



- [About Slackerwood](#)
- [Contributors](#)
- [Venue guide](#)
- [Reviews](#)
- [Archive by category](#)
- [Archive by month](#)
- [Contact](#)

### Search

Thanks to the *Austin Chronicle* for selecting us **Best Austin Movie Blog** of 2011.



[Home](#) » [Blogs](#) » [Jordan Gass-Poore's blog](#)

### Review: *The East*

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#) on June 14, 2013 - 11:00am in [Reviews](#) | [New Releases](#)



Yes, I agreed to cover the red carpet of *The East*, this year's SXSW closing-night film, for my campus radio station because I wanted to meet actor [Alexander Skarsgard](#) (Eric Northman on *True Blood*). And it's tempting to go on about my reaction to meeting Skarsgard briefly and shaking his hand and how I made him laugh, but I'll spare everyone the details. I wasn't so much there on the red carpet to profess my like for him as I was to watch *The East*, in which he plays Benji (yes, like the dog, and with his Jesus-like beard throughout much of the movie he doesn't look that different), the charismatic leader of the eponymous group out to give corporate America the finger through "jams" - targeted eye-for-an-eye-style attacks on the people they feel are responsible for destroying the environment.

Corporate negligence aside, I'm one to believe that not one, two or even a handful of people are to blame for, say, pollution of a community's water source that may have caused or been a cause of a person's cancer diagnosis. Members of *The East* have complicated rationales for their crimes that contradict their actions, and much of the dialogue incorporates fallacies that would make even philosophy majors balk. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

*The East* is actress/writer/producer [Britt Marling's](#) sophomore effort with writer-director [Zal Batmanglij](#) (whose brother is the keyboardist for the band Vampire Weekend). The duo previously collaborated on 2011's *Sound of My Voice*, which explored similar themes about Stockholm Syndrome and cults.

In *The East*, Marling's character, Jane, is on the opposite end of the Stockholm Syndrome spectrum as a former FBI agent now in the field for a private D.C. intelligence firm that specializes in hunting down criminals for their white-collar corporate counterparts. Jane's latest assignment is to take down *The East* through [freegan](#) assimilation -- the lifestyle includes wearing Birkenstocks, eating out of dumpsters and riding the rails hobo style. Despite or maybe because of her Christian beliefs, she lies to her live-in boyfriend (Jason Ritter) about her undercover assignment and through a series of cringeworthy events ends up infiltrating *The East* in their dilapidated, backwoods mansion.

At the mansion, she meets and starts giving the googly eyes to Benji, whose followers include the distrustful Izzy ([Ellen Page](#)), the Robert Smith-wannabe Luca ([Shiloh Fernandez](#)), the Ivy Leaguer with Parkinson's-esque symptoms Doc ([Toby Kebbell](#)), the friendly, deaf Eve ([Hillary Baack](#)) and the hacker Tess ([Danielle McDonald](#)).

At first, Jane, known to *The East* as "Sarah," is repelled by the squatters' actions: naked swim meets in the mansion's nearby lake (yes, there is Skarsgard nudity) and candlelit spin-the-bottle. But she soon views their strange actions as delightful R&R, until they come to an end and she's asked begrudgingly to participate in *The East's* latest jam after a member of the group abruptly leaves. It's through this jam that Jane starts to unravel some of the members' personal motivations behind their group involvement and begins to sympathize with them, despite still wrestling with the notion: Is the penalty inflicted on employees of corporate America harsher than their crimes? Do these people deserve to be punished?

The cause becomes an obsession for all involved in *The East*, but as a viewer, I was less concerned about what that cause may be than what facial cleanser and shampoo the characters were using -- they were living a freegan lifestyle in the middle of nowhere, but

### Recent posts

- [Welcome to \[Archived\] Slackerwood](#)
- [Lone Star Cinema: Kid Blue](#)
- [Au Revoir, and Don't Forget to Feed the Parrot](#)
- [Movies This Year: Our Reviews of Upcoming Releases](#)
- [Slackerwood: Where We're All Going \(We Hope\)](#)
- [Debbie's Fantastic and Favorite Film Memories](#)
- [Film on Tap: Pass the Bubbly](#)
- [Review: The Connection](#)

### Recent reviews

- [Lone Star Cinema: Kid Blue](#)
- [Movies This Year: Our Reviews of Upcoming Releases](#)
- [Review: The Connection](#)
- [Review: In the Name of My Daughter](#)
- [Review: Poltergeist](#)
- [Review: Tomorrowland](#)

[more](#)

their complexions were near perfect and their hair was artfully disheveled. Anarchy never looked so good.

*The East*, admittedly well written and thought provoking with really beautiful cinematography, is still a CliffsNotes version of eco-criticism. It highlights pertinent, timely issues, but in a way that mirrors my Twitter feed. The biggest takeaway from the film was that maybe it is better to have partners in crime because the feelings of guilt and dismay that will inevitably ensue in the struggle of good and evil will be more subdued.

All material copyright © 2006-2009 by the author, or if no author is cited, J. Kernion.

[\[administrator login\]](#)