

TIFF 2022: How to Blow Up a Pipeline, Sisu, Blueback

[Brian Tallerico](#) September 17, 2022



Some dispatches shape themselves around genre or theme. Some are just random assemblies of orphans that couldn't find their way into pieces with similar film siblings. This is the latter.

[Daniel Goldhaber](#)'s kinetic, riveting "**How to Blow Up a Pipeline**" was like nothing else I saw at TIFF. It has a gritty texture to it that's unusual in a festival typically dominated by over-polished, big studio fare. Goldhaber revealed in his introduction that his parents were in the audience, noting how they have fought against the climate crisis for years, and one can feel that personal passion in the "[Cam](#)"

director's film. This is a movie that is tired of talk; the time for action is yesterday. And I think Neon was very smart to pick it up out of TIFF—it's a movie that's going to have a lot of young fans, people inspired by its intensity and ability to take a relatively dry concept like climate change and use it to fuel a heist thriller.

Very loosely based on the non-fiction book by Andreas Malm, "Pipeline" cuts back and forth between a group of climate activists sabotaging a Texas pipeline and flashbacks as to how this unusual crew assembled in the desert. It's very much an ensemble piece but if there's a lead it would be Xochitl (Ariela Barer), a climate change activist who has been radicalized after her mother died due to a recent heat wave. Everyone in "Pipeline" has reached a point of violent action—although, it should be noted, they're careful to make sure no lives are lost, only corporate profits—due to a personal setback that could be traced back to inaction in the climate crisis. For example, Theo ([Sasha Lane](#)) has leukemia that likely wouldn't exist without her proximity to a nearby plant, and Dwayne ([Jake Weary](#)) has literally battled pipeline installation on his Texan property. Goldhaber makes the political personal here, which gives the action emotional stakes instead of just global ones.

Goldhaber again works with his "Cam" editor [Daniel Garber](#), who does some of the best editing work I've seen all year

with this project. There's a propulsion to "Pipeline" that could have been derailed by its flashback structure, but Garber and Goldhaber somehow find a way to never let that happen, turning each flashback into something of a short film, character portraits in the middle of the heist that don't detract from it but enhance the tension. I generally find films that rely on flashbacks to have momentum problems, but that somehow never happens here because of how expertly assembled it all is.

"How to Blow Up a Pipeline" kind of writes itself into a corner—we don't want the kids to fail but it's also not too naïve a film to suggest that one act could end climate change so a victory might seem simplistic. I'm not fully convinced it finds its way out of it, but that's a minor complaint for a film I suspect that young people will embrace. I keep telling my kids that theirs is the generation that's really going to drive the climate change conversation—I like that this angry film will influence that discussion.