

Josh Becker DGA

Directing From The Edge



Q & A Archive
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Name: Jim
E-mail: Starion106@aol.com

Josh,

I wonder if you would go so far as to agree with this quote by Allison Anders concerning restraints and boundaries in filmmaking:

"While admittedly among the guilty as a filmmaker who uses a lot of f-words, I also often wish we could return to the days when the restraints of the industry forced us filmmakers to economize on language, violence and nudity. If we're going for naturalism in our characters (I tend to make films about rock musicians or gang members!) we use the freedom allotted us by the ratings system to go for the real and the natural, for how these people would truly talk. This is a freedom I don't think we filmmakers would want to lose, but, like you, I wonder sometimes if we wouldn't make our work more powerful by having to curb the strong language and reach for more literate solutions in our dialogue. Having gone through a re-edit due to an undesirable rating from the MPAA, I found the scene, after much of the nudity was cut, was made far more intense by playing most of it on the actresses' face. Artists hate to admit it, but boundaries are just as important as freedom to the success of one's work and restraint forces us to come up with new solutions that often surprise us."

Dear Jim:

That's on a censorship level and not what I was really discussing. I don't believe in censorship, which may well have caused filmmakers to think a bit harder in the old days, but there's no going back -- or, at least, I hope not. The freedom/restraint issue that's been discussed here is entirely self-imposed. I am forever running into people who think things like the three-

act structure, solid story construction, theme, and a point are infringements on their freedom. It's sort of like an actor knowing their lines. Until the lines are memorized there is no getting to any subtler or deeper level of performance. Until your story is worked out, there is no getting to the subtler or deeper realms of writing. If every time you sit down to write you have no idea where your story goes, then you're simply groping for the next situation. Whereas, if you know what comes next and what that leads to, then you can deal with the subtleties of motivation and thematic development. The "freedom" of sitting down to write and having no clue what occurs next in your story, is called being an amateur.

Josh

Name: Corinne
E-mail: liberty5-3000@startrekmail.com

Hi Josh,

I was wondering, what do you think of Kevin Smith (the director)? Do you like his films?

Dear Corinne:

Mr. Smith's films do less than nothing for me. I walked out of "Clerks."

Josh

Name: marian
E-mail: vivesa@eresmas.es

Dear Josh:

Hi!!!!!! I'm from Spain! I'm a very fan of xena, warrior princess. I've got a question... can we, (the fans) make something to keep seeing the show? and will we see a movie? I hope yes!! Ah! tell renne and lucy that they are the best!!!

thanks for all!! a kiss from a friend!!

Dear Marian:

Can you, the fans, make something to keep seeing the show? Yes, it's called a video tape. That way you can watch the show anytime you want.

Josh

Name: Cynthia E. Jones
E-mail: cynthiaejones@hotmail.com

Dear Josh,

Just to let you know, there are actually Bolex super-8 cameras; I have one. No sound, but hey. Good to hear that you're back in California with the rest of us. So, was your PG&E bill, like, \$400? But seriously, folks.

As far as "Fear and Loathing" completely sucking...that seems to be the general consensus, so I guess my friends and I just do too much acid. We loved it immensely. We also love Johnny Depp and Benicio Del Toro, though. And Terry Gilliam. I guess it's like watching a bunch of your friends on drugs.

On shooting film: I'm glad to know that you're an efficient director. As a photographer, I feel the same way. My boss here at the newspaper shoots 36 pictures of the same setup, I shoot 36 different photos of the same situation. It's just the way we think. If you've done it one way, it's done, that's that, time to move on.

I was also sorry to see the news of Stanley Kramer's death, and consider "Judgment at Nuremberg" and "Inherit the Wind" to be two of my favorite films. Spencer Tracy, of course, contributed to that. He rocked.

Regarding Powell and Pressburger, have you seen "A Matter of Life and Death?" It is also called "Stairway to Heaven" and I caught it at the UC Berkeley Theatre a couple of years back. David Niven...fantastic work. I love those guys. I'm sure you own "Peeping Tom."

Also...did you ever notice that Bruce Campbell bears a resemblance to Gene Kelly? There's a scene in the beginning of "Singin' in the Rain" where he becomes a stunt man, and it's the whole "handsome guy being thrown into a window" scenario, and I couldn't help but think of Bruce.

So...what are you going to do with yourself back in Cali?

sincerely,

cindy

Dear Cindy:

My friends and I were more fun on acid than Depp and Del Toro. I'm not a Johnny Depp fan anyway, I find him too self-consciously the pretty boy. And call me a stick-in-the-mud, but the Del Toro part was supposed to be a 300-lb. Samoan.

My apartment is so small (the mice are hunchbacked) that it doesn't cost very much to heat it. Nor do I spend all that much on electricity.

Yes, I've seen "Stairway to Heaven" and it's OK, but not one of my favorites. I like "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," which I failed to

mention earlier, much better.

No, Bruce has never reminded me of Gene Kelly, although I'll keep it mind. I like that he just got a part that Tom Selleck turned down. Bruce being a younger Tom Selleck is sort of amusing to me.

Josh

Name: Mandy
E-mail: jomayo@hotmail.com

Mr. Becker~

My name is Mandy McMillan and I am a freshman at Crook County High School, and I am doing a projet about directing. So ANY information you could give me would be great! Thankx!!

Dear Mandy:

My pleasure, what's your question?

Josh

Name: marg
E-mail: www.olympia252001@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

What are lucy, renee, kevin and ted like having worked with them on soul posesion?

Dear Marg:

Ask a very general question and you get a very general answer: they were fine.

Josh

Name: Jim
E-mail: Starion106@aol.com

Hey Josh,

What do you think about the writings of Hunter S Thompson? I recall a piece you wrote on this site about a trip from Texas to Cali that was semi-Fear and Loathing. What did you think of Gilliam's filmed version of that? Any favorites of Hunter's other books? I ask this because I just saw a hilarious fax from Hunter to a production company executive, which you can check out at: <http://www.aintitcool.com/display.cgi?id=8218>

He's trying to get his latest book into a film, and has been a little.. frustrated I guess, at the process. Supposedly he also has a column at ESPN.com now, but I haven't been able to locate it. Anyway, just wanted to know your thoughts the guy. I found F&L the film to be occasionally amusing and completely pointless (which was the point, I suppose). Maybe Hunter's stuff just isn't right for film. Still, that fax is one of the funniest and most honest things I've read in awhile.

Dear Jim:

I enjoyed "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" when it came out, but it definitely seems like an artifact of its day. The movie was a worthless waste of film. As for him being frustrated by the filmmaking process, well, so what? If you sit and wait for other people to do things for you then you'll certainly end up frustrated.

Josh

Name: jennifer chadwick
E-mail: chadwick2005@hotmail.com

DEAR JOSH

MY NAME IS JENNIFER I LOVE THE SHOW XENA I NEED YOU HELP CAN YOU PLEASE TELL LUCY AND RENEE THAT IAM THIER BIGES FAN MY WISH IS TO SEE THEM ONE DAY IF YOU CAN PLEASE EMAIL ME BACK

THANK YOU JENNIFER RENEE CHADWICK

Dear Jennifer:

Too late, I'm already back.

Josh

Name: Tamandra
E-mail: TAMandraM@aol.com

Josh,

Your words about art have been something I really gravitate to. I agree there is far too much general crap out there. It's so inspiring to see someone like yourself, who stays true to their own vision. I think it's important in art to know what you want, to be specific. Seems like two of the most important in the line of collaboration in film is the writer and editor, with one, of course there would be no story, the other ultimately decides how we'll see it. Narrowing down to specifics.

Just saw Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, despite what I'd read you saying about it. All I kept thinking about, was your butt burning analogy lol! Do you know if Rob's seen it? Bride With the White Hair is way better. Also saw Pollock the next day, which I thought was ok, great acting by Ed Harris, but if you didn't bring much knowledge of Pollock to the experience, you're at a disadvantage. I think the artist's life is good material for a film, but it felt like the surface was being scratched. Looking forward to seeing this episode, and have a safe flight back to rainy CA!

Tamandra

Dear Tamandra:

If you shoot things very specifically, then you probably won't screw it up in the editing, which doesn't mean you can't, but you've lessened the chances. I was congratulated at lunch while shooting by the producers for shooting less film than any other director all season (this was ep #19 of 22). I take pride in this. I shoot what I need and don't bother covering the piss out of scenes -- if the scene is working, then it's working; if it's not working, more shots won't save it.

Josh

Name: august E-mail: joxerfan@hotmail.com

Dear Josh,

Just saw the news of Stanley Kramer's death, and wondered if you might have some observations, comments, favorite and least favorite films, etc. Would you say that he was very unusual for his time, to be a producer that went into directing, and had some critical successes? The ones I've seen that come to mind are "The Defiant Ones," "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," "Judgment at Nuremberg," and "Inherit the Wind." (Although the last one seemed very stage-y to me, but I enjoyed the acting of Fredric March and everyone else, even Dick "Darren" York!")

And of course I have to toss in the obligatory "Soul Possession" question - are you still down in NZ? Are you doing editing now? Any more good wisecrack-behind-the-scenes stories? The pictures are intriguing, and you guys look like you had a blast!

Thanks,

August

Dear August:

I hadn't heard of Mr. Kramer's death and it saddens me. I respect him very much. He was a top-notch producer, a first-rate director, and had terrific taste in stories. He produced "Champion" with Kirk Douglas, which had a big impact on me as a kid, as well as "High Noon," one of the great westerns, and "Member of the Wedding," one of my very favorite films. "Judgement at Nuremburg" and "Inherit the Wind" were both plays, but he was smart enough to leave them alone and not try to open them up beyond what they should have been. His camera-work in both films is wonderful. That he could then follow up such severely serious films with "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World" is one of the great displays of versatility in motion pictures. I also quite like his very first film as a producer, "So This is New York," "Home of the Brave," "The Men" (Marlon Brando's first film), "Cyrano De Bergerac," "Death of a Salesman," "The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T," "The Wild One," "The Caine Mutiny," "Pressure Point" (which really got me as a kid), then as director: "Not as a Stranger," "On the Beach" and "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner." Now that I really think about it, he produced and directed many of my favorite films and I think he was really great.

I am back from NZ. The editor is doing his cut now and I'll go in and do mine next week. I had an absolutely great time doing this episode. No funny behind-the-scenes events are occurring to me right now.

Josh

Name: margarita
E-mail: olympia252001@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

Can you give any info as to what will happen in the xena ep. soul possession?

Dear Margarita:

Comedy, action, adventure and excitement.

Josh

Name: Aaron
E-mail: agraaham83@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

Just two quick questions: I was looking through your 'favorite films' list and noticed that you listed "The Fury", just wondering if this was the Brian DePalma film? Also, just wondering if you read Michael Powell's second part autobiography "Million Dollar Movie"? and what is your general opinion on the work of the Archers? (That was three questions, sorry!)

Dear Aaron:

I have on my list both Brian DePalma's "The Fury" and Fritz Lang's "Fury." DePalma's film is almost a guilty pleasure. I think Kirk Douglas and Amy Irving are both very good and it has some wonderful bits of filmmaking in it. I just received the DVD of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's "Black Narcissus," which is one of my very favorite movies. I also quite like "The Red Shoes" and "The 49th Parallel," but not nearly as much as "Black Narcissus."

Josh

Name: Jim
E-mail: Starion106@aol.com

Josh,

Is that really Lucy in those new set pictures? I haven't seen the show in awhile, but that doesn't look like the same person, wig or not. And how Tapert ever got that is beyond me. Lucy was always attractive, but damn.

Also, not to beat a dead horse here, but in response to FR's comment about film as a collaborative rather than auteur medium: FR, I'm not gonna disagree with you that filmmaking is collaborative, I'm not completely stupid (though I'm sure some would disagree). What I really mean to say is that I don't think that collaborative aspect is necessarily a great thing. You talk about higher-ups on the set that various people report to, so that "the right person can give the answer to any question". See, I feel like "the right person" should probably be the director.

I guess I'm of the belief that the smaller the crew, the better the production. I'm very supportive of the technological/digital advances being made in filmmaking, many of which serve to take away many crew positions. I think the unions are fighting against this, and while I can understand their position, I think its just stupid to stand in the way of progress when there are surely other jobs to be found in the industry. The fact that filmmaking right now is very collaborative does not preclude the possibility that this cannot change. I don't see any reason to NOT strive for a single vision in filmmaking, and I think its settling for less to do otherwise.

And Josh, you say that art is not about "freedom". I agree with that to some extent. There will always be some restrictions on the filmmaking (whether imposed by the money men, by the equipment, or by mother nature). But wouldn't it be in the artwork's best interest to strive for as much freedom as possible, within certain confines? Getting kind of theoretical here I suppose, but I just believe that restrictions inevitably lead

to compromise. And isn't it a worthy goal for a director to try to compromise as little as possible?

Jim

Dear Jim:

Lucy is as attractive as ever, this character she plays, Annie, is supposed to be mousey and pale. She also plays Xena in this ep and looks great, considering she had her second child 16 months ago.

Back to the "freedom in art" discussion -- the goal in art is not to achieve freedom, but to express yourself specifically, exactly as you mean to. Every artistic decision is a restriction: I'm working in THIS time period, I'm telling the story of THESE characters, my lead is THAT character, I'm working with THIS frame size, not THAT one, I'm shooting from THIS angle, etc. As I have been known to say many times over the years: anything specific is better than anything general. The more specific you get, the more restrictions you've given yourself. But YOU gave the restrictions to YOURSELF! That's what makes you an artist. This is where everybody, in my humble opinion, is falling down on the job these days. In art, structure is freedom; no structure is garbage. Don't fight it, just go with it.

Josh

Name: Thrace Spencer
E-mail:

Josh,

Sorry to hear about Stevie. Do you think you may get another cat some day?

Wishing you the best,
Thrace

Dear Thrace:

I will when I move out of L.A.

Josh

Name: Thrace Spencer
E-mail: tspencer22@hotmail.com

Josh,

Have you ever seen a film called, "The Ice Storm" with Kevin Klein? If you haven't, check it out. You might like it. Bruce Campbell kinda reminds me of Kevin Klein. BTW, How did Bruce get the directing gigs on VIP? Will you be directing for other tv shows now that "Xena" is over?

Thanks,
Thrace

Dear Thrace:

I've seen "The Ice Storm" a couple of times and I like it, much better than "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," that's for sure. I particularly liked the end with the electrical cable. Bruce got the VIP directing gigs because they contacted him to be on the show, which he wouldn't do, but he offered to direct instead and they took him up on it. As for me doing other TV shows, we'll just have to see.

Josh

Name: Stone

E-mail:

Josh,

If your "Devil Dogs" script is copyrighted and registered with the WGA, why not put it online? Maybe someone would be interested in producing it if they knew more about it. Or, at least put a pitch page up, so producers can take a look at what you have to offer. :-)

Best,

Stone

Dear Stone:

You make a valid point. You don't happen to be Oliver, do you?

Josh

Name: D. Underwood

E-mail:

Josh,

Thanks so much for the advice. I'll go the Digital Video route. On a side note, have you ever read "Breaking Through, Selling Out, Dropping Dead" by William Bayer or "Writers in Hollywood" by Ian Hamilton? If you haven't, you should. I really think you'll get a kick out of them.

Best,
Underwood

Dear Underwood:

I have not read the former, but I have read (and own) the latter, which I enjoyed. I am presently reading "Death on the Cheap: The Lost B Movies of Film Noir," which is pretty cool, quite intelligent, but too short.

Josh

Name: D. Underwood
E-mail:

Josh,

What's the biggest challenge you have writing low budget films? And, what kind of Super 8 camera would you recommend to someone just starting out? I've heard you mention Bolex before, but what version is the best for a beginner? Lastly, if the camera doesn't have sound capabilities, what do you need to buy to supplement that?

All the best to you,
Underwood

Dear Underwood:

I think writing a low-budget film has the same challenges of writing anything, with the extra challenge of keeping the budget in mind. But the real challenge is coming up with a story that's worth telling, that has a point, and has good characters, none of which cost any more than telling a bad story with crappy characters. Regarding cameras, the Bolex is 16mm-- I'm pretty sure they don't make a Super-8 camera. I don't recommend Super-8 at this late date because it's now expensive and hard to get and develop, then doesn't transfer very well to video. I recommend shooting 16mm or digital video. If you're using a 16mm Bolex, then you're automatically shooting MOS, meaning without sound, because they don't record sound. This isn't an issue if people aren't talking, but if they are speaking, then you need a sound camera. Then you'd either have to move up to something like an Arriflex-BL or better and have a sound man with a Nagra sound recorder or a digital sound recorder, which is sort of a big deal. Why not shoot digital video? It's got picture and sound and needs no processing.

Josh

Name: Devil Dog
E-mail:

Hi Josh,

I didn't see a link to your "Devil Dog" script in your link section. Is it online?
I'd really like to read it.

Thanks,
DD

Dear Devil Dog:

No, it's not posted. I'm still hoping to get it made.

Josh

Name: Dusty
E-mail:

Josh.

Just wondering what the mood was like on the Xena set, especially with Lucy and Renee, given that there are only a few more episodes to go before it's over.

Also, did you ever speak to Renee about her recent marriage or congratulate her, and does she seem happy with her new marital status? And what does she do with her wedding ring while filming? Also, does she and Lucy still seem as close as they have always been, and was Lucy a part of her little birthday celebration?

As for Ted and Kevin, I know Ted did an episode before yours called "When Fates Collide", but was your episode the last one for Kevin and Ted or where they scheduled to film any more after "Soul Possession" since there are only a few left to film?

One last question that you may or may not be able to answer. Do we see Renee with hair extensions and her old green sports bra and brown skirt and staff since it's a flashback to earlier times?

Dusty

Dear Dusty:

The atmosphere on the set was great; I believe that a good time was had by all. There were a few teary celebrations: Renee had her birthday, it was Kevin Smith's last ep, Ted Raimi's last ep, George Lyle, the 1st assistant director's, last ep, as well as Simon Riera, the D.P. and my last ep, too. Nevertheless, I think all concerned did very humorous work and it ought to be a rather funny episode. I did not speak to Renee about her marriage, but she seems as nice and happy as always, and I've met Steve, her husband, and he's a very nice guy. Lucy and Renee get along fine, as do Kevin Smith and Ted Raimi with Lucy and Renee. It really is a big happy family. I suppose Renee takes off her wedding ring, just like all other married actors do. As to what Renee is wearing in flashbacks, watch the episode.

Josh

Name: Ben
E-mail: ben@internetben.com

Dear Josh,

When you say you won't support anti-drug anything, I don't assume that means that you advocate drug use (but it might, who knows). Is it that you don't support soap-boxing in general, or is it because the drug war is futile? Could you elaborate.

I wrote a short script that me and some friends want to film. One guy said, "Get it into a shooting script and let's get to it." What do you suggest? When you're preparing it for yourself, you don't necessarily have to use industry-standard style, do you? Would it help to do so anyway? How does a spec-style slug line differ from a shooting-style slug line? What are the most common and useful camera descriptions?

Thanks a lot.

Ben

Dear Ben:

I am for the complete legalization of ALL drugs. If people want to do heroin or cocaine, I say, let them. I am completely against prohibition of any kind, which I believe causes crime. Regarding shooting scripts, the main difference is that a shooting script has numbered scenes, which is entirely necessary for the breakdown, budget, and schedule. I never mention cameras at all in my scripts. The closest I ever get is to say, "Our view widens to reveal . . ." Camera placement is up to the director.

Josh

Name: Cynthia E. Jones

E-mail: cynthiaejones@hotmail.com

Dear Josh,

"Traffic" is NOT an anti-drug movie. Being an advocate of the removal of drug laws myself, I went in to the theater wondering what Soderbergh would have to say. What he said was simply the truth. There's no moralizing about it, just facts. Marijuana isn't even an issue, it's considered a harmless drug compared to the thousands of pounds of cocaine and heroin entering this country every day.

As for "Erin Brockovich," for me that movie was more about the hand-held available light cinematography that Steve did in one scene, which made him so excited that he had to shoot all of "Traffic" himself, so now he's always going to be his own cinematographer. Otherwise, it was a TV-Movie-of-the-Week, yes, but it's brought recent near-toxic arsenic levels in Fallon, Nevada's water supply to light thanks to the skepticism people now feel about PG&E and their residual Chromium-6 levels in their soil. So, if one person's life can be saved from that film, directly or indirectly, that's pretty fuckin' rad for any filmmaker. (There have been nine leukemia cases reported in the last year in Fallon. The population is slightly over 1000 people.)

The social relevance issue doesn't usually exist in modern filmmaking, and that's something that has excited me about Soderbergh's recent work. Just as new pop songs are all about escape, most films are as well, and I think that's ignoring a powerful medium to send a message to the world. While escape has its time and place, Soderbergh has shown us that he can make weird, personal films, arty, expressionistic work, and now, revolutionary, truth-telling films about how the government and big corporations are fucking this country. While you and I and most educated, intelligent people take this as a matter of course, a lot of 'average' individuals living in this country, movie-attending individuals, need to be hit over the head with a sledgehammer. The government knows that Mexico is importing drugs into this country. Slam. The entire war on drugs exists as a cash cow for the government, to create tons and tons of beurocratic jobs that will do little or nothing to stop the 'drug problem,' which doesn't really exist because we created it in the first place by criminalizing plants and drugs, instead of treating addiction as a medical problem. Slam. There are a lot of people who truly think that the government is working hard to "save our children" and that's bullshit. Slam.

Movies are for the masses. A large number of people don't read books or articles that have too many words. They like pictures of Brad Pitt's new fucking hairstyle or who some chick on some sitcom is dating now, as if that fucking matters at all. It's the "weapons of mass distraction" that keep people from realizing what's really going on in the world.

Okay, I'm through ranting for now. Please go see the movie "Traffic" and think that it's going to suck completely. Think that it's going to be a tv movie of the week. Maybe you'll like it. It might surprise you. Then again, maybe you've seen everything and I just need to watch more movies to know that there is no originality left in cinema. But for now, I'm pretty stoked.

--cindy

Dear Cindy:

I think it's cool hearing anybody rave about a modern-day filmmaker. Clearly you enjoy Soderbergh's films and that's great. It's fun to be a fan and mean it. I will definitely see "Traffic" when I get back to the U.S.

P.S. I'm not much of a fan of hand-held camera work. It has it's place, but, for the most part, I like my shots to be very specific.

Josh

Name: Cynthia E. Jones
E-mail: cynthiaejones@hotmail.com

Dear Josh,

Hope everything is well in New Zealand. We're enjoying sunny 65 degree weather here in California.

Wondering what your opinion of Steven Soderbergh is. He received two nominations--one for "Traffic," and one for "Erin Brockovich," plus both films were nominated for Best Picture. Me? I'm immensely proud of Steve, and as his work in "Schizopolis" shows, he's truly an artist inside. Plus, he was the cinematographer for "Traffic," and it was shot entirely hand-held and with available light. Unheard-of. Absolutely amazing. I love Soderbergh.

As for "Gladiator," well, Ridley Scott can kiss my ass. I know you don't take much stock in the Oscars at all, but sometimes it's cool when the "indie" dudes you've loved forever, who are still being mavericks, are recognized by the "respectable" world of Oscar. I haven't cared much in years, but this year could be interesting.

Have a nice weekend,

cindy

Dear Cindy:

I finished "Soul Possession" and I think it went very well. It fits in with the other Xenas I've done quite nicely. In response to some earlier questions -- Squiggles cookies (or bisquits as they refer to them here), with their hokey pokey centers, are excellent. There was a ceremony at lunch for Renee's 30th birthday, with a cake and flowers and it was nice.

Now, as for Mr. Soderberg, I just saw "Erin Brockovich" and thought it was a TV movie with swearing. I'm supposed to actually give a crap that all these fatally ill people will get some money? They're all still going to die or something equally as awful that money won't help. I hope "Traffic," which I haven't seen, is better, but I won't support any sort of anti-drug anything, including that movie.

Josh

Name: Diana
E-mail: sdhawkes@penn.com

Hello Mr. Becker!

(relatively) long time fan, first time poster here.

How thrilling it was to stumble into your site and see you are posting from the NZ Xena location! Thrilling doesn't scratch the surface we fans feel--getting word from those involved in our favorite show.

This season Kevin Smith has carried the *comedic* ball MAGNIFICENTLY in the absence of our man Ted. I hope Mr. Tapert sent you Coming Home and Old Ares Had a Farm! (I tend to think its harder for handsome men to be truly funny, and he somehow accomplishes it!)

When you mentioned Ted's "I become more hideous..." comment, a bolt of lightening shot through me! Will these two have scenes together?! Can I slip you a C-note under the table to convince you to keep in your cut, any and all scenes with these two guys?!

And I second August's plea for any behind the scenes antics-stories of Ted's wonderful aura of goofiness. We cannot, CANNOT get enough!

Dear Diana:

Ted said that he and Kevin have done 20 episodes together and this is the very first time they've ever had lines with each other, which is sort of odd. They have entire scenes together in this ep. I must say, for a very handsome guy, Kevin Smith is hysterically funny. He comes up with great ad libs all the time, all of which I will attempt to keep in. Kevin is also an amazingly nice, pleasant fellow and joy to work with. Now I must leave for the second to last day of filming on a horribly hot stage, but I love it.

Josh

Name: Blake Eckard
E-mail: bseckard@hotmail.com

Josh,

I know you're not in the country but have you heard the awful news? Yes, we all know the academy awards are fixed, but I truly didn't think they'd ever stoop so low as to come up with the nominations they have. Gladiator swept everything! I thought all the talk out there about this film was just ridiculous bull shit hype. My god, it wasn't! When I heard the announcement this morning I nearly choked on my coffee. I blurted out a

very bad cuss word and then ripped the belt from my pants and whiped the hell out of my chair. It didn't make me feel better.

It's time for something harsh to happen to the academey members who apparentally have gone totally brain dead. This is too much.

(I do think that Traffic was a perfect film. It's the only sane nomination on the ballet.)

Blake Eckard

Dear Blake:

I haven't heard the nominations, but I must say I'm not surprised. Since Hollywood only puts out bullshit now, obviously bullshit will get nominated, something's going to. I haven't really cared about the Oscars in many years, so it doesn't upset me at all.

Josh

Name: jason adam keller
E-mail:

hey josh,

sounds like the episode is coming together nicely. can't wait to see your work. i was wondering if you can wish renee a happy 30th b-day from some of her fans..thanks...

Dear Jason:

I'll do my best to remember. Once I get to the set, I have a tendency to not remember anything but what's occurring directly in front of me.

Josh

Name: F. R.
E-mail: swanlandprods@yahoo.com

Dear Josh,

Hey, thanks for making me genuinely "LOL" at the office today! I've got some down-time & decided to use it to look around my usual websites, including yours. I read Ted's comment on Kevin Smith and literally burst out laughing. Thank goodness I wasn't drinking milk at the time... "Spit take," anyone?

Can't wait to see the episode you've been working on. You directing, Ted and Kevin Smith guest starring...yeah, a keeper. It will also be interesting to watch it while thinking about some of the production info you've been providing us.

And here's a reply to Jim, to whom you replied a couple of days ago about film as a collaborative medium. Jim had thought I had misunderstood your intent, which you have always made amply clear: "it takes a village" to make a film, and the auteur theory just cannot hold up in the harsh light of reality. Well, Josh, to second what you wrote in your reply to Jim: *you bet* film is collaborative. I should know; I'm a collaborator. Am I in charge of the set, or am I determining how the scene will be shot, or am I the one who wrote the words, or am I the one embodying the character in front of the camera? Hell, no. Could this film (or, in my current case, TV program) be completed without me, or someone just like me, doing my job (in my current case, production coordinator)? Again, hell, no. *Everyone* on the set or in the production office has an important role to play in getting "picture up."

I think Jim is mistaking "collaboration" for "democracy" when he stated, more or less, that the more people in the process, the more a "single vision" becomes something diluted. Well, it's not like we're talking about the wardrobe designer telling an actor how to play a scene, or that the D.P. has a say in casting, etc. There *is* a hierarchy on the set, where each person knows who to report to, so that the right person can give an answer to any question.

However, I will agree with Jim (and I bet Josh will agree here, too) that films do get screwed up when there's a whole committee of people involved in decision-making. But the writer is usually not part of this committee; nope, I'm referring to TPTB that control any particular show. As Josh pointed out in his reply to Russ, the producer (or, tell it like it is, producerS) come in and make a million requests, demands or restrictions, based on budget, "marketing department research," last-minute production emergencies (e.g., a location fell through, an actor had to be re-cast, etc.), hell, maybe even based on a particularly convincing hallucination. And the producer may in turn have to adjust his or her vision to fit what "the money" wants (whether it's a studio, foreign financing entity, network, syndicator, etc.). Sometimes it's hard to identify just who are "TPTB." I think this crowd of "suits" is what leads films and TV to try to appeal to the lowest common denominator, or to fit what the market research wanted, and that's when movies get soul-less.

Of course, on the other hand, filmmaking is neither free nor inexpensive. You have to get money from someone, somewhere. And, the movie has to be seen, so you have to find some way, somehow to get distribution (and Josh has certainly illuminated for us how tough it is to get your film "out there"). So, as nice as it would be to say "screw you" to the money guys...well, you see where there is an unfortunate necessity to adjust "the vision." But, as Josh told Russ, "it's your job to deal with" the restrictions you're given, and to find creative solutions.

But, please -- don't blame the writer for that. I mean, how frustrating is it for a person who came up with an idea, massaged it and nursed it until it became a two-hour screenplay full of interesting characters, plot twists, brilliant dialogue, etc. (in a perfect world, sure), and then to show up at the theatre for the premiere (because, after all, the writer may not have been

allowed to visit the set) only to see that this creation of his is now "A Film By..." some other guy. C'mon, give the poor ink-stained wretches a break!

Film (& TV) is collaborative medium, period. If you want to see a true "single vision," read a book.

Thanks for letting me vent, and thanks (to you *and* Ted) for the laugh. Hope editing goes smoothly, and that your trip back to the States is somehow an enjoyable way to spend, what, 10 hours or so.

best,
F. R.

Dear F.R.:

Thanks for the clarification, which I agree with. There's still this false notion floating around that art is about "freedom." It's not; it's about restriction. Each decision made -- the story's about this, so it's not about that, we'll shoot it here as opposed to anywhere else, we'll cast these actors, not those, they'll interpret it their way, not some other way -- is a restriction on pure freedom. Pure freedom in art is chaos.

Josh

Name: Watermelon Man
E-mail: spittinseeds@aol.com

Josh,

Do you have a new script ready to be filmed? Or, are you writing something new?

BTW, great site!

Dear Watermelon Man:

I have many scripts, 28 to be exact, and I'm working on another one now. I would really love to shoot my World War One script, "Devil Dogs."

Josh

Name: Hud
E-mail:

Dear Josh:

When "Xena" ends will Renaissance Pictures leave New Zealand and head to LA?

Thanks,
Hud

Dear Hud:

Renaissance Pictures is already located in L.A. Pacific Renaissance, their New Zealand division, will probably close down with no shows to shoot.

Josh

Name: Ren
E-mail:

Josh dear,

Do you still have a major crush on Renee O'Connor?

Ren

Dear Ren:

I never had a MAJOR crush on her, or Lucy, but I sure do like working with both of them. I don't have a crush on Kevin Smith, either, and he's terrific to work with, too. Besides, Renee's an old married lady now and this sort of talk is unseemly.

Josh

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