

Women and men in action and a dog's purpose

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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A twenty-year-old prostitute in Cape Town searches for meaning when she falls pregnant in *Tess*; three brilliant women working at NASA team up to launch astronaut John Glenn into orbit in the Oscar nominated *Hidden Figures*; 20 years after the cult classic *Trainspotting*, the wild bunch returns in *T2: Trainspotting*; a devoted dog finds the meaning of his own existence through the lives of the humans he teaches to laugh and love in *A Dog's Purpose*; two rebellious teachers solve their differences the hard way in the comedy *Fist Fight*; and *I, Claude Monet* is a feature-length documentary film about one of the world's most famous artists.

Tess

Tess is a hard-hitting journey into the heart of a young prostitute who sells her soul on the streets of Cape Town.

Sassy twenty-year-old Tess (Christa Visser) sells her body and survives by popping painkillers by the bunch and through her wry humour. But her life turns upside down when she falls pregnant. Though Tess tries to run, her past torments her. She begins to question her own sanity. Tess fights back, fighting her demons, searching for the truth.

When she abandons her daily ritual of popping pills, awful pictures from her past ambush her mind. But Tess does not allow herself to collapse. Instead, she learns – perhaps because of the baby in her belly – to connect with the people around her. The Congolese refugee next door (Nse Ikpe-Etim) treats her like a daughter. An impotent client shows her his heart. Tess finds sanctuary among strong women in a belly dance studio, and discovers she can dance up a storm. With new courage she tracks down her childhood friend, Dumé, who helps her to face the truth of her past.

A gritty no-holds-barred drama, shot in found locations in a living, breathing handheld style. Tracey Farren adapted her novel to film, with Meg Rickards in the director's chair.

"The fact that Tess is a sex worker is almost incidental. She's a young woman who is undergoing a tumultuous journey: facing the truth of her childhood, coming to terms with it and moving forward with her inner dignity intact," says Rickards. "She is so unflinchingly honest that your skin itches; you feel her suffering like a punch in the gut and her catharsis like a purging of your own emotional closet."

Hidden Figures

Everyone knows about the Apollo missions. We can all immediately list the bold male astronauts who took those first giant steps for humankind in space: John Glenn, Alan Shepard and Neil Armstrong. Yet, remarkably, Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson are names not taught in school or even known to most people - even though their daring, smarts and powerful roles as NASA's ingenious "human computers" were indispensable to advances that allowed for human space flight.

At last, the story of a visionary trio of women who crossed gender, race and professional lines on their way to pioneering cosmic travel comes to the screen starring Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer, singer Janelle Monáe making her motion picture debut and two time Oscar winner Kevin Costner.

The film recounts the vital history of an elite team of black female mathematicians at NASA who helped win the all-out space race against America's rivals in the Soviet Union and, at the same time, sent the quest for equal rights and opportunity rocketing forwards.

Director Theodore Melfi (St. Vincent) brings the women's rise to the top ranks of aerospace in the thrilling early days of NASA to life via a fast-moving, humour-filled, inspiring entertainment that illuminates both the gutsy quest for Earth's first, seemingly impossible orbital flight and also the powerful things that can result when women unite.

For all its joys and triumphs, *Hidden Figures* is also a film that takes place at the crossroads of the most defining struggles in American history: the evolving fight for Civil Rights; the battle to win the high-stakes Cold War without risking nuclear war and be the first superpower to establish a human presence outside planet Earth; and the ongoing drive to show how the mind-boggling technological breakthroughs that create the world's future have nothing to do with gender or background.

Says Melfi: "This story takes place at the collision of the Cold War, the space race, the Jim Crow south, and the birth of the Civil Rights movement. It is incredible territory for a rich and powerful story few people know about at all."

T2: Trainspotting

First there was an opportunity... then there was a betrayal. Twenty years have gone by. Much has changed, but just as much remains the same. Mark Renton returns to the only place he can ever call home. They are waiting for him: Spud, Sick Boy, and Begbie. Other old friends are waiting too: sorrow, loss, joy, vengeance, hatred, friendship, love, longing, fear, regret, diamorphine, self-destruction and mortal danger, they are all lined up to welcome him, ready to join the dance.

With Ewan McGregor, Robert Carlyle, Johnny Lee Miller and Ewen Bremner. Directed by Danny Boyle from a screenplay by John Hodge.

A Dog's Purpose

Based on author W. Bruce Cameron's beloved best-selling novel, *A Dog's Purpose*, from director Lasse Hallström, shares the heartwarming and surprising story of one devoted dog (voiced by Josh Gad of *Frozen*) who finds the meaning of his own existence through the lives of the humans he teaches to laugh and love.

Over the course of five decades, a single voice — that of an indefatigable dog — takes us along a riveting and uplifting path that speaks to the heart of anyone who has ever loved an animal. Although he is reincarnated in the bodies of multiple canines through the years, it is his unbreakable bond with a kindred spirit named Ethan that carries and inspires one dog throughout his journey to find a true purpose for his boy.

Hallström claims it is no accident he was attracted to the material: "I made two movies about dogs previously — *My Life as a Dog* and *Haichi* — so this is my third dog story. If you have an interest in outsiders and emotions that seems irrational to humans, you can certainly relate to a dog's feelings and a dog's life."

"Ultimately, the one rule we had was that the dog could not speak on camera," offers Hallström. "With the narration, the dog's thoughts have human elements to it, and I have become more and more caught up in the idea of reincarnation because of this film. But whether the possibility is real or not...who knows. The point is to be open to the magic that there is something going on in the universe that we cannot yet explain."

Fist Fight

Remember those inspiring high school movies where a dedicated but unconventional teacher is assigned to the worst class and, defying the odds, transforms them all into well-behaved honor students? Well, *Fist Fight* isn't one of those.

Ice Cube and Charlie Day star as high school teachers prepared to solve their differences the hard way in the New Line Cinema comedy *Fist Fight*, directed by Richie Keen. On the last day of the year, mild-mannered high school English teacher Andy Campbell (Day) is trying his best to keep it together amidst senior pranks, a dysfunctional administration and budget cuts that put jobs on the line. But things go from bad to worse when he accidentally crosses his much tougher and deeply feared colleague, Ron Strickland (Ice Cube), who challenges Campbell to an old-fashioned throw down after school. News of the fight spreads like wildfire and ends up becoming the very thing this school, and Campbell, needed.

Keen says, "This is definitely a heightened experience of high school. It takes place entirely over one day — the last day of the year at Roosevelt High, which is the traditional Senior Prank Day, so it's utter chaos. We wanted to see how far we could push that envelope."

It starts out as the teachers versus the students, or, as Keen puts it, "the prison guards versus the inmates." But everything changes when two teachers are pitted against each other.

I, Claude Monet

This fresh new look at who is arguably the world's favourite artist – through his own words – is directed by award-winning director Phil Grabsky. Based on over 2,500 letters and narrated by Henry Goodman, *I, Claude Monet* reveals new insight into the man who not only painted the picture that gave birth to impressionism, but who was perhaps the most influential and successful painter of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Monet's life is a gripping tale, an endless quest, about a man who, behind his sun-dazzled canvases, suffered from feelings of depression, loneliness and even suicide. However, as his art developed and his love of gardening led to his glorious series of paintings depicting his Giverny garden, his humour, insight and love of life are revealed.

The film, shot on location throughout Europe at the very spots where Monet painted some of his most iconic paintings, *I, Claude Monet* is a fresh and intimate cinematic exploration of some of the most loved painted scenes in western art.

Filmed exclusively for cinema at the exhibitions and on location, this ground-breaking series allows art lovers worldwide to enjoy, marvel at and delight in the amazing works of some of history's foremost painters on the big screen and in stunning high definition.

I, Claude Monet releases on Saturday, 25 February for four screenings only: 25 February, and 1 and 2 March at 19.30, and on 26 February at 14.30 – at Rosebank Nouveau in Johannesburg, Brooklyn Nouveau in Pretoria, Gateway Nouveau in Durban and at V&A Nouveau in Cape Town.

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