



GLASGOW FILM FESTIVAL PREVIEW

How to Blow Up a Pipeline

Inspired by Andreas Malm's book, director Daniel Goldhaber (*Cam*) spins a tense thriller that is part heist movie wrapped up in an exploration of the current climate crisis that the world is facing. Featuring a tremendous ensemble cast, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* follows a crew of activists who plan to sabotage an oil pipeline. With their plan in motion, each character's motivations are revealed in a timely call to arms as the film barrels towards its explosive climax.

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Hollywood has long had an uncomfortable relationship with the environment (and environmentalists). From Bruce Willis firing golf balls at Greenpeace activists in *Armageddon* (1998) to the eco-terrorist villains who have haunted Bond films (*Quantum of Solace*, 2008) and comic-book movies (*Avengers: Endgame*, 2019) for over a decade, mainstream movies have largely been happy to portray radical environmentalists as pompous hypocrites or downright unhinged. Artier American filmmakers have also proved susceptible to this tendency, albeit in a lower key: Kelly Reichardt's *Night Moves* and Zal Batmanglij's *The East* depicted their eco-terrorist protagonists as cultish, irresponsible and violent, and though both films are ten years old this year, there have been few positive portrayals of young green activists in the intervening years. The kids today, huh?

Now, with the climate crisis growing increasingly fierce and groups such as Extinction Rebellion gaining more popular support, the extreme is beginning to look a lot more sensible. Or as one of the characters of Daniel Goldhaber's new film, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, writes on a note she leaves on an SUV she just vandalised: 'If the law will not punish you, I will.' Loosely based on a non-fiction book by Andreas Malm, the movie takes a refreshingly bold approach, part early Tarantino, part *Ocean's Eleven*. Goldhaber turns Malm's manifesto for activism and sabotage into a slick, entertaining and timely eco-thriller that refuses to sit on the fence.

The plot is straight out of the heist genre playbook. A ragtag group of individuals from all over the USA meet in west Texas to sabotage an oil pipeline. In doing so, they aim to tank stock prices and create a sharp shock to carbon-based fuel consumption in the US. The group leans young but has a diverse background, related in a series of character-titled flashbacks that fill in their various motivations and different paths to extremism. Michael (Forrest Goodluck), from North Dakota, is the moody James Coburn type, a Native American violently opposed to the occupation of his land by miners and oil workers. Dwayne (Jack Weary) is an ex-serviceman with a young family, whose land is being bought from under him to build the pipeline. Xochitl (Ariela Barer) – the SUV vandal – and Theo (Sasha Lane) both grew up in a refinery town, and now Theo is dying from a rare leukaemia caused by refinery pollution.

Some have less apparently political motives. Rowan (Kristine Froseth) and Logan (Lukas Gage) are a coke-snorting, thrill-seeking couple, and Alisha (Jayme Lawson) is helping out to support Theo, her lover. Shawn (Marcus Scribner) seems to have the least compelling motivation: he's a doom-scroller impatient with the more gradualist approaches espoused by the documentary filmmaker he's assisting.

The film gives voice to the relevant debates: other environmentalists, law enforcement officers, and friends and loved ones object, touting incremental progress and lawful passive resistance, and warning our heroes about not putting off the public. But when an internal discussion of being labelled terrorists kicks off, the night before demolition day, Michael gives it short shrift: 'If the American Empire calls us terrorists, we're doing something right.' The film, likewise, has little time to indulge lip-biting doubt. It's keen to get on with the action, accompanied by Gavin Brivik's techno score, which tick-tocks throughout the film as the gang makes the bombs and then sets them in multiple locations (before the inevitable entry of unforeseen variables threatens to turn everything tragic). Throughout the narrative, the flashbacks themselves detonate like well-placed charges to disrupt the conclusions we've reached about the characters and their motivations; some of editor Daniel Garber's smash cuts are, literally, dynamite, leaving the audience suspended in a flashback until we return to the present-day timeline and see who's still alive when the smoke clears.

Not since Sergio Leone's *Duck, You Sucker!* (1971) has someone produced such a subversive, politically forthright, partisan piece of genre entertainment. There are undoubtedly some well-oiled clichés and on-the-nose dialogue, but it's refreshing to watch a film that doesn't dress up weary, unimaginative irony as political sophistication. It means what it says; fire alarms aren't meant to be subtle. *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* is eco-friendly dynamite, a necessarily dangerous film that argues that violence against property can be an act of self-defence.

In a slightly different context, Conservative Prime Minister John Major once said that we should 'condemn a little more and understand a little less'. To paraphrase Xochitl: if the law will not condemn you, this film will.

John Bleasdale, *Sight and Sound*, [bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound](https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound), 26 January 2023

HOW TO BLOW UP A PIPELINE

Director: Daniel Goldhaber
Production Company: Chrono
Executive Producers: Forrest Goodluck, Eugene Kotlyarenko, Riccardo Maddalosso, Jon Rosenberg, Natalie Sellers, Jordan Sjol
Producers: Daniel Goldhaber, Ariela Barer, Alex Black, Alex Hughes, Isa Mazzei, Adam Wyatt Tate, David Grove Churchill Viste
Co-producer: Danielle Mandel
Screenplay: Daniel Goldhaber, Jordan Sjol, Ariela Barer
Based on the book by: Andreas Malm
Director of Photography: Tehillah De Castro
Editor: Daniel Garber
Production Designer: Adri Siriwatt
Art Director: Kendra Tuthill
Costume Designer: Eunice Jera Lee
Music: Gavin Brivik
Sound Mixer: Andrejs Prokopenko

Cast

Sasha Lane *(Theo)*
Forrest Goodluck *(Michael)*
Lukas Gage *(Logan)*
Ariela Barer *(Xochitl)*
Kristine Froseth *(Rowan)*
Jayme Lawson *(Alisha)*
Marcus Scribner *(Shawn)*
Jake Weary *(Dwayne)*
Irene Bedard *(Joanna)*
Olive Jane Lorraine *(Katie)*

USA 2022
102 mins

Courtesy of Vertigo Releasing

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FILM FESTIVAL

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Member Salon: Close
Mon 6 Mar 20:15
Seniors: The Teckman Mystery (+ intro) + The Stranger Left No Card
Wed 8 Mar 14:00
African Odysseys: On Her Shoulders: Black Women in Broadcast Journalism
Wed 8 Mar 18:10
Woman with a Movie Camera: Fashion Reimagined + Q&A with director Becky Hutner and designer Amy Powney
Wed 8 Mar 20:40
Member Exclusive: BFI Southbank and BFI IMAX Tour
Mon 13 Mar 10:00
Art in the Making: Art We Deserve? (+ intro by Ken Worpole) + Marketing the Arts: Foundation for Success
Mon 13 Mar 18:15
Projecting the Archive: The Clairvoyant + intro by Dr Lucie Bea Dutton, historian
Tue 14 Mar 18:10

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

TV Preview: Inside No. 9 + Q&A with Steve Pemberton, Reece Shearsmith and Adam Tandy
Mon 6 Mar 18:15
WOW Festival Presents Prima Facie + panel discussion
Wed 8 Mar 18:15
Preview: Winners + Q&A with director Hassan Nazer
Thu 9 Mar 18:15
Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI
Mon 13 Mar 18:30
Preview: Rye Lane + Q&A with director Raine Allen-Miller
Monday 13 March 20:45

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