

# Baghead

Contributed by Noralil Ryan Fores  
Thursday, 31 January 2008

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Photo Courtesy Sundance Film Festival

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Film opens at the Los Angeles Underground Film Festival where brothers Matt (Ross Partridge) and Chad (Steve Zissis)--who eerily resemble brothers Duplass themselves but for the fact Jay's quite a bit more handsome than his counterpart Chad, apologies Zissis--sit with lady friends Katherine (Elise Muller) and Michelle (Greta Gerwig) watching the premiere of We Are Naked. Laugh worthy already in its jabs at current trends in indie films, Baghead sets its sights to filmmaker Jett Garner (Jett Garner) who steps up next to answer mundane fest questions al la "What was your budget?," a question which unsurprisingly became the Duplass' bane of existence in their tour of debut The Puffy Chair. Catered to audiences who regularly attend film festivals, this opening section is a hoot for circuit insiders but may flounder with blockbuster-only educated audiences.

When the four friends decide to make their own indie film, though, heading off Henry David Thoreau style to a secluded cabin, Baghead slips into a more universally accessible narrative pattern, mixing up relationship awkwardness with Blair Witch Project homage well-timed frights. Sexual tensions run high as Michelle, chased by Chad, hits on Matt, who in turn is still attracted to on again, off again girlfriend Katherine, and brother pitted against brother, woman pitted against woman, the horror develops from the ineptitude of the four to get on the same page at one time. While Partridge and Muller put in straight, strong performances--Partridge particularly in the moving closing scene of the film--the heavy weight falls on Zissis and Gerwig's shoulders. There's an element to Gerwig's performance that by the parody's design is pat, and yet in the moments when she's allowed to break out of caricature, Gerwig surfaces a palpable and grounded sense of fear and aggravation. Zissis, in crafting Chad, manages to steal the screen with his absolute sincerity, sweetness and committed emotional investment at every moment, and in fact, Chad is the only of the four characters who doesn't really subvert moral goodness throughout the film.

For a moment in review, Baghead sounds entirely too heartfelt, but the truth of the matter is that it's scary and funny without all the emotional bells and whistles. Well conceived and superbly executed, it's a completely entertaining watch--the modern indie must-see of indie must-sees.