

Unofficial Movies on a Shoestring 2003 Reviews

So the [Movies on a Shoestring](#) festival is underway for 2003. I thought I'd pre-write reviews of all the films by examining the descriptions presented by the [Movies on a Shoestring](#) website and assuming that each film follows every short film stereotype. I have actually seen one of the films in this event ([True Believer](#)) but I managed to put aside my experience and fake it ... the real film is a bit off from what I would have originally expected.

Remember that the opinions expressed in the "Jayce's summary" column in the tables below are based entirely on the summaries printed in the [Movies on a Shoestring](#) website and on past experience with the festival. The opinions in no way reflect the actual content of the films. As an added bonus, I've never even worked on a real film before, nor do I really know anything about the industry other than "making of" documentaries.

The original movie synopses are available at the [Movies on a Shoestring](#) website at <http://www.rochesterfilmfest.org> and are used here without permission. Jayce's reviews were created as part of the weekly events listings at <http://JayceLand.com>.

Thursday, May 1, 8:00 p.m.

| Title Artist, City | Technical | <i>Movies on a Shoestring</i> Synopsis | Jayce's summary if this is a stereotypical short film |
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| <u>The Marsh</u> Joshua R. Gramse, Sodus, NY | 10:00, Color, 1/2" video | The development of human society as seen from a marsh. The archiving of human culture in nature. | The camera never leaves a low-angle view of a marsh and follows a quasi-animated view of the development of society, is paved over, then released again as society crumbles after nuclear war. |
| <u>Tremors</u> Evelin Longo, Santa Monica, CA | 12:00, Color, 16mm | A woman in love is tempted by another man and gets lost in the seduction game, forgetting about the world around her. | First-person perspective and wide-angle lenses are used with a soundtrack that builds to a cacophany of inviting voices. |
| <u>All That I Perceive</u> Lindsay Daniels, Oakland, CA | 4:00, Color, 1/2" video | Share an experience about an unsuccessful eye surgery that caused the filmmaker to have double vision giving her a unique and broad visual terrain that served as an inspiration to think about the world in a new way. | A split-camera view shows us the way the world is normally perceived and an alternative view that highlights what's really important. |

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| <u>Jungle Picnic</u> Laura Di Trapani, Portland, OR | 5:00, Color, 1/2" video | Two brothers, Stodgy and Starchy, lose their taste for the great outdoors when one encounters a tiger and the other has to decide how many hot dogs to eat. | A primitive animation technique is used to tell this humorous story with a contrived punchline about vegetarianism. |
| <u>Spikedriver</u> Stefanos Kafatos, Los Angeles, CA | 12:00, B&W, 1/2" video | Xiang becomes unemployed after the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. Isolated and in desperate need, how far will he go to find his way? | Dramatic black-and-white camerawork enhances the feeling of desolation by using railroad tracks fading into heat-induced illusions at the horizon. |
| <u>The Legend of Razorback</u> Michael Greenspan, Los Angeles, CA | 25:00, Color, 35mm | Eleven year old Avery Small must find the key to unlock his silence and pain. | Some middle-aged guy decided it would be cool to use simple metaphors to explore fears—both in childhood and adulthood. |
| <u>Reverberations</u> Matt Costanza, Livonia, NY | 7:00, Color, 1/2" video | Live action footage of martial artists and dancers brings this experimental animation to life. | The impacts of martial arts are visualized using a ripple effect. |
| <u>Smithee's Lecture</u> David Liban, Washington, DC | 24:00, Color, 1/2" video | Follow five students as they rush to attend a lecture that their professor says is to be given by famous Hollywood filmmaker Alan Smithee. | A self-congratulating film about how films can make fun of themselves by poking fun at plays like <i>Waiting for Godot</i> and the concepts of anonymity. |

Friday, May 2, 8:00 p.m.

| Title Artist, City | Technical | <i>Movies on a Shoestring Synopsis</i> | Jayce's summary if this is a stereotypical short film |
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| <u>All Games are Home Games: Baseball in San Quentin</u> Josh Springer, San Mateo, CA | 27:00, Color, 1/2" video | Inside San Quentin State Prison you will be introduced to the all-inmate baseball team, the San Quentin Giants. This film answers the questions "What's it like to play against an inmate serving a life sentence for murder?" and "How does baseball help them reform?" | Gritty, cinéma vérité camerawork exposes the harsh realities of prison life while also exploring the humanity of the inmates. |
| <u>The Least of These</u> Rik Swartzwelder, Solver Spring, MD | 20:00, Color, 35mm | The fading, isolated life of a diner owner and the dull routine of his varied late night crowd are forever changed by the unusual proposition of a stranger. Based on a true story. | The first 8 minutes of the film are spent introducing us to the drudgery of owning a diner by using soft, smokey evening light and old people, while the latter 12 minutes are introduced with the arrival of a flashy stranger who makes an interesting proposition. |

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| <u>Die Leiden der Jugend</u> (The Sorrows of Youth) Brian M. Plow, Athens, OH | 16:00, Color, 1/2" video | Amidst the quiet rhythm of a library, a young couple defy the strictly ordered confines of an institution and find the courage to love. Or do they? | Oh boy, a lusty couple in a dusty library who find they're not alone in their endeavors. Too bad this one is crippled by video washout from the bright windows to the outdoors. |
| <u>Some Lucky Bastard</u> David W. Tamkin, Vancouver, BC | 22:00, Color, 1/2" video | When Chris Miller is given the task of running the office pool, he discovers it gives him an excuse to see co-worker Tanya Nichols twice a week. Events lead the financially strapped Chris to take a risk that forever changes his life. | Some guy lusts after one of his co-workers—but it's not sexual harassment like in the real world because this is a short film—and he uses the office betting pool to throw away his money to be near her instead of just talking with her. |
| <u>Alchemy</u> Anna Condo, New York, NY | 18:00, Color, 35mm | What goes around comes around—and around. Saskia gives an unusual gift to her doctor only to receive it back from a friend. | The audience is asked to suspend disbelief that there's a doctor that hasn't been crushed under the pressure of the medical insurance industry. Then, they're asked to stretch further and believe that the contrived pre-scripted world of the movies is a match for the kind of magic that can happen in the real world. |
| <u>La Toiletta</u> Dave Goldenberg, Ridgefield, CT | 8:00, Color, 1/2" video | The epic saga of a fifth grader who has to go to the bathroom during a test, and the teacher who stands in his way. Presented, of course, as an operetta. | An operetta gimmick is applied to a simple situation as some kind of high-art humorous juxtaposition of style and story. |

Friday, May 2, 11:00 p.m.

| Title Artist, City | Technical | <i>Movies on a Shoestring</i> Synopsis | Jayce's summary if this is a stereotypical short film |
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| <u>Sobering</u> Robert Deege and Michael Turfler, Vienna, VA | 24:00, Color, 1/2" video | A young man wakes up with little recollection of the night before. During the day, flashbacks and phone conversations provide conflicting evidence of what happened. In his search to figure out the truth, he makes a discovery that will change his life. | Some guy has a wild night and finds out he's gay. |

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| <u>As Virgins Fall</u> Natalie Barandes, West Hollywood, CA | 28:00, Color, 35mm | August 8, 1969. Amid sex, drugs, and the Viet Nam War, a privileged teenage girl is about to learn that no one is safe. | Gritty, cinéma vérité camerawork brings the reality of war to life, just like any other film with gritty, cinéma vérité camerawork in a wartime setting. |
| <u>Crossing</u> Riccardo Costa, New York, NY | 9:00, Color, 1/2" video | While walking in Manhattan, Cass meets all the people that matter most in his life. Something strange is going on. | Some guy dies and doesn't realize it until he meets everyone he knows in some bizarre homage to <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i> . Do you even care if he's really dead? |
| <u>Unearthed</u> Christina Spangler, Cold Spring, NY | 8:00, Color, 16mm | Alone and exposed in the above ground world, an unearthed potato fights for survival and is given the gift of sight, only to realize the impermanence of its existence. | Yet another silly animation where we're supposed to empathize with talking food. |
| <u>Shadowboxer</u> Vilka Tzouras, Brooklyn, NY | 28:00, Color, 16mm | Filmed in a direct and provocative style, "Shadowboxer" brings issues of female teenage violence into focus through the story of a 16 year old girl named Reena. | Gritty, cinéma vérité camerawork tells the tale of one young woman who has to learn to fight to survive on the street. |
| <u>True Believer</u> Dave Puls, Rochester, NY | 4:00, Color, 1/2" video | The alarm is sounded to be aware of the True Believer. This film blends humor with stark observations of fanatics past and present. | Carefully assembled soundbytes from various historical fanatics hammer home the idea of fanaticism. |

Saturday, May 3, 4:00 p.m.

| Title Artist, City | Technical | <i>Movies on a Shoestring</i> Synopsis | Jayce's summary if this is a stereotypical short film |
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| <u>Nine</u> Jennifer Campbell, Lowell, MA | 26:00, Color, 1/2" video | In this uplifting documentary, nine breast cancer survivors prepare for the world's largest two-day rowing event. The film follows the women's stories as they bond and share hope, from their first meeting through the entire race. | Starting with the staged diagnosis of a patient's breast cancer, we follow her to a support group. A touching, female-acoustic-dominated soundtrack helps set the mood. |
| <u>Tiny Magic</u> John Takacs, Lewiston, NY | 21:00, Color, 1/2" video | Nick, a magician with supernatural abilities, attempts to charm Michelle. A memorable evening punctuated by a magical ending. | Despite wearing a cape, some girl still finds a magician alluring. |

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| <u>Match Scratch Fever</u> Kristin Solid, North Hollywood, CA | 3:00, Color, 1/2" video | When a match escapes the matchbox and enters the world, he soon uncovers the meaning of life and embarks on a mission to fulfill his destiny. | Yet another animation where we're supposed to care about talking matches. |
| <u>Barntasia</u> Helen Kiefer, Oak Park, IL | 12:00, Color, 35mm | Beautiful photographic imagery from America's historical barns dances to music in a fantasy of sound and light. | Uh oh ... someone figured out that you can use Photoshop plug-ins in Premiere. |
| <u>Back to One</u> Reid Mihalko, New York, NY | 10:00, Color, 1/2" video | John has finally summoned up the courage to pop the question, but he can't seem to make it come out right. Even the most well rehearsed moments aren't what they seem. | A few minutes of setup and 8 minutes watching some guy trip over his words trying to propose to his girlfriend, only to have her fill in the blanks for him. Quick cuts and unusual camera angles help convey anxiety to the audience. |
| <u>Bamboo Master</u> Ding Ye, Rochester, NY | 4:00, Color, 1/2" video | A talented young martial artist is defeating renowned martial arts clans in China. One day he is defeated by the Bamboo Master in the Bamboo Forest. | A deliberately sloppily-dubbed soundtrack is enhanced by vaguely Asian-sounding music in the background in this martial-arts parody. |
| <u>Mount Everest—Up Close and Personal</u> Ron Strobel, Malvern, PA | 17:00, Color, 1/2" video | This is a story about being middle-aged, out of shape, and lazy. It's about two cultures literally a world apart. It's about surmounting obstacles and seeking pure adventure and a life-long dream. | Some fat guy gets a bug in his ass about climbing Mount Everest. He's so inspired that he stands up and goes to the other room. Comedy ensues. |

Saturday, May 3, 8:00 p.m.

| Title Artist, City | Technical | <i>Movies on a Shoestring Synopsis</i> | Jayce's summary if this is a stereotypical short film |
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| <u>Taste It All</u> Richard J. Liukis, Los Angeles, CA | 27:00, Color, 35mm | What goes on behind the scenes of the art world. A different view of the artist, the gallery owner, and the patron. | When it comes to art, it's really all about the hors d'oeuvres at gallery openings, shown alone and being eaten with wide-angle lenses and close-ups. |
| <u>West Bank Merry-Go-Round</u> Bob Barancik, Portland, ME | 3:00, Color, 1/2" video | A meditation on the cycle of violence between the Israelis and the Palestinians on the West Bank. | An animated view of violence in the Middle East is shown in repeating form until it's revealed to be actually circular. |
| <u>Water</u> Gabriele Zamparini, New York, NY | 14:00, B&W, 35mm | An African immigrant searches for a job in Harlem, but finds something else.... | An African immigrant finds racism rampant in New York. |

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| <p><u>Waiting For Johnnie Walker</u> Kerry Logan, Burbank, CA</p> | <p>30:00, Color, 1/2" video</p> | <p>Hana is considered eccentric by the other patrons at the bar where she goes each night, waiting for her "mystery man" to appear and take her away. Karl, the compassionate bartender, looks after her.</p> | <p>Some drunk is revealed as a drunk while the other patrons actually think she has real friends.</p> |
| <p><u>Rocks and Chocolate</u> Teddy Sharkova, Savannah, GA</p> | <p>12:00, Color, 35mm</p> | <p>In a post-communist Eastern European country, times are tough. A little girl steals from the jar containing the poor family's meager savings.</p> | <p>A family of thoroughly mid-1900's Eastern-Eurpoean looking people who wear lots of scarves has their impoverished world changed <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i>-style when their daughter takes their savings.</p> |
| <p><u>19 at 11</u> Michael Schwartz, Marina Del Rey, CA</p> | <p>15:00, Color, 16mm</p> | <p>Greg, a young reporter, gets his first shot at prime time, where he is challenged by Roger the senior anchor. By 11:30pm, only one newsman will be left standing.</p> | <p>Lots of reaction-shots drive home the humor of an escalating battle between young and old.</p> |