

Josh Becker DGA

Directing From The Edge



Q & A Archive
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Name: Christa
E-mail: sgrave2@yahoo.com

Dear Josh:

I shouldn't have used the word "trend" in my question. Once again, I do know that there have been actors who also directed. I was just asking what you thought about SO MANY actors now getting into directing, owning production companies, etc. I was only asking for an opinion, not a lesson. I realize now that I should have analyzed my wording better (both times).

Christa

Dear Christa:

Well, *excuse me*. Actors, being human beings, have just as good a chance of being competent directors as anyone else. Why should a former writer or producer or music video director, for that matter, be any better at it?

Josh

Name: Christa
E-mail: sgrave2@yahoo.com

Mr. Becker,

I do realize that movies are made all over the world. I was just using the word "Hollywood" as an example of what many directors look to, to be considered "a success". Ang Lee, makes movies in his native country, but he sure doesn't turn his back on "Hollywood" when "it" comes calling,

(whether with the big bucks or with gold-plated statues in hand). I sincerely do hope that you achieve the success that YOU deem to be "enough".....

Also, I was wondering what you think about the trend of actors wanting to direct? Not necessarily the actors that can no longer get parts, but more like the big star types that all seem to have their own production companies these days,(i.e. Jodie Foster heading up Egg Pictures). Do you feel like they should spend some of their millions hiring a director such as yourself? Or, do you think that the years spent in front of a camera would give them a keen "awareness" when standing behind it?

Thanks again for your time...

Christa

Dear Christa:

What do you mean, "trend"? Actors have always been directors. D.W. Griffith was first an actor, Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles, etc. Raoul Walsh was John Wilkes Booth in "Birth of a Nation." And directors generally seem to make pretty good actors, too, like Sydney Pollack and Martin Scorsese.

Josh

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

Dear Josh,

Yes, I agree with you about that opening five minutes of "Lives." After that scene where Harold Russell is looking out the window, with that golden light on his face...he looks like an angel. All I could think was "wow...I'm excited about the next two and a half hours!"

I just saw "Blow" last night at a press screening. Johnny "pretty boy" Depp delivered a fine performance. Rachel Griffiths and Ray Liotta played his parents, which was fascinating (young people in old age makeup--hmmm), and Penelope Cruz didn't really do anything for me. But the story was good, "Traffic"-style, except with a PROTAGONIST, and yes! A conflict, resolution, and ending. My God! So simple, yet so elusive.

I think unlike Benedict, who said earlier about how he doesn't care if a plot exists in a comedy if it can make him laugh. Cheech and Chong comedies are only watchable when stoned. No structure is needed 'cos it's an excuse to watch Tommy and Cheech get high. The first two times I ever watched "Nice Dreams," it didn't get any funnier. Then I watched it stoned, and it made sense. But, honestly, there's no structure...so I just don't think that they're good movies. Watching someone fart makes me laugh, but that doesn't make a good movie. Lots of things that make me laugh my ass off would make horrible movies. This is what gets us awful "humor" like "America's Funniest Bathroom Accidents."

Have a lovely Wednesday. There's a cold front moving in to California...

--cindy

Dear Cindy:

Yes, there sure is. I'm a tad chilly right now. There are a lines from "Best years . . ." that never leave my head, like Fredric March saying to Myrna Loy, "Last year it was kill Japs; this year it's make money." And how he could never leave his "big fat job at a big fat bank." Also, regarding Myrna Loy who is so great in the film, she not only did not win the Oscar that year, she wasn't even nominated! I'm still outraged for her. That Jennifer Jones was nominated for "Duel in the Sun" only makes it worse.

Josh

Name: Steph McEvoy
E-mail: soinc@n-jcenter.com

Josh,

I'm loving your articles (very refreshing after reading the junk from other websites and message boards), especially your views about sequels and remakes, theme and irony, and, my favorite, smoking.

I quit smoking and drinking coffee a while back at the request of my husband, started working out with a personal trainer. I immediately went into a writing slump, couldn't write to save my life. Just missed the caffiene and the nicotine, even missed saying "Benson and Hedges Menthol Deluxe Ultra Lights" to the hapless counter folks who would point at the lovely lines of packs, while I imagined the people behind me scowling in their hate for the smoker holding up the line.

Then, I found myself leaving the gym and heading straight for the Speedway, then hitting the drive-thru at Duncan Donuts (couldn't wait for the cappachino machine at home to pump out my caffiene, oh no, had to have it hot and ready for when I sat down to write and light up). I'm writing again and, even better, I have a secret to hide around the house, making everything a bit more exciting in a perverse sort of way.

Last fall, I went to Europe, starting in Amsterdam, and was charmed by the fact that everybody smokes and nobody cares. My husband, feeling the old "when in Rome," let me smoke cigarettes in peace throughout the trip, down the Rhine, and eventually in Rome. I watched other Americans there, going outside to smoke while the Germans smoked without guilt at their tables in the bars, and resented that guilt within myself. Ah well, it's good to be back with my favorite crutches (and Lysol Lemon Spray). I don't know what it is but it helps the writing.

Thanks for the articles. If you give kickbacks for clicks on your site, thank Bruce Campbell because I found your website there. Or just kick him back.

(Just kidding. I wrote him a while back and he answered me, very kind of him. He's a prince.)

Steph McEvoy

Dear Steph:

Thanks for the lovely missive. I think the answer, interestingly, is that nicotine is a creative drug. It's that drug that's causing many of our more interesting ideas, as well as the many creative people who smoked before us. I absolutely love Amsterdam and have never felt so at home anywhere else in my life.

Josh

Name: Christa
E-mail: sgrave2@yahoo.com

Mr. Becker,

I was just wondering, if your disdain for "showbiz" is so high, would you ever just leave the business completely? Or, are you of the "never give up, never give in" school of thought? Since Hollywood is essentially run by the rules of...who you know...how far you're willing to bend(over)...and how well you pucker-up...would you ever completely compromise your belief system to get a job?

Thanks for your time...

Christa

P.S. The DGA after your name, did you get that through the trainee program or putting in enough hours as a PA or...?

Dear Christa:

My bravado about not kissing ass is a fairly recent development. If I happen to not be a whore, it's not that I wasn't completely eager to be one for most of my life. I've simply tried to take what seemed like a deficit and make it into an attribute. Since I've never officially been part of the Hollywood movie business, it wouldn't be difficult to leave it. People do make movies all over the world and have nothing to do with Hollywood. Regarding the making of movies, I will "never give up & never give in," but it may well not be in Hollywood. About the DGA after my name, which I use like M.D. or D.D.S., I joined the Director's Guild in 1993 when I was a 2nd unit director (I had already directed two features at that point), I did not go through their training program.

Josh

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

Dear Josh,

I agree with you on "High Fidelity." Much like "Almost Famous," I heard a lot about how much I would love "Fidelity" and watched it with amusement. While I liked the tone of the film, the overall structure was lacking and felt thrown together as a series of scenes, reasons to highlight the caustic wit of Jack Black, and making a movie about record store geeks for record store geeks because they need one and "Empire Records" wasn't it. Upon a second viewing, I found I wasn't drawn in because the story didn't hold up. (Throwing the new girlfriend in with four old ones really lessens the impact of the need for the two of them to get back together.)

I don't know that Spielberg and Bruckheimer should even be mentioned in the same sentence, but that's because I really love "Jaws" and hate everything Bruckheimer has touched (including Don Simpson). As far as that argument goes, comparing your structural concepts with a "test market" mentality will never work. Test audiences rarely like good endings, and in fact, ask for them to be changed if they are made to feel "uncomfortable." Inexplicable wrap-ups, such as "The Rock"'s ending where Nic Cage can NOT ONLY read microfiche with his bare eyeballs and no magnification, but can tell who shot Kennedy from files made in 1962, before the assassination ever happened, are unforgivable. When the last fadeout line of your film isn't even remotely near making sense, that's bad movie making. I know, it isn't in the dictionary, but "The Rock" would fit as an entry. Why did I see it? Nic Cage. Oh, how he has failed me. But then, I have to remember, actors gotta eat, too! Now I know to avoid Bruckheimer.

So, the point is, even if your structure is flawless, your film might suck, but your film can't be great if you have no structure. Good, but not great. It doesn't hold up. The reason a story is compelling is because you want to see what's going to happen. Sentences cannot be read if they don't have a subject and verb. They are fragments. Likewise film.

I rented "The Best Years of Our Lives" this weekend. Thank you. I've been putting off seeing this movie (because it's 164 minutes--what a stupid reason!) for a long time, I got it on DVD and it's gorgeous. Gregg Toland? Man, why did I wait so long! Wonderful, wonderful movie. And I love Myrna Loy. Have any other movies used "real" disabled people again? Wonderful.

--cindy

Dear Cindy:

I've been waiting for you to check back in. "The Best Years of Our Lives" is as good as movies get, in my humble opinion. Toland's photography is awesome. The early scene of the three men coming home in the belly gun of the plane is too much and it's five minutes into the movie, and it's all process. I love Homer lighting everybody's cigarettes, getting to himself third and asking, "Anyone superstitious?" The other guys say no and Homer replies, "Well I am" and lights another match. Harold Russell, who

plays Homer, made one other movie called "Inside Moves" in 1980, which is just OK.

Josh

Name: Georgia
E-mail: glantonyshyn@home.com

Josh

2 questions, you said Lucy Lawless has a part in a film, does she have a lead part or a smaller part in this film? 2, you said that Xena will still have repeats but the new season will be cancelled and which season do you mean and why the new season only to be cancelled? Is that the reason for the possible rumors of the death of the Warrior Princess has been on the internet and news? I guess it does keep interest on the outcome in June and much talk at the convention that takes place in May.

Thanks
Georgia

Dear Georgia:

1. Apparently, there is no movie.
2. The show "Xena: Warrior Princess" was cancelled after six seasons, and they have now completed shooting the sixth season. New episode-wise, that's it. Rerun-wise, it will probably continue to run for years to come.

Josh

Name: Rose
E-mail: rosebude@aol.com

Hi

Josh I first want to thank you for such an interesting site they are all informative a very interesting. I was on your question and answer page and saw a post that mentioned Rennie Harlan and that Lucy might be doing a movie. I would like to know about Rennie and to check out this movie and if Lucy indeed will be starring in it.

I also want to thank you from my heart for writing about Xena and supplying pictures it was good to see where Lucy lives. This is such a special treat for a fan to actually write directly to a director and get an answer thank you again. Looking forward to hearing from you about Rennie Harlan take care cheers

Dear Rose:

Now the rumour is that the whole film fell through.

Josh

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

Dear Josh:

The Spielberg and Bruckheimer comment meant that every director has an aspect that they rely heavily on, that they go for before anything else. Primarily, Bruck goes for action, Spiel goes for drama (heart-felt, humanitarian stuff), and you go for structure. When I want to see a well-planned story, I'll see one of yours. If I want to see shit explode, I'll watch Bruck.

I guess I just get the wrong impression from you. Judging by your commentary and advice, if a movie doesn't have structure, then it's absolute shit. This was the first time I heard you say anything positive about a movie that you didn't officially like (High Fidelity). True, when I see a movie, I come out thinking of how I could have made it better, but I still might say, "Well, it was funny, anyway," and therefore consider it worth watching. I didn't think that happened with you, but maybe it does. A movie with bad structure can still make me laugh, cry, think, shriek -- any of the typical desired reactions from film. If it does, I consider it a good movie.

Whether it is or isn't the case with you doesn't matter. But I'd rather not be so sensitive to one aspect (structure) that gets so routinely ignored in today's films.

Dear Benedict:

But Jerry Bruckheimer pays more attention to structure than most of today's filmmakers, even if his films are knuckle-headed actioners. Drama, to work properly, certainly needs structure. These things are not exclusive of one another. "High Fidelity" would have worked better with better structure, a theme, and a point. As it is, I was amused and laughed several times, but it had no resonance, which is too bad.

Josh

Name: Ted Ryan
E-mail: ecryan@holycross.edu

Josh,

I've never seen any of your flicks. But, I did your essays, and i really was struck by the line, "If you see a trend, then it's gone."

I was wondering if you can see yourself directing a larger budget film in the future? Do you think you'll ever get the opportunity. Or, do you think you'd have to sell your soul and make some sappy Robert Zemeckis type movie? It must be pretty frustrating.

Alright, I'm going to try to rent one of your movies this week.

--Ted

Dear Ted:

I can envision myself directing a high-budget movie, I just can't see myself eating the required amount of shit to get it. My disdain for the film business and the people in it is so high that I can't hide it anymore.

Josh

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

Josh,

I may not have been clear. By POV, I wasn't asking about main point of view, but rather seeing what the character sees and experiences. I don't want to go back and quote you, but you said something about the people in Aliens didn't know what was going on, so why should we? Then you say you don't buy the "that's what war is like" argument from another guy about Gladiator, because you're just a guy in a theatre, and you don't want to be jostled around. Either you don't believe war is chaotic or you don't think it should be manifested in the film style.

By the way, Maximus' motivation was not that he didn't get to be Emporer; he didn't want to be Emporer. His motivation was (and we know about the tree that bears no fruit) that his wife and kid were killed. Or you could say that his motivation was regaining his freedom. But I don't expect you to get too worried about plot misunderstandings when you have no interest in the movie.

You also said that you, unlike most others, have criteria for what makes a good movie. You've made it widely known that once you have structure, you're well on your way to a good movie. I don't blame you for being uninterested in today's movies, and what you don't like may make them textbook bad, but I checked some resources and there doesn't seem to be an entry in any dictionary for "bad movie." So while I'm not telling you anything new by saying that this entire Web site is opinion, I may be telling you something new by saying that not everybody's viewing experience can be so easily shattered as yours. If I watch a comedy that makes me laugh, I don't care if the plot was good; I don't care if the characters are well-developed.

You're a good filmmaker, and the fact that you've even made films with your own devotion and drive is incredible. But I don't envy your enlightened state of film viewing that doesn't allow you to enjoy anything that doesn't follow the three-act structure, even though it might be, technically, a less-than-perfect movie. But it is good to have you here; at the very least, it will keep one filmmaker out there making movies with decent structure. Let Spielberg worry about the drama, and Bruckheimer worry about the action.

Thanks.

Benedict

Dear Benedict:

What you are insinuating, which is perfectly OK with me, is that by having criteria, I am the limited one. A gourmet is not limited, they simply have a more fine-tuned palate. I know why I like what I like, and I also know why I don't like what I don't like. "Gladiator" is a stupid "Spartacus" rip-off, as well as a rip-off of "The Fall of the Roman Empire." It has one-dimensional characters, no theme, no point and is badly motivated and plotted. And it's not like "Spartacus" was considered a particularly intellectual film in its day, but it's miles ahead of "Gladiator." Regarding my "enlightened" state and not enjoying films with no structure, I finally saw "High Fidelity," which I'd say is a structureless mess, and I liked it a lot better than "Gladiator" or "Traffic." However, "High Fidelity" could have been a lot better had it some structure, a theme and a point. And, like everything else these days, it's a half hour too long. Nevertheless, the characters were well-observed and I believed the situation. I'm not sure what your last line about Spielberg and Bruckheimer means.

Josh

Name: Carl Schmitt
E-mail: schmitc_brodie@yahoo.com

Dear Josh:

I was wondering about a script I read about called Cleveland Smith Bounty Hunter. I was wondering when you did it, about the 10 minute clip, and why it wasn't made? Thanks.

Dear Carl:

It's funny you mention that script in that I just dug it out so that it might be posted on this website. Scott Spiegel and I made a short, 16mm film called "Cleveland Smith Bounty Hunter" in 1981. We adapted it into a feature script over 1983-84 and tried to raise money to shoot it, but we were never able to achieve that and finally dropped it. If you'd like to read it, it will be posted here in not too very long.

Josh

Name: Jay
E-mail: ZeBoneHead@aol.com

Dear Josh:

Do you ever intend to quit smoking?

Dear Jay:

Nope.

Josh

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

Hi again Josh,

You're giving too much away! Your matter-of-fact answers are destroying me! My heart can't take your words that Ted and Kevin will not be in the Japan finale!

I prefer to tell myself that while filming your episode, SP, either or both ALSO filmed a scene or two for either the finale or one of the seven remaining new eps. You know, blue screen or "dream sequence" or something. So technically your saying that SP was their final ep meant final "filmed" ep.! (They film out of order, no?) Ted himself said just this week at a convention that he will be in THREE more, so "SP", "When Fates Collide", and a mystery third one! Ted is known to be cryptic and liberal with his statements...so his appearance may be in the form of a "clip show", and you may not be aware that a musical ep. was recently canceled so maybe Ted and Alexandra Tydings stayed on in NZ.

But please tell me my theory is *possible* and I will be happy and back on pins and needles, which is where any self respecting, die-hard fan wants to be! (We're masochistic that way.)

Have some fun with us and give us a "blind item", a cryptic clue about something that happens in SP. Something we'll never figure out but when we see it, we'll say "of course that's what he meant!" Maybe a clue about what is in those pics you posted up. I happen to think the sign that says C.H.A.K.R.U.M. in your photo means our clan are at a future fan club gathering. That'd be a hoot.

Dear Diana:

OK, here are my clues indicating that what I said was true (although, of course, anything's possible): there were last-episode ceremonies and flowers for both Ted and Kevin on the set of SP; they always did shoot the episodes in order; I read the last three scripts and there were no references to either Joxer or Ares; Rob Tapert called me the day before yesterday and left a message saying he was on his way to the set for the very last day of principal shooting of "Xena" (he did say both a 2nd and a 3rd unit were still shooting, though). So, that's what I know. As far as a "blind item" goes, how about "Goat cheese milkshakes."

Josh

Name: Mike Jones
E-mail: TheDarkPanda@aol.com

Dear Josh:

Why isn't the screenplay for "Lunatics: A Love Story" on your website? I have it on tape, (\$70 well spent, via amazon) but i'd really like to read the screenplay. Thanks for reading this stupid letter.

-Mike

Dear Mike:

Nothing stupid about it, the script for "Lunatics" ought to be posted. Shirley and I were just discussing it since I don't even have the unaccessible disks it was written on (an Apple 2C) and the OCR program in my scanner sucks. Shirley, the webmaster, has very kindly offered to re-type it in. So, it will be coming soon.

Josh

Name: Iona
E-mail:

Just curious Josh.

I know your good buddies with Ted, so do you know whether or not Ted will be appearing in the two-part Season finale of Xena that was directed by Rob?

Also you said you had already heard about Renee and the upcoming addition to her family, but it was just confirmed yesterday. When were you informed of her condition and by who? And was she pregnant when you directed "SP"?

Thanks.
Iona

Dear Iona:

Yes, I heard the news when I was down in NZ from Mr. Robert Tapert. And no, Ted is not in the final episode. "Soul Possession" is his final episode, too.

Josh

Name: Renee
E-mail: Nickipook@aol.com

Dear Josh:

What do you think Lucy Lawless will do next in her future career? I really am obsessed with the show and it pains me to see it come to an end. Obviously, the cast and crew have done a spectacular job in showing the life of a warrior princess who befriends a bard. Also, will there be reruns after the show is over? I hope so, because I don't want to suffer from Xena Withdrawl Syndrome!! Good Luck!

Sincerely
A dedicated Xenite

Dear Renee:

It's been in re-runs for years already. The re-runs aren't cancelled, it's the new shows that are cancelled. I hear that Lucy got a part in Rennie Harlan's new film.

Josh

Name: patrik
E-mail: waltermad@hotmail.com

Hey Josh.

One question: What do you think of Dario Argento and his films?

Another one: Do you like Lucio Fulci?

Dear Patrik:

I'm not a fan of either one, although I kind of like the screenplay for "Once Upon a Time in the West" which Dario Argento co-wrote with Bernardo Bertolucci and Sergio Leone.

Josh

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

Dear Josh,

I just read your [essays on structure](#). I'm working on a film with my friend, who's stuck on a few points, and you've distilled it to it's simplest essence. I would like to thank you on making filmmaking, or storytelling on film, into a zen practice. One cannot learn to run before one can walk. So simple, yet so ignored all the time. Guy Ritchie? Too many style over substance directors to mention. Thank you for a clear view. Coppola ("Cotton Club") could've used your advice a few times.

Once again, I must reiterate how cool "Running Time" was. I didn't even know it was shot on 16mm 'cos it looked so good. I've made four of my friends watch it so far...all of them have been impressed.

So, know that this one startup filmmaker is going to listen to your advice. And...don't worry about your age so much. Time is relative.

--cindy

Dear Cindy:

As Jack Warner said to Albert Einstein as he showed him around the Warners lot in the 1930s, "I'll tell you my theory of relatives -- don't hire them." Yes, I agree with your observation that story structure is a Zen-like thing, in that freedom arises from structure. Until you know your structure, you can't move deeper into the story, which, for me, is where the real interest lies. Have fun.

Josh

Name: Justin Salibrici
E-mail: jsalibri@radford.edu

Hey Josh Becker,

Running Time was an insanely bad-ass and innovative film. I'm in a cinema class, and on April 23, I was going to make a short presentation of your

movie, if you don't mind. I was wondering what clip you'd suggest for presenting (it's got to be under five minutes). I was leaning towards the part beginning from when Patrick says, "I'll kill you for the fun of it!;" to when they are running away and Carl gets shot. I thought I might introduce the clip and give some details about the difficulty you had writing the script and shooting in "real time". I wasn't sure if you had any suggestions for presenting your film in the best possible way in a period of a few minutes.

Sincerely,
Justin Salibrici

Dear Justin:

That sounds like a good clip, although it's certainly a difficult film to pull a clip from. I'm honored you chose my film for your presentation. Good luck and I hope you get an 'A'.

Josh

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

Dear Josh,

Regarding "Gladiator" and "Aliens," how come the "it's what the character knows/sees" doesn't work for the former, but it does for the latter? I seems like absolute bias, but I can't figure out why "Aliens" would be any less attacked. It was a big Hollywood movie made solely for the profit, and it capitalized off of a then-original, sci-fi alien plot and morphed it into the type of action sequences that you deride "The Matrix" for. (Not the exact same action, but still loud and dumb.)

Maybe in "Gladiator," you could say they overdid it, but how can they be that dissimilar that one is absolute dogshit and the other is mysterious.

I can completely understand that one is designed to cause mystery while one is designed to cause confusion, but you don't want to be just some guy in the theatre; you want to be in the film.

At the very least, say you enjoyed one, but not the other, but admit that it's a matter of preference, which is fine. If you simply didn't like what you experienced in "Gladiator," then say that. But both movies did the same thing--put the audience in the character's point of view.

Basically, it all comes down to a self-contradiction while defending a film you liked and ridiculing a movie you hate.

Thanks.

Benedict

Dear Benedict:

Confusion is a mistake, mystery is craft or even artistry. Certainly this is all about preference, but unlike most anyone else, I actually have criteria for what makes a good movie. I get a sense that most people think it's some sort of alchemy where you throw various things into a pot and sometimes it comes out good and other times not. If you're trying to make a good soup, you actually can know what ingredients to put in. My argument about no POV was against "Traffic," not "Gladiator." "Gladiator" does have a lead character and POV, it's just not a good one. Maximus is a dumb character with poor motivation ("But I wanted to be Emperor and they wouldn't let me. What!"). I completely believe the motivations of the crew of the Nostromo -- get the minerals in space and bring them back to Earth, and if you come across any life-forms, check them out. Motivation is the basis of drama -- why are the characters doing what they're doing?

Josh

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

Josh,

Got to thinking about how your buddy is making a 16mm film (I currently am too)...Well, if he's shooting his entire picture with a Bolex it must be a silent film? Bolex cameras aren't sync sound like a BL or SR2. They are great, I suppose, for 2nd unit type stuff where sound isn't necessary but you can't get sound to ever match a "wild" camera. Or am I wrong?

Also, what type of rolls go into a Bolex? 50ft., 100ft? Has he processed any of the footage yet? It amazes me that he has 85% shot and hasn't spent ten grand. Good luck to him!

Blake Eckard

Dear Blake:

He's processed all the film and it looks great. Regarding sync sound, which, as you've stated, a Bolex doesn't do, most of his film has no dialog. The thirty-five rolls we shot are all visual and are clearly telling an interesting story, but there's no talk. There will be, however. He intends to rent a Arri-BL and sound equipment for one weekend and shoot out all his dialog scenes -- this way he just pays the rental for Friday and returns the equipment on Monday. He has already shot all the dialog scenes on video as rehearsal so when he gets the sound film equipment he'll just blast through it. Nevertheless, you can shoot dialog with a Bolex as long as you don't go into close-ups and just put it in later. Also, if you shoot over-the-shoulder shots, you simply cut it opposite of how you generally see it, so that you're over the shoulder of whomever is talking so you can't see their mouth.

Josh

Name: Gary
E-mail: mofo@biomech.cjb.net

Josh,

I just finished reading "buds". You should really consider making this film with Bruce. It is a great script and would make a pretty good film.

Gary.

Dear Gary:

It's not that I don't want to make it, I simply haven't got the financing. Right now all I have is enormous debt from making the last film. If I can ever get out of this, then we'll see what comes next. Thanks for reading the script.

Josh

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

Josh,

Would you ever shoot a feature on 16mm again? It sure is cost effective and with RT you did a good job of getting a stock that looks very close to 35mm...But so many filmmakers are leery to work with it. If it can look good and costs half as much what's wrong?

Oh, and just for arguments sake...You mentioned that it isn't good to be confused in a movie like you were durring "Gladiator" and "Traffic". Well, I didn't like "Gladiator" one bit. "Traffic" is a great film...at least to me. I wasn't confused durring it, but I do see what you mean about the opening battle in "Gladiator". Now, with that said, how do you feel about various scenes in "Alien", "Blue Velvet", or "Apocalypse Now"? I'm sure you'll agree that there are some very confusing scenes in these films. In "Alien" you have no idea not only what the creature looks like, but how it's killing the crew. Everything is filmed in an extreme close up and in the dark. In "Apocalypse" people still wonder what the ending is about, and it's also edited in a dreamy\confusing type way. And in "Blue Velvet" the whole movie is odd, but especially the ending in Dorothy Vallen's apartment...dead bodies can't stand up! But do these scenes ruin anything? Not for me. Do they "take you out of the movie" and prevent you from "getting lost in it"?...No way. If anything they add character to the them...It's unique, something diffrent. I picked three titles that are on your list of favorite films just to make sure you wouldn't say the pictures sucked to begin with.

Sincerely,

Blake Eckard

Dear Blake:

I think there's a huge difference between confusion and mystery. If the direction, camerawork, and editing are so crappy that I can't tell what's happening -- when the lead character clearly knows whose arm he just cut off -- that's confusion based on poor filmmaking, as opposed to not knowing what's stalking the character when the character themselves doesn't know what's stalking them, that's mystery. In "Alien," "Blue Velvet" and "Apocalypse Now" I am intrigued and caught up with a character, and whatever now happens to them is happening to me. I don't know why Dennis Hopper's character in BV is so crazy, but neither does Kyle MacLachlan. Since Sigourney Weaver hasn't gotten a good look at the alien, why should I? In all honesty, however, act three of both "Alien" and "Apocalypse Now" stink.

As for shooting another feature in 16mm, I can easily envision it, and it's less than half the cost. You save many thousands in post by having a 3500 foot movie instead of 10,000 foot movie. My buddy, Paul, has been shooting a 16mm feature with his Bolex for the past year or so and is about 85% shot and he hasn't spent \$10,000. And it looks great. I operated camera on the first 35 rolls of film for him and we shot a lot of it in his apartment between 3:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M. when the setting sunlight beamed through the windows and it's gorgeous. It looks like a really good D.P. lit it and we didn't do anything but be there at the right time. I love that. I have a Bolex, too, and I'd really like to use it.

Josh

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

Dear Josh,

Aha! Finally after some eBay work, I was able to procure a copy of "Running Time" (VHS--no commentary) and watch it yesterday for the first time. Wow. After having seen "Lunatics" as the only thing you've done (over ten years ago!), I must tell you: I can find nothing wrong with this film. I was sitting there, trying to find a flaw, something to dislike, some bad actor, or bad delivery, or bad camerawork--nothing. Of course, I wanted to like it, but there was a part of me that wanted to say, 'Look, there, that's not great,' because you can be so damn opinionated about films. And of course there's nothing I can criticize. I'm sure YOU could, since it was your own film, but I would like to congratulate you on a great movie. Beautifully shot, beautifully acted (so glad to see Bruce NOT in a comedy), wonderfully written--thank you. You're the guy who's doing things the right way and I just want you to know that I noticed. Of course, I can't pay you millions of dollars to PLEASE replace all the jobs that Michael Bay or that "See Spot Run" guy is getting...but I hope someone figures it out before you're eighty. Wow. Now I need to see "TSNK...E," and "Hammer" whenever possible.

Thank you for making my Monday a fantastic thing.

--cindy

Dear Cindy:

Thanks, I'm very glad you liked it.

Josh

Name: Marcello

E-mail:

Dear Josh:

Thanks a lot for those answers! It was just for a stupid quiz with a friend of mine. That last question was one of those silly trick questions, When Spencer Tracy won for "Captains Courageous" it was inscribed 'To Dick Tracy'.

Anyway, thanks for the help!

Dear Marcello:

Hit me with your best shot, dude, I'm ready.

Josh

Name: Rob Gregory-Browne

E-mail: rob@gregorybrowne.com

Dear Josh:

Read your comments on Traffic and couldn't disagree with you more. While I don't think it's the great and wonderful movie the critics are calling it, it's certainly head and shoulders above much of Hollywood's product.

You pointed out that there wasn't a main character, then you proceed to break it down into three stories and guess what? Each of those stories has a main character. What do you know!

The traditional movie will, of course, have a main character with a specific goal, but this was not, obviously, a traditional movie. Yet it works.

Your frustration with the storylines is understood, but guess what? You were supposed to be frustrated. The whole point of the movie is that the

people running the drug war are clueless idiots, and the people down in the Mexican trenches DON'T know which side they're on.

Oh, and the look of Traffic was certainly part of its appeal. As I read your scathing criticism I had to wonder if you were awake when you saw the movie.

Rob GB

Dear Rob:

Although the film was relentlessly trying to put me to sleep, sadly I was awake throughout its ridiculously long running time. It's like when I bitch about not knowing what's going on in the fight scenes in "Gladiator" and the reply is, "You're not supposed to know what's going on. That's what it would be like in a real battle." Sorry, I'm not in a real battle, I'm a guy sitting in a movie theater trying to lose myself in this film. The exact moment I become confused and don't know what's occurring in front of my eyes, I'm thrown out of the movie and I'm a guy sitting in a movie theater again. A story needs to have a point of view, meaning the lead character's, which then becomes the viewer's point of view. Without this, once again, I'm just a guy sitting in a movie theater, not a participant in the story. The biggest joke at the Oscars was giving "Traffic" best editing when it's so deadly overlong. Regarding the "Yet it works" statement, for me, by the 145th minute, I was as bored and aggravated as I've ever been in any movie ever. That this film was "head and shoulders above much of Hollywood's product" is like the comparison of dog shit to cow shit. Which smells worse? Honestly, who cares?

Josh

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