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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Having recently wrapped the production of a digital feature film in Fort Lauderdale working as a DIT, (that's a Digital Imaging Technician… more later) I find myself looking back on my brief time spent there and have concluded that in some oddly appropriate way the Floridian environment paralleled, and consequently fostered, many of my reflections on the movie business as it rockets forward into its digital future. Fort Lauderdale epitomizes the clash of a dying conservative culture with an ostentatiously vibrant one. Old timers in wheelchairs and walkers, dark sunglasses and sunhats, wrapped in layers of protective clothing, step off their walled reservations and are encircled by tattooed, nearly naked hard bodies, on display on the beaches, screaming superbikes and for the fabulously wealthy, their Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Maseratis, Bentleys, Aston Martins and three-story yachts. It's the confluence of the retired, hard working, saved-all-my-life for this pathetic moment, depression-born, nursing-homers, with the fast-money, high-living, yacht-borne high rollers and their wannabees. It's "Girls Gone Wild" in a

funeral home and the services have already begun.

Only a few years ago, the thought of shooting a movie on video was anathema to professional filmmakers and wannabees alike, yet today, it is commonplace. Since 2000 when George Lucas announced that Episode II of the Star Wars Prequel Trilogy would be the first major motion picture to be shot 100% digitally on a SONY CineAlta camera and later in 2001 when Panasonic introduced the VariCam, perhaps the first camera whose direct output was designed to look like film, they and other manufacturers have moved the technology forward at such lightning speed that now small, handheld consumer cameras are enabled with more features and better image quality than their noble ancestors, while the cost for “super-cameras” has plummeted to affordable levels with the introduction of the Red One and its successors, Epic and Scarlet. Even the venerable Arriflex has committed to the movement with the introduction of the Alexa, a classically designed and well-planned, obsolescence-diminished, modular camera somewhere between a Red Epic and everything else in concept and pricepoint.

Now as youTube and Vimeo websites offer everyone the potential to be seen and heard round the world for free, lower-end pro-sumer and consumer

cameras are being manufactured to produce high quality images suitable for broadcast and theatrical release at pricepoints that most can afford. While Canon spun several HD camera models off from a professional camera originally designed for photojournalists, its still/HD combo-camera, the 5D Mark II, costing a mere $2800, (the 7D, 60D, 2Ti & 3Ti at even lower pricepoints) other manufacturers like Black Magic Design have produced a camera exclusively designed for filmmakers at under $3,000. Recently, moviegoers throughout the country flocked to a major film release, “Act of Valor,” unaware that the entire film was shot with a Canon 5D MarkII.

Barriers to entry into the exclusive club of theatrical release fell with “The Blair Witch” and now are all but gone, but just as we all have pencils and computers and yet we are not all artists and authors, so too, feature film production remains an elusive goal for all but a few stubbornly talented, hardworking dreamers and it is fair to say that digital production has made their dreams attainable.

There are many advantages to digital production, but chief among them is immediacy. Gone are the days of wondering, “if you got it” while you wait for film dailies to come back from the lab. Now you can see in great detail exactly what is being recorded,

allowing necessary adjustments, creative or technical, as needed. Finished picture can be delivered to an editor the same day it is shot and postproduction can be completed in record time, expediting delivery to a distributor or film festival.

Florida is often referred to as “God’s waiting room.” To be sure, it is the retirement capital of the United States and the largest portion of the population are seniors safely riding out their old way of life between hurricanes, huddled together in walled and gated condominium enclaves, engrossed by right wing radio, before stepping out for their cardiologist appointment. Once on the highway, they come face to face with new Florida, as small, customized imports--fast and furious and tweaked for speed, and shiny exotic supercars of the superwealthy-- whiz by these timid, slow-moving old-timers at phenomenal speeds, often exceeding 150 mph. At these speeds lane changing is ill-advised. By the time a slow-moving senior checks his rear-view mirror, returns focus to the highway ahead and initiates a lane change, it’s all over.

Sitting in a five-lane parking lot of traffic on I95 north has become a regular occurrence for me on my days off as I head from Fort Lauderdale to visit my father in nearby Boynton Beach. Inevitably the

problem is always a terrible wreck being cleaned up and moved to the side of the road. But wrecks on I95 Florida are unlike wrecks anywhere else, for little remains identifiable of the cars involved. In Ohio, cars still look like cars, just dented up cars. In Florida, the parts are scattered willy-nilly up and down the highway, a bumper here, a catalytic converter there, a tire in the median, nuts and bolts and twisted metal and broken plastic, a litter path strewn for half a mile, a debris field larger than flight 93, and I realize the immediate effect of mixing traffic of such extremely different speeds. Not even the most cautious senior, wrapped in protective layers of heavy sheet metal surrounding a trusted 3 ton, 12 mpg gas-guzzler, can escape.

So too, there is no escape for the filmmaker focused in a rearview mirror and surrounded with layers of protective tradition. The pace of digital technology is just far too fast.

I have been privileged to work on this past film as the DIT and with what may be the most boring job on the set once filming starts, I am able to spend most of my time sitting, observing and thinking, a dangerous combination. What I write about the people I observe may seem at times to be, at the very least unflattering. My opinions may seem

harsh or cynical, or just unkind. And whether true or fictionalized for a clarity of truth unable to be discerned in factual truth, anyone who has worked a film set will see themselves and the others that they have worked with. Consequently, I hope that in spite of anything that may be said about my experience and my observations, that it may still be realized that I love them all. All irritations, frustrations, and disappointments are of no consequence. I have seen how the bonds of friendship are far stronger than the differences we encounter. In the scant 3½ weeks of production, I have seen sad, withdrawn and beleaguered people come out of their shell and laugh and join us in work and play. I have seen intolerance diminished, resistance foregone. There is something magical about a film set, where anything is possible, but you have to believe.

Rumors fly at lightspeed on a film set. Everybody knows everything about everybody and then some. However, secrets are kept within our “Vegas” world of production. The personal lives of the participants to my story will remain private. Neither you nor I shall be their judge. Peace and happiness are so fleeting and the human condition so frail and needy, that it is quite likely that the profession of dreams may attract an undue share of those who cannot find it elsewhere.

Finally, as we move from film to digital acquisition a great many of our terms are obsolete but will remain in our language forever, so that someday a few hundred years from now, an apprentice will understand their meaning but not know the source of terms like “check the gate”, “hold the roll”, “speed”, and even “cut”. Very soon, we will no longer be making films, but we will forever be making movies.

I have tried to make every attempt to explain to the uninitiated the inner workings and technical issues of movie production without boring them to abandon the story. My hope is that you will find this book entertaining while enjoying a perspective from the inside looking out.

Chapter Two

SCIENCE AND ART

Motion picture production is not an exact science, if it be a science at all--not that it is devoid of science--but that is not the first thought that comes to mind when we see a movie. Nevertheless, even in the early days of the industry, there was an awareness of the nature of the beast, for the organization formed in 1939, the one that hosts the yearly Oscar ceremonies, is named the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Those who founded it wisely understood that it was at once both an art form and a science based industry, an unholy marriage of opposite attractions, fostering a mixed progeny of stillborns, dullards, idiot savants and yes, the occasional genius, siblings with the same features, having little else in common but worthy of our recognition, adulation and awards. Also of note is that nowhere in the academy's name does the word "film" appear.

Over the centuries, both artists and scientists have endured ridicule and even torture at the hands of their contemporaries, usually status quo religious forces, for embracing new technologies or politically incorrect

ideologies. Flogging, branding, hot pokers, crucifixion, the rack, hot oil, dunkings, and the iron maiden, all were widely used to exact compliance.

Not much has changed in that regard. The “Flat Earth Society” has many members in all walks of life. For those who have a rigid belief system, the quest for knowledge is over. While technology and objective science have long since triumphantly walked the reverberant halls of religion, pockets of resistance still exist in the most unlikely places. In many professions, bodies of faithful, still kneel in submission to their very own, idealized “Almighties”. They pray beneath painted and gilt-edged plaster statues, mythical intermediaries, asking them for this cure or that, to the problems that plague them. Magic and miracles trump logic. Paper covers rock. The heart rules the head. Action is born of emotion, inaction from praying too long.

It is a certainty that consumers of American Film entertainment, those on the outside, average viewers that is, can never understand the combative nature of the collaborative process upon which the nightly offerings of their favorite cable channel, after an ever-so-brief theatrical run, are launched into the orbit of global rerun perpetuity.

Although much has been written about writers and producers, directors and actors, agents and talent, the spendthrift bean-counters in the office and the extravagance on and off set, torrid new flows of creative conflict are bubbling up from this lava field of economic and ego-driven turf wars, creating fresh opportunities to burn money in a contest to impose one will over another in quarrels instigated by the changes in technology.

Nothing can be more disconcerting than to realize that which was once is no longer, that the very earth beneath our feet is not “rock solid” but an ever-shifting mass of tectonic plates that can open up and swallow entire communities in one gulp. The motion picture camera was created in the middle of the industrial age and has survived in its basic form unscathed throughout. For example, cameras that were built in the fifties were still being used effectively for the remainder of the 20th century. Consequently, the rapid shift to digital media came as a surprise in the middle of the night and despite warnings from prophets like Coppolla, was unforeseen by a community safely asleep at home in their beds and accustomed to the occasional tremors. The result was fear and confusion.

Chapter Three

A NEW DEAL

For the average free-lancer on a film crew, it all starts with making the deal. Each and every film is a unique job and each film is staffed by a collection of workers who must first form an agreement with the producers who manage the film. It begins as a verbal agreement—a simple phone call and a "yes," but immediately followed with a deal memo and a contract. The position of DIT is a new position recently added, incidentally not without controversy, to the hallowed list of film crew. It is an acronym for the Digital Imaging Technician, who is the person charged with managing the technical aspects of the film, those that determine how the video and audio are being recorded and thus how the film will look and sound. This role is now doubly important because the technical decisions made by the DIT also determine the postproduction workflow. To many it's just another strange name in a long list of strange names describing the film crew, names like Gaffer, Key Grip and Best Boy. But management by a DIT can determine the successful look of a film or limit it's potential and can impact the budget even more so

than the choices made by the Director of Photography and has become the frontier border crossing where science meets art in this industry.

Previously, there was no need for such a position. The technical aspects of film have always been the exclusive domain of the cinematographer and required only enough understanding to make one basic decision—the choice of film stock. From this decision, all other variables become fixed. The film stock inherently defines the ISO, the speed of the film; the color balance—daylight or tungsten; the color saturation; the contrast and dynamic range; and the texture of the image—smooth or grainy. Any other manipulation of the image occurred later in the processing of the image by the lab and the coloring of the image by the color timer who prints the negative in the same way color photographs were printed for consumers before digital photography, leaving the cinematographer with only three very simple choices, the same choices that all photographers must make—aiming the camera, determining the exposure and focusing. Ah, but in those three choices lies the art, crude or sublime.

Most consumers think that the camera operator is the cinematographer or that the director of photography operates the camera. To be sure, they are both

cinematographers, but the attention of the operator is limited to the camera and the assistants, while that of the DP is broadened to include directing the entire crew, which includes the camera team, the grips, gaffers and their teams, and the art department as well. Colors, all colors, affect the mood and the look of a film, and so painted set walls and wardrobe choices need to be integrated into the total look and meaning of a film. Where your eye goes, what you focus on, what you ignore, can all be directed by color choices. How you feel about a character is a color choice as much as an acting responsibility. In it's basic form we know that the good guy wears the white cowboy hat and the bad guy wears the black one. Lawrence wears white, Darth wears black, but color goes far beyond that. Color can make us feel edgy or calm. It can excite or titillate or create a feeling of sickness. It can signal health or disease. It can arouse anger, create hope or express uncertainty. A Tony Scott film is edged with disturbing color, while most Woody Allen films are shades of grey. It all means something that you understand at your deepest, most basic level.

As the DIT enters this sacrosanct mix and the technical responsibility in digital production moves away from a choice of film stock, to encompass every issue formerly associated with that choice, even an emotionally secure DP might feel threatened with the

loss of authority and a lack of control. So married is filmstock to a DP's vision, that recognizing this, Kodak named it's most popular filmstock "Vision". Thus, in the elimination of this bedrock choice, the move from film to digital represents nothing less than a frontal assault on the DP's "vision" and a crack in the dike separating professional DP's from the wannabee DIYers (do-it-yourself-ers) who proliferate our below-sea-level landscape and continue to win film festivals by blindly ignoring every sacred rule of flood prevention.

To counteract this movement, film oriented DP's retreat to their last bastion of defense, the mattebox, where they cling to the use of glass filters to provide some degree of control for color, contrast and sharpness. For those unfamiliar with production equipment, the mattebox is the device that attaches to the front of the lens to provide shade, flare protection and accommodate the use of glass filters. With the exception of graduated neutral density filters and polarizers, color modifications can be accomplished simply by a qualified DIT, with more potential and greater variation, sophistication and, there it is that nasty word, control.

For the DIYer, there are no restrictions, no rules to get in the way. With cameras that perform just about

every function that an entire camera team on a major motion picture might perform—focus, exposure, color balance, audio levels—it's not about skill but the story. For the professional DP working in a digital world, these same expressions that support story are filtered through the DIT and this is a source of recurring problems.

My selection as the DIT of this film came about as a result of my relationship with Panasonic Broadcast. Since the year 2000, I had been working as a free-lance director of photography on independent films, but I am best known for my consultancy work with Panasonic, which is largely very technical in nature. In addition to conducting seminars and speaking at trade shows, I created the "looks" for Panasonic digital cameras. Looks are files that can be read by the camera affecting a change in the color settings and hence the output of the image. From 2001 through 2010, I created all the color set-up files (or looks) for all models of Panasonic professional cameras. Since this film was to be shot on two of their flagship cameras, both VariCams, I was the logical choice to be the DIT. The Director was a former client and I had trained his staff.

Before leaving for a different production in Europe, he confided that the original DP for this film had become

unavailable and no one had been chosen to replace him. In two weeks, he would return and he was concerned about finding a new DP in the short time remaining before scheduled shooting. Mistakenly, hoping to be helpful, I offered my services in that regard (I had already DP-ed several independent films) and set in motion an undercurrent of events that continued to haunt me throughout the production process.

A few days after that discussion I received a call from his 1st AD requesting a demo reel. I had little to offer except a few scant clips on the Internet, as I was accustomed to getting employment by referrals, word-of-mouth from happy clients. What began as a casual suggestion to help a friend had now turned into a formal interview process to convince strangers of my abilities, a process I was both unprepared for and had little interest in.

So it came as no surprise that after several interviews with both the line producer in New York and the 1st AD, a DP was selected who had a proper demo reel.

In micro budget films (under one million dollars) every penny counts and so tedious negotiations continued, centering around my deal memo and rental agreements: adding gear, removing gear, trying to

keep necessities, legal boilerplate, conflicts between the deal memo and the rental agreements, state employment laws, insurance, more legalese, more reductions, discounts, special rates, terms, shipping, travel, method of invoicing ad-nauseam.

It all became too much. I like to think that I have learned a few things over the years and one has been to walk away when something doesn't feel right, and this didn't. I declined their offer. To my surprise my cause was championed by the director who emailed the various producers that "If Mike quits, then so do I."

Shortly after that I got a phone call from the executive producer. I knew I was being schmoozed by one of the best but I liked her take-charge approach. We had never spoken before, but as we were both from the same city, she began her conversation with a remark to that effect and in short time we discovered that we had something peculiar in common. Many years ago her grandparents had owned a theater in my hometown that had since been torn down. At that time I had acquired 16 of the salvaged theater seats to use in a set that I was building for a national ad. Over all these years I have kept the seats and on that basis alone, and her excitement over the coincidence, I suddenly felt at ease, we resolved our differences and I agreed to serve as the DIT.

Once roles are established there is one significant choice that has to be made that is customarily not made by the DIT but remains exclusive to the DP, the selection of the type and model of camera. Unfortunately for our DP this decision had been pre-empted by our director, who owns the VariCam that will be used on the film and as I was the owner of the second VariCam to be rented to the production, it seemed to put me in direct opposition to the DP who wanted to use his camera, a RED One. In reality, this was not a financial issue for me, as I also owned a RED One and could supply either camera as the second unit. The real crux of the matter was that the director had made the choice and that my job and obligations were to first support the director. This would come to a head soon, but cast me in a negative position with the DP, especially since he learned that I had also been considered for his position. This realization was interpreted as a mandate of sorts for his point of view, but more so, perceived as a threat and a conflict. In truth, I was there to help him achieve his vision by supporting him technically on a camera he was unfamiliar with. Nonetheless, he resented my presence and repeatedly created barriers to the execution of my responsibilities.

But, I get ahead of myself. First the deal had to be

finalized. After many lengthy phone calls negotiating my deal with the line producer and intervention by the production supervisor, production coordinator, first AD and production accountant I had little tolerance for the interruptive calls from the DP a young man with no experience with the camera owned by the director and whose agenda was to rent his own camera to the production. Unhappy with the director's choice the DP began lobbying me for support in his choice of camera and after discovering that I owned both types of cameras and was renting to the production a second unit "B" camera of the same type as the director's, before giving up, tried to change the argument to technical issues, of which he had not a clue. Clearly, he had a solid background in film, but equally clear was that he knew very little of the inner workings of digital production cameras other than his own. So it goes. Now rather than setting the stage for cooperation, resentment and rivalry had been created by the selection process.

Chapter Four

CASTING THE CREW

Selecting the crew is for the producer what casting the actors is for the director. The right combination of talents and personalities will make even the worst production bearable and lift the best to greater heights. Experienced crews, those that have been in it for the long haul, are a special breed apart from other occupations. They make pretty good money for short amounts of time and have long periods of unemployment in between. They travel far from home and are away from family and friends for months at a time, living out of suitcases, working 6 day weeks, 12 hour days plus overtime and nights. They are fed two meals a day, 6 hours apart and survive the rest on a $35 per diem. They spend their evenings at the hotel bar or just drop-dead tired in bed without eating. Sundays are spent sleeping-in, followed by a trip to the Laundromat. While on set, cell phones must be turned off so as not to ruin a good take, but also so that crew cannot escape to a better production. They are yelled at by just about everybody else working with them, both

above and below them in the pecking order, as even the lowliest PA takes great pleasure in exercising unchecked authority by yelling in their loudest voice, commanding them to shut-up while whispering three rooms down the hall during a take in another room, or by denying them access to the parking lot. Therefore, the most sought after quality while selecting co-workers for a film is just good-natured, old-fashioned maturity. While many other traits will contribute to the selection of one person over another, each position to be filled has specific qualifications.

The first person that I met upon my arrival in Fort Lauderdale was the driver sent to pick me up at the airport. I was told that he would meet me in the baggage area and would be carrying a sign with my name, and lest I be disturbed by his appearance--perhaps it was because I was arriving from Ohio--I was warned that it was “unconventional.” My driver proved to be perfect casting for the part. His faux-hawk haircut, sleeve tattoos and large-diameter, black-spiraled ear piercings made him instantly identifiable among the many formally attired, black-suited limo drivers.

A short drive to the hotel serving both as lodging and the location for the movie, and I entered the production office on the first floor. There I was

introduced to Elaine, the production supervisor; Eddie, production coordinator; and Stacey, Assistant production coordinator, all working quietly at their desk, shuffling paperwork and phone calls.

This trio manages the daily expenditures of the production in such a way as to not go over budget. It is the function of the supervisor to review requests for expenditures and advise the applicant what they can't have, while it is the function of the coordinator and the assistant coordinator to get it for them. The supervisor must be unflappable and intractable, while the coordinator must be able to maintain an expression that communicates an unphased lack of concern at the denial and complete disinterest, as if not even present, while memorizing every syllable of the conversation so as to proceed on it. The assistant coordinator just has to have brass balls, because it is she that will walk into the lion's den to get it for them.

The office is also shared by Donna, the accountant. Donna is the most loved person in the office and at lunchtime every Monday, for it is on that day that she signs the paychecks and disburses the per diems. Donna also keeps a healthy supply of petty cash in the safe next to her desk and approves all legitimate requests for cash reimbursements in an expedited manner by reaching for the cash. Adding to

her popularity, she bakes homemade chocolate chip cookies that taste like your mother's and distributes them on a plate next to the coffee machine for all to share.

Far from Donna, in a cramped corner of the room sit two other desks like Eastern European countries, the no-man's land of the office, belonging to the locations manager and the production designer. Taken together, the combination of locations and production design create the sets that we will shoot on. In the middle of the room are a few other desks belonging to set PA's, who protect the sets before and during production. Set PAs are equipped with walkie-talkies with headsets and for the most part restrict the flow of traffic on the set. They quietly receive their orders from the first AD over their walkies, even though the rest of the crew and public can hear the first AD from 3 blocks away. Still they echo his commands from all corners of the set. As if in a telepathic trance, much like an obedient congregation of the faithful at a Baptist service answering their minister, 20 smaller voices can be heard. A quiet PA looks up from playing scrabble on her iPhone and screams "LOCK IT UP" as 19 other voices scream the identical phrase in unison, then return quietly to their previous behavior only to join again quickly in screaming "LAST LOOKS"—a longer pause then, "ROLLING" followed

immediately by “QUIET ON THE SET”. They are truly the lowest on the totem pole, but are imbued with the same powers as that of a blue-latex-gloved TSA officer to remove a water bottle or an oversized tube of toothpaste from a wheelchaired senior attempting to board a commercial plane and divert them to a private office for a strip search.

The Locations Manager is the Sheriff of the production. This is his town and if you fail to obey the rules, he’ll shoot holes in your ass and drag you off to boot hill. He answers to the politicians of the town, the producers and the owners of the locations, who have defined a delicate balance of “dos” and “don’ts” that allow the production to continue. In our case the rules of our hotel set have been defined by the marketing manager of the hotel, a heartless former SS officer, who enforces her will with daily search and seizure maneuvers that she personally directs. Thus, the locations manager is likened to the partisan informant working with the enemy to protect his people from a darker outcome. It took me over half of the production to get to know the locations manager and develop a relationship. His hard, outer shell masks a kind inner soul worthy of true friendship.

Next to him is the desk of the art department/

production designer, the dark-haired personification of Krusty the clown. The resemblance is remarkable, especially when considering that his sidekick assistant needs only have a black circular line drawn around his mouth to be the spitting image of Homer Simpson. How in the infinite universe did these two find each other? On another day, as he assembled some set props, I witnessed the assistant squatting gorilla-like on the floor, stabbing a broken set piece with a 12 volt drill, looking very much like Homer trying to assemble a Christmas toy without directions. Kismet. And like Krusty, there is a dark side to the Production designer. From the moment I met him, he seemed miscast. There is an arrogance and swagger about him that is overwhelming, like a made man, acting with immunity, Joe Pesci in Goodfellas. Yet there is a deep sadness behind his gregarious exterior, something akin to how Marilyn Monroe must have felt before her untimely demise.

Lacking an aesthetic and having only basic design skills he is more resourceful than artful, yet he delivers what is needed--but on his terms. One day I watched as he smoked a cigarette off set. When a set PA relayed a message to him from the Key Set PA requiring his services on set, he calmly took a long draw on his cigarette, exhaled and responded, “You tell Justin to just shut the fuck up and quit calling me

on the fuckin' walkie". The consequences of such inaction were displayed later that night in the dim evening light as a burly, tattooed grip was moving quickly through a palm grove and was "clotheslined" in the face by a black nylon rope, used by the art department to tie up falling palm branches, but forgotten and left behind. From the shadows, a litany of "MOTHERFUCKERS" could be heard as he crawled out of the grove, probably in the same manner as the many Harley accidents he'd survived that have scarred his shoulder, knees and wrist.

In spite of the fact that the Production Designer holds court daily, bragging to talent about hanging with John Turturro and other movie stars, or perhaps because of it, and for all the other aforesaid mentioned incidents and the many not reported here, I avoid him as much as possible.

The second to the First Assistant Director also occupies a desk in the office. The First AD is the Mussolini of the production. He sets the shooting schedule and makes the train run on time, but his work is really done on set. The second AD does the office work to print and deliver the schedule and the revised schedule and the revised/revised schedule many times throughout the day. At 5AM a schedule is delivered, slipped under our hotel doors, then it

is delivered again at the Chuckwagon at 6:30, as we gather for breakfast. Mid-afternoon we get a preliminary schedule for the next day and as we wrap at 7PM, we are handed the final schedule for the next day, the one that will be revised in the morning and slipped under our doors and distributed at the Chuckwagon all over again.

At that point, the first AD takes over, allowing the painful, time-consuming set-ups of camera rigging and lighting; blocking, rehearsals, placing actors marks, measuring for focus marks, swapping filters and gels, moving lights, moving video village a few times, answering questions and arguing over the script, to set the production back about 2 hours or so per day. By mid afternoon, the 1st AD begins telling the director in a loud voice what he can't have in order to stay on budget and avoid overtime and extra days. First, lines are cut, then shots are cut or consolidated, then scenes are cut. Extras sit all day and are asked to come back the next day, or just sent home without working, in exchange for the privilege of sharing a few bagels and coffee with the crew who is working with, or has at one time known, a movie star and is willing to talk about it during the two misspent hours that created the situation in the first place.

Writers are a special case because they do

their work off set before anyone has gathered for production. In our case the writer was the stereotypical movie writer that appears in movies about movies. His problems were compounded by coming to the set during the shooting of the film and occupying a seat in video village, where his writing is deconstructed daily and rewritten on the spot by anyone who can spell at a third grade level or above. In this comedy of comedies, the lead actor is a stand-up comic accustomed to improvising jokes all centered on being Jewish. The Co-producer, also a writer, had been tailoring the dialogue of the lead actor's character, a detective, to be more Jewish, less Jewish, correctly Jewish, etc. and at the same time cutting scenes and trimming dialogue so that our daily schedule could be met without failing to do the script as written. It's a lot like rewriting history to fit the answers on your history exam, or more appropriately, it's like going to the grocery store with $1.25 to buy a $3 bag of potato chips and cutting the bag open, proceeding to the register with the appropriate amount of chips to be able to pay for it. Unfortunately, on the way to the register, the writer intercepted the rewriter, snatched the bag away and filled it up with $4.oo worth of a Jalapeno-barbeque chips and blamed it on the young Latino actor, the result of which, when discovered, was the writer's banishment from the set.

My favorite part of working larger productions is the wide variety of personalities and the cross section of cultures that forms the crew and supporting production services. By and large, the most interesting people are the most humble and you have to spend time and get comfortable with them before their story unfolds. Our Key Location PA was one such fellow. Though sparks of enthusiasm would occasionally grace his eyes, there was little else to betray that he was perhaps one of the most talented people on the set. While driving to a remote location we spent some time together talking film and as modern times require, he was able to demonstrate his recent productions by way of his iPhone while chauffeuring four people to the location. I was more than impressed, perhaps envious… of his energy, creativity and the window of opportunity that was opening wide for a long career. But the bottom line was that this work, commercials and music videos, was good enough to put up against anybody's and he was just getting started.

Several other PA's, office personnel and crew came from other cultures and their talents were directly proportional to their modesty and quiet charm. In every case where someone was from another country or culture, there was a quiet devotion to their duties that spoke loudly of their commitment to their

tasks. In one case I spoke at length to a masters-degree graduate, an overly qualified drama major from the Dominican Republic who had been studying in New York and who was now working as an extra. She possessed a rare natural beauty, unadorned with makeup, tattoos or the shiny baubles of contemporary American society and that same quiet charm. The simplicity of her attire and the inexpensive construction of her garments spoke to her roots and the contentment she found in just being herself. No pretensions here. It was refreshing to find in a community based on inflated self-image.

As she and the others waited patiently for the better part of the day to spend a few minutes demonstrating for the camera that they could walk from one side of the room to the other on command, in another part of the building the wardrobe department was slavishly fashioning the images of the principal actors who would carry the movie on their ability to pretend to be someone other than who they really are (or in this case, perhaps not).

Key wardrobe was a delightful and charming gay fellow who could always be counted on to find the best restaurants, food, wine and pastries. His assistant, Veronica, was the physical embodiment of the Veronica character from the Archie comic

strip and although others had trouble remembering her name, often confusing it with Vanessa, I found it inconceivable that I would be the only one to see this remarkable casting resemblance, thus making it impossible to forget her name. She was one of those people who knew how to wear a straw hat on a windy day and possessed a tall walk, graceful shoulders set high in an aristocratic dignity that glided calmly through the many on-set disturbances. Together, this team was formidable and their resourceful solutions could always be counted on, but their performance, if in fact that is what it is, rising above it all, was sheer brilliance.

Not so for the grip department who always seem to be in constant conflict with one another on any given day. Grips and gaffers are often the most overworked persons on the shoot, arriving first and leaving last, and humping heavy equipment every hour in between. But any attitude they carry to a shoot begins with their business history and carries through the establishing of rental rates for their equipment used on your shoot.

As production requirements have declined with the advent of reality TV, internet distribution and high ISO cameras that can get remarkable pictures in available light, so too have community colleges pushed

record numbers of semi-qualified videographers into the professional arena, with the result that more programming and corporate productions are now being recorded with little or no assistance from grip services and rental companies on small cameras edited for lo-res internet delivery.

As business declined, rental houses moved from daily rates to what are called 3-day weeks, meaning clients with long term needs could rent equipment by paying for three days and getting the use of it for seven. So bad has this business become, that one-day weeks are becoming common and I have even heard of fractional-day weeks in extreme cases. The changing nature of the business has soured long time veterans and jaded newcomers.

Under pressure with unreasonable demands resulting from indecision or bad decision, circumstances beyond control or just bad weather, grips and gaffers bear the burden of readying the production for shooting by setting up all the gear except the camera. With the only thing protecting them against outright stealing being their union status, grips and gaffers can be the most contentious and legalistic group on set. By the time they get to work they have bent and swayed as much as they will and the lines have been drawn. Their threats

alone seem to keep lunch on schedule and overtime to a minimum. When not complaining “secretly” on their designated walkie-talkie channel about the management, they bicker amongst themselves about how to accomplish a given task, or who is not working hard enough, running fast enough or is taking too many cigarette breaks. This is not just an attitude on this production but is a universal attitude on every production in every city I have ever worked in. While they are always disadvantaged and often treated unfairly, it is still an unfortunate and unbecoming attitude to witness.

Chapter Five

THE SET UP

A few days before production begins our crew is put on the clock and summoned to the location for prepatory work. While key people have been active in preproduction (referred to as prepro) for many months and the office staff has already been functioning here for a few weeks, the production crew is put on the clock just a few days before shooting begins. Those who are brought in from out of town are established in a room at the hotel while those who live nearby, the locals, come to the hotel for meetings and to prep their gear and survey the locations in order to refine their plans and spot potential problems. After a day is allowed for everyone to meet and acclimate themselves, a table read is scheduled for the following day for everyone to attend. A table read is an event that usually lasts about half a day. The crew gathers around a large table and the entire script is read aloud while the department heads are queried by the producers and the director regarding their responsibilities for each shot and scene. At the same time, everyone on the crew has the

opportunity to discuss the issues and raise questions and is informed as to what support is being brought to bear to the needs of their job. It's the final checklist before filming begins.

As the DIT, for me the table read is followed by two days of technical prep with the cameras. To properly accomplish this, I have brought a backfocus collimator, several highly exacting camera charts, a top-end waveform/vectorscope, a pair of daylight balanced lights, a light meter, a color temperature meter, my laptop computer, an accurate color reference monitor and a bevy of SD cards with at least 63 pre-designed looks that can be used to alter the output of each camera quickly. In the two days before the shoot I will go over every aspect of the cameras and match their output to each other so that any image from one will be indistinguishable from the other. This must be done with specific lenses in the imaging processing path because lenses have different coatings and a different composition to the elements, flare properties from the inner barrels and a host of physical characteristics that can affect the color rendition. These are the two most critical days for me and require the most time. HHHowever, once properly completed and discounting equipment failure, the balance of the production should be a simple matter to manage.

Unfortunately, on the day of the table read, the DP had a different plan. He abandoned the meeting and took both cameras and the entire camera department with him to a rental house in Miami to get them fitted for outboard gear. This meant that five people on the crew would not be present at the table read and would not participate in the discussion of potential issues.

In Miami, the DP Selected Zeiss digi-primes as the lenses for the shoot and the cameras were rigged with support rails, matteboxes and focus pullers, as well as a selection of glass filters and various adapters to be used with the tripod, Steadicam and crane. Two items that were on the rental list were there at my request, namely two camera control units, one for each camera, often referred to as “Paintboxes”. Paintboxes are remote extensions for all the controls of the camera. When fitted to a camera it allows a DIT to affect changes remotely while watching a color reference monitor many feet from the camera. It literally controls every aspect of the camera, and to have one on the shoot means that in the tent used as the video village, the director and the DP can work side by side with the DIT to get the exact look desired for each scene without interrupting the work of the camera team in setting up the shot. In other words, it saves precious time and hence extends the budget

by reducing overtime, increasing both the number of shots attainable in a day and the amount of time that can be devoted to shooting as opposed to set up. With a cast and crew of say, around fifty people and with overtime averaging $60.00 an hour per man it's easy to see the cost analysis benefit of camera management enabled through a paintbox. Therefore, I was elated to see the camera team return with the two paintboxes I had requested.

However, in addition to the unexpected additions to the rental charges, the addition of the daylong trip had used over $1000.00 from the budget. As a result, the $800 request for expendables—colored tapes, gel filters and diffusion materials—was denied by the line producer. The budget was just that tight.

I was looking forward to getting started on my tech prep but was informed late that evening after the camera team had returned from Miami that there had been a change in the schedule. Now instead of being available for prep, the cameras and myself were required for test shots at all the various locations. Test shots are important to the DP and help in making lighting decisions, but are less than conclusive on a camera whose output remains to be adjusted. The bad news for me was that it pushed back my camera prep to the last day and cut the time I was to have

with the cameras in half.

Even though a full day was spent on testing it did little to establish any conclusive results or to create confidence in our methods. There was a root problem between the DP and myself regarding the image displayed on the color reference monitor. He was accustomed to displaying an image that was tonally very flat—black levels are raised and white levels are crushed—producing a very grey-on-grey look and dull coloration. I was accustomed to displaying an image that is tonally accurate for proper evaluation. The camera he regularly used records in a RAW mode, so he was never concerned with exact color levels on recording. In his workflow, color was to be manipulated in post. This makes very good sense and is a standard practice, but is a plan of action better suited to a film that has the budget to spend on color timing in postproduction than a low budget indie. Ours did not.

Our plan, the one decided on by the producers in conjunction with the director, was to shoot the film so exactingly as to be able to use the footage without color correction, thereby saving many thousands of dollars. This is only possible with thorough camera prep and exacting on-site decisions regarding the look of a scene.

After working with the paintbox on the test shots, the DP decided that he did not like relinquishing control of the cameras parameters and had them sent back to the rental house.

At this point my tech prep is behind schedule; the DP thinks we have created the looks for the film with unbalanced, unmatched cameras; the time left for me to solve the problem is half what was allotted, and I will be managing the picture without paintboxes.

Several tests are required to set up a camera. Tests are made by measuring a camera's signal output against a known standard. To do this a DIT uses some very exacting charts and a waveform/ vectorscope to measure the signal from the camera. Many types of charts are used to measure both color and tone. These charts have been printed with special inks and measured for color content very exactingly. So critical are these charts, that they are dated for "freshness" like milk and travel in a light-tight case, like good olive oil.

Resolution is also checked using the "trumpets," tapering curved lines of alternating black and white stripes, printed on the charts. Backfocus is checked on each lens/camera combination with a collimator

to ensure that the distance markings on the lens are exactly located. Lens mounts on cameras can consist of different materials and some expand and contract with changes in temperature. Even small changes going from Florida heat to air-conditioning can affect the focus on small chip cameras, so backfocus is checked regularly throughout the shoot as well.

Lastly, the ISO rating of the camera is determined so that light meters used on set will read what the camera actually will produce.

After all this is done, the cameras theoretically should match, but they rarely do. Using the color reference monitor and switching back and forth between identical set ups on each camera aimed at the identical subject will show if they can be cut in the edit without visible shifts in color or tone. So, the last step, and this is the artful part where the scopes are abandoned and replaced by the critical eye, consists of minor tweaks made to the cameras by comparing their output subjectively and adjusting accordingly. This must be done for every look created, and as looks will be created on set under the pressure of real money being spent, its sure helps to have those two paintboxes in the video village.

Chapter Six

VIDEO VILLAGE

It is an established custom on every film set, to create a small portable working office on set for the film's oligarchy by erecting a pop-up tent and filling it with chairs and video monitors. This portable configuration is referred to as "video village" and is moved around the set according to the angle of the sun and the desire of the camera team to have the closest possible location to the camera, minimizing the distance that the DP will have to walk to reach the reference monitors. Folding director's chairs are set up for each of the individuals who are required or entitled to watch the recording of the film. These are the Director, the Continuity Person ("scripty"), the DP, the DIT, the Producers and the Executive Producer, but on our set also includes the Writer, the Re-writer, the 1st AD, guests of the Executive Producer, Hair and Makeup, Wardrobe, Grips and Gaffers, the actors, stand-ins and passersby. Only the extras do not get to view these monitors, as they are held in a separate area removed from the set. It is impossible to maintain

a seat in video village even when the designated seats are marked with marker pen names written on white camera tape and affixed to the seat backs. On an indie production such as this, everyone ignores the names. Only on a big production are seats rigidly enforced, as the seat backs are embroidered or silkscreened with the name of the only person who can officially use the seat, and this expense alone guarantees the validity of ownership and is respected by the interlopers who would otherwise be hovering to steal their place of rest. It's not that all these people do not have a good reason to view the monitors, but they do not require them to do their job, as do the people assigned to the chairs.

The amount of time wasted before shooting can proceed on any given take is directly proportional to the number of people in the village. Everyone has an opinion, but movie production is not a democratic process. It's a lot like the United Nations, where motions are put to a vote and then ruled on by the super-powers. It is the last legally certified holdout of the feudal system and the director rules. But like any monarchy, appearances are everything, and in order to rule effectively, the director must appear to consider all opinions before making a determination. The village serves as the media in our democracy, reporting events to maintain order, thus as Noam

Chomsky would say, “Manufacturing Consent” by controlling what is reported. This is why the images on the monitors are so crucial. This pretense of objectivity calms the otherwise unruly mob, as all Americans are nurtured in a dual world of ideals and falsehoods, allowing a small comfort, a feeling of influence and self-determination that is strictly an illusion. We all ride someone else’s wave.

It was in this makeshift theater that I met our continuity person on the first day of production. Perhaps because she had been working major films like “Transporter II”, “Speed II” and “A Walk to Remember” as well as hit TV shows like Dexter and Burn Notice she seemed standoffish at first, but we eventually made friends.

The function of the continuity person is to observe both the big picture and the small details and expose errors before they are printed into the final edit. “Was the gun in his right hand or his left hand?” “She exited camera left, so in the reverse she should enter camera right.” “Her eyeline should be closer to the camera lens.” “He missed his mark”--are all typical comments. It takes an OCD personality to be a really good scripty, because ultimately the job is like searching the monitor screen for a “Where’s Waldo” find. Perched on the edge of her canvass

director's chair, poised as if about to hit the buzzer on "Jeopardy" she gathers valuable "director's points" with each circumvented gaffe and finding it hard to turn off between takes, looks at each job performed on set, like a nagging mother, to find and correct the performance of every individual in every department. She is not without opinion.

But it does not stop there. She inhabits the minds of the characters as well. Each day more time is spent in arguments about the hypothetical than about the factual. She is certain that a character would not do a certain action in scene 63 because in scene 47, they have knowledge of such and such or in scene 138 they will realize something. Or she will analyze a character's motivations for a certain action like "why would he knock on the door and yell, if the whole time he had a key?" Why people do anything is a mystery to me, but in a movie? C'mon—the good guy's gun has 27 bullets. The starlet's hair is perfect in a windstorm. The suspension of disbelief is so pervasive, an audience will believe anything you need them to, as long as there is a rewarding emotional payoff.

At the same time, she lingers on the arcane, she misses events that seem obviously wrong. The bad guy checks his revolver for bullets, yet the audience

can see in the close up that the chambers are empty. A tall plant is inserted into the middle of a set after the wide shot has established that it is not there. Lights are added to the medium shot that are not present in the master, and so on. It's a case of hyperfocus, of the type experienced by ADD-ers. You miss the forest for the trees. Still, all said, there is no one better suited, nor anyone that I would rather have than her.

The term "video village" was coined in the days of film. In order to direct the action, a director needs to see what the camera sees. To accomplish this, a small--crude by today's standards--video camera is attached to a tap that is aimed at the prism that directs the image to the eyepiece for the operator. Known as video assist, this method produced a noisy image, at first in black & white then later in weak color. The image was ultimately viewed on a monitor positioned for the director to watch in what would become video village.

Initially it was sufficient to just be able to look at composition and blocking, but as the video assist cameras improved, more detail and expression became visible and the tool became a standard of production. When the move to digital production occurred, HD monitors replaced the NTSC monitors used with video assist and suddenly the image on

the viewing monitor was color accurate and theatrical quality. Now everyone who wanted to watch could find a reason and improve their game.

Since strong light diminishes the contrast of the screen, it is impossible to view in sunlight, so a tent was erected and dark sides attached. Chairs were added, then eventually more creature comforts. It is not uncommon to see electric fans, party coolers filled with ice and drinks, half empty coffee cups and iced drinks and a variety of video accessories, often a playback deck, a digital camera (Polaroid in the old days), a small video camera, battery and iPhone chargers, clipboards with notes, backpacks, purses, hats, and bundles of cable hanging from a roll around cart that functions as a table, the heart of the village, often referred to as the village itself.

An expanded village will also contain laptops and hard drives, an iPad charging station and a D.A.T., the Digital Acquisition Technician also called the Data Wrangler, who uses these tools to offload digital media, before returning the wiped cards to the camera team to be re-recorded.

The location of the village is a constant source of conflict. Time is always at the heart of the issue. The camera team wants to save time by moving the village

after every relocation of the camera, no matter how small the move, thus savings a few more steps for a micro managing DP to walk to the camera and back, in the event that the many endless communications on the walkie-talkies cease to have the desired effect. But moving the village is an exacerbating process.

First a consensus must be reached as to the location. Many members of the crew have a need to be nearest to the camera and all have carts. The camera assistant has two carts, one for each camera. The sound department has two carts. One is a working station and the other is full of alternate and spare equipment. The art department, the grips and electricians all have carts that need to be as near to the set as possible and they move in quickly to the set as hyenas towards a fallen prey. The village is usually first placed in the best position for the least number of moves, allowing for a speedy change from a master shot to a reverse or other predetermined angles without moving the village. At that moment the 1st AD, the most threatening person on the set, has the responsibility to direct the village to move to the location of his choice, which will inevitably prove to be in somebody's way, or worse in one of the shots following the master set up. This leads to a highly vocal discussion where all views are aired under threats of violence and it is decided that the village

should be moved back to its original location. By that time the hole left by the village has been filled with the sound carts and backed up all the way off the set and down the street, lane, path or hall by all the other carts, creating a cascading chain of movements to reinstall the village in its original position.

Even though the village is set up on a rolling cart, moving the village is no walk in the park because the many wires routed to it branch off in several directions and ultimately get entangled with the cables used by the other departments. Sound has several audio cables and the electric department runs “stingers”, 110v electric cables from lights to many outlets and “distro” (distribution) boxes. If there are two cameras, then there will be two monitors. Each camera has several ports to route the signal in different ways. On this shoot the cameras have three ports each. Two ports will route an HD signal, but each can carry a clean signal or show a display that can include status and/or menus. A status display includes a variety of information used to manage the camera and verify functions as operating properly. The third display is switchable from Hi-def (HD) to standard def (SD), which allows the picture to be sent to other devices that are not HD. On this shoot, we route the SD signal to the soundman to watch the boom operator’s movements so that the microphone does

not accidentally appear in the picture.

The monitors in the village are used to display both picture and the status information. A picture without the information is referred to as “clean”. Status can include such info as: Timecode, audio levels, framelines, alarms and warnings, information about white balance, filters, aperture, zoom settings, and menus turned on and off. Menus lead to the inner workings of the camera. On sophisticated cameras, there are literally many hundreds of menus branching out like the diagram of a family tree. These menus can change every aspect of the performance of the camera, thus affecting the image that is recorded, and are responsible for the “look” of the image and are critical to whether it looks like video or film.

Chapter Seven

WORKING HAPPY SETS

Before I left for Florida I began to get the distinct feeling that this might not be a happy set. The director had already told me of his plans to provide a separate, third monitor for the executive producer far away from video village, always in another room. His reasoning was obvious. This person is the opinionated and ultra-protective wife of the star, who carries the anxious burden of financial responsibility and with fingers in every pie, micro manages every detail except the weather. Unfortunately, that third monitor was an SD monitor, and given the choice between enduring her every comment or the potential for reshooting takes with boom shadows or a peek-a-boom microphone entering frame top, we chose to route the SD signal to the sound cart, thus bringing her front and center in our burgeoning village.

Her deadpan-faced husband, ever curious, the innocent-while-proven guilty child of a passing generation, is the last of the great stand-up Jewish

comics. Ritualistically, he chops the air mechanically with both hands, punctuating his every word in a broken rhythm of unsynchopated beats as if to emphasize the linearity of his logic, which is for the most part impeccable, if ever politically correct. Speaking with the moral authority of a pre-school child unfettered by societal restrictions and social circumstance, he provokes both nervous laughter and thoughtful insight. The intractability of his logic runs head on into the vagaries of her emotional intuitions producing a textbook of psychological case studies with every event.

To their credit, they travel with two sincerely caring, if by now thoroughly jaded, assistants who manage to keep them moderately in balance. Understanding their every foible these two young heroes, provide nurturing comfort at every turn.

But on our set, the models of nurturing comfort are the staff of the hair and makeup department. Each day, they are first in line to have contact with the talent and possess both the instincts and the influence to model a supportive environment rather than invent one filled with deriding cattiness.

By and large, even the most secure actor is a fragile being. Whether on a quest of personal

discovery or secure hiding in the identity of fictional others, each day begins looking in a mirror and ends in a performance that could always be improved, given more time, money and opportunity. While the hard work of organizing the set to avoid overtime hours by cutting scenes occurs, the actors are sequestered far from the madding crowd, isolated with their insecurities and “hair and makeup.” Marched to the set by stern PA’s at the command of the first AD, they walk the gauntlet of disgruntled grips, debating co-producers, co-writers and co-extras into a small arena limited by C-stands, flags, silks, nets, reflectors, lights and carts, and marked with positions defining their every movement, determined by a conspiracy of unsolicited co-directors, each with a special purpose or need regarding the space. Within this arena they must perform naturally, as if no one was there--“Not so close, we can’t hold focus.” “A little to the left you’re in the other actor’s shadow.” “You’re too far back and the boom can’t reach you without being in the shot.” “Slower.” “Faster.” “Try looking a little more towards camera. Your eyeline is not quite right.” That and a few “attaboys” and they are whisked back off set to the hair and makeup department, where they can deconstruct their performance with the only two people who can talk to them at length.

The balance of the crew is busy on their walkie-

talkies. Walkie-talkies for film are unique because they have specific frequencies reserved for use in film production. This is done to avoid crosstalk with other industries who may be communicating on walkie-talkies nearby. Also, channels can be selected to avoid chatter from other films and TV productions in the area. Typically, they have 15 channels and a production will use certain channels for specific departments, usually skipping every other channel, so that open channels can be used to jump to for “private” conversations. 1 is production, 8 is camera department and so on. Certain numbers are traditional and have a relationship to numerical references like an IATSE number or some such, so that local 6 would be channel 6, etc.

To operate a walkie-talkie, you must first qualify by learning certain key phrases to circumvent being ostracized as a newbie. The most important is “Roger that” or it’s sister phrase “copy that” which are both forms of agreement. The next most important phrase is “I’m taking a 10-1” or “I’m going 10-1,” which is the polite way of saying that you are headed to the bathroom. Other important phrases are “eyes on” as in “does anyone have eyes on so and so”; “lives in” which means belongs in a certain place; “flying in” which most often refers to bringing in some equipment, usually in a hurry; “own it” which

translates to having made arrangements that secure a property for use in the movie; “lock it up” which means to secure an area from outside interruptions; and “last looks” which means this is the final chance to review anything on the set before we roll on the scene. Two other terms that are used by the grip department and the camera department that can be heard constantly on set as well as on the walkie-talkies are “in” and “out”. These are used to compare physical changes in lighting and camera filtration that equate to “before” and “after” or “with” and “without”. Typically, a filter will be inserted in the mattebox and then withdrawn. As the camera assistant reports this action, it can sometimes be a very subtle difference and it becomes necessary to call out “in” and “out”. The same is true for nets, silks, flags, reflectors, bounce cards and other light modifying tools used by the grips and gaffers.

Walkie-talkies have a variety of accessories, most of which are headsets. The best headsets are the clear vinyl-coiled type used by news anchors and the secret service and FBI agents and the cheaper headsets are the type used by telephone switchboard operators that require a stiff wire to loop across your head to keep it in place. If you are the DP sitting in the village, you try to mimic the secret service by whispering into your sleeve, where the

small microphone that is part of the clear plastic coiled headset is located. Nothing could be more true than to recognize the military nature of mounting a film production, and these outward signs are an important part of identifying with that mindset. Without a headset, communications are not private and a humorous comment or terse directions can set off an embarrassing chain reaction.

Chapter Eight

DRESSING THE PART

Wardrobe on a film set is a key part of identity and follows certain strict universal guidelines. In large part, the crew is divided between those who wear T-shirts and those who do not. The T-shirt wearers are further divided by categories according to the designs printed on the shirts.

Grips and gaffers are allowed to wear only shirts that display industrial and farming products unrelated to film-making; or products that promote killing, such as sports and hunting products, fishing images and war implements—guns and planes. Self-promotional shirts are also permitted if they promote a rental house or a show previously worked, like “Burn Notice” or “Miami Vice”.

T-shirts worn by PA’s (production assistants) may contain images of movie stars, recording artists and whimsical cartoon characters. Clint Eastwood as the

loner cowboy, Homer Simpson, or Lady GaGa—all are permitted.

The sound department is exempt from these rules and they are the only department permitted to wear camouflage T-shirts bearing no marks of insignia, so as to be heard and not seen on set.

Writers must identify themselves by wearing shirts containing words only, such as “Park City” or “RUN DNC”.

Shorts are permitted for crew as long as they contain many cargo pockets. PA’s must identify themselves by wearing plaid shorts only, and may be subject to censure for assuming the uniform of the rigging and electric crews. Under no circumstances should any of their clothing be pressed.

Different rules apply to above the line personnel. Men must wear buttoned shirts and women designer blouses and tops. The Director and First Assistant Director may take exception to this rule, if only to demonstrate that they can take exception to the rules and to endear them to the crew as one of their own. However, under all circumstances, their T-shirts must be black. The wardrobe department is always the most stylish, with special rules that apply to no one

else. They are free to mix and match anything and everything as long as they include neatly pressed clothes of bright colors or nostalgic styles not currently in favor.

Extras must wear their Sunday finest so they might be mistaken for movie stars, while movie stars are required to dress down so they appear humble. Ball caps and sweatpants work very well for this effect.

Hats are permitted for everyone except actors, unless in costume. They must walk under large umbrellas carried by another when moving about the set. For lesser mortals, hats provide shade. Ball caps are the standard issue for grip/electric crew, while camera team is allowed to wear floppy wide brimmed canvas guerrilla hats of the Viet Nam era design or jaunty Australian Army issue hats with brims that can be snapped or tied up on the sides. Straw hats are permitted for everyone and are quite fetching on ladies adorned by them, creating mystery and style. In certain states, such as Florida, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, grips and gaffers may wear straw hats that would otherwise be scorned by the balance of the crew, as too conspicuous. These styles include the conical Southeast Asia peasant hat, the Mexican sombrero and hats with brims larger than can be fit in a compact car without bending. Straw

cowboy hats are strictly forbidden unless worn on the set of a country music video by a six-foot four, six-figure-income country singer. Other styles are also permitted, but must be worn by PA's. These include the straw pork-pie hat familiarized by Brad Pitt and Kid Rock and the 1950's "Roscoe"-the-bookie hat as seen on the hit TV show of the late fifties, "77 Sunset Strip," also worn by Justin Timberlake. This hat is based on the classic "detective's" fedora from the forties but with the exception of an ever so slight brim that exudes a playfulness lacking in the larger hats.

Homemade tribal necklaces are all the fashion on set and are unique to each department. Created by hanging utility devices on a string they are similar in design, but are functionally determined. The key gaffer is entitled to wear a splay of clothespins on his chest, and uses them to clip gel-filter material to the barn doors of lighting fixtures, but more importantly to signify his authority and rank. The First Assistant Camera has a necklace of the same design but made from multi colored pens, while Hair and Makeup department's necklace is made from hairclips. Wardrobe department uses the wide-mouth office paper clips, the ones that quickly modify garments to fit, for the same effect.

Chapter Nine

A MIX OF STYLES

A new person has entered the set today. Her pleasant Florida-tanned features and lithe form attract a first look that is quickly averted by observing her overgrown Billy-Bob mullet--soft cotton-candy textured hair lacking only the pink color, looking more like over-bleached straw--complemented by a black-edged tetracycline smile. She has been chosen by her benefactor, our executive producer-mother-hen and matchmaker, as the perfect offering to our director, who the night before declined her matchmaking skills to provide a companion for life eternally, forever and ever, in perpetuity. She stands alone at the edge of the set with her 18-year-old son, not wishing to insert herself into the complex process unfolding before her. Witnessing a crime and foiling a criminal are quite different skills and realizing this, she waits patiently just to be acknowledged by her intended.

Her patron, a diminutive, childlike woman of an uncertain age somewhere beyond a collagen enhanced 75, munching cardboard flavored, lo-carb matzo crackers,

toothpick thin, shoulders wider than hips, veins to tantalize an inoculation nurse, on a lifelong quest to avoid the sun, unfurls her parasol and strolls over to greet her. Today, the heat index is 101 and Florida shade is a priceless commodity. So pale is her skin, at this distance it would be too easy to mistake her for an Albino. As she crosses from shade to sun, her long, platinum, Marianne Faithful perfect haircut and white "Pink" sweatpants, tank top, and layered sweaters suggest a ghostly Victorian apparition that clips at broadcast limits, causing an effect upon the eyes, referred to in the industry as "blown out". Her two watches, both on her left wrist—one, a large faced watch from Target allows her to read the time, while the other a solid gold Rolex hanging only as a large bauble--float in space until the withering light form settles back into shade.

Across the busy parking lot, the Florida sun has set in motion yet another in a series of daily arguments regarding white balance, a process that brings a camera's color response in line with the color of the light source for the scene about to be recorded. The camera team—a director of photography, the camera operator, and her two assistants—a college educated team of working professionals are befuddled by the process. Their every attempt produces an off-color picture, at times too blue or too red and often a ghastly yellow green with tangerine tinged clouds. They become increasingly frustrated by the "Pre" selection on the external switch modes of the camera,

which will not produce the desired result. Reacting to that, they engage the auto white balance switch, while in the fixed pre mode, praying and hoping for that miracle that will fix the picture, unaware that this switch, common to all video cameras does not function in the pre mode and must be set to either the A or B channel to function. It's one of those rare things that camera manufacturers have long agreed on and ever since has been included in every broadcast camera ever made, making it as easy as locating the gas pedal and the brake on your family car.

Standardization of function is laudable in manufacturing, but these same ideals can be corrupting when applied to people, as the result is often compartmentalized specialization. This specialization of function, often idealized by union dogma, can cause some unique gaps in understanding as information everyone needs, slips through gaps that should be in fact overlaps. To understand this, one has only to look at the job functions of the camera team. Any comprehensive study of photography will include an understanding of visible light and the specific properties of color temperature, the additive & subtractive color systems, complementary colors, gamma curves and density, all base factors in photographic imaging. But as shown on our team, functions have been so specifically defined by previous industry experience, that gaping holes exist in what should be common knowledge. For example, one member of the

team believes that the sun, a glowing yellow orb, is bluer than “daylight.”

The Director of Photography is charged with orchestrating the efforts of the camera team and integrating their work with that of the gaffers (electric and lighting) and the grips (rigging) towards one unified goal. To do this job properly on a modern digital production, the Director of Photography, DP, must have a good working knowledge of every technical aspect of production, a good sense of aesthetics and be a good “people person.” Unfortunately, today, most DP’s get hired for having a good sense of aesthetics, often lacking the other qualifications. Our DP, the visual melding of Howdy Doody and Opie Taylor, carrot-topped and freckled, a wooden smile, has a favorite color—orange. Hmmm. This obscure fact surfaced in a conversation about cigarettes, his favorite pack and Bic lighter being the identical shade of orange, the same color that invades our footage until a correct white balance is achieved through a test of wills, thus casting that suspicious red pall over the entire process.

The operator, his partner in crime, has a pretty cushy job, as her singular job requirement is being able to skillfully pan and tilt the camera, creating composition through framing and cropping, which is largely dictated by the DP. This fact alone has caused a phenomenal growth rate in the job market career index (the JMCI) for camera

operators, supply now exceeding demand exponentially by a factor of 29.3. The operator does not have to carry the camera, set up the camera, move the camera, focus, or even change the settings unless directed to do so by the DP. All else is done by her 2 assistants, and best of all, she gets to sit and ride the dolly all day, while eating grapes from a paper cup, as the camera moves around the set.

As more and more young people have uncovered these little-known facts, interest in cameras has been growing. It begins by shooting a youTube video with an iPhone and quickly moves to an inexpensive purchase of a better camera for participation in the "48 Hour Film Project." Meanwhile a new camera company called RED is marketing a low-priced, extremely high-quality camera that is being purchased at record rates, forcing venerable, old, industry rental houses like Panavision into bankruptcy, succumbing to the DIY movement and giving new meaning to the phrase "point and shoot."

Until recently, the higher end of the camera manufacturing industry (both film and digital) produced only a few cameras so expensive that they were available as rental items only. Below that number, the upper cost for a fully equipped camera that could be purchased was around a half million dollars--a set of 5 prime lenses alone, can run upwards of $200,000.00. However, the ripe market for easy pickings is in the under $5,000.00 range and even

that number has been climbing as the newbies who were making films that began with internet delivery, to advance their skills, flood to higher priced cameras running in the low $20,000.00 range. Film school graduates and self-taught Do-It-Yourself-ers, running with auto focus, auto white balance, auto everything cameras, in their feverish explorations, frequently push the limits of these tools and occasionally it is they who birth the unique sibling that changes our filmic traditions.

The first AC (assistant camera) does all the moving and set up of the camera, assisted by the second AC, who gets the bulk of the grunt work and is charged with keeping the camera notes, recording the camera settings and offloading the media. The first AC builds the camera, meaning he mounts the lens, adds the support—plates and rods, attaches the mattebox, the focus wheel and zoom controls, motors, viewfinder, on board monitors and batteries; keeps track of the amount of time left on media and batteries; turns the camera power on and off; and presses the record button.

The first AC also has the unique distinction of getting to shout “speed” whenever the camera begins recording, a verbal anachronism previously used in film production to announce to the set that the analog motors of the camera were moving film through the gate at the proper frame rate signaling that acting may commence at the command of the

first AD or the Director.

The first AC is also often the focus puller, a unique and nearly antiquated job, somewhat akin to a carpenter with a handsaw. The range of technical innovations that have developed in recent years to support correct focus of the camera image is overwhelming. Cameras have displays that measure focus in a histogram style chart, or through an onboard-monitor display referred to as red focus. Lenses can be autofocused with the use of a sonar device managed by an iPhone, yet the focus puller uses only a measuring tape of the type provided by the local hardware store. By putting taped marks on the ground and carefully pre-measuring the distance to those marks, the focus puller then manually focuses the camera by matching the numbers on the footage scale of the lens to the pre-measured distances on the ground at the exact moment that an actor passes over the marks, thus making the successful focus puller the most talented member of the camera team.

Adding to the stature of the first AC, he is allowed to wear as many rolls of brightly colored tape as possible, on a short rope attached to his belt and he carries the walkie-talkie designated for the camera team, which he periodically gets to speak quietly into like a secret service officer protecting his identity, giving the first AC a rather dashing appearance like a guerrilla Army officer. All this makes for a very enticing occupational draw, especially if

you are strong and handsome and have not yet learned to pan and tilt the camera. It also allows the first AC to have a commanding presence when doing such things as moving the tripod across the set. This procedure is always done by extending the pointed, bottom end of the legs forward so that they might easily penetrate a thin plywood door on impact and then moving very quickly through a dense crowd of crew and actors shouting "POINTS" repeatedly, which draws everyone's attention but has little effect since the vast majority do not understand its meaning until too late. So enamored of the effect of this procedure, the first AC has invented many new calls for a variety of movements on set.

Newcomers to the set generally tend to remain at the outer fringes of the crowd away from the "points." As with most, not knowing what "POINTS" means, they have no fear of the consequences of their inaction, but eventually, as boredom sets in and they drift deeper into the set, they become bolder and feeling more privileged are less likely to move away with the warning.

The mecca of their pilgrimage is the monitor intended for the director of the film. From this position, the director directs the actors; continuity—the script supervisor also known as scripty—makes sure there are no continuity errors; the DP directs the crew; The DIT (Digital Imaging Technician) monitors the technical status of the recording

devices; the producer moans about her actor husband's treatment and the writer looks for a seat to steal. The co-producer looks on politely, having only 3 chairs for an ever-burgeoning audience and the young actor slips in and out to sneak a peak at his performance and boost his confidence. The producer's phone is ringing constantly, often during takes and the trio of elderly gentlemen, her husband's cronies, looking every bit like the patients from "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" on their fishing outing, have arrived at their destination beaming pride after a successful struggle overcoming the crowd blocking their path from the outer fringe of the set.

Chapter Ten

EGOS AND IGNORANCE

As the DIT on this film I am charged with managing all the technical aspects of the production, but most importantly the camera settings. While I was hired by the director, I serve the DP who was also hired by the director. Therefore, in that sense, my function is to help the DP fulfill his “vision” by removing any technical obstacles to it. Educational obstacles are entirely another matter, and although I have trained camera personal all over the world for major corporations, television networks and news organizations, I have never failed to deliver an understanding of the most complex of camera theories and practices, yet alone the most basic, until now. Two prerequisites are required. One is a common understanding of, or an agreement on, some basic principles of physics such as the properties of light, and the other is a willingness to learn more, a receptivity to new ideas. When one is lacking it is difficult. When both are missing it is impossible.

Consequently, working for a DP who has short knowledge of the technical side of digital video production, conflicts will arise concerning the application of standard practices. These include such basics as how to perform a white balance, how to determine the proper exposure and methods to read color temperature. Disagreements have defined the battlefield today as access to the camera itself, which is now guarded by the misguided camera team, junkyard dogs, who are charged by the DP with warding off all my attempts to improve the picture quality under ever changing conditions.

I watch as the camera operator's hands wander from her pan/tilt handle into uncharted territory to attempt a white balance by depressing the AWB (auto white balance) switch while in the A channel. She is using using the 5600 (C) filter and is getting a reading of 8800K. She validates her procedure by deducting the 3200K base (filterless) reading from the 8800K filtered reading and by sheer coincidence arrives at 5600K, the value of her current filter choice and therefore deduces through the logic of perfect grade-school mathematics, that the white balance is correct. However, the picture is terribly wrong.

Finally, she calls in the 1st AC, then the gaffer, then the DP and only after much debate, confusion and

lost time, the director, who turns immediately to me to enter the fray. After having refused all my attempts to explain proper white balance procedure and now succumbing to the ultimate authority, the director, the uncomfortable politic of maintaining egos on the set gives way to establishing proper picture quality and I am permitted to do my job without interference. There are many overlapping areas of responsibility on a film set and since everyone is hired as a free-lancer and may never have occasion to work with you again, considering the differences in backgrounds, experience and knowledge, there is almost always an adjustment period.

So when this same situation with mixed light sources repeats itself over again and again, I am pleased when the gaffer finally relents, stops conspiring with the camera operator and approaches me with his problem. It's simple stuff, really. I explain that because of the many different light sources on the set, he must take color temperature readings of each of the various lights being used on the set and bring them into closer balance with each other. Until now he has been assuming that all light sources that were rated as daylight balanced were equal in color temperature. Very wrong. On a professional set with a professional crew, I should be able to assume that certain areas of knowledge are common and

accepted. To assume otherwise imparts insult. To act on it alienates your support team and creates political enemies. Therefore, certain procedures must be allowed before understanding can be achieved. People must be receptive to learn. In order to learn they must drop their fears and abandon their egos. Humility is the most prized asset on any set.

At our current location, there are many different sources of light. This location is typical of the problem we have been having at almost all the locations of the film, so it bears some analysis. Until now, the gaffer has been mixing the sources and under an erroneous assumption that all our daylight-balanced fixtures are within an acceptable range, has been taking his color temp readings based on the average temperature of the room and not the exact temperature of each source.

Individual readings of the sources indicate that the sheer white curtains are filtering natural daylight at about 7400K, a DIVA KinoFlo is reading at about 5000K. While an incorrectly performing HMI reads 11,250K, the fluorescent practicals are so warm as to be about 2400K. Any white balance reading of the set made as a whole will always be overwhelmed by the extreme Kelvin temperature of the 11K HMI. As the camera, in an attempt to compensate for the extreme

blue light of the HMI, adds enormous amounts of red gain, it makes all other light sources appear unnaturally warm. The answer to this dilemma is to select the source that will be your base or neutral colored light and balance the other lights to it's color temperature through the use of filter gels on the light sources, except those sources that should be colored for effect, mood or to suggest a different source. This should be among the first things learned in film school or on set. It is basic to both film and video, exists outside the arts and is firmly rooted in science. In any case, the Art exists in knowing the rare exceptions and applying this knowledge to support a vision outside normal perceptions of the "real" world as filtered through memory.

But we are not at that point and the ruffled feathers created in the power grab at the camera taken together with the direct communication with the gaffer, have created a challenge to authority that signals "danger" to the territorial camera team. Power can be seized wholly or it can slip away in imperceptible increments. It is always best to make wise decisions. Data is just raw information without the complexion of opinion. A DIT deals in data and data should never be a personal threat unless it contradicts opinion. In a data world, all are equal with the same data. In the real world, differing opinions define winners and losers. To many, data can be just excess baggage.

Chapter Eleven

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

No study of the human species would be complete without an overture to the Galapagos of the Western world, Florida, where an evolved diversity of humankind undergo a period of accelerated incubation before migrating to other areas. Many species can be easily viewed from the comfort of a film set or from an outdoor sidewalk table, offering hours of entertaining diversion.

The bird-beaked Italian dandy; the right-winged, white-belted cockatoo and the endangered species, his blue-haired, bugle-beaded mate following in compliance; the tattooed, ball-capped, keg-bellied biker; the small-breasted, girls-gone-wild, thonged-bottomed, extravert, and the large-breasted, ankle-tattooed grannie extravert, all pecking their way through a mélange of shops offering sundries unsellable elsewhere. Glasses, sunglasses, hats, clothes of all styles, all beyond description, a composite of colors and shiny surfaces, iridescent

plastics and baubles, alligator and animal patterns, gold and diamond bling, no shape, no design too extreme for consumption. Dressing the part, on-show-all-the-time, “I’m ready-made for my close-up, Mr. DeMille,” they parade their stuff up and down the avenue of parked exotic cars with no particular purpose other than being somebody among the many other somebodies.

About Midway through the production, on a lonely Saturday morning I decided to venture a brisk five-minute walk up Las Olas Boulevard to try breakfast at a popular local diner, The Floridian. Our hotel, the Riverside, is the destination center for social-climbing tourists on Las Olas Boulevard, where for the privilege of staying in a $139 room, guests can comfort their quest for social equality with the rich and famous by paying as much as $469 a night. Meals are priced appropriately to reflect their need to pay more for less. Despite the 15% off discount card supplied to cast and crew, the thought of paying real prices for a real meal was enticing. The Floridian did not let me down. For the sum of $7.50 I had a breakfast of 3 poached eggs, grits, corned beef hash, biscuit and coffee, a meal not offered, but surely would have cost about $27.50 at the Riverside.

The Floridian exists in a space removed from the

“strip” of mainstream shops on Las Olas. The islanded boulevard ends at a small bridge crossing the last canal into a no-mans land of run-down neighborhood businesses including a real old-timey barbershop with haircuts for under $8.00. In any other town, this would be “slumming” but in Fort Lauderdale, slumming is pulling up to the Floridian in your other car, the Mercedes convertible, leaving the Bentley at home with the Maserati, for the drive to the bistros and cafes a scant ½ mile away, neighboring the Riverside. Abject poverty is really only a short northwesterly drive away, to a section of town, where toothless residents polka-dot a landscape that looks like a happy Haitian village before a hurricane. Only days before, we sat at a table, high aboard the canopied rear deck of a camera vehicle towing a process trailer with our lead actors in the featured automobile, as we paraded our entourage of chase vehicles through that very part of town, to the waves and cheers of an adoring public. As we slowed to turn around, our producer tensed with the rush of street people to the vehicle. “What movie y’all makin’?” “Where can I see it?” “Who’s in it? Anybody I know?”

Adding to my mealtime pleasures was a tour of the menu and the reminder that, in any case, I was still in Fort Lauderdale, capital of conspicuous consumption. For there, midway through the variety of endless

combinations of meats, eggs, potatoes and breads was the “Fat Cat Breakfast”, a $299.00 offering of steak, eggs and Dom Perignon, and for the aspiring tourist, it’s companion-mate, the “I-can’t-afford-it-but-want-to–pretend-I’m-somebody-breakfast” (my quotes, not theirs) for $49.95 featuring the same steak and eggs, but paired with a bottle of Asti Spumante.

After breakfast, I strolled across the street to explore a shop claiming to offer African Art, expecting to find sculpture and carved masks but surprised to find that it was a ladies clothing store with an unusual theme. Prominently featured in the cluttered window was an ensemble consisting of a woven straw bodice, a stiff wicker like bustier really, a most uncomfortable looking article of “attire”, atop a pile of kindling--twigs and feathers--hanging as a stiff hula-skirt on the mannequin. Completing the fantasy was a large hat of the Queen-Elizabeth-goes-to-the-Kentucky-Derby variety, causing one to wonder about the appeal of the woman who might actually wear this costume and to what end. Is this what the sun-tanning men reclined on the upper decks of those parading multi-storied yachts desire, as they daily cruise the canals in an effort to maintain our dependence on fossil fuels, traveling on lavish floating platforms consuming three gallons of fuel per mile, going no particular place at all, except to view the suckers, Bernie Madoff style,

from deck of their Titanic--a lusty native girl, breasts bound in straw and an open skirt, thorny as it may be, an invitation to both desire and chastity, crowned as a woman of intellect and wealth—slave girl to a gigolo?

Chapter Twelve

CRAFTY

Each day the temperature of the crew seems to mimic the Florida weather, hand in hand like skipping schoolgirls. Mornings start cool and breezy as they gather around the Chuck wagon for breakfast but by afternoon the sweltering heat and blanket of humidity encompasses all. It seems to make no difference whether outdoors or in. The hotel rooms are air-conditioned with individual wall-perforated motel units, but the halls of the hotel are not air-conditioned. Today the hotel halls are functioning as the set, but that limited space is also where all the staging of crew and equipment occurs. Humidity quickly couples with the many artificial suns provided by the lighting crew and the fifty or so lingering bodies, all radiators, boost the temperature to a stifling high.

In the room next door, “Crafty” is having a meltdown. Crafty is the nickname for the person who provides craft service, drinks and snack for the crew over the 12-hour workday. On a budget of

just $200 per day, she must provide for 50 people. This includes, soft drinks, water, tea and Gatorade in those big orange coolers, fruit, nuts, and candy, chips, crackers, cheese, fruit dips and veggies. She arrives each day with bags and boxes from the dollar store and sets her service into motion. Her station can be the hub of emotional support or the epicenter of infectious discontent. Best to keep Crafty happy. At the moment she is stressed as she works alone without helpers and has just been informed by the location department PA's, who are charged with enforcing the Draconian rules imposed by the hotel, that she must vacate all her supplies, coolers, boxes and cans from both the 12th floor hotel room and the storage area in the sandlot by the pool in just 15 minutes. The rest of the crew is allowed to leave all their equipment—cameras, lighting and rigging in the secured rooms and just walk away. She is crying. Earlier in the day, she was told by the hotel that she could not bring water into the hotel, this because the hotel wishes to sell the crew bottled water at exorbitant prices through room service, an unfortunate assessment by the hotel manager who does not understand the dynamics of production. Crafty's workaround was to fill a Gatorade cooler with water and label it lemonade. Regardless of this action it is a statistical certainty that not a single bottle of water would have been sold, and the only outcome of

the decree is just one more reason for resentment of the foolish manager who issued it and has resultantly acquired a litany of other, more colorful names.

Chapter Thirteen

MAKING MY DAY

As a study in contrast, the first AD (assistant director) is an example of power displayed in such force as to be both unyielding and effective. He rules with an iron fist and refers to himself as “the bad guy” on set, but is loved by the crew because he maintains the schedule at all costs. The source of his power lies in the trust placed in him by both the director and the crew to make the hard decisions that determine the timing and scheduling of events that allow us to “make our day,” or in other words finish our work on time and on budget.

Producing a film is a very complicated endeavor. The integration of the tasks of disparate strangers, brought together for a month-long focus session in film making and then cast to the wind on completion, is difficult in theory, almost impossible in practice. No one person can be everywhere and oversee everything and since the art of film lies in subtle differences in otherwise meaningless decisions,

everyone is suspect of causing unnecessary delays. Thus, no decision can be unimportant, nor any better, nor any worse than any other cause for delay. The AD must remain evenhanded in his administration, but at the final moment, anything can and will be cut to make the schedule and protect the budget. Everyone on set knows that he does so with their best interests in mind, so his power is absolute. Very rare.

Even as the schedule is rewritten each day to adjust for scenes that were not completed due to inevitable delays, the writer is busy rewriting scenes while the rewriter rewrites the writer and is in turn rewritten by the lead actor who is interpreted by his wife, the producer. Each time there is a change in the script, replacement pages are printed and issued to all the cast and crew. Every day there are replacement pages and in order to identify each day's change—you can well imagine how confusing this can get—every day's changes are printed on a different color paper. Quickly the script has transformed into a rainbow of colors that could well be mistaken as a LGBT manifesto. So while the schedule grows and the script changes, one thing remains fixed—the budget and while the line producer is back in the office pushing numbers around, the 1st AD is on the front lines enforcing the financial limitations, being resented as an unyielding hard-ass.

Those 1st ADs who are less fortunate must be satisfied just to be considered the biggest A-hole on the set. This universal truth is confirmed each time I begin a new production. The question is whether the position attracts or creates first class jerks. Is it the chicken or is it the egg? Just as it takes a certain mindset and aptitude to be a law enforcement officer or a medical caregiver so too are 1st ADs determined. It's probably just simple genetics and would be easily forgiven as such, were it not for the lack of humility displayed in the execution of their office, a privilege of rank.

Chapter Fourteen

IT'S HOLLYWOOD BABY

Upon arriving on set Thursday, I make my first stop at the hotel room designated for safely holding the camera equipment overnight only to find that our "secure" room is full of unrelated activity. Apparently, the equipment storage room where we keep the expensive camera gear is now doubling as the combination craft service staging, wardrobe storage, fitting room and official crew & cast toilet facility. Crafty is hard at work while the stand-in for our "star" sits quietly alongside her cart, ever-present knowing smile firmly fitted to his face. Short in stature, his sharp features have caused him to be mistaken for Joe Pesci not hundreds, but literally thousands of times. Today he is at his Floridian best. On first sight, I thought he was wearing a costume fitted for the scene today, perhaps pajamas, certainly a peculiar pairing: a black silk shirt and matching pants with a shiny satin collar and cuffs, both on the shirt and pants, also in black but with ¼ inch white stripes spaced an inch apart. His Italian shoes were polished black loafers

with an inset top, half white alligator and half brown alligator. He said it was his “Jersey” look. We all agreed.

The lure of filmmaking is so overwhelmingly strong that those from without dream that anything is possible but those from within believe it. Hence, an entire production schedule can be arranged around an event so unlikely as the arrival of a multimillionaire rock star actor, who they have been told has agreed to travel two hours round trip by car, with entourage, from an engagement in a neighboring city to perform in their micro-budget independent film starring a nearly forgotten stand-up comic and an unknown teenager from Disney TV, in return for a $268 union scale payment, a wardrobe fee and per diems committing to an 8 hour day before performing at a major concert. It’s the movies, BABY!!

On the ride from the airport on the day of my arrival, I was told by the location PA who picked me up that Bon Jovi would be appearing as a cameo in the film. Every day since, from one mouth or another, the Bon Jovi buzz fills our drama quotient. He’s coming. He’s not coming. He’ll only give us four hours. He agreed to eight. He wants to limit it to two hours. We can get by with six. It’s confirmed. His agent said… He loves the idea. He hasn’t signed

the deal memo. He has signed the deal memo. His plane is late getting in. He's two hours away. He never signed the deal memo. He's landed and on his way. He's going to be four hours late. We'll have him sign the deal memo here. He's not coming. He was never going to come. Nobody even told him about the movie. His agent lied. His agent has done this before. In ten occurrences, the agent has never delivered. The agent was fired. Oh well, it's the movies… baby. Maybe we can get Boy George or Gloria Estaphan, they're available.

But before that drama had played itself out, yet another, more unlikely scenario had risen from the tenuous negotiations. The star and his producer wife had just learned that Bon Jovi's assistant was the star's daughter—his estranged daughter, an illegitimate child. The rest of that story, true or otherwise, played itself out off set, and quite honestly, is nobody's business.

Undeterred by the Bon Jovi debacle, bit parts are added for established actors, almost all Floridians, for cameos that will increase the marquee value and sale-ability of the film. A part has been written for Steven Bauer to play a gangster. He was the young crime partner to Al Pacino in Scarface who secretly courted his sister, played by Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio.

Audrey Landers of “Dallas” fame added a sexy comic element to the script and her son Daniel, who is well on his way to being a teen heartthrob, took a small part as well. Adding to our nightly enjoyment, we were joined each evening by Audrey and Daniel in exploring the cuisine of Las Olas Boulevard with rousing discussions, much laughing and sincere friendship.

Mario Cantone (“Sex In The City”) put it over the top with a wildly funny scene as a gay bartender conversing with a sexually extroverted Lynn Shaye (she played Magda in “There’s Something About Mary”) who kept us laughing for hours as she improved her scene with Mario.

One day, as we were filming a news reporter at the gates of a typical Florida McMansion, Davy Jones (of the “Monkees”) suddenly appeared on the set and stayed for the day. Lesley Ann Machado, who was playing the news reporter in that scene, was Davy’s wife and Davy had also agreed to take a cameo playing himself in a later scene. Davy was just one of those people with a relaxed attitude about his fame, comfortable with himself and eager to engage others in conversation, a regular guy enjoying each moment, he shared thoughts on family and personal values with a laugh and a smile, just happy to be a part of the team.

And I suppose that's the real lesson here. Davy has since passed, but I will never forget him and the many others who contributed to the wonderful experiences I had on this film. Those who opened their hearts to us will remain with us and the moments we shared will connect us in ways that cannot be fully measured. In the early days of my career, we used to build large-scale sets as a regular part of each commercial production. Now we work more on location. At the end of each job it always broke my heart to watch these glorious sets hauled off to the dumpster. We had invested so much time and thought into them, we valued them as art, but truth was they held so many memories. To be fully involved in this business there is some sort of common trait common to each personality, a desire to share. It goes beyond job description, beyond station and beyond consciousness. Sharing a story, sharing data or sharing a laugh, it is the most wonderful part of filmmaking. It is as exhilarating as any experience in life and infinitely replenishable. To those that desire to pursue a career in film use this as your compass, for all knowledge and experience can only lead you to the same place. You must enjoy each moment, each day for the gift that it is and share your talents openly with all that seek them.