

Q & A Archive

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QUESTION ANSWER

Name: JT

E-mail: jcarroll@austin.rr.com

Josh,

Thanks for all the answers, btw. This time it's about writing. I'm working on a short film that will end up being approx 30 minutes -- my question revolves around structure. Should my proportions of timing remain the same as a long film, or do you think I should extend acts I and II since I'm not extending the action over such a long period of time?

Thanks again.

JT

Dear JT:

Proportionately, the 3 acts ought to be similar to a full-length script. In a 30-minute film it should be around 10 minutes an act, but acts 1 & 3 could be 7-8 each so that act 2 comes out to about 15-minutes. Act 2 is generally the main action of your story. Just keep in mind that you really want to play to your act ends, like Xena or ER--meaning, if it's not actually a cliff-hanger, then it should be a psychological cliff-hanger. Good luck,

Josh

Name: Elizabeth Bennett

E-mail: elizabethannebennett@hotmail.com

Hello Josh,

I would just like to say that I enjoy your website very much. I liked your "Evil Dead Journal."

Do you prefer to direct strangers or your friends or both? Do you find it easier to direct people you know prior to filming?

Thank you.

Elizabeth

Dear Elizabeth:

It don't make no never mind to me, I'm happy to give direction to friend and stranger, old and young, weak or strong, rich or poor. As long as people do what I say I don't care who they are.

Josh

Name: Anthony Bautista
E-mail: beef@inreach.com

Josh,

I have no idea how I possibly got here, but now that I'm here I do have a question to ask. I'm 23 yrs old and I have done absolutely nothing in my life. The only thing that interests me is movies. I want to become a screenwriter, director. What schools do you recommend? I live in Sacramento ca.? I would like to live in L.A next year.

Thank you

Dear Anthony:

UCLA and USC are supposed to be good, I wouldn't know, I didn't attend either one. I think if they knew how to teach people how to make good movies there would be a lot more good movies now. Anyway, good luck.

Josh

Name: Michael Anthony Lee
E-mail: mal@kingston.net

Josh,

I see you have done some acting as well. Both you and Sam have a few small parts here and there and I was wondering how you like acting? I know your main love is behind the camera and the creating process, but wondered why you act once and awhile? Is this a ich you just have to scratch sometimes, or do you just do a small cameo in one of your films or one of the guys films?

Any plans or desire to get in front of the camera again?

Dear Michael:

I've taken a few parts for a lark, but I'm not an actor and I really don't enjoy it. Also, my sight is just bad enough so that I have great difficulty hitting marks. I don't even make cameo appearances in my own films-- the sight of myself embarasses me.

Josh

Name: Xenamour
E-mail: Xenamour@cs.com

Dear Mr. Becker,

In my last question to you, I asked about your interest in participating in a television series. I see from your response that your heart is in movies. I wondered subsequent to reading that your focus is not on money making but on story telling, if you feel that television movies, especially for independant/cable companies would be of interest to you? If not, why?

Are there as many restrictions in feature film making, given the ratings system, as there are in non-network television film making?

And if the goal is the story reaching an audience, via which route is typically the more successful? Do TV movies reach more people than smaller independent films is what I am asking?

The Anxiously Awaiting Kindred Spirits,
Xenamour

Dear Xenamour:

Either I'm doing what someone else wants me to do or I'm doing what I want to do. In TV I will always be doing what someone else wants, no matter what the length. I would direct a TV movie just as happily as if I were doing Xena, but I won't attempt to initiate it because all I'll get is grief and not end up making anything like the picture I wanted to make.

Josh

Name: I.M.
E-mail:

Dear Josh:

In the commentary for Army of Darkness Bruce says you're standing near Embeth in the pit scene. Is that your head poking out behind the big red headed guy?

Dear I.M.:

I think I'm right up front without anyone in front of me, although it's been quite a few years since we made the film or since I've even seen it. Embeth was to my left and I'm wearing an idiotic burlap hat. I'm also a skeleton in a number of scenes, but to pick me out from all the other skeletons would be impossible. I'm much easier to spot in ED2, not to mention that my hand is the last thing you see in that movie.

Josh

Name: DREW
E-mail:

Dear Josh:

First of all, I just want to say that to all you men and women who like to bust Becker's balls about "American Beauty" is that tried and true saying that opinions are like assholes, everyone's got one. And he's entitled to his opinion, just like he's entitled to his asshole. Anyway, I was wondering if there were any of your short stories that you would like to adapt into a movie someday? Thanks.

Dear Drew:

Thanks for defending me. It is kind of amusing how intense people will get about a movie when it's new. It's actually sort of heart-warming--movies may well not be very good, but people love them and will defend them like they were abused children. Regarding my short stories, I wrote them as short stories because I didn't think they were screenplays. Although I love writing short stories, my natural inclination is toward writing screenplays. Anyway, the only one that seems like there might be a feature film there is "The Gospel According to Judas," I think.

Josh

Name: Seesilheedamill

E-mail:

Dear Josh:

American Beauty

Every once in a while a screenwriter creates an original script that manages to maintain its originality all the way to the screen. Alan Hall's "American Beauty" is such a script. Though it is not obviously filmic in a "Star Wars" kind of way, it is a classic example of the screenwriter's art.

To see how it works, you first have to see how it deviates from the traditional Hollywood movie structure. If there is any one story element that defines the classic Hollywood movie it is a strong desire line. The hero comes up with a goal early in the story and then goes after that goal with great speed and intensity.

But "American Beauty" cannot use this strategy because it is the story of a man who is purposeless. In other words, his problem through much of the story is precisely that he has no desire line. What's more, his wife, Carolyn, and his teenage daughter, Jane, can't stand him. So instead of a hero with a single, driving story line you have a family where centrifugal force is pulling everyone apart.

The writer, Hall, thus faces some crucial questions: How do you create narrative drive for a character with no desire and a family that is exploding? How do you show the journey the hero takes internally when he is literally going nowhere? How do you take the time to show the forces destroying this family when there is no forward momentum to keep the audience interested?

Hall's solution is the storytelling structure. Conventional wisdom looks down on the voice-over in movies as uncinematic. Conventional wisdom has never been more wrong. The storyteller is one of the great film techniques because it allows you to sequence a story by deep structure, not simple chronology.

In "American Beauty", the first-person voice-over tells the audience almost immediately that the hero will be dead within a year. This puts a sensational piece of information up front that is also somewhat mysterious.

The writer gains two great benefits from this strategy. First, he tells the audience that big things are going to happen later, so they don't become anxious in the first half of the film while the hero has no desire line. That allows Hall to spend more time detailing the mini-society surrounding the hero and so show the causes of its breakdown.

Second, this information forces the audience to focus on the steps of the hero's journey - both his fall and rise - instead of on what's going to happen at the end. In other words, Hall sacrifices suspense for understanding, texture and depth.

Problem/Need

After the initial voice-over information, Hall uses the first few scenes to depict a man living a suburban nightmare. Not only is Lester hated by his wife and daughter, he has a dead-end job from which he is about to be fired.

Opponent

With the the voice-over structure buying him time, Hall has the luxury of detailing the hero's intimate opponents. In a wonderful filmic sequence, wife Carolyn cleans, then shows a house she represents to a number of uninterested buyers. The process ends with her breaking into tears of frustration, then slapping herself to get back on the track to success. This is an opponent with a strong desire of her own, but she is so lost in the hollow optimism and denial of the salesman's life she can only psych herself back up and try again.

Daughter Jane is an opponent who loathes her weak, purposeless father, but she has no purpose of her own, other than to go to school the way she's supposed to.

Desire

In the midst of this family nightmare, Lester gains a desire line that galvanizes him. But it is a desire line he cannot act upon. He falls head-over-heels for dream teen, Angela, his daughter's blond cheerleader friend. Every effort he takes to accomplish his desire - fawning over her, calling her, fantasizing about her - only makes him more pathetic. The inappropriateness of his desire is underlined when we hear Angela speak. She is a walking stereotype who likes when men drool over her because it means she has a chance to become a model.

To kick this story to the next level, Hall introduces another ring of society. Frank, an army colonel who hates gays, and his obedient wife move in next door, along with their weird son Ricky who shoots videos. A gay couple lives across the street and Carolyn is attracted to her idol, real estate king, Buddy King.

Ricky becomes the catalyst for the freedom of both Lester and Jane. He gets Lester high and shows him the liberation that comes from telling your boss to screw off. Through his camera, he literally opens Jane's eyes to the beauty that is all around her, even in the "dance" of a grocery bag.

Lester's desire alone cannot drive the story because he cannot act upon it. So Hall extends the story by tracking the desire lines of all the characters in this society. Carolyn wants Buddy, Jane wants Ricky, Ricky wants Jane, Angela wants to be adored by men, and Frank wants to control his son.

These often conflicting desire lines have the ironic effect of both liberating many of these characters and making them hate Lester even more. Lester is still infatuated with Angela, but he is also becoming stronger, challenging his wife and turning the tables on his boss.

This complex of conflicting desires leads to a pivotal scene. Carolyn, feeling great from having sex with Buddy and shooting her pistol at the firing range, returns home to find Lester feeling great too. He is dazzled by how she looks and comes onto her, reminding her of her wild college days. Now comes the decision point that will make this a comedy or a tragedy (or in this case a black comedy). If she kisses him they rediscover the spark that made them fall in love and we can see them "remarry." But at the crucial moment she worries that he will spill his beer on the couch. The wall goes up between them and their relationship can only end badly.

Unfortunately, the writer chose a cheap response for Carolyn. Because this is a black comedy/satire, the characters are naturally more broad, more a character type than an individual. But in the case of Carolyn and Frank next door, they are too broad, too simple, too stereotypical, too cliched.

Battle

Hall returns to the voice-over to set up the battle sequence. "You know how they say every day is the first day of the rest of your life? Not the day you die," he says. This forces the audience to stand back and study the anatomy of a disaster. In a brilliant cross-cutting sequence, we see how different characters are motivated to kill Lester. The suspense comes from who will do it, and what will finally push him or her over the edge.

The desire of Jane, Carolyn and Frank to kill Lester becomes the apotheosis of each person's character, the fruition of their development. Unfortunately, this moment shows in even sharper detail how stereotypical Frank's character has been from the beginning. The moment when Frank comes onto Lester in the garage struck me as totally false, a plot contrivance dictated by a theme the writer was determined to express.

Self-Revelation

The crosscut technique to compare character and express theme is one of the greatest in the art of screenwriting. But it is not set up properly here. Intercutting Lester's memories of when his family was happy with what each character is doing at the moment the gun is fired should have brought home the tragic loss of this man's death at the moment when he has found new happiness.

But the final punch is hollow. Partly this is a problem inherent to the story structure Hall chose in the first place. You can't do a black comedy for the entire picture and then try to evoke tragic loss at the end. Black comedy makes fun of everyone and shows how each is trapped in a system. No one learns because no one is capable of learning. Tragedy makes us feel tremendous loss for a character who had rich potential but learned too late. You can't have it both ways.

You also can't have a dead man narrate the events leading to his death and expect an audience to feel sorrow. Why? He's still talking. The dead man storyteller, first used in *Sunset Boulevard*, is great for showing the anatomy of decline. But it also makes tragic loss almost impossible.

But mostly the hollow end results from Hall's failure to properly connect theme to character. Carolyn clutches at Lester jackets when she sees he is dead (a great acting choice). But we have never seen a moment of magic between the two, nor have we seen Carolyn as anything more than a selling robot.

Jane hates her father even when he gains a backbone and breaks out of the suburban, consumer straight-jacket that still binds her mother. Ricky is the angel of freedom, but he buys that freedom with some hard selling of his own.

And what about the other side of the thematic equation, the possibility of beauty? Some general comments by Ricky and Lester about beauty in the world are meaningless if they aren't woven through the character oppositions during the course of the story.

I suspect that "American Beauty" will win the Best Screenplay Oscar, and based on what else I've seen this year, it should. Alan Hall has written a challenging and funny black comedy/satire that exposes the spiritual hole in the American materialistic family. If there is less here than I had hoped for, there is far more than I expected.

REVIEW BY: John Truby

Dear John:

Is this the same Truby that writes screenwriting how-to books? I sort of feel like you started off disagreeing with me and ended up agreeing. The last line sums it up for me--it's called grading on a curve--meaning, it may not ACTUALLY be good, but in comparison to everything else last year, it was better than everything else. My response is: so what? "AB" doesn't know where it's going or why and halfway into the story it all drops dead. The tacked-on "Sunset Blvd." bookends do not fix the problem. I don't think that Spacey should have died--it has nothing to do with the disintegration of the dysfunctional American family and really nothing to do with the entire first half of the picture. Having the story turn into a murder mystery at that stage is called "Melodrama," where the drama is heaped on top of the characters as opposed to coming from the characters. Resorting to melodrama is a last ditch effort for the confused or unaware writer. By the way, the writer's name is Ball not Hall.

Josh

Name: Robin Goodman
E-mail: rcg9@hotmail.com

Dear Josh,

I am also Jewish. I believe there are 2 kind of Jews. Orthodox or just the rest (who don't seem to fit in a category.) I don't mean that I'm not proud of my heritage. I am, but I'm kind of lost and confused.

I am 37 years old and have hardly stepped into a Temple. When I was a kid I was never taught to go to Temple. I never had a bat-mitvah.

I am a mother of 3 children. My son Justin turned 14 in January. I also have 2 daughters ages 10 and 6. They have never attended hebrew school. I believe it's something you had to have a long time ago.

My mother lives with me. She is 59 years old. She never even went to Temple as a child. She thinks I am wrong for not raising my kids (her only grandkids) with any Judiasm. I told her she's being unfair. My kids will always be Jewish. I'm proud they are.

But reality is that they don't even want to attend hebrew school. I think it's not right to force them to choose who they are.

I don't know how religious your beliefs are. But only if I had a dollar for everytime she says I am wrong.

Please what do you think about this problem? Please tell my mom Glory that you are who you are no matter what.

P.S. I think she gets a little crazy around Passover coming up. Thanks for your input.....

Dear Robin:

Legitimately, there are 3 kinds of Jews: Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. I suppose they could add a fourth group, the Que Sera, Sera Jews. Although I am jewish and was born that way, I pay no attention at all to it. I hated going to Hebrew school as a kid and skipped so much I had to have a tutor come to the house to teach me my Bar Mitzvah piece. The only time I have been in Temple since then was for a few weddings. My beliefs are much more based in the Hindu philosophies: that any living thing IS God and that we are all one. I think Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all divisive, pulling people apart and pointing out their differences as opposed to bringing people together.

Josh

Name: HORSE

E-mail: horse@metallica.com

Hey Josh,

I'm a 23-year-old college student who's been busting his ass for the last few years writing/directing horror films with a few of my friends. Needless to say, they haven't been very good. I took a screenwriting class and read a couple of books on writing/directing. I think I have a script that might actually make a good movie, but I don't want to mess around with amateur-looking handheld photography. I am in the process of trying to build a steadicam system. What sorts of tricks did you use when you were making films with no money to make them look better?

Thanks a lot.

HORSE

(Oh, yeah ... I loved Running Time and the DVD commentary track is excellent.)

Dear Horse:

I had no idea you can get internet access through Metallica, although I did know that David Bowie offered it. First of all, have you ever a tried a tripod? They offer great stability to the camera. You can also make a pretty good dolly with PVC tubing and skateboard wheels. Or simply use a wheelchair. You can even hand-hold as long as you are using a wide enough angle lens to remove all the bumps. Bruce and I made a body-brace for a Super-8 camera out of aluminum tubing, foam rubber, and gaffer's tape. Sam used a gizmo on "Evil Dead" called Vaso-Cam, which is made by mounting your camera on the bottom of a miter box (which fits perfectly on a 2x4), then covering the 2x4 and the inside of the miter box with vasoline for a smooth

glide. When using a wheelchair, which is the easiest of the choices, always make sure to have a couple of sheets of plywood around in case the surface you want to dolly over is too rough. Just as a thought, however, John Ford never did any camera moves (unless he was follow moving people) which he felt gave him a lot more freedom in the editing room, which is true. Ford won more Oscars for direction than anyone else (four), so maybe he has a point.

Josh

Name: Stumpy

E-mail: your_friend_stumpy@hotmail.com

To John Becker:

It is fine that you spent a "greater portion" of your life studying story structure, but I think you might be taking it a little too seriously. You DO NOT need a "good" story structure for a film to be amazing and have a deeper message to it. If someone does not understand something in a film it is not necessarily because the structure has fallen apart. It might be because the film is too deep for them or they are just stupid. American Beauty is indeed the best film of 1999 as well as a great movie. I do not know a lot about story structure but I do know that the film must have had some sort of structure in it to keep it from going nowhere. The characters are well-observed but that is not all that made it the best film of 1999. At the beginning Lester tells us that he is already dead. This is not something that makes us sit up in our chairs and wait to see who the killer is. Although you say act two and act three never begin or end, we do not have a series of red herrings. We do not, in fact, know what OR who is going to kill him. The only reason you got annoyed 40 minutes in was because you were waiting for the next act. This is a poor excuse for not enjoying a film, especially one like American Beauty. THE ONLY REASON YOU LOST INTEREST was because you were waiting for act three. Just because a film does not have an act three doesn't mean it is a poorly made movie. Alan Ball never repeated anything in this movie. This "structureless mess" made its point and made us, the audience, think about life in a different perspective. Also, you might want to rethink your statement "No, that's not possible. I don't give anyone that credit. The minute I stop understanding is the minute they've failed. Nobody is going over my head." If someone writes something that you don't understand, it doesn't mean that they have failed. It means you are either too stupid to understand or you are too opinionated to get it through your thick head. We should not blame others for thinking up things that are beyond us. Ever read anything by Emerson? Do you understand everything he writes? No, but he is still a genius and he still illustrates his point to those who get it. The makers of American Beauty know exactly what is going on, if they didn't then the film wouldn't have made any sense at all. They would not have left a deeper meaning for all of us to ponder when we leave the theatre. You need to be more openminded and not so focused on everything you have learned because it is stopping you from seeing the big picture. Just watch a movie, don't spend all your energy keeping track of which act it is on and how the structure is laid out. If you continue to be so ignorant to everything, you will not learn anything from films and you have no business for being a critic.

Go and watch the film again and try to get the message instead of wasting your time. If you want to judge structure, get involved in politics.

Dear Stumpy:

Not liking "American Beauty" is so much easier than not liking "Schindler's List" because at least I'm not being accused of being a hard-hearted anti-Semite. It's far too easy defending my position on "AB" because the only people loudly taking the opposition are clearly idiots. I just love being told I'm too stupid to get the point, but as yet, no one has had the temerity to even put forth an attempt at a point. Quite frankly, I have more problems with the film than I even enumerated in my review. The only reason that Kevin Spacey does NOT fuck the cute girl is because the film was produced by Dreamworks and Spielberg would never get behind such a thing. Once he's met the girl and realizes she's as stupid as a box of rocks, but doesn't stop

fantasizes about her or working out for her, there's no way he wouldn't fuck her when the opportunity presented itself.

Josh

Name: Jerome

E-mail:

Hello Josh!

I really like TSNKE, and really like your site I think it's great that you answer people. I doing a site on Sam Raimi, Ted Raimi and Bruce Campbell, and I know that you know them well, I hope you could answer some of my questions.#1. Is there a way to reach Sam(address or email)? #2. Do they have a favorite causes(PETA, Aids, Ocean protection...)? #3. Do they love horror movies? Thank you for your answer, by the way, I spend two months in the hospital last year, because I was beath up by crazy guy who hate jew, (because I a jew), is that ever happen to you, something like that because of your religion? And are they jew to(Sam,Ted and Bruce)? Thank you

Dear Jerome:

I'm glad you like my film. 1. No, 2. No, 3. No. Sam, Ted and I are Jewish, Bruce is not.

Josh

Name: Xenamour(the long playing version)

E-mail: Xenamour@cs.com

My Dear Mr. Becker,

I occassionally am honored to speak with Mr. Sears via email and in talking with him have learned that he is in the middle of a writing/producing a new series. Although I am a tried and true, "even in death I will never leave you", Xena fan, I truly miss his story telling skills and his vision this year a great deal. I know Mr. Stewart has recently returned, and I am hopeful that this will signal an improvement in the writing of the characters and story lines. I have, (quite sadly), noted that in the derelict episodes this year, your point about the story "having a point", was sorely missed. Given your essays on structure, I am looking forward with great anticipation to Kindred Spirits, and to the characters, and perhaps the plot, again having a "point".

I was wondering, after having talked with Mr. Sears, whether you would ever consider doing what he is currently doing, that is, writing/producing a series of your "own". If so, can you speculate as to the type of story you might tell, character you might like to develop, or "point" you might like to make?

If not your "own" series, can you see yourself comitting to participation in another series, say, in a regularly scheduled rotation of writer/producers, with a specific number of episodes per year you might be responsible for... thereby freeing you up for other projects during the "off" periods of your rotation?

One of Many Fallen Angels,
Xenamour

Dear Xenamour:

I have no interest in having my own TV show. I direct TV to make a living, my true love is movies. Quite frankly, I'd rather make my living on my movies and drop the TV entirely.

Josh

Name: Joe "The Organ Grinder" Fama
E-mail: jrf3591@yahoo.com

Josh:

So I was ripping through the channels and caught a blurb on Tesla and the Niagra Project. Holy shit. The guy on the plane, Josh Becker Films. The piece was on History Channel; subject the Niagra Project. It ran last Saturday or Sunday night.

I later checked out your website and have been jumping around and reading your short stories .etc.

You remind me so much of the friends that I used to keep when I was free, single. Creative, excited about my work, excited about people and things, free spirited and answering to most no one. Talking to you was like sort of a through back to my single days. Since I am not a fan of Xena or other work you named on the plane were just a dude talking out loud.

Jesus, you are a talented writer. Your short stories are engaging and bring out some wide eyes in the brief span of attention you demand. Great stuff. I can relate to most of those stories, maybe all. We all have had our coincidental commando missions and of course, moments of doubt as a Christian is par. I will leave this subject alone.

The organ grinder was once a young upstart and ambitious "stud like" creature that had the world at my feet. I was on the fast track in Silicon Valley, gearing up to make millions and shagging everything that moved. In the late seventies, San Jose and the rest of the Bay Area was a haven for single, white, middle class upstarts. Plenty of women, three to four to one, maybe more. The nice, innocent Italian boy from N.Y. was scoring records. Quantity over quality.

In 1983 I met my wife who lived in Manhattan.....we were married in 1985. Our marriage in the beginning was somewhat uneasy. Chicks would knock on my door at 2 AM. Gee, I do not know how she knows me? I found that we had to move back to the east coast in order for this marriage to work. Besides, she was homesick. Pussy whipped at an early stage. Where is the Italian Stallion that I once emulated. Yo!

We had three beautiful children and love each other. My career in electronics took a leveling position. It was hard to continue my rise with no real contact in Silicon Valley. I did well financially but was not on the forefront of technology as I once was in the seventies. As a good husband I gave up the life style that I loved, stone cold. Nothing was the same for me. Marriage grew routine and predictable. Tortured man I am.

In 1996 my middle daughter was diagnosed with kidney cancer. One operation and a year of chemotherapy put the fear of life into me. Trust me, this experienced humbled me to now end. I also had a religious episode that makes my hair stand on end when I recall it. Even the Goys have their moments of pain. This episode in my life brought all the pain and suffering in the world into a state of reality. I can now feel pain that I never knew existed. At times I am an emotional wreck when I hear of tragedies. Otherwise I can be a cool hand in a business situation.

I have learned that one can relate and be compassionate to only those areas that one has experienced. In some ways I am fortunate that I can maintain my memories as a free spirit and yet hold the burden of death in the palm of my hand. There is nothing worse in the world than losing a child. I came close to it. I still feel this pressure. Cancer is just that. I can relate to the sorrows of so many others that have passed before me.

When I moved to this area, Simsbury Connecticut, I ran across an article on the historic cemeteries of the town. The article reviewed how history can be uncovered by the inscriptions on the head stones. One gravesite had a man, wife and child buried there (circa 1850). The couple lost their six year old daughter long before each died of old age. The headstone read, "to our little flower who never had the chance to

bloom". At the time I read this, approx. 15 years ago, I was taken by the anguish of these poor parents. I remember thinking that their pain must have been unbearable. I could not imagine what levels of pain this people went through. Yet, as I went through my episode with my daughter, my severe pain lead me to visit this gravesite and feel for what pain they had endured. Today, I am cursed with this pain, the Holicaust, individual tradegies, slavery, murders.....I find it hard to glance to the newspapers without grimancing.

O.K. Before I go I want to give you my uneducated review of American Beauty. Here again, this movie is not of rth light of heart of those like you, who have not endured the trials, monotony and strangulation of marriage. The story is a real life account of perhaps average American marriages. Pussy whipped and all and trapped into "don't let the kids here you" kind of web. I thought the movie was great and sent a message to my wife who got a useful message. Shape up bitch.

Well now that I know who you are and what you do I will look at you as a celebrity.

Before I go I want to tell you that you not only reminded me of my past friends but of myself. It was good seeing me again. And great meeting you.

Best of luck, I'll be watching Running Time.

Joe Fama

Dear Joe:

I enjoyed speaking with you on the airplane. It was a bit surprising meeting an electrical engineer who had not heard of Nikola Tesla, but then he has no entry in my Webster's Unabridged Dictionary while there are no other terms for the Tesla Coil, and a Tesla is also a unit of measurement. I think there's been a conspiracy against the guy.

If you and your wife got something out of "American Beauty" that's great. Quite frankly, I think you and most everyone else is giving the film its second hour because you liked the first hour, but that's your deal.

Josh

Dear Joe: I enjoyed speaking with you on the airplane. It was a bit surprising meeting an electrical engineer who had not heard of Nikola Tesla, but then he has no entry in my Webster's Unabridged Dictionary while there are no other terms for the Tesla Coil, and a Tesla is also a unit of measurement. I think there's been a conspiracy against the guy.

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Josh

Name: Pat
E-mail: Littlecowman.com

Dear Josh:

How is math used in the making of a film?

Dear Pat:

Well, math sort of comes into play all of the time. There are 24 frames per second, but in 16mm there are 40 frames a foot, and in 35mm there are only 16 frames a foot. 10,000 feet of 35mm film is about 100 minutes.

And when you transfer film to video you are suddenly at 30 frames per second. Math comes into play a lot, actually.

Josh

Name: Andy Signore
E-mail: Boneheadp@aol.com

Dear Josh:

I asked you a while about presenting Running Time at my college in Carlisle, PA. We would be able to pay you, what is your usual asking price? (besides expenses)

Dear Andy:

I have archived my prints and negatives and quite frankly don't want to dig them out. Besides, I only have one showable 16mm print and one 35mm print. I suggest buying the DVD and projecting it.

Josh

Name: Cody
E-mail: greekgabrielle@xenafan.com

Dear Josh,

The latest "Cleopatra 2525" episode 'Run Cleo Run' was a homage to the German film "Run Lola Run" (Lola Rennt), which I really like. I think it's a very well directed film. My question: What do you think about the film (if you have seen it)? Thanks in advance for your answer.

Cody

Dear Cody:

Sorry, I haven't seen it yet.

Josh

Name: Ima littleTpot
E-mail:

Hi Josh,

Are you sure you aren't William Goldman? Check out this recent interview, he agrees with most everything you have to say about screenwriting and filmmaking.
<http://www.aint-it-cool-news.com/display.cgi?id=5358>

All the best,
JoshuaTree

Dear JoshuaTree:

I'm quite certain that I'm not William Goldman because I looked everywhere for my two Academy Awards and couldn't find them. The reason, I believe, that Mr. Goldman (whom I admire) and I so completely agree on the state of movies is that we've both put in so much time studying storytelling and screenwriting that we

can both clearly see how wrong most recent movies are being written. As a great example, watch "All the President's Men" again and see what a brilliant, tight, well-structured screenplay looks like and consider whether you've seen anything like it at the movies recently (you haven't). William Goldman and I are not the same person, but we are brothers in spirit.

Josh

Name: Brittanie

E-mail: Ucigrad97@aol.com

Dear Josh:

Just a note to let you know that you have an exceptionally sharp sense of humor...your 99 cent store article came up under a www.dogpile.com search I conducted. VERY FUNNY stuff. If directing doesn't work out for you, try comedy...you're real good at it.

Dear Brittanie:

Thank you, I rather enjoy that essay myself.

Josh

Name: Thelonius

E-mail: cirra@clear.net.nz

Dear Josh:

As you may be aware, Xenafans analyse and debate every word and look in episodes to see where the series is going, or whether subtext is decreasing, or whatever. They also frequently assume that Rob Tapert is personally responsible for every last detail. My questions (if you think they merit an answer) are:

How much detail is RT (or the head writer for that matter) actually responsible for, and how much gets put in by the director (or cameraman, or actors) at the time of filming?

And my other question, re continuity, is: How much do directors study previous episodes to ensure consistency? If the writer puts "Lucy looks at Gabrielle" who decides what sort of 'look' is required - the director or the actor? Do the stars (Lucy and Renee, or even Ted or Kevin) have a lot of input into the consistency of what their characters say or do? I suspect, myself, that a lot of these little points that fans read deeper meanings into simply happen by chance, or because Director A happens to be directing this ep rather than Director B, but I could be dead wrong.

Hope these aren't stupid questions, and I do appreciate your answering questions on this website, I've just read all ten pages and it's fascinating reading.

Thanks

Thelonius

P.S. Please excuse any spelling errors - my spelling's good, my tpying's luosy! :)

Dear Thelonius:

The consistancy of the characters is mainly up to the writers, although Rob Tapert is very aware of it and brings it up frequently. Also, the actors pay a lot of attention to those sorts of details, too. I can't speak for other directors, but I haven't seen most episodes of the show. I take each episode that I do as the beginning and end of the job and that it should make sense within itself and stand alone. Rob Tapert has a huge amount

of influence on everything that occurs on the show, including a lot of the story ideas.

Josh

Name: Jim

E-mail: Starion106@aol.com

Hey Josh,

I got Running Time on DVD a few weeks ago. I really enjoyed it, and the commentary you did with Bruce was great. Got a question though: besides Rope, what other films do consider an influence on Running Time? It reminded me a bit of Reservoir Dogs, and also a film from a few years back called Nick of Time. Neither high quality films (although I think Dogs is at least a little more watchable Pulp Fiction). Do you try to watch alot of movies when you're in the middle of production? Or do you try to get all that over with in prep? I've heard/read that alot of filmmakers watch films during production as a way of pumping the creative juices, so to speak. I remember a Woody Allen quote that was along the lines of "yea, I try to watch alot of pictures when I'm directing. Unfortunately it makes me very self-conscious about my work and think that my current film is horrible." Or something like that.

Dear Jim:

I don't watch any films while I'm shooting. I have a hard enough time dragging my weary old ass home, eating something, prepping for the next day, and going to sleep. I didn't watch any films as research for "RT." The biggest influence on it by far is "Straight Time" (as well as on Quentin for "Revervoir Dogs," who actually had the author, Edward Bunker, in the film) which I haven't seen in many years, but I remember it quite well. I've never seen "Nick of Time." I've seen so many movies in my life (3449, as of this moment) that I don't need to go out my way to see any for research purposes. I find books much more useful, although, other than the speech about safe-cracking, all the rest came out of my head.

Josh

Name: Amin Sabet

E-mail: aminsabet@netcologne.de

Dear Josh:

Hi, The Tarantino interview: did you record it, or taped it or whatever? Or is this what you remember from it ?

Thanx

Amin Sabet. Cologne, Germany

Dear Amin:

I taped it, then transcribed it. The interview was much, much longer than what I used. I'm pretty sure I still have the tape somewhere, too. I ought to dig out and listen to it, maybe Quentin really incriminates himself.

Josh

Name: JT

E-mail: jcarroll@austin.rr.com

Josh,

Have you worked with an Arri BL-III in the past, and (if so) would you recommend it?

Thanks as always,
JT

Dear JT:

I think Arriflex cameras are terrific. I've used them for three of my four films, and they've got the new ones on "Jack of All Trades" and they're great. They use Moviecam on Xena and after a bumpy start where the gates were shredding the film and had to be sent back to Austria to be retooled, all has been well.

Josh

Name: Brian Lashmar
E-mail: blashmar@home.com

Hi Josh:

Just to let you know that I enjoy your work (what I've seen of it) very much. I thought "In Sickness and in Hell" was hilarious. I also liked "For Whom the Bell Tolls". I wish there were more serious Joxer roles.

I've noticed that there are strong similarities between the cosmology on Herk and Xena, and the cosmology that is practiced by the Rosicrucians and their offshoots: The Golden Dawn and The Ascended Masters. Is there any connection?

Also, my favourite movie of 1999 was "The 13th Warrior". Did you see it? I think I'm one of the few people who liked it; but then, I'm a "genre junkie" If "Beowulf" had a historical basis, this would have been it. Also, I think the critics missed the point. Ibin was not the hero of the tale, he was merely the teller. Bulvine was the real hero. Any way, if you have not seen the movie you may want to put it on your "to do" list.

Finally, I am waiting with great anticipation (as only a genre junkie can) for the release of "Lord of the Rings" I always felt that Raimi, Tapert and Dilorentis(sp?) should have been the ones to make this flick. Did you try to get on the project when you were in NZ? I believe that you would have been great as the director.

Thankyou;
Brian Lashmar
Hamilton, Ontario blashmar@home.com

Dear Brian:

I have no idea what you're talking about regarding The Golden Dawn and Ascended Masters. These things mean nothing to me.

As it so happens, Bruce Campbell, his wife Ida, and I all went to see "The 13th Warrior" together in New Zealand. Oddly, all three of us had read and enjoyed Michael Crichton's book (entitled "Eaters of the Dead"). The movie was so awful that we walked out within 25 minutes. Bandaras is painfully miscast as an Arab, it's too dark to see what's happening, and McTiernan directs so badly that you never know what's going. Bruce now uses it as the standard of awfullness, and just brought it up again the day before yesterday as the worst film of the past decade.

I personally have never had the slightest interest in the J.R.R. Tolkien books; little hairy hobbits don't interest me at all. I like stories about humans. Since Peter Jackson, whose film it is, happens to be the director, I doubt they needed yet another one.

Josh

Name: xenamour

E-mail: xenamour@cs.com

Dear Mr. Becker,

I find myself constantly amazed at the ability of the human animal to be creative, but I often wonder if there are truly any new things we have to say to each other as human beings, or if there are truly any new stories to tell. I suppose that in the end perhaps all we can hope for is to find a new way to re-tell an old tale, a way that reaches someone who could not absorb that self-same story in any of its pre-existing forms. What do you think about this?

I have also read, in books on writing, that stories must have both minor and major conflicts to be interesting. This fits well with the 3 act premise in the Gospel according to Becker (I think?). Would you see the major conflict and its resolution as being more consistent with a character driven story or a plot driven story? It seems to me that it would be easier to write in a character driven movie, because the conflicts would probably be more limited in scope (applying to the character versus life as we know it)(?)

Can you have it both ways? Can you have a strong character driven story within a bigger plot driven story or does the attention of the audience get overwhelmed or too diffused? For example, when I was a kid, I used to draw these perfectly wonderful pictures and would then essentially ruin them by filling in any empty space. Is that a frequent problem you risk if you try to use both strong character and plot driven stories? The example that comes to mind is Norma Rae... is that a good example of both a character and plot driven movie that worked?

One of Many Fallen Angels,
Xenamour

Dear Xenamour:

My new big question-asker (look out Drew). The longer I've written the less important plots have become to me--you've got to have them, mind you, but they are of secondary importance. "Norma Rae" is pretty strictly a character piece, there isn't much plot--(I haven't seen the film in years, but always liked it) An average factory worker begins to take an active role in union politics, and by hanging around with a big city union organizer realizes the deficiencies of her own marriage. That's not really much of a plot, although it's perfectly sufficient for that story. The plottier the story the less interesting I find it, particularly as I get older. If you've begun with the plot, then the character probably will never become very well-developed because it will have to conform to the plot it's been stuck into as opposed to the way it will express itself in just an interesting situation. The example that always jumps to my mind showing the difference between plot-driven and a character-driven story are "The Guns of Navarone" and "Patton." Once you know that they blow up the guns, you really don't need to see that picture again; whereas George Patton is such a fascinating character that I can watch the film endlessly.

Josh

Name: xenamour

E-mail: xenamour@cs.com

Dear Mr. Becker,

Thank you for your offer to allow me to copy your scripts from this web site. I will gladly do so.

I am relatively new to computing, and relatively new to the net forums. I joined discussion in the Xena

Forum a few months ago and find myself much shagrined about the types of caustic and disrespectful tones some people take when posting thier view about Xena. Although I believe everyone has a right to thier opinions and views, and even thier criticisms, I have a very difficult time dealing with HOW these people express them. Additionally I frequently find myself under attack by those same types of people for finding messages of hope and courage, love and loyalty, inclusion and acceptance, strength and support in the Xena stories.

I find myself having to work hard to not respond in kind. I am sure I am probably spitting into the wind to respond at all, but it is difficult not to point out the frequent irony; they are aggressive and hatefull and disrespectful in the way they address Xenastaffers and yet in thier posts they are slamming Xena for irresponsibly depicting aggressive and hatefull acts with disrespect.

My question is this; How in the world do YOU deal with the people who criticize your work, let alone those who do so with aggressive, disrespectful, or hateful tones and vocabulary?

One of Many Fallen Angels,
Xenamour

Dear Xenamour:

I know that I do the best job that I'm capable of, and if other people don't like it, fuck 'em!

Josh

Name: Michael Anthony Lee
E-mail: mal@kingston.net

Josh,

Three quick questions of various nature for you to answer.

I know you have sold one screenplay, and was wondering how many you have optioned?

I see you like to keep journals and take pictures of everything you are involved in. Have you ever considered making one of those "The making of (your movie)" movies?

Finally, from your experience as a director in both film and T.V. I was wondering how you feel is the best way to deal with your cast & crew. Do you rule with an iron fist, or are you more soft and understanding? I enjoyed reading "The making of If I had a Hammer" article and saw that you had to fire a few unprofessional folks. I think you handled the "Asshole" remarks very classy and wondered if this is how you always take care of the things that need to be taken care of.

Thanks,
Michael

Dear Michael:

I've had quite a few scripts and stories optioned in the past, although that's a game I don't really play anymore, either. I have one story under option right now.

I write my "Making of . . ." essays for each of the movies, that's enough for me.

Although I'm a reasonably intense guy, on the set I try to be as mellow as humanly possible. I'm almost always in a good mood and smiling, since it happens to be thing I love doing most in the world. Also, if I'm

smiling and having a good time, everyone else generally is, too. However, I do not brook much interference-- I'm perfectly happy to listen to anything the actors have to say, but not really from anyone else on the crew-- their job is to do what they are instructed to do and do it quickly.

Josh

Name: xenamour

E-mail: xenamour@cs.com

Dear Mr. Becker,

I recently read your 5 essays on "Structure" and found them interesting, if a bit redundant :). I work in health care, and frequently have to give people information they are not yet fully ready to process, and think this redundancy is actually quite necessary. We humans simply seem to need to hear things about 3 times in order to hold onto them. This varies a bit depending on the meaning and emotional impact, as well as the number of senses stimulated at the "moment of memory".

I found the 2nd and 3rd essays on structure to be particularly inspiring. In talking with Mr. Sears I gleaned a similar sense of "greater purpose" driving his writing. I heartens me to know that people who write for television shows I love desire to write stories that mean something beyond ratings.

I apologize, I digress. Perhaps I should pose my question, which is; How does one come to own copies of movie or television scripts to use as writing examples?

One of Many Fallen Angels, Xenamour

Dear Xenamour (yet again):

Look around on the internet and you'll find some scripts, I think. You can download five different [screenplays](#) from my site if you'd like. I can't post the Xena scripts, though, because they don't belong to me.

Josh

Name: xenamour

E-mail: xenamour@cs.com

Dear Mr. Becker,

You seem to have one foot in the "real" world, and one in the "surreal" world of TV and motion picture production. When you are surrounded by hollywood types who are, if one believes what they read, quite superficial, how do you do with them? Are you comfortable? Irreverant (well, to their face :))?

Next, I wanted to know, if and hopefully WHEN they finally do a Xena movie, will you be interested in directing it? I have read a great deal of fan-fiction and have noted a few stand out authors with very original and provocative premises. (No, I am NOT a fan-fiction author!). As a very big Xena fan, I would love to see a few of these better fan-fiction efforts brought to life on the big screen. *If* you had the power to decide such things, would you consider adapting one of these well written epics? Do you think any at RenPics would?

I have realized that some of the best stories are labeled "alternative", meaning subtext becomes more maintext. However some are so well concieved that even playing that part of the story down to a subtextual level, they would stand apart.

Do you think the people at RenPics have the vision to see past the label to the story? Would you?

Dear Xenamour (again):

I'm something of a recluse and don't hang around with Hollywood types. I had a meeting yesterday and when the producer told me that movies were all about making money, I told him I didn't see it that way--I said that I didn't give a shit about money, the point was to make good movies. Anyway, I think the day of a possible Xena feature has come and gone; it's not that popular anymore. I would have been happy to direct it, however, had they asked me.

Josh

Name: xenamour

E-mail: xenamour@cs.com

Dear Mr. Becker, Thank you for your quick reply. I continue to be pleasantly surprised at the access many of the people associated with Xena allow we fans. I would like to know, more specifically, what your personal take is on the issue of pushing the envelope, specifically related to the issue of the subtext.

I personally would not wish to be feminist poster child for a day, let alone 5 or 6 seasons, so I understand the possible potential reservations of producers associated with Xena about playing that role, wished for or not. The episodes you have directed have neither been devoid nor deluged with subtext. Does the "anything for a laugh" line apply here too?

Mr. Sears tells me the subtext was done out of respect initially, a wink and a nodd to that large subset of fandom. What are your feelings on this issue? Just so you know, yes I am a subtexter, but I also am a firm believer that the "Greater Good" is better served when all types of people can both identify with and see the characteristics of others portrayed within the same characters.

I understand you have no current desire to plot the progress of these characters. However, given you have co-written a few episodes, I would be interested to know if you currently have story ideas for these characters that you would like to see come to fruition?

Dear Xenamour:

Rob Tapert and I were kicking around a story idea that we may write together, as we wrote the story for "Locked Up & Tied Down." Regarding subtext, I have been a proponent since the beginning. I may have actually been the first person to bring it up, back in the first season. When I first suggested that there may possibly be something going on between Xena and Gaby, Rob looked horrified and said, "This is a family show!" Nevertheless, he soon embraced the idea. However, this is really the writer's domain, I just direct the scripts that are given to me.

Josh

Name: ASHTTON

E-mail: TEXANGROWN@aol.com

Hi again Josh=),

Also what does the big finale in "Kindred Spirits", the wrestling match between Xena and Joxer have to do with the Amazons or the episode in general? Was this thrown in just for laughs? Thanks again.

Dear Ashton:

The wrestling match relates to the plot--not brilliantly, but it does. It turned out pretty darn funny, though, I think.

Josh

Name: ASHTTON
E-mail: TEXANGROWN@aol.com

Hi Josh,

In your new upcoming Xena episode "Kindred Spirits" what is the premiss or story line for the episode? What is your take on the episode, do you think it turned out great? The Xena fanclub has the logline of "Joxer breaks Amazon laws that force Queen Gabrielle to choose between settling down in the Amazon village and life on the road with Xena." Is this small synopsis correct? Also what does the title "Kindred Spirits" have to do with the episode? Since some Xena titles have nothing to do with the episodes or are hard to figure out. Any answers to these questions would be greatly appreciated, thanks.

Dear Ashton:

That's an accurate little synopsis, I suppose. They have a bit of a heart attack over at Renaissance Pictures if I discuss the plots too extensively before the episode airs. Do I think it turned out "great?" I think it turned out pretty good given the problems: I had 5 days, whereas all other episodes get 7-8 days, and I received the script on Saturday night and began shooting on Monday morning, so I had almost no prep time--you usually get two weeks to prep. Luckily, Lucy, Renee and Ted, as well as the crew, are so damn good it didn't matter. As for the title, it means absolutely nothing to this episode. When I first received the script it was dark and grim and was about killing horses and I guess the title had something to do with that story, not the one we ended up shooting.

Josh

Name: JT
E-mail: jcarroll@austin.rr.com

Josh,

What kind of camera did you use to film "Hammer"? And just out of curiosity, did you get the \$20k you need to finish it? (Your story ends with "we'll see..")

Thanks!
JT

Dear JT:

I shot "Hammer" with a 35mm Panavision Gold, which didn't ultimately impress me all that much, particularly the lenses. I've already decided to return to Arriflex the next time around--their new 35mm camera is gorgeous and what we used to shoot "Jack of All Trades." And no, I haven't gotten anymore money to finish the film, but finish it I will no matter what.

Josh

Name: noel hodge
E-mail: noel.hodge@windmere.com

Dear Josh:

I want to start directing music videos, how can I get started.

Dear Noel:

They direct music videos? No shit? It all looks like outtakes to me haphazardly assembled by untalented editors. I think good preparation would be pounding your head as hard as you can on the sidewalk.

Josh

Name: xenamour

E-mail: xenamour@cs.com

Dear Josh,

First let me tell you I have enjoyed your work on Xena a great deal. Second, I would like to ask how you personally feel about the changes in the characters this season and whether you, should you spontaneously be granted such powers, have taken them in the same direction? Third, when directing, especially but not limited to Xena, do you find yourself purposely pushing the envelope? "Directing From the Edge" seems to indicate you might. I "talked" with Steven Sears not too long ago, and I definitely got the impression he frequently wrote/produced episodes with just such an intention.

Regards and Respect,
Xenamour

Dear Xenamour:

Luckily, I'm not in a position to have to figure out where to go with the characters, nor would I want to. I'm perfectly happy coming in for an episode or two a season, generally the zany eps, and attempt to make them as funny as possible. I certainly try for as many laughs as humanly possible, given the script and what the story is. In this new episode, "Kindred Spirits," every laugh we got was not in the script, including the big finale, which I suppose is pushing the envelope a bit.

Josh

Name: Jodie

E-mail: tandia12@hotmail.com.au

Dear Josh:

I have to write a 1 page assignement on " The role of the director",please could you give me a little info?
Thanks so much.

Dear Jodie:

No.

Josh

Name: August

E-mail: joxerfan@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

I have a few more Herc TV-movie questions.

1) It seems like a lot of the humor in your work is added by you once shooting is under way. I was already

laughing at Iolaus carrying such a huge bow in "Minotaur," an cracked up when he tried to run through a doorway, only to have it get caught! Was that an improvised gag?

2) Any idea as to why there were two different Deianeiras? (The young Renee O'Connor sacrifice victim, and the mature Tawny Kitaen version whom he married.) They weren't supposed to be the same character, were they?

3) I always enjoy Michael Hurst's cameos, and in "Underworld," he had little bits as both Charon and a villager who died in the opening scene. What inspired him/you/whomever to do that?

Thanks!

August

Dear August:

1. Yes, I do add gags all the time. I also like to create an atmosphere where the actor's ideas are just as viable as my own. The long bow through the door gag was strictly Michael's. There was another take where he went WAY further with the gag, unable to get through the door on six tries. I thought it was hysterical, but they cut it.

2. Believe it or not, Renee and Tawny are supposed to be the same character. As you noticed, there is a big time-span between the movies and they seemed to believe that Renee would grow up to be Tawny.

3. I didn't direct "Underworld," I was 2nd unit director and didn't have a thing to do with Michael in any of his parts. I did end up directing Kevin quite a bit, however, on that film. I reshot all of the underworld stuff after the director, Bill Norton, left. I'm particularly pleased with the sequence in "the ghoul trench," as it was called, where the three babes of hell shoot their tongues around Herc, then ghouls come from everywhere. I reshot every single shot in that sequence.

Josh

Name: JT

E-mail: jcarroll@austin.rr.com

Josh,

How do you typically go about selecting a DP for a new project? IMDB shows that for SW you're credited for it, and on RT you worked with Kurt Rauf (whom I assume you have known for some time..) I was just curious if you usually base your decision on financing, artistic style, or if it's just a question of "best fit at the time."

Thanks (as always.)

JT

Dear JT:

On TSNKE (why IMDB has it listed as "Stryker's War" is beyond me) I was the DP. On "Lunatics," Bruce Campbell, the producer, hired the DP. On the last two films I've worked with Kurt Rauf because his stuff looks good and he's a very pleasant person that doesn't give me any shit. Until he fucks up or I can hire Vilmos Zsigmond, Kurt's my man.

Josh

Name: Maggie S.

E-mail: april1671@email.com

Dear Josh:

Hi! How are you? I'm doing good. I have a couple questions for you if you don't mind here they are- Is it a fun job?, What kind of things do you do?, How much do you get paid?, How many hours a week do you do?, How many days a week do you do?, Have you meet any famous people in you life?, If you were wondering what this is for it is for my project at school.

Thank you have a nice day or evening
Maggie S.

Dear Maggie:

How did I become part of your school project? I was just sitting here minding my own business.

1. How am I? All right.
2. It's fun when I'm doing it.
3. I tell actors where to go and I tell the camera people where to put the camera.
4. I get paid a zillion dollars a day, minus taxes.
5. I directed Anthony Quinn, but he hollered at me.

Josh

Name: Stephanie Spivey
E-mail: spiveyr@aol.com

Dear Josh:

How do you feel about Blacks being bypassed for Oscars? The Academy Awards are considered and American tradition as we have also accepted being overlooked or snubbed, by the Academy as a tradition. Please give your opinion on this. I failed to see any quotes from any AA winners. Could it be that we are so few?

Stephanie Spivey
Slidell, La

Dear Stephanie:

You can count the black Oscar winners on one hand: Hattie McDaniel for "Gone with the Wind," Sidney Poitier for "Lillies of the Field," Lou Gossett, Jr. for "An Officer and a Gentleman," Denzel Washington for "Glory" and Whoopi Goldberg for "Ghost." But it's not like there's been a lot of really great movies made by blacks that were overlooked, either.

Josh

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