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MANDELBLACK

Graham King
"Producing is about controlling your own destiny"

In this issue:
2010 Producers Guild Awards
For Love of Liberty
Out at sea with James Cameron

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Over 150 sets were built for Coraline, spanning 183,000 square feet across 52 different soundstages – the most ever deployed for a stop-motion animated feature.
David Gerber passed away early this month. I’m still getting over the news.

It’s unfortunate — and hard to believe — but some PGA members may not have known who David Gerber was, or why he was important to this Guild. Which is why I wanted to devote a column to him.

David Gerber wasn’t simply a producer: he was a Producer — capital “P.” There are thousands of producers in this industry, but only a handful who so completely define the profession that they achieve the status of icons. David Gerber was one of those.

He was a big man, and sitting in a room with him, he seemed even larger. He was an expansive storyteller; listening to him talk about his experiences as a producer, the characters and events sprang to life as vividly as if you were watching one of his TV series or movies. It’s no wonder he was so prolific; it’s hard to imagine an executive turning down a pitch from someone who could sweep you up so effortlessly in a story.

David was most essentially a storyteller, but like any producer, his job encompassed far more than that. He was a deal-maker, a salesman, an executive, an editor … whatever he needed to be to get that particular project made, that’s what he was. In this respect, he was typical of his profession, which requires expertise across such a broad cross-section of skills. A few years ago, the Guild ran an ad campaign, asking, “What does a producer do, anyway?” We could have answered that question with, “Whatever David Gerber is doing right now.”

David Gerber was a longtime Producers Guild Board member and was a member of the Board that hired me, nearly 10 years ago. David’s passion for his job and his essential belief in the power of storytelling made an immediate impact upon me, and even today, I continue to be inspired by his example. There’s a special energy that people generate when they’re doing what they were born to do. David Gerber was born to produce, and the vitality that David brought to his work couldn’t help but spill over into the many lives that he touched.

I realize that we’ve lost many great producers over the past year, and in a sense it’s unfair of me to use this space to memorialize David to the exclusion of other worthy professionals and Guild members. But he was one of the small group of producers who hired me to do this job that I love, and I’ve always been grateful for the opportunity and support that he gave me. And as many in this industry can testify, it’s a nice feeling knowing that you have a strong producer backing you up.
Graham King is a big guy, who produces big movies. In some ways, it’s really that simple.

Graham King (standing) on the set of Young Victoria. (Photo: Liam Daniel © GK Films LLC 2009. All Rights Reserved.)

You can look at his recent credits — the contemporary Martin Scorsese epics The Aviator and The Departed, high-intensity dramas like Blood Diamond and the about-to-be-released Edge of Darkness — and get a sense of King’s passion and ambition. These are sprawling, full-bodied stories, anchored by larger-than-life characters, a fair reflection of their producer, who’s a little larger than life himself, and whose reputation is still growing.

But in plenty of other ways, it’s far from simple. King entered the business not as a producer, but as a distribution executive, first selling FOX television shows and then, later, independent features around the globe. From there he became a financier, acquiring, packaging and selling films. But it was his pivotal backing of Scorsese’s Gangs of New York, and his burgeoning relationships with the director and star Leonardo DiCaprio, that awakened him to the joys and terrors of the producing career. After that, there was no going back.

Since then, he’s more than established his bona fides as one of the industry’s go-to producers, not to mention found himself at the center of at least one Hollywood controversy. (King was the sole producer to receive the Best Picture Oscar® for The Departed, after the Producers Guild determined that originating producer Brad Grey’s decision to leave the production to run Paramount rendered him ineligible for the award.) As King transitions his base of operations from Warner Bros. to Sony, he’s entering the most prolific phase of his career, looking forward not only to the opening of Edge of Darkness, but two films with Johnny Depp, The Rum Diary (currently in post-production) and The Tourist (shooting in Europe this spring, and co-starring Angelina Jolie), London Boulevard, the directorial debut of Oscar-winning The Departed screenwriter William Monahan, and further down the road, the much anticipated Mel Gibson/Leonardo DiCaprio “Viking project,” as well as the adaptation of the award-winning children’s novel, The Invention of Hugo Cabret.

This is the 45th in Produced by’s ongoing series of Case Studies of successful producers and their work. Editor Chris Green sat down with Graham King in the Santa Monica offices of his GK Films to talk about what a producer can learn from working in distribution, the enduring lure of gangster films, and the pleasure of listening to Martin Scorsese hold court for three hours.
So, how did you find your way into the industry? I came over here in 1981. And I came over to go to school at UCLA and realized within a very short period I was learning all I had already learned at school in England. And it was really expensive, the foreign student thing. But I just fell in love with Southern California.

It’s not hard to do. Right. I wanted to do something in the media business. But I didn’t know what my niche was. I got into show business through 20th Century Fox. I started at Fox in the mid-80s, working in television, in International Television Distribution. Distribution taught me so much about movies, television, theatrical releases, which countries like what, etc. And it’s really helped me, even now. When I read a script, it’s always in my mind. How much is this film going to play in Japan? How much will this film work in France? Will it work in Scandinavia? That’s my train of thought.

You’re starting from an international perspective from page one. Right.

I’m sure lots of our readers would be curious to know, is there any sort of thumbnail for what works in Japan or France as to what works here? What are you looking for, or noticing as you read? Well, first you have to think about the whole package … director, cast, everything else. Genre is very important. We know that comedies are really tough in Japan, unless they’re visual comedies, that kind of thing. And it’s just experience … the experience of spending time out on the road, meeting with distributors all over the world and finding out what their tastes are and what they want to do. I had a wonderful mentor at Fox then — he sadly just died a couple years ago — Bill Saunders. He taught me so much. He took me under his wing and took me around the world with him and taught me the game. He taught me distribution. Thoroughly after a while I learned that I wasn’t a corporate guy. So I went to work for a very small independent company and it was quite a wake-up to go from going around the world and distributing Fox material to this kind of mini-independent company that no one had really heard of. But I was learning. I was learning a lot more there than I ever learned at Fox because it was a company of six, and you just mucked in and did what you had to do. And we got involved in production and that was my first real exposure to that side of the business. Because, again, when you’re at the studio it’s all about doing only your job and not doing everyone’s job. Indepedently, it was a matter of doing everyone’s job.

Right. So I stayed there about two or three years — it was a real learning curve for me — and then worked for other independent like Kings Road, and a bunch of companies like that. Always in the back of my mind, I was watching these independents and the way they handled themselves and thinking "I could do that." So I raised a little bit of money through a partner of mine from many years back, through her family. And I started this company, Initial Entertainment Group, and was literally buying and selling movies. We weren’t really a production company; we were acquiring finished products, or even products at the script stage, where we’d finance a movie for a producer. And we would sell it around the world, market it and everything else. Then in the late ’90s, it became very popular to do an IPO in Germany. A very close friend of mine had a company in Cologne and we did a lot of business together. We decided to go public together, in Germany. I had no idea what I was getting myself in for. I had never done road shows. I had never done an IPO. It wasn’t really my game. But we raised a bunch of money. So a couple of weeks after going public, I get this phone call from an agent, Ken Kamins. And he said to me, “How would you like to be in the Martin Scorseses/Leonardo DiCaprio business?” I was like, “Okay. Well… What is it? Some obscure Shakespeare play they’ve wanted to do?” I was imagining some experimental film that’s all shot in one room in black and white. He said, “No, no, no, no. It’s a script over at Disney, called Gangs of New York and they’re looking for a partner.” And he said, “It’s not going to be cheap. It’s going to be really expensive.” So I read the script, and loved it. And there were no other attachments at the time. It was Marty and Leo. But I really thought that it was the perfect film for the international marketplace, so we decided to do it. And all of the sudden we’re in this business of Gangs of New York. The biggest movie I’d had before was this movie called Very Bad Things which had a budget under $20 million. All of the sudden I’m doing this. I’ll never forget. I was flying over to London and I read the script again. I had sent the script to a...
"MS. MULLIGAN IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF ‘AN EDUCATION,’ AND SHE’S PHENOMENAL. THE WHOLE FILM IS PHENOMENAL. I LOVE IT. I’VE DISCUSSED ALL THE PERFORMANCES AS IF THEY’D OCCURRED SPONTANEOUSLY, RATHER THAN UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF A SELF-EFFACING VIRTUOSO. DIRECTION CAN’T BE SEEN, BUT DIRECTOR LONE SCHERFIG’S APPROACH MAKES ITSELF FELT IN A SPARKLING STREAM OF FELICITOUS CHOICES. SHE’S A POET OF NATURAL RHYTHMS AND INTIMATE INSIGHTS, AND THIS FILM WILL MAKE HER A STAR IN HER OWN REALM.”

-Joe Morgenstern, WALL STREET JOURNAL

Leonardo DiCaprio (left) and King on the set of The Departed.

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PRODUCERS GUILD OF AMERICA AWARD NOMINEE

BEST PICTURE

Finola Dwyer & Amanda Posey

Producers

AN EDUCATION

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

PRODUCERS GUILD OF AMERICA AWARD NOMINEE

FINOLA DWYER & AMANDA POSEY

AN EDUCATION

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

AWARDS 2010

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couple of key distributors. And I got off the plane and I got all these voice mail messages in Japanese, “We love it. We love it. We want to meet with you.” The British, the French too… So my confidence is growing. And I’m working out these budget numbers. I’m thinking, these numbers are record-breaking numbers, that have never ever been done in this business. I think, the Japanese, the most they had ever paid for a movie before that was Mask.

Really?

I think it was like 11 and all of the sudden I’m asking 18, 20, or something. And I’m not exactly dreaming up the numbers … but I’m kind of dreaming up numbers. [laughs] So anyway, I walked into the Meridian Hotel in London and got absolutely attacked: I got attacked by every distributor in the place, because, in those days, independent distributors had never been able to buy a movie with really top talent. It was insane. I was so stressed out that I had to leave early and come back to Los Angeles, because I was just getting attacked everywhere I went. I had Japanese distributors literally falling on the floor and grabbing my legs and saying, “We’re not going to let you go until you close the deal.” So it was a great experience and my confidence was very high. But, more importantly, I was now getting to work with someone who… I mean, I had grown up watching every friggin’ movie he had done, over and over again. Scorsese was one of the reasons I wanted to be in this business. So I remember my first meeting with him, 1 p.m. at the Bel Air Hotel. And I am just so nervous … this kid from London is about to go and meet Martin Scorsese. He opens the door and says, “Hey, hey, Graham. It’s Marty. Come in.” Really friendly. And he had books. He was literally on the floor and says, “Hey, hey, Graham. It’s Marty. Come in.” Really friendly. And he had books. He was literally on the floor reading history books from the time of the gangs. It was supposed to be a 30-minute meeting that turned into 3½ hours. Even now it was one of the greatest meetings I’ve ever had in my career.

What did you take away from that? What did you guys talk about?

I said, “I have to ask you a question. Mr. Scorsese…” And he’s like, “No, it’s Marty. It’s Marty.” I said, “I have to ask you a question.” I said, “Were you ever going to kill Lorraine Bracco in Goodfellas when De Niro is telling her to go in and get some clothes?” and that kind of thing. And he would tell me. When you ask Marty a question that’s interesting for him, he loves to answer those questions in depth. So that’s how the time went on. I would just ask him about Goodfellas or Taxi Driver. And, again, this is what I grew up watching; it was very surreal for me. Anyway, we accomplished what we had set out to do on Gangs, which was selling it internationally, and got our money back, and made a little bit of money, even before the film was coming out. I went to the set a lot. And it was the most amazing thing… Dante Ferretti built six miles of New York in a studio in Rome. And I’m sitting with Marty at the monitor and I’m really loving what I’m doing. This is a new thing for me. This isn’t just finding a movie and buying and selling it. I struck up a great relationship with Leo and Daniel Day-Lewis and those guys. And, you know, as a business-
never forget, I was at the American Film Market, and I had pictures all over the office of Harrison Ford and Catherine Zeta-Jones. And Peter Rice calls me that day and said, "Harrison has dropped out." So the pictures came down. And I fell in love with the process. And I fell in love with having this Marty/Lee/John Logan/myself team, making this movie. There were no studios involved in the production. It was the four of us making a film. And it was fabulous. I was on that set every single day. I didn't leave one day. And well, we all know now the results of the movie. It speaks for itself. We really had a great time making this movie. We were a family. And that was a great feeling for me, to be a part of that family. There were no "suits" on set. Of course, a movie of that size, $110 million or something … if it doesn't work for a company of my size, it's over.

Right.
It's all over. So Marty would say, "Why are you so nervous all the time?" [laughs] By now I'm hooked. Now I want to produce movies, and finance them, and be that guy that everyone talks to. And it's not like one's in charge and one isn't. When you're doing a film at the level of these filmmakers and level of these actors, you're not in charge. But you've got to make it a collaboration.

So when you're deciding which projects to push, what goes into that decision?
Well, now we have the Sony slot deal, so now we're taking the ultimate gamble. I think it was one of the trades, when I agreed to make *Gangs of New York* and *Traffic*, that called me the "suicide king" or something like that. But they didn't know that I was pre-selling. They didn't know that I had covered my investment on *Gangs of New York* while we were still shooting the movie. But now we're taking the ultimate gamble. Because now we're funding the movie, we're not pre-selling it, and we're distributing it through Sony. It is so important that it shows at the box office now, more than ever. That was important before, but I had covered my risk, or most of it. Now I'm exposed for the whole production budget until the release of the movie. So it has to perform. There's a big difference there.

You're just kind of an adrenaline junky? That's sort of the picture I'm getting here.
Oh, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. About a year and a half ago, I asked Bill Monahan to write this script, *Edge of Darkness*. And I said to him at the time, "You know, this would be really cool for Mel Gibson." Because I knew that Mel was the only actor who could play a father with a 23-year-old daughter and could open a movie of this size, and he loved the original miniseries *Edge of Darkness*. Martin Campbell, who directed the miniseries, wanted to direct this and he brought me a draft script. Then Bill came on board and delivered me a great script, and before you know it, Mel says "yes." So all of a sudden, wow, it's happened again.

They were on board for Harrison, then.
Yeah, they got cold feet. It just didn't work for them. But I stuck with it. I really believed in it. And by then I was going to the sets much more, protecting my investment, yes, but also learning the routine of making movies.

That's right.
And Marty, being the amazing collaborator that he is, taught me everything. I sat next to him for 80 percent, 90 percent of *The Aviator* shoot and just watched what he does, and how he deals with department heads. I remem-
(laughs) I’ve got Mel Gibson in a film, and Martin Campbell directing Bill Monahan’s script. And I thought for sure I would get a deal from a studio before we started shooting, but that didn’t happen.

Really?

Yeah. But we went and made the movie without a distribution deal anyway. It was a huge risk, but I did it because I believed in the movie. And I believed in Mel as a really talented actor and a great movie star. So we went ahead and made it and halfway through production we showed Warner Bros. footage, and they came aboard and bought all North American rights. But the point of the story is I do not want to make movies at that budget level without distribution in place. My first-look deal at Warner Bros. was coming up with Amy Pascal, who I didn’t know that well but really respected. We talked about the kinds of movies I wanted to make and we found we were very much on the same page. And so here we are. We have a deal with them, and it’s just fabulous. I can make a movie and give it to Sony to distribute worldwide.

When you sit with Amy Pascal now and say, “these are the kind of movies I want to make,” obviously you want to make commercial movies with big stars and international appeal.

Right.

But everybody wants to make those kinds of movies.

No, they don’t.

They don’t?

They don’t.

Really?

I don’t think you’ll get a studio to easily green-light an R-rated thriller at $100 million nowadays. Look at the math. I mean, The Departed, while successful, I think made $130 million domestic. So although you think that people would green-light that, it’s not that easy in today’s market. It’s all about comic books and franchise movies. I like to make what I think are big event movies, that tell...
a great story. But it’s not that easy. I don’t know whether a film like The Aviator would get green-lit today with a studio. In today’s market, does that get green-lit for that budget? I’m not too sure. But that’s where I find opportunity. There are great opportunities on the kind of down market we see today.

Right.

Right? I have a lot of money for development and for producing my own movies now. And I’m not scared to push that button for $110 million or $115 million. And it’s not just about the movie stars for me. It’s about the material and what I feel I’m passionate about. If you’ve got a pie, 50 percent of that pie for me is about the material. The rest you fill in with the other elements.

What is the appeal? Is it that these are people operating on their own rules? Or operating outside the established system?

I think it’s a world of complete danger. And it’s such a fantasy to people that don’t do that for a living. I don’t mean it’s my fantasy to be like that, but it’s a world that you just think of as unreal. And then you meet people that actually are those guys. And this is the way they live their lives. You know, I bought the life rights last year of this guy called John Martorano. And he was a partner with a guy called Whitey Bulger, in Boston. And this guy goes on 60 Minutes and they ask, “Did you really kill over 20 people in cold blood?” and he says, “Yes.” And I got to Boston — we were shooting Edge of Darkness — and I said to a cop who was an advisor on The Departed and Edge, “Do you know Martorano?” And he said, “Do I know him? I arrested him.” I said, “I want to meet him. I really want to meet him.” He killed all these people and he’s just walking the streets. And he’s going to buy groceries and he’s living his life, you know? I think he was in prison for 13 years and he now works for the government. And he comes to my trailer. And I’m sitting there, like I’m sitting with you. And I said, “So, how do your kids feel about what Daddy does for a living? How do you feel when you go to bed at night at that moment before you fall asleep… What goes through your head?” And he’s answering these questions as though it’s the most normal thing in the world. It was a fascinating meeting.

Yeah.

This is real. This is not movies. This guy lives this life. So there’s a certain excitement to that world, I think. I grew up in a part of London that was kind of “rough and ready,” and full of shady characters, and we would always just watch. Watch how they handle themselves, their gestures and body movements. And that just fascinated me. So that’s why I gravitate to that genre. It’s a long story. [laughs]

Thanks for sharing it. Speaking of gangsters, I want to talk a little more about The Departed since you played a unique role there, sort of pinch-hitting for Brad Grey when he was hired to run Paramount. Was that a delicate transition?

Well, I have to say that Brad was great. I mean, if he didn’t take the job at Paramount, he’d be the producer on that movie. He developed an amazing script. He put Marty and Leo on the film, and then got that job and called me up. And, for me, coming off of Gangs and The Aviator, it was a natural fit to do a Scorsese film. You know, there was no animosity. None at all. And then all these producer credit issues came along and that became really, really sensitive and uncomfortable, for me certainly. Because Brad was so instrumental in getting that project made. And then of course, I’m lucky enough to win that big award and I forget to thank him. Honestly, the first guys on my thank-you list were Brad Grey and Brad Pitt. And I got my speech out, but I just couldn’t open it! Because you’re holding an envelope, you’re holding the Oscar… There’s no podium…

Producers often talk about learning to scrutinize and refine their own instincts for material … what they respond to and why they respond to it.

Right.

What’s that equation like for you? What do you find yourself gravitating toward?

I like gangster movies. I like the characters in those movies. I love the stories. And again, that’s why when I first met Marty, I was speechless. It was the biggest meeting I’d ever had because Taxi Driver and Goodfellas and Raging Bull and, oh, my God, Mean Streets, these are the movies that I grew up absolutely gravitating to.

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That's right. And so I'm just going from memory. And I forgot. It was horrendous, because, again, let's give credit where credit is due, he spent so much time developing that project. If he hadn't taken that Paramount job, he'd be standing there on that stage. And I even saw him 10 minutes before I won the Oscar! But when you win an Oscar, wow, everything just goes out the window. It was just an out-of-body experience. But, boy, that was a tough one to forget. I didn't thank my mother, either. That was the first phone call I got, from my mum. "I'm so proud of you. I'm so proud of you. Why didn't you thank me?"

Brad is in good company, then. Yeah, yeah. It was never done purposely. And I know how it feels because I was in that audience for Traffic and we won four Oscars and not one of them thanked me. So I know how they felt. But I also know the other side of how nerve-racking it is when you get up there and you forget people. And to me The Departed was always about Marty. I mean, The Aviator was a tough night. Because we had won the Globe and the PGA Award, and I remember we won the first five Oscars that night. It was Harvey Weinstein that came up to us and said, "Don't get too carried away. These are the technical awards." And we all know what happened. I mean, it's very surreal. But, as I say, the biggest thing for me was both of us winning, Marty and myself. Thank God he won for The Departed, because that would have been the all-time nightmare, for me anyway.

I know you've got a bunch of movies to go and produce, so we have to wrap this up, but having gotten to this place in your career, what do you find yourself looking back on? What do you think about in that moment before you fall asleep?

For me, producing is about controlling your own destiny. And it's starting small. It's starting as a salesman, going from country to country, with literally a 35 millimeter frame, trying to sell a movie that no one has ever heard of. And it takes awhile. People come in to me for jobs and I ask, "What do you want to do?" "I want to be a producer." I say, "Well, that's 12 to 15 years of learning, if you're lucky enough to learn from the right people." And all my staff here, I completely drill it into their head, "If you want to be a producer, great. Do 'this.' Do 'that.' Learn 'this.' Learn 'that.' Because that's how it was for me. And if people hadn't given me certain breaks and opened certain doors, I wouldn't be here now. So it's great to pass that on.

But they're the one that has to step through the door. Yeah. You can open it, but someone has got to go through it. Listen, I was given a break at Fox to do that. And I have a lot of friends that still work at Fox, in the same position they were in 20 years ago. And they all say to me how I'm lucky and all that. Luck? It's 18 hours a day, every day, seriously. I mean, there's a huge price to pay. Your personal life is nonexistent. You try and balance it, but it never really works out that way. I've never worked this hard. And yet, I can tell you, it's never been so satisfying.
Such is the case of the 10-years-in-the-making of For Love of Liberty, a four-hour film about black soldiers in the U.S. military that airs on PBS in February, just in time for Black History Month. It stars more than 50 actors and reads like a who’s who of black Hollywood, including Halle Berry who serves as host, Morgan Freeman, Danny Glover, Lou Gossett, Jr., Angela Bassett, Bill Cosby (to name only a few) as well as Mel Gibson, Susan Sarandon, John Travolta and is introduced by Colin Powell.

The project began when a young man, Jim Crite, found a book called African Americans in Service of Their Country that had been published by the Department of Defense during Colin Powell’s tenure as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. After purchasing it at a garage sale for about a dollar, he brought it to Dennis Considine, who was running Lou Gossett, Jr.’s company at the time. So enthralled were they with the subject matter, they brought it to award-winning filmmaker Frank Martin (MGM: When the Lion Roars; Sex, Censorship and the Silver Screen). Martin was repped by Hillard (Hilly) Elkins who had worked with Considine and, of course, represented Gossett for years. So, with less than six degrees of separation, a project was born.

That was back in April of 2000. Pre-9/11. Martin explains, “This film was supposed to have ended after the Gulf War when Bill Clinton gathered a number of black veterans from WWII at the White House to present them with the Medal of Honor, because there were no black men given the Medal of Honor during WWII. Nor were any given the Medal of Honor in WWI. So there was a huge ceremony at the White House with only one guy who lived long enough to attend, Vernon Baker.” And that’s where he planned to end the documentary. And then 9/11 happened. Martin had just finished writing the treatment for the film on September 10 and went to bed at 11 o’clock, he woke up to a changed world.

Putting your money where your mouth is: Documenting For Love of Liberty

By Rona Edwards
Television who really liked the film gave them the airtime but shows for the Playboy Channel and other that helped pay the bills by producing the filmmakers will always be grateful. 

A deal, and waived the interest, for which deliver the film; to Showtime’s immense to Showtime and tell them that they couldn’t it was impossible to tell his story in 90 minutes. The producers had to return to set. 

Enter producer and PGA member Richard Hull, who cut his teeth working for Hilly Elkins (didn’t everybody?) and who had a relationship with Showtime, producing the animated series *Free for All.* Because of that special relationship, Hull was able to mastermind a deal to fund the shooting and development of *For Love of Liberty*, though Showtime pushed for a much shorter and lower-budgeted version than the one in Martin’s head. And though he agreed to do it, Martin quickly realized it was impossible to tell his story in 90 minutes. The producers had to return to Showtime and tell them that they couldn’t deliver the film; to Showtime’s immense credit, they let the producers out of their deal, and waived the interest, for which the filmmakers will always be grateful.

Now, without any more funding, Martin continued shooting on his own dime, having been blessed with a business that helped pay the bills by producing shows for the Playboy Channel and other companies. He had eight edit bays and kept one dedicated to the documentary. A chance meeting at Reel Screen (a documentary/reality conference in D.C.) with an executive from Maryland Public Television who really liked the film gave them the airtime but no money. So now the business model changed. They would have to go out and find sponsorships; having PBS as their distribution outlet would help — or so they thought. They didn’t get any money from the foundations. Every single one turned them down, including the National Endowment for the Humanities. One of the foundations said, “Wonderful project, but come back to us when you need completion funds.” So eight years later, Martin did, sending them a copy of their original letter and asking for completion funds. Their reply: “Sorry, we got no the filmmakers were just tired of hearing about it,” maintains Martin. “How do you not spon-sor a documentary about black soldiers who have done these incredible things? We were getting patriotism jammed down our throats and I think people were just tired of hearing about it,” maintains Martin. “How do you not sponsor a documentary about black soldiers who have done these incredible things? We were getting incredibly frustrated but we kept making the film — in the belief that it would just somehow get finished.” He got the film as finished as he could, saved the music, and needed $150,000 cash to finish the soundtrack. By a fortuitous series of events, the project was rescued by none other than the U.S. Army. Frank screened 40 minutes of excerpts for a thousand ROTC cadets; the kids started cheering. An invitation to show the film at the Pentagon followed, though it took almost another year to bring the Army in as a major sponsor. In the end, the Army wound up underwriting almost two thirds of the film’s budget. In questioning whether the Army made any editorial changes, Martin reassured me that while they are wonderful, hard-working patriots, they don’t know how to make films. “In my case, the film was done except for the music — and PBS wouldn’t allow them to make changes anyway.” So the Army came on and with the Army, US Bank and State Farm stepped up as well. But it was the Army that unquestionably saved the day.

Showtime may have been the catalyst that allowed the train to leave the station. But as often happens on documentaries, the project took on a life of its own. When they left Showtime and gained Maryland Public Television as their presenting PBS station, they also aligned themselves with American Public Television (APT), which is releasing the film as a syndicator throughout the public television system of 300-plus stations. The producers offer great praise for the PBS model; the network provides multiple avenues for a documentary of this sort would be $1 million per hour), and they’re prepared to make up any additional shortage in DVD sales. PBS gives courtesy notes, but the filmmaker has complete control. “It’s your baby, and that’s why filmmaking ought to be,” Martin imparts. The art of producing has always been about being able to inch multiple pieces of the pie toward the middle, such that they are all close at the same time. Hull expounds further that it’s very hard to look out at the universe and figure out what the pieces of that pie are, let alone how to actually get your arms around them. “I think we did a lot of that on this film,” he observes, “where PBS was sort of being worked concur-rently with some sponsorship deals, which is sort of being worked concur-rently with some DVD deals and some television deals, and all these different things were being pushed toward a close at the same time.” Aside from chashing the money, the hardest thing about making this film was how to bring the story to life: How do you visualize it and give it a kind of unifying signature? What Martin discovered was tombstones. “I was in Arlington, and it hit me,” he recalls, “the one thing that all these people we talk about in the film have in common is they have a tombstone somewhere.” So they set out shooting tombstones for a year, traveling to each stone and realizing that every stone represents a story, like that of Reuben Rivers, a black tanker in WWII, buried in France. “To stand there, at Reuben Rivers’ grave,” Martin continues, “there were so many guys like that. Milton Olive was...
the first black guy in Vietnam to get the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was 18, jumps on a hand grenade; he's buried in a cemetery in Mississippi. When you see Normandy, and when you think about Normandy, you never think about black people. But they were there. A bunch of them died on that first day; we went to their graves. And that to me is the essence of this film, that when we [white people] think about warfare in America, everybody is white. John Wayne won all the wars. You certainly don't think about black people in the Revolutionary War. Martin is emphatic that as Americans, it's essential that we understand and recognize who has contributed to this country and got us where we are today.

But why did they fight? The first casualty in the Revolutionary War was Crispus Attucks, a black soldier. The Harlem Hellfighters fought in World War I under the French flag, wearing French uniforms and firing French weapons because the American Army wouldn’t provide for them. And when it was time to return from World War II, the 92nd Division wasn’t even allowed on the segregated battleship. The answer to that question — why did they fight? — is told in their own words, confirming that like all Americans in all wars, black Americans fought for love of liberty... even a liberty that was frequently denied to them at home.

With a non-existent crew (basically Martin and his cameraman, Chris Burke), Martin recorded most of the voice-overs on a portable DAT machine, often grabbing minutes of his all-star cast's time at their houses, hotels or dressing rooms. When the project was in danger of losing its funding from the Army due to cutbacks, it was Martin who took a second mortgage out on his house, believing passionately in his film. That this project saw so many producers helping out at different times is a testament to the way projects are done in modern Hollywood. Hull discloses, “I think the old days of having a single producer are gone — fewer things are getting made, they’re harder to get made, and it takes ultimately, more hands on deck to get something made. So it’s only appropriate that there are multiple producers. I will say the neat thing about this project is that I’m not sure any two of the producers on this film have the same background or same skill set.”

U.S. soldiers on patrol in Iraq

Elkins, who enjoys long-standing credibility within the black community, having marched with Dr. King and representing Sammy Davis, Jr., amongst others, adds, “it was everybody chipping in and doing what they could to make it happen cause we all thought it was a terrific idea to make this film.” And while Hull supported Frank Martin’s vision, they wouldn’t have done it if it wasn’t a story that they, as producers, wanted to tell.

“The thing about producing,” continues Hull, “is that you get to tell stories that you’re passionate about, whether it’s making a mainstream movie or making a documentary that’s an untold, undiscovered story. And one of the things you bring to the table is supporting the director’s execution of that. But it’s also just one of the things, not the only thing.”

Martin says, “The secret to documentary filmmaking — or to any filmmaking — is the story. It all comes down to the story. If you got a good story, odds are you’re going to have a good film. If you don’t have a good story, you’re not going have a good film, I don’t care who’s in it. That’s the secret. Do you have a good story you want to tell? And if you do, go tell it.”

In the end, Martin explains that documentary filmmaking is about never taking no for an answer — ever. Persistence and determination are the essential qualities. You never give up.

“But that’s what being a producer is all about. Never, ever give up. Especially when you believe in something, when you know you really got something good. We all make stuff that’s maybe ‘eh,’” he smiles, “but when you have something that you believe in with all your heart, you can never give up because you just can’t. It’s what we do.”

26 Produced by Awards 2010
Ten. It’s a nice round number. Not only is it the number of our recently rung-in new year, it’s also, conveniently enough, the number of nominees that PGA members considered for its top motion picture prize, the Darryl F. Zanuck Award. Following in the footsteps of the Motion Picture Academy, the Producers Guild widened its field this year, and the result has been a veritable cornucopia of intriguing nominees, drawing from all corners of the motion picture spectrum. The following pages will cover the Big 10 in more substantial detail, but given that it’s the incredible range of choices that has the PGA membership buzzing, it’s more than fitting that we lead off our coverage of the 21st annual Producers Guild Awards by heralding this exciting innovation.

Just as noteworthy is the distinguished roster of honorees the event will pay tribute to. The Guild’s most prestigious honor, the Milestone Award, will be presented jointly to Amy Pascal and Michael Lynton, whose stewardship of Sony Pictures Entertainment has steered that studio to a leadership position among Hollywood’s key companies, and made the lot a supportive home to numerous appreciative producers. The Guild’s two Achievement Awards go to a pair of innovators who literally re-wrote the rulebook for their respective media. As the guiding force behind Pixar Entertainment, John Lasseter brought animation into the digital age and created a model of cinematic storytelling that has become the gold standard for the entire industry; the Guild is honored to recognize him with its David O. Selznick Achievement Award in Theatrical Motion Pictures. No less a visionary will take the stage to accept the Norman Lear Achievement Award in Television: Mark Burnett, whose series such as Survivor and The Apprentice created the template for what we now call “Reality Television.”

The PGA’s Vanguard Award will be presented to visionary producer, writer and director Joss Whedon, whose work has served as a model of multi-platform storytelling, as his richly-imagined universes play out simultaneously in film, television, the Internet and comic books. And the prestigious Stanley Kramer Award goes to the searing drama Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire, a film whose stark, kitchen-sink realism and indomitable human spirit carry on the potent legacy of social conscience that was the great Stanley Kramer’s trademark.

The Producers Guild Awards returns to the Hollywood Palladium on Sunday, January 24, featuring a spectacular show mounted by the Guild’s returning Awards Chairs David Friendly and Laurence Mark. Congratulations to all of our Guild’s nominees and honorees, and we look forward to seeing you there.
The expansion of this category to 10 nominees has done exactly what the Guild hoped it would: showcase the incredible variety of quality motion pictures released over the past year, from every corner of the industry. For our part, we love the chance to look at the honor roll and see the groundbreaking blockbuster *Avatar* and the poignant coming-of-age drama *An Education* sitting side-by-side, or to weigh the stark realism of *Precious* against the wildly fanciful (though no less visceral) wish fulfillment of *Inglourious Basterds*.

Certainly, it’s been a banner year for science fiction, as evidenced by the presence of not only James Cameron’s aforementioned opus, but a pair of other divergent titles — the idiosyncratic and rough-hewn allegory of *District 9*, as well as the effortlessly polished “reboot” of *Star Trek*. Thrown in the pulse-pounding *The Hurt Locker*, the flinty romance of *Up in the Air*, and plenty of uplift, both metaphorical (*Invictus*) and literal (*Up*), and you’re looking at a true feast of great cinema.

The new “instant runoff” voting system implemented by the Guild to accommodate the 10 nominees makes predicting a winner an even dicier proposition than usual. But if there’s one thing the system favors, it’s broad appeal. For that reason, we’re betting that sci-fi escapism and gripping naturalism work to cancel each other out. And the grab bag of nominees just so happens to feature one title that’s almost unanimously agreed-on as a treasure, with equal measures of fantasy and emotional depth. Which is why we’re boldly predicting that *Up* will be the first animated film ever to take home the Darryl F. Zanuck Award.
What kind of year was it for animation? Well, for the first time, the Producers Guild features five nominees in this category. And it's not just the numbers, it's the variety: two stop-motion films, two digital and one that was hand-drawn, the good old-fashioned way.

Moreover, this quintet is almost certainly the most grown-up set of animated films the PGA has ever nominated. From the post-apocalyptic world of *9*, to the subtly spooky wonders of *Coraline*, to the wistfully ironic Wes Anderson sensibility of *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, to the searching meditation on sadness and loss at the heart of the otherwise buoyant *Up*, animated films this year most definitely shed the remnants of their just-for-kids label.

It's almost a shame that only one of them can win. Given that Pixar chief John Lasseter will be taking the stage to receive the Guild's top honorary award in motion pictures, we'll do the polite thing and predict that *Up* will make it a clean sweep for the animation studio that everyone loves to love.
PRODUCER OF THE YEAR AWARD IN DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FILM

Producing documentaries is just about the toughest job in show business. Whether it’s finding the right subject matter, or finding the scarce funding available to tell these provocative and challenging stories, the path of the documentarian is never easy. The best of them, however, are always worth the effort, and this year, the Producers Guild is proud to honor a quartet of films that are among the best of the best.

Each of the four nominated documentaries is, in some sense, a story about change, though each approaches the topic from a wildly different perspective. Soundtrack for a Revolution looks back (and forward) at the American Civil Rights movement, investing the ongoing struggle for equality with the energy and dynamism of great music. It’s a more violent revolution at the center of Burma VJ, charting the 2007 uprisings against the military regime in Burma with white-knuckle immediacy. Sergio considers the legacy of the late UN Ambassador Sergio Vieira de Mello, and the passion for human rights that led him to risk his life for his ideals, while The Cove stands as a searing indictment of man’s inhumanity in the face of the natural world, exposing the brutal slaughter of dolphins off the coast of Japan.

As in years past, due to the relative (and unfortunate) inaccessibility of many great documentary films, these nominations were arrived at by a special blue-ribbon panel, rather than by the membership at large. However, the entire membership casts its ballots to decide a winner. There’s very little to go on in terms of conventional wisdom here, but if we have to bet on one, we’ll bet on the one that had to have its footage literally smuggled out of a foreign country, which means that we’re backing Burma VJ.
DAVID L. WOLPER
PRODUCER OF THE YEAR AWARD
IN LONG-FORM TELEVISION

It's a different sort of crop this year among the Long-Form Television nominees. Previous winners such as HBO’s *John Adams* and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* offered sweeping historical panoramas; there’s none of that to be found here. Instead, we’re looking at period pieces of a far more intimate caste, along the lines of Lifetime’s elegant *Georgia O’Keeffe* biopic, or HBO’s empathetic double portrait *Grey Gardens*. *Prayers for Bobby* and *Taking Chance* each offer a meditation on the meaning of a single lost life and its impact on those left behind. *Little Dorrit* carries on the strong long-form tradition of great literary adaptations (and gives the fans of period sets and costumes plenty to chew over), while *The Prisoner* offers a true wild card … a update of one of television’s great cult oddities, maintaining the cerebral spirit of the original while painting its canvas in a more contemporary and international hue.

HBO has dominated this category like no other, racking up an incredible eight consecutive Wolper Awards. And much as we want to cheer for an underdog, we think that the star power, creative and technical precision, and expansive spirit of *Grey Gardens* is a good bet to make it nine in a row for the premium cable outfit.
Ladies and gentlemen, your new go-to network for prime-time drama: AMC.

The nomination of Breaking Bad along with returning 2009 winner Mad Men is only further evidence of the shift that began last year, cementing basic cable (stingy and shallow a term as that now seems) as the wellspring of television’s best dramatic storytelling. Following the model laid down by HBO and Showtime (each of whom boasts its own entry in this category), AMC hasn’t hesitated to give viewers challenging stories, deeply conflicted characters, and top-grade production values. And while we still think that Mad Men seems likely to take this category, the emergence of Walter White alongside Don Draper in the pantheon of conflicted TV (anti-)heroes is something that deserves to be cheered.

Though let’s not skimp on the cheers for our other nominees: Showtime’s Dexter, whose annual nomination now seems appropriately methodical; ABC’s Lost, entering its swan song season (will we see a single broadcast network among these nominees next year?); and HBO’s True Blood, which continues to blur the lines between the sexy, the scary and the soapy with peerless panache.
Four of last year’s five nominees for the Producers Guild’s Danny Thomas Award have returned, with only Showtime’s stealth bomb *Californication* breaking through to shake things up. The nomination for that series, along with third-time nominee *Weeds*, would seem to mark the premium cable network as the most fruitful soil for envelope-pushing comedy.

But will that prove enough to sway the voters to hand over the award? We’re sad to say that we kind of doubt it. The critical consensus seems to have coalesced around *30 Rock* as the best comedy out there, at least until some celebrated new kid on the block comes along (it hasn’t) or Tina Fey’s crazy-quilt of backstage lunacy and metropolitan angst suffers a drop-off in quality (far from it). Still, we remember the days when *Sex and the City* took home this award regularly, and much as we enjoyed the exploits of Carrie Bradshaw and company, it got to be a little less fun watching the same folks take home the hardware year after year. Predictability is the antithesis of great comedy — a principle these five series demonstrate with nearly every episode. We’ll see if the PGA voters feel similarly.
PRODUCER OF THE YEAR AWARD
IN NON-FICTION TELEVISION

This year’s collection of nominees in non-fiction television has the interesting distinction of being both highly idiosyncratic and surprisingly stable. Granted, it’s a real grab bag of a category that pits a storied news magazine against an epic fishing show, an offbeat slice-of-life former radio show, a stark addiction recovery drama, and a frothy takedown of celebrity culture. But consider that for all of its seeming randomness, there’s an honest-to-goodness pattern here; with the exception of newcomer Intervention, each of the other nominees coped this same distinction last year. It may be madness, but the PGA voters have a method to it.

History says that 60 Minutes is the favorite in this category, having won last year despite head-to-head competition with Frontline. With no other news program to split its potential vote this year, we have a hard time seeing how that ticking stopwatch doesn’t prevail again. And frankly, we have no problem with that. With the relatively recent passing of the program’s legendary creator Don Hewitt, the PGA could do worse that once more pay tribute to the series that redefined investigative television reporting.

60 Minutes (CBS)
Jeff Fager

Deadliest Catch (Discovery)
Thom Beers
Jeff Conroy
Matt Renner
Ethan Prochnik

Intervention (A&E)
Gary Benz
Sam Mettler
Dan Partland
Jeff Grogan
Kurt Schepmer
(additional names under appeal)

Kathy Griffin: My Life on the D-List (Bravo)
Marcia Mulé
Bryan Scott
Lisa M. Tucker
Kathy Griffin
Todd Radnitz
Amy Kohn
Blake Webster

This American Life (Showtime)
Ira Glass
Julie Snyder
Nancy Updike
Ken Druckerman
Banks Tarver
Christopher Wilcha
Lisa Pollak
Kevin Vargas
PRODUCER OF THE YEAR AWARD
IN LIVE ENTERTAINMENT/COMPETITION
TELEVISION

The across-the-board stability of last year’s nominees continues into the Live Entertainment/Competition Television category. As in Comedy and Non-Fiction, incumbents rule the roost, with four of the five series from last year’s circle returning for another round. Only *American Idol* is, technically, a new choice, though the landmark music show has been a frequent nominee in years past.

This particular lineup seems destined to deliver a third straight win to *The Colbert Report*. Reflecting *60 Minutes*’ win in the Non-Fiction category, Colbert was able to turn the trick last year despite stiff competition from another comic take on current events, HBO’s *Real Time With Bill Maher*. But with four outstanding competitive programs potentially splitting this year’s vote, fans of straight-up (or perhaps rightward-tilting) comedy have nowhere else to turn to besides the Report.
Two ships, four manned submersibles, 40 dives at 10 sites in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans ... I like big operations, but this one was off the hook."

Yeah, tell me about it.

That was James Cameron’s quote regarding Aliens of the Deep, one of the four ocean documentaries his company Earthship Productions produced from 2000 to 2005 — you know, the time between Titanic and Avatar. It’s funny how many people asked me during that time, “So, when is Jim going to do another film?” (Hmmm, I thought we were doing two films… Aren’t documentaries for the big screen considered films these days?)

Cameron developed the cameras used for Avatar on these projects. He partnered with underwater 3D camera specialist Vincent Pace to perfect what he envisions as “the holy grail of cameras” — a high-definition rig that is maneuverable, digital, high-resolution, 3D and won’t give viewers a headache.

As his associate producer/production manager for those five years, I had to build a whole new skill set for what lay ahead.

Before Ghosts of the Abyss, the only water-based show I had worked on was a really bad German soap opera in the Florida Keys, so when I signed on to work with Earthship, my idea of working on water was about to take a whole new direction.

WELCOME ABOARD!

My aqua education began when producer and PGA member Peter Barnett hired me to production manage the BTS footage for Ghosts of the Abyss. I hadn’t been back a week from shooting a film in Cambodia, City of Ghosts with Matt Dillon, when I and six crew guys were put on a flight to St. John’s, Newfoundland. All I knew was that we needed to install about a dozen surveillance cameras on the Russian ship Akademik Keldysh, the same ship used in Titanic. Upon arriving at the ship there was a problem with the local longshoreman. They refused to unload any of the 10 shipping containers and four trucks waiting on the dock until a deal point was resolved. So, without knowing the full situation, my crew and I took the initiative and spent the next several hours unloading the trucks and containers ourselves. That was a huge no-no.

When you arrive into a port of call, don’t touch anything until you know what’s going on. You can get into a lot of trouble with the locals if you load even one case without approval from the longshoremen. Luckily for us, Cameron saw it as a big help regardless of the fine they paid.

Another lesson learned. Your crew should be prepared to wear many hats. No matter how big or small your budget, having a smaller, more elite team of multifaceted professionals willing to do anything for success should be a necessary requirement, especially if you happen to be working for a demanding visionary like Cameron. Also remember, when you make crew deals, they’re on a boat, so days off and hours worked should be flexible, if possible. (No one will be heading into town for dinner, if you catch my drift.)

MAN OVERBOARD!

Just as in any form of production, safety and communications are extremely important, but when working on the water, it can literally mean life or death. Our entire production depended on us coming up with a system that worked.

Our Russian ship’s crew that “wrangle” the MIR submersibles surface recovery are nicknamed “cowboys” — when you watch them do their thing, you’ll understand why.

One night, the seas were so rough, they had a major problem attaching the “umbilical cord” to one of the MIRs; if it weren’t for the safety officer implementing their marine recovery protocols, the cowboy easily could have drowned.

On all our expeditions, we hired a surface and safety coordinator that was also a six-year marine and Iraq war veteran, who just happened to be Jim Cameron’s brother, JD (John David Cameron). Trust me, nepotism had nothing to do with it. Each mobilization was run like a full-blown military campaign and the ocean was our enemy to conquer.

JD and Jim drafted a set of safety procedures that contained all “in case of emergency” scenarios we could possibly conceive. Inevitably, it was the one they didn’t think of that sneaked up and bit us in the ass.

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On Aliens of the Deep, our A-frame launching crane had a cylinder breakdown and we couldn’t launch our subs in the conventional method. As Jim observed, “We can’t just call ‘Cranes R Us’ and have this thing fixed. We’re 300 miles at sea, for fuck’s sake.” So minutes after the breakdown, Jim, JD and our ship’s captain focused on an alternative solution. Several hours and 40 pages of diagrams later, they devised a way to launch the subs by cutting away one side of the ship and sliding them into the water by using the ship’s smaller crane. Lesson No. 2: Thinking outside of the box will always save your ass out on the high seas.

Marine walkies are standard for ship-to-ship communications. Most shows want walkies should work on board, but it would be a good idea to test them prior to setting sail. The Keldysh had extremely thick steel walls that occasionally interfered with our walkies. As you might imagine, a few crew members blamed the walkies for being crap and thought nothing of hurling them overboard. Lesson No. 3: A hair dryer, cotton swabs and alcohol will never really repair the damage, but can temporarily fool the vendor in thinking it was a manufacturer malfunction. You’ll still have to pay for it in the long run, so make sure you have the proper insurance.

LAND HO!
One of the many responsibilities I had was to oversee the inventory, packing and shipping of all the equipment used at sea. As Cameron told me, “Bring two of everything, because it’s that one, five-dollar part we miss that can shut us down.” Talk about stress… On Aliens of the Deep I shipped one flat rack, with two submersibles and two 40-foot shipping containers to Miami, Florida, to meet with our sister ship the EDT Ares, and four 40-foot trucks convoying up to Newfoundland to meet with the Keldysh. Once the trucks to Canada left our headquarters, they had to be sealed for customs and security purposes, so at that stage, whatever we forgot was going in our own luggage — and be careful about what you try to stow in your carry-on.

...AND WHY ARE YOU SHIPPING TWO SUBMARINES TO SOMEONE’S HOUSE IN CALIFORNIA?
Customs brokers and ship’s agents are your best contacts when working in ports and overseas. At the very least, there’s no one better to have in your corner if you’re being detained in a customs holding area in Marseilles, France. In 2002, Cameron sent me to France on what JD explained as “a black ops mission on a need-to-know basis.” I wasn’t told what I was going to be doing in France until I arrived in Marseilles. It was surreal. My taxi driver couldn’t find the address I had, so I called JD in Malibu explaining where I was; he said, “Sit tight. Jim will be there in five.” All I was thinking was, yeah, right. I’m in a little town in the south of France with no landmarks. How will he find me?

Of course, five minutes later a silver van pulled up and there was Cameron and his whole family. Still not knowing what I was doing, Jim, like an excited kid on Christmas, nudged me: “Wait ’til you see, wait ’til you see…” By this time, I was three years into working with Earthship Productions, so nothing surprised me anymore.
We arrived at a nondescript building behind a feed mill. Our French driver got out and started to open the padlocked door; all the time, Jim was nudging me, “wait ‘til you see, wait ‘til you see…” The door swung open to reveal a giant warehouse filled with every piece of marine expedition equipment you can imagine, including a pair of two-man submersibles weighing six tons each, standing 15 feet high and 12 feet wide. These were the submarines we would use for *Aliens of the Deep*. Cameron turned to me and asked, “So, how long will it take for you to photograph, inventory, pack and ship all of this to my ranch in Santa Barbara?”

Now mind you, this was the first time I was told why I was in France, so my first thought was to laugh, then cry. Knowing that neither would fly with Jim, I put hand to chin, walked around the warehouse and with Cameron staring intently at me, ultimately blurted out, “Eight weeks.”

“Eight weeks?!” he screamed. “You’re fucking kidding me! You have four.”

About 3½ weeks later — don’t ask me how; some secrets should be taken to the grave — I was at the Marseilles airport, with the operating manuals to the submersibles in my carry-on luggage. It was 2002 and the world still had 9/11 fresh in its collective mind. So when my customs agent asked me what the manuals were for, I responded, “These books tell you how to operate a submarine.”

I guess that was the wrong answer, because they escorted me to a backroom with no windows and started to interrogate. Luckily, I had the business card to my local shipping agent who explained the whole thing; since I wasn’t an authorized shipper of such material, they needed more details from a reliable source. After five hours, I was free, but missed my flight. Several months later, two military intelligence guys showed up at our Malibu office asking for me. JD took care of that one. But the experience left me something else to remember it by: From now on, I always have to go through an extended search whenever I fly. So again… be careful about what you put in your carry-on.

WORDS TO SAIL BY

During every expedition, Cameron would write on the white board in our mission control the following statements, which we all tried to live by:

**LUCK IS NOT A FACTOR.**

**HOPE IS NOT A STRATEGY.**

**FEAR IS NOT AN OPTION.**

Any type of photography on the water is difficult and expensive. Give yourself enough prep time, always plan for the unexpected, budget 15% more than what you had and above all, have a good attitude, because the ship gets real small, real fast.
PGA Green Outreach Committee (“GO”) collects and shares information about eco-friendly practices in production and is helping to expand the website www.PGAgreen.org. Committee members Kim Van Hoven and Dan Halperin sat down with PGA producer Fred Baron of 20th Century Fox Studios to hear about the “greening” of his feature The Day the Earth Stood Still.

Dan: How did the idea originate to pursue sustainability efforts on your film? It was a corporate idea at FOX, which lined up with the initiatives at our parent company Newscorp. Additionally, it was me saying, “I’m a member of the planet and I want to do my part.” Plus we had actors like Keanu Reeves, who are concerned human beings.

Because of the movie’s theme, it was the perfect vehicle for FOX to initiate its green efforts on the feature side. The theme of the original picture was the Cold War, warning that people had to get together and stop threatening to kill each other with nuclear bombs. While similar, in our remake the plot is more of a Noah’s Ark theme; the aliens are taking two of each species to repopulate the Earth after killing off the human race, and then they’re going to destroy all the remaining humans. They say, “We are an alien race that has lost your planet. You Earthlings know what has to be done to save your planet but you’re not doing it. We know how valuable Earth is and we won’t let you destroy it.”

Kim: Did you have the support of the studio? From the beginning, we brought in CTP (Change the Picture) Media Consulting and they met with every single department. They were supported by the studio, and Newscorp paid for it, so it didn’t affect the cost of production.

Dan: What are some examples of greening actions that made an impact on the production? Alternative energy is big in Vancouver, so that helped. We used hybrid automobiles both in front of camera and behind camera. We were green in our set construction and we recycled every possible piece. And we stored sets too so that they could be used on other movies. Every department pitched in.

Vancouver is so far ahead of us. The crews there all had metal water bottles. They even took them to Starbucks for their coffee. We plan to give those bottles as production gifts instead of T-shirts or hats.

FOX donates leftover paint to schools, allowing the schools to mix the colors to fit their needs.

Kim: What was the impact of being green on your budget? It was really minimal. Maybe $20,000 to $30,000 extra to have a construction crew break down the sets in the proper way so that they could be recycled or stored. It may have cost us a little more in the wrap because it’s easier to bulldoze and dump, but this was a cost we accepted.

It’s also a savings in efficiency. PAs don’t print paper call sheets, get in the car, drive to the hotel and throw them under the door of every hotel room. We made sure the crew knew that they were responsible for checking their e-mail for any changes.

Dan: What other ways do you think the film industry can become more eco-friendly? Everyone’s thinking “solar power.” We’re not quite there yet as far as the amount of wattage we need to run the lights. But the electricity that comes from the power companies … we make sure that it is as green as possible.

And post has become greener too, just through advances in technology. The director is getting communication on the set directly from the cutting room, which is in another city; at the same time he/she’s having video conferences with a visual effects house in Wellington, New Zealand, thousands of miles away on another continent. You don’t have to make a print, drive it to the airport, put it on a plane and ship it in order to screen it. That’s getting green just through technology.

Kim: What do you see as the specific role of producers in achieving sustainability in production? It’s up to producers to carry the flag and make sure that everybody on their production plays a role in being green. Producers can encourage their departments to take advantage of the resources provided by the PGA, the Green Production Alliance, and ESi. Unless the producer says, “Do it,” no one on the production is going to take the initiative on their own.

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The producer is a leader. This isn’t about weekend box office. This is about making a grip, an electrician, a caterer, a production coordinator, a PA, an actor ask, “What can we do to make our production as green as possible from prep to delivery?” Unfortunately, a well-run production does not necessarily make a movie great. But a production that’s run green will be successful in helping make a better environment and a better world.
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