE* is not easy to watch but one cannot deny Bellocchio's talent in the telling of this compelling tragedy of Ida's life.

*THE WILD HUNT* (Canada 2009) \*\*  
Directed by Alexandre Franchi

*THE WILD HUNT* is geek country from start to finish complete with a geek plot, geek horror and geek humour. A group of so-called friends engage in a fantasy battle of role playing. Predictably, they get carried away, do not know how to stop and blood happens. Like they say, it is all fun and games till someone loses an eye. Erik (Ricky Mabe) goes looking for his girlfriend, Evelyn (Tiio Horn), who has left him for the game. He will need the help of his brother Bjorn (Mark A. Krupa), who happens to be the Viking leader and owner of Thor's hammer, Mjolnir. (Erik has been storing the weapon on a shelf at his place.) Erik's entry into the game angers the dedicated players when he refuses to role play, setting fantasy and reality on a collision course on the night of the enactment. No one really cares what happens. Franchi's camera tracks his characters most of the time though he stages a few fight scenes impressively. But the lighting is poor and one often can hardly determine what is happening on screen m- not that it matters! Though set in Quebec in a venue near Shawinigan, the film only has one line of French spoken.

*THE YOUNG VICTORIA* (UK 2009) \*\*  
Directed by Jean-Marc Vallee

Quebec director (*LISTE NOIRE* and his recent hit *C.R.A.Z.Y.*) goes big time with the British costume period piece *YOUNG VICTORIA* about, obviously the early years of the monarch (Emily Brunt). The film concentrates on her rise to the throne and her romance with Prince Albert (Rupert Friend from *CHERI*). But Vallee's film plods along tediously during the first part. It is only after Victoria's marriage to the Belgian prince that the film takes flight, taking on the passion and drama that was initially missing. For all that it is worth, the costumes, sets and props are stunning and Vallee has a good camera eye for the film's royal look. Pity he fails to connect the audience with the *YOUNG VICTORIA*. For a film based only on a small portion of Queen Victoria's life, Vallee's story feels as if he has assumed the audience's familiarity with all the details of that period. The supporting cast of the excellent Paul Bettany (as Lord Melbourne), Miranda Richardson (as the Duchess of Kent) and Jim Broadbent (as King William) try their best at lifting the film out of the doldrums. Surprisingly, it is Friend

who saves the day. THE YOUNG VICTORIA, TIFF's closing night gala has already opened in the U.K. last spring and is slotted for a November release in North America. Still, the film should be seen for all its glory despite it (should I mention this?) already being downloadable on the net.

YOUTH IN REVOLT (USA 2009) \*\*\*  
Directed by Miguel Arteta

Miguel Arteta is apparently the director of choice for filming weird people after his success with CHUCK AND BUCK and episodes of FREAKS AND GEEKS and UGLY BETTY. The hero of the piece is Godard-loving (several posters of Belmondo hang in his room) virgin, Nick who spouts sarcasm as if there is no tomorrow. His mother (Jean Smart) and dad (Steve Buscemi), not living together are just as odd but lend their support the best they can or cannot. A misadventure lands mum and Nick in a trailer park where he meets the girl of his dreams. The rest is teen romantic comedy fare with a black twist. But the problem with the film is that everybody speaks in the same manner. Yes, from son to mother to dad, to mother's boyfriend and all else, every character in the film seem to have graduated from Sarcasm 101. The saving grace of YOUTH IN REVOLT is the manifold laugh-out loud moments (example: the mum's boyfriend in the trashy trailer after their TV dinner saying : What say we let the kid do the dishes and we head for the master bedroom?) and the amazing claymation that accompanies the film in spots.