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First-Time Director Triumphs at Sundance

Filmmaker John Hindman discusses his film, "Arlen Faber," picked up for distribution at Sundance.

February 20th, 2009 | [John McMahon](#)Posted in [February 2009](#), [Distribution](#), [Film Festivals](#), [Interviews](#)

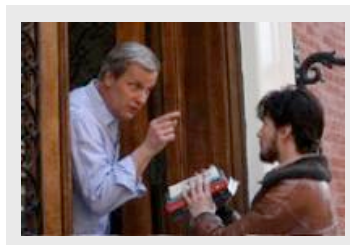
Writer and first-time director John Hindman's romantic comedy *Arlen Faber* was one of the 118 films showcased at this year's Sundance Film Festival. Magnolia Pictures picked it up for an undisclosed amount. "If you're fortunate to be one of those 16 films [in the Dramatic Competition category] it's a given that people are going to come and see your movie. Being in competition is the best advertising you could hope for."

The modestly budgeted film stars Jeff Daniels as *Arlen Faber* -- a reclusive author who became famous 20 years prior -- when his book *Me & God* became a best-seller. Because of the book's premise, the public assumes he must have a direct connection with the Almighty. In reality, Arlen is anything but serene. He is miserable and highly neurotic and would probably go through the rest of his miserable life in solitude if it weren't for a back injury, which forces him to seek help from a therapist. At its core, the movie is a romantic comedy about three people who find the answers not in a book or in the clouds, but in each other.

It was the perfect film for the Sundance Film Festival, which has become one of the few festivals where a smaller independent film can get recognized, bought, and find its way to a wider audience. Hindman was thrilled to be there. "I got to meet Robert Redford!" he said, adding that he told Redford, "I don't know what's going to happen to my movie after this week but getting here was my goal."

As a writer who hadn't proven himself as a director, one of the biggest challenges for Hindman was getting people to sign-off on letting him direct. "You need to have an emotional vision and you need to be able to convince other people, everyone from the actors to the producers to the financiers. They want to know that you can translate that vision to others whether it's the production designer or Jeff Daniels, and maintain that vision in spite of difficult circumstances. Do you have what it takes inside to marshal the forces around you to execute the story?"

Much like Rocky Balboa, Hindman has proven that he can go the distance. Presently, he's putting the finishing touches on *Arlen Faber* and hoping that when it hits theaters people will see it and talk about it



A still from John Hindman's "Arlen Faber," picked up for distribution at Sundance.

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on the way back to their cars. "I mean, how often does that happen," he said. "My goal is to continue directing the movies I write." His next project, *Christmas In New York*, is a large ensemble dramatic-comedy about how the Christmas season offers a couple of days a year when the world is not out to get you, and how it can encourage people to be more compassionate.

Publicity for *Arlen Faber* was handled by 42 West. They were brought to the table by producers Jana Edelbaum and Rachel Cohen, both with the financing company iDeal Partners Film Fund. "42 West has a great track record," said Hindman. "They did a great job of setting up interviews and creating a nice buzz before hand. I think they were representing 10 films there."

Hindman, who is now represented by Creative Artists Agency said that, if there was any one thing that helped him the most as a first-timer, it was the script itself. His managers gave the script to producer Kevin Messick who loved it and began sending it out to talent agencies. "Our goal was to attach actors first and then find someone to pay for it. The script became very popular in a short amount of time and started to get passed on from agency to agency without our shoving," said Hindman. Ultimately, the script caught the attention of Eddy Yablans at International Creative Management. He sent it to his clients Jeff Daniels and Lauren Graham. They loved the material and came on board. Through the process Hindman realized that what filmmakers need at every step of the process, from the actors who read it to the investors, are fans of the material. "Because ultimately, people agree to do it because they want to," he said.

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