

Severance Press Kit

CONTENTS

- 1. The Setup** (summary)
- 2. The Tale** (synopsis)
- 3. The Low-down** (history/biography)
- 4. The Players** (principal cast profiles)
- 5. The Operators** (principal crew profiles)
- 6. Cast** (full cast list)
- 7. Crew** (full crew list)
- 8. Short Synopsis** (1 line & 100 word synopsis)
- 9. Press Photographs**

The Setup

Sparadigm Cinema, an independent film production company formed in Austin, Texas, is proud to present *Severance*, a feature length comedy about reality, fantasy, and what happens when they collide.

Severance tells the story of Steve Saddleman, played by Troy Anthony Miller, a frustrated would-be writer of detective novels who embarks on a misadventure of self discovery on his 30th birthday. After a series of compounding frustrations involving his best friend Zach (played by Brian Hecker) and his corporate technology job, Steve finds himself with a chance to start a new life. In a moment of epiphany, he decides to live out his dream of being a suave hero straight out of classic Hollywood cinema. It's a kind of cracked fantasy forced into existence, and his decision leads him to a love affair with Jennifer, a beautiful co-worker played by Lauren Zinn, but also to disaster involving a suspicious heavy named Clyde Buxler, played by Jules Loth.

Shot on super 16mm black and white film, *Severance* not only pays homage to the style of film *noir*, but uses the all-too-real experience of the recent tech boom and subsequent crash as a focal point for its hero's comedic hijinks. The film's director, Miller, was a project manager at a major internet consulting firm before being laid off himself in the summer of 2001. This experience, coupled with his love of classic black-and-white movies, gave birth to *Severance*.

The key members of the *Severance* production team, including producers Chris Keyland and Melissa Trompeter, have between them nearly twenty years experience in film, video, and multimedia production. And many of the players in the Austin-based **Heroes of Comedy** improvisational comedy troupe lend their talents as principal and supporting characters in the film's cast.

Severance, a Sparadigm Cinema production, stars Brian Hecker, Bryan Kent, Jules Loth, Troy Anthony Miller, Todd Tatom, and Lauren Zinn. Original music is by Pat Murray. Director of Photography is Levy Castleberry. Production design is by David Moreau. Producers are Chris Keyland and Melissa Trompeter. Executive Producers are Victor Cachia and Willard Miller. Writer, Director, and Producer is Troy Anthony Miller.

The Tale

Every man dreams of getting laid... off.

Steve Saddleman (TROY ANTHONY MILLER) would love to be a mystery writer. Only he can't get past the title page of his unwritten novel. Even his love of Humphrey Bogart films provides no inspiration. Burned-out by his corporate technology job, he is trapped in a vicious cycle of work, booze, and sleep. And to top it off, he is unable to express his feelings for Jennifer (LAUREN ZINN), a beautiful co-worker.

He'd like to be tough and suave. Like Bogie in "Casablanca". *The cigarettes. The confident swagger. That white tux.* He sees himself wearing it, sipping a martini, lounging with beautiful women in bikinis. For a moment he's really there. His fantasy life. It's as if he has stepped into 1940's film *noir*. Mysterious smoke fills the room. Venetian blind shadows cut across his face. The light is soft, silky. Everyone laughs gayly.

But reality rips through his illusion like the slug from a .38. It's his 30th birthday, and Steve begrudgingly starts his day preparing for an important meeting at work. During his morning coffeeshop ritual, his best friend Zach (BRIAN HECKER) advises Steve that he needs to "grab life by the balls", quit moping around and tackle his fears. He talks Steve into getting drunk and going to get a very "special" haircut at a place called Trim & Blow. Alas, things go terribly awry.

Afterwards, Steve, who is quite disheveled and still slightly drunk, rushes to work and immediately runs into Jennifer. With Zach's words echoing in his brain, he attempts to ask her out, but is interrupted by his smarmy supervisor Larry (BRYAN KENT). Teetering on the edge of sanity, Steve escapes briefly into his imagined life. But when he is yanked back into reality during the critical part of the meeting, Steve finally explodes.

Steve's boss, Jim (SEAN HILL), *should* fire him. Instead, he gives Steve a second chance: not at his job, but at his life. Freedom comes in the form of severance, and with it, Steve shuffles off the shackles of his dead-end existence. Encouraged by his health-conscious roommate Justin (TODD TATOM), he vows to revoke his bad habits, tackle new hobbies, and write his great American crime novel.

Only none of that happens. Steve remains unfocused, a new life eluding his grasp. That is until one day, when he stumbles upon Jennifer at his regular downtown coffeeshop. As he sneaks around, attempting to spy on her, he has a brainstorm: instead of *writing* a detective novel, Steve decides to *live* one.

The Low-down

Severance was shot on location in Austin, Texas, in the sweltering summer of 2002. Utilizing a beautiful super 16mm black and white film stock created by the English company **Ilford**, director Troy Anthony Miller and cinematographer Levy Castleberry devised two distinct visual styles within which to tell the film's story.

One would reflect the drab, sterile life of Steve Saddleman and his routine trials with morning hangovers, stifling neckties, and insufferable office meetings. The other would emulate the classic film *noir* scheme of high key light, smoke filled rooms, and venetian blind shadows, as Steve begins to see his world through the eyes of a Bogart-style movie hero. Thus, one style reflects Steve's reality, and the other reflects the fantasy he *wishes* were reality.

The story itself was inspired by Miller's experience as a project manager in the high tech industry. He started out working for a 30-person educational software company. A year later, they were bought by a 200-person gaming company. And six months after that, Miller and his co-workers were acquired by a 2000-person corporate consultancy.

The final company was business giant **Sapient**, and after 8 months of trying to figure out what to do with their newest toy, beloved Austin company **Human Code**, Sapient ultimately decided to close the shop and lay everyone off. This proved to be the jolt Miller needed, as his dream of making an independent movie sharply came into focus. One year later, the camera began rolling. Appropriately, the film was partially funded with Miller's own severance check.

To bring the story to life, the producers needed the right cast of comedic actors. They tapped Austin's **Heroes of Comedy** improv troupe, of which Miller is a member. The Heroes perform at the **Hideout**, a coffeeshop/theatre where several key scenes were shot. Actors mined from the troupe include Lauren Zinn, Todd Tatom, Amy McClellan, Sean Hill (troupe founder), Ted Rutherford, Shana Merlin, Jay Michaels, and Shannon McCormick. Many other members appear as featured extras.

MOVIE TRIVIA TIDBITS

Severance had all of the Ilford super 16mm film stock that could be found in North America during the summer of 2002.

All the scenes inside Steve's house were shot in 100+ degree weather with no air conditioning.

The Players

Troy Anthony Miller (“Steve Saddleman”): Troy is a native of Kansas City, Kansas, where he studied acting at the Theatre for Young America. He performed on stage in high school and at Northwestern University, where he majored in film production. He has been doing improvisational theatre with the Heroes of Comedy (Austin, Texas) since 2001. *Severance* is his first feature film role.

Brian Hecker (“Zach”): Born in South Florida, Brian began his acting career at the age of 10, appearing in various local and national TV spots, including Colgate, Subaru, and SW Airlines. While attending Northwestern University, Brian landed a part in the ensemble student-produced tv comedy show *Stinky’s Pub*, which was produced by Troy Anthony Miller. Brian then received a Master’s Degree in Directing at the American Film Institute, earning the Director of the Year award after his first year. Brian currently resides in Los Angeles, where he has been hired to ink screenplays for Universal, Miramax, and MGM.

Lauren Zinn (“Jennifer”): Lauren has been acting on stage for the past 5 years, and is an original member of the Heroes of Comedy improv troupe. She is also a veteran writer, having worked for News 8 Austin and AOL Time Warner, and has lent her voice talents to the dubbing of nearly a dozen Japanese anime films. She is currently living in New York City.

Todd Tatom (“Justin”): A former member of the Heroes of Comedy improvisational comedy troupe, Todd has done extra work on the features *Second Hand Lions* and *Cheer Up!*. An accomplished rap artist and d.j., Todd hails from Dallas, Texas.

Jules Loth (“Clyde Buxler”): A veteran of stage and screen, Jules list of credits includes starring roles in the independent films *The Sleep Eaters*, *Inconceivable*, and *The Dinner*, on television in *The Man Show*, and in commercials for Toyota, Nintendo, and Texas Lottery.

Other featured cast members and current residents of Austin include:

Bryan Kent (“Larry”)
Amy McClellan (“Jean”)
Sean Hill (“Jim”)
Ted Rutherford (“The Phone Cop”)
Mark Lit (“The Camera Cop”)
Shana Merlin (“Sally Porter”)

The Operators

Troy Anthony Miller (Writer, Director, Producer) attended film school at Northwestern University, where his short film *Of Things That Will Come to Pass* won Honorable Mention at the New Orleans and Kansas Film Festivals. He first worked on set for B-movie mogul **Roger Corman**, then as a p.a. on commercials and music videos before freelancing as a digital video editor. Miller spent several years teaching English in Portugal and Japan, and eventually wound up in high tech during the internet craze of the late 90s. This led him to make *Severance*, his first feature film.

Melissa Trompeter (Producer), a Radio/TV graduate of Kansas State University, has worked in the industry 10 plus years focusing on corporate training, distance learning and science education. She has written, directed and produced numerous training videos for various organizations including Venture Stores, St. Luke's Hospital of Kansas City, Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas, Goodwill Easter Seals and United Way. She was director and associate producer of *What's the Secret?*, an interactive science show broadcast live across the country via satellite.

Chris Keyland (Producer) is a freelance sound designer, independent filmmaker and musician in Austin, Texas. Some of his recent sound work has been on the award-winning *Adventures of Mad Matt*, as well as *The Anatomy Lesson*, *Tom's Wife*, and *Room*, which screened at both **Sundance** and **Cannes** in 2005. He is a recent graduate from the University of Texas at Austin.

Levy Castleberry (Director of Photography) has shot 35mm, 16mm, and digital video, and his many credits as a d.p. include the short *Lonelyland*, the short *Out of Bounds* as part of 2001's *Six in Austin*, the feature *Living*, the documentary *Hitmen* (shot in Las Vegas), the feature *The Grotto*, the short *Bone Snap*, the feature *Radio Free Steve*, a Best of Fest Finalist at the 2000 San Francisco International Film Festival, and the feature *Sweet Thing*, distributed on DVD in 2000 by **The Asylum**.

Pat Murray (Music Composer) is a composer/trumpet player living in Austin, Texas. Formally trained in music at the Manhattan School of Music, his film composing career includes two feature films and several shorts, including the award-winning shorts *Adventures of Mad Matt* and *Perils in Nude Modeling*. In 2002, Pat worked with songwriter David Baerwald on two songs for the romantic comedy *Down With Love*. As a trumpet player, Pat has performed with such acts as the Count Basie Orchestra, The Mavericks, and Kevin Lovejoy, and has played in orchestras behind Roberta Flack, Al Jarreau, and Chris Sarandon.

Cast

Steve Saddleman
Zach
Jennifer
Justin
Clyde Buxler
Larry
Jean
Jim
Betty
Cop with Camera
Cop with Phone
David Peters
Drunk Bum
Bum with Newspaper
Bum with Glasses
Bum with Gloves
Cindy
Sheila
Group Therapy Leader
Sally Porter
Bill Carlson (voice)
Nebulon Proposal Team

Waitress
Sheila's Lover
Hair Stylist #1
Hair Stylist #2
Steve's Fantasy Girls

Troy Anthony Miller
Brian Hecker
Lauren Zinn
Todd Tatom
Jules Loth
Bryan Kent
Amy McClellan
Sean Hill
Adele Coles
Mark Lit
Ted Rutherford
Garry Peters
Phil O'Hern
Chad Nichols
Buzz Moran
Shannon McCormick
Emily Roberts
Safia Gray
Jay Michaels
Shana Merlin
Chris Allen
Deneen Frazier
Kevin Miller
Tom Procida
Stephanie Dennis
Madeline Lavrentjev
Christopher Cole Denman
Valerie McIntyre
Elizabeth Withey
Michelle Mika
Lauren Morrow

Crew

Writer & Director & Producer	Troy Anthony Miller	Grips/Electricians	Terry Beck Benjamin Hayes Mike Blair Julien Leal Travis McHam Phil Hall Justin Spence Eugenio DelBosque
Executive Producers	Willard Miller Victor Cachia Troy Anthony		
Miller Producers	Chris Keyland Melissa Trompeter	Production Assistants	Vira Chay Chris Cantu Joe Weaver Todd Bailey Pamela Cardenas Jay Hodges Mark Siplovic Josh Knowles Caroline Duncan Chris Shephard Keith McKay
Director of Photography	Levy Castleberry		
Production Designer	David Moreau		
Music Composer	Pat Murray		
Sound Mixer	Blayne Gorum		
Line Producer	Melissa Trompeter		
Production Coordinator	Sarah Howell		
Production Consultant	Renetta Amador		
Co- Producer	Khrysten Williams		
Associate Producers	Robert Ballard Ann Downing Gloria Bankler		
1st Assistant Director	Johnny Bartee	Post Production	
Editor	T. A. Miller	Sound Designer	Chris Keyland
Sound Designer	Chris Keyland	ADR Editor	Mike Mann
1st Assistant Camera	Angel Grenados	Foley Recordist	Brittany Matoska
2nd Assistant Camera	Matt Egan	Sound Editor	Ben Lazard
2nd Unit D.P.	Helena Wei	Final Sound Mix	Chris Keyland
Script Supervisors	Sabrina Vela Santiago Olano Salina Vela	Musicians	
	Cher Young	Drums	Kyle Thompson
Makeup Artists	Sarah Howell Emily Collins Lisa Honnefeld	Rhodes, Piano	Eddie Hobizal
	Joanna Gallager	Acoustic Bass	Hamilton Price
Makeup Consultant	Cher Young	Alto Sax, Bari Sax, Flute	
Set Decorators	Cari Gerraughty Sarah Howell Beth Gosnell	Trumpet	Jack Lampe Curtis Calderon Pat Murray
	Santiago Olano	Trombone	Randy Zimmerman
Boom Operators	Sabrina Vela Terry Beck Andy Olson	Guitar	David Pulkingham
	Levy Castleberry	Studio Baby	Lily "Hammer" White
2nd Unit Sound Mixer	Grip Matt Egan	Music Recordist	Pat Murray
Gaffer		Scoring Mixers	Pat Murray Matt Ludwick
Key		Poster designer	Jeff McDonald

SADDLEMAN

Short Synopsis

& associates

1 line

After enduring a series of misfortunes on his 30th birthday, a burned-out internet developer finds a chance to start a new life through his love of classic detective stories.

100 words

Steve Saddleman, a burned-out internet developer, fancies himself a writer of detective stories. He wants to be tough and suave, a movie hero like Humphrey Bogart, so he can get the girl of his dreams and tell his boss to shove it. Steve, however, is paralyzed by fear: he can't write, quit his job, or express his love. But on his 30th birthday everything changes, as Steve gets a chance to break free from his dead-end existence. Over two weeks time he'll pursue a dream, one filled with the smoke and shadows of film *noir*... and one that may prove to be just as elusive.

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Steve Saddleman, hero, awaits a visitor at the Hideout coffeeshop.
Photo by David Moreau



Steve has a moment of departure from reality with two fantasy girls.
Photo by David Moreau