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Introduction

Do you dream of someday making an independent film? Can you picture your low-budget masterpiece debuting at Sundance next year? Can you see the poster for your indie feature under the lights of New York's Angelika Theater or L.A.'s Laemmle's Sunset 5? There has never been a better time to dream and achieve each of these goals if you know what to do and what pitfalls to look out for.

Today anyone hoping to make a terrific-looking narrative feature or full-length documentary can shoot in filmlike 24p digital video, assemble everything on a decent laptop using intuitive and affordable editing software, put a trailer up on YouTube and Facebook, and distribute the finished product on professionally replicated DVDs for only a dollar per disc. There are more avenues for getting independently financed shorts and feature films seen than ever before, allowing aspiring filmmakers who may or may not have gone to leading film schools to showcase their talents.

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Developments that promised to revolutionize film production and democratize the industry have arrived, and all the tools anyone would ever need are available, affordable, and within reach. The technology needed to make independent films will only get cheaper and better, and the reasons to go through traditional middlemen will increasingly fall away, allowing filmmakers to self-publish and be totally independent from anywhere. In this environment, all that is needed is a passion for storytelling, a reservoir of perseverance, and a modicum of talent. Gone are the days when aspiring filmmakers had to spend thousands of dollars to have dozens of fragile MiniDV tapes digitized in real time before they could be edited on a slow-as-molasses computer. Today, many HD cameras record directly to memory cards or high-capacity hard drives, allowing each day's footage to be quickly imported into Avid or Final Cut Pro 6 as easily as copying a Word file from a pocket USB drive. Indeed, filmmakers can now make their editing "selects" immediately and start assembling a project in their living rooms in full, uncompressed HD, without having to wait for a lab to process their digital footage or their reels of 16mm or 35mm film.

On the theatrical front, new specialized distributors are expected to eventually take the place of those that folded in 2008. The Internet continues to provide avenues to get shorts and features in front of those eager to experience new voices, innovative stories, and fresh perspectives. There are several sites that showcase feature films online and new software applications such as Adobe's Media Player that aggregate content for mass consumption.

On the marketing side, new software widgets can be used to help aspiring directors and producers reach out to people who might invest in their projects and build a fan base by aggregating groups of consumers who appreciate a certain

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topic, all without hiring an ad agency or PR firm. For those pursuing festival acceptance—and after all, who isn't?—companies such as Withoutabox and its new competing service, B-Side, allow filmmakers to save time by paying a flat fee to have their films submitted to hundreds of festivals.

In just a few months, pocket still cameras available at any Radio Shack (such as the Kodak Zi6) and portable devices like the Flip from Pure Digital will be able to record higher quality video to internal standard drives or SD cards with improved sound, ushering in a new era of handheld indie filmmaking. Later this year, some intrepid filmmaker will debut a first film shot using store-bought gear and civilian actors, creating a sensation that merits an article in *Vanity Fair* and inspires a new generation of filmmakers. It could be you. The tools to pull it off are a fast laptop, a licensed copy of Final Cut Studio 3, StoryBoard Quick 5, an external Blu-ray DVD burner, and WordPress software to create the website—all are available for under $5,000, all-in. The newest HD and affordable 3K video cameras that record gorgeous filmlike images to swappable 64-gigabyte and 128-gigabyte memory cards can be rented for around $1,500 per week. Amazon's CreateSpace and the Tribeca Film Institute's Reframe Project can help filmmakers digitally master their projects and sell them online. Breakthrough Distribution can handle the DVD sales.

We already live in a world of amateur filmmakers, where the ubiquity of camera phone video, webcams, and cheap recording equipment has opened up opportunities for everyone to create something eye-catching and cool. Raw talent, an ear for dialogue, an eye for the perfect shot, and the passion to craft something that touches and inspires audiences are increasingly the only missing ingredient.

Yes, the best time to make an independent film is right now.

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What won't ever change, however—with production budgets of $10,000, $100,000 or even $1 million—are the misperceptions about what can trip up aspiring filmmakers along the way and prevent their films from ever being completed. Because filmmaking is one of the most collaborative of the arts, a book focused on "101 Indie Production Pitfalls" would barely scratch the surface and could address just a tiny fraction of what can happen to make footage unusable, sound unrecognizable, editing impossible, and even the most compelling stories untellable. Indeed, one reason independent filmmaking can be so tough is that there is no single compendium on how to dodge the dozens of pitfalls, punji sticks, and land mines that are unavoidable on the way to celluloid glory. This book is that guide, providing everything in one place—including contracts to protect screenwriters from being ripped off—that all filmmaking stars of tomorrow need in order to avoid being blindsided, tripped up, or stopped cold.

Some parents believe that their children should make their own mistakes in life and learn their lessons from the school of hard knocks, but many aspiring filmmakers don't get a second or a third chance to try again and get it right. As a result, the country is filled with immensely talented but failed filmmakers who might have become the next Miranda July, Christopher Nolan, Kimberly Peirce, Kasi Lemmons, Alice Wu, or Darren Aronofsky.

Established filmmakers take pride in their suffering when recounting their stories from the podiums of festivals and other symposia. Those stories always get a laugh. But aspiring filmmakers in the audience think that an inordinate level of pain and tragedy is a rite of passage. The question going forward is "Should every filmmaker have to serve as his or her own crash-test dummy as an educational exercise?" Absolutely not. This book seeks to help new filmmakers

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avoid the obstacles that send so many first- and second-timers through the windshield of their own inexperience.

The good news is that many films produced today will be completed just in time for a coming wave of interest in user-generated content (UGC) and in novel forms of portable, short-form entertainment viewable on 3G iPhones, Samsung Instincts, BlackBerry handsets, Archos 805 or 905 portables, Sony PSPs, and the next batch of innovative 4G devices.

A convergence of other factors will well position aspiring independent filmmakers who start this year. According to recent estimates, the traditional movie download market, which doubled from $689 million in 2006 to $1.6 billion in 2008, is projected to reach $3.6 billion by 2014. Netflix is now offering more than ten thousand titles through its Watch Now service available through the Netflix Player by Roku and via Microsoft's Xbox LIVE service. Sundance short films in competition are now $1.99 a download and the festival may soon offer consumers the ability to buy distributor-less feature films and documentaries. In 2008, Motorola introduced full-length films to watch on its mobile handsets for the first time, offering downloads of *The Italian Job*, *Star Trek*, and *Team America: World Police* through Motorola's online store. Similarly, Sprint Nextel announced a new service to allow users to watch full-length movies, TV shows, concerts, and comedy specials. TiVo, Miglia TV Max, PlayStation Home, Sling Media, Xbox LIVE, VUDU, and AppleTV will no doubt provide new exhibition platforms for independent filmmakers.

Australian researchers have developed a prototype computer chip that will allow wireless links to a laptop that are twenty times faster than current chip architectures, allowing high-speed downloads of movies from data kiosks to portable handheld devices in less than a minute. At the same time, the global broadband boom will continue, doubling to

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661 million households in 2012, according to a 16.4 percent compound annual increase.

Broadband penetration in the United States will reach 101 million households in 2012, a growth rate of 10.5 percent from 2008. There is also immense opportunity for a generation of content creators and filmmakers with an eye toward overseas markets. India's mobile phone industry, the second-largest market in the world with more than 280 million subscribers, is poised for the next big wave in the form of mobile value-added services. In mid-2008, China passed the United States to become the largest Internet market, with 253 million users compared to 230 million in the United States. To take advantage of these and other opportunities, Cinetic Rights Management was launched in 2008 to broker the online sale of films that make a splash on the festival circuit but might otherwise remain undistributed.

But as high-end tools have become more democratized, independent filmmaking is now far more competitive. Only about 120 films were accepted from the pool of 3,661 features submitted to the 2009 Sundance Film Festival, up from the roughly 3,624 features that were submitted for the 2008 festival, which in turn had been up from 3,287 submitted in 2007. More than 5,000 completed indie films are made each year—and probably three or four times that amount are attempted—but only 200 receive any kind of aggressive distribution effort by the major studios, and only 100 remaining show up in theaters through self-distribution and service deals.

The number of individual SKUs in big-box stores such as Wal-Mart, Target, and Best Buy has dropped from 4,500 to 2,500 in recent years, making things harder for independently financed films as box sets and episodic TV DVDs fill shelf space and squeeze out indie-film DVD sales. This has forced many aspiring indie filmmakers to investigate ways to

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fend for themselves, such as partnering with duplication and fulfillment houses like Breakthough Distribution to handle the replication and the "pick, pack, and ship" of their DVDs.

Given that the general movie-loving public has less and less time to watch movies on any platform, the biggest challenge for the independent filmmakers of tomorrow is probably in how to effectively market their films and attract significant audiences, whether by themselves or through traditional theatrical distribution deals. In 1928, when the U.S. population was 120 million, 65 million movie tickets were sold each week. Today, even with 300 million people living in the United States, fewer than 30 million Americans go to a movie theater in any given week, a decrease of more than 50 percent. Consumers are bombarded with choices from entire recorded seasons of *Mad Men*, *Dexter*, *Weeds*, *Nip & Tuck*, the new *90210*, classic episodes of *My So-Called Life*, DVDs from Netflix, or the latest box set of *Robot Chicken* or *Family Guy* purchased on Amazon. And because moviegoers no longer cut indie films any slack as far as production value goes—Kevin Smith disciples beware—specialized and low-budget indie-film projects now have to be as clever, entertaining, and visually coherent as everything else on offer.

The quality bar has been raised far above what used to qualify as watchable, given that even low-budget projects can now afford to shoot on 24p HD video rather than MiniDV. Aspiring filmmakers are expected to know more about film grammar and the craft and business of filmmaking than earlier generations, who defined the do-it-yourself movement with static camera shots and piecemeal financing.

New production shingles and Web 2.0 billionaires—beyond the reach of most civilian, middle-American indie filmmakers—continue to define the indie-film financing business model on the high side and have raised the level of sophistication of the projects that get made, which in turn

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has raised the bar for what average aspiring filmmakers need to spend and achieve with their first projects. And while the overall economy of recession, the housing downturn, bank liquidations, the credit crisis, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have dampened the ability of friends and family to invest in indie films in recent years, many enterprising filmmakers are still finding ways to make their projects happen.

However, the dark secret of indie filmmaking is there are many grievous professional and personal injuries that are often risked and incurred. For example, screenplays that may have been polished for years can be stolen en route to production simply because aspiring indie producers aren't careful, handing them to anyone who will read them and e-mailing drafts as unlocked Word files all over town. Aspiring screenwriters often fail to officially register every new draft—or even their first draft—with the Library of Congress, opting instead to save $20 with a Writers Guild of America registration, despite the fact that a registration with the WGA provides no statutory protections to motion-picture screenplays whatsoever.

The reel truth is sometimes hard to swallow, but throughout these pages every assertion is backed up by an industry insider who hopes to help the next generation of screenwriters, directors, and producers avoid the years of pain and suffering that they themselves had quietly endured. This book is designed to show new filmmakers, including those who have attended elite film schools, where they are likely to run into trouble that can unravel years of preparation and sacrifice. Each chapter is set up to present to filmmakers and their film crews how to dodge the risks and dangers that keep even the most wildly talented filmmakers from achieving their dreams. It may surprise many, but sheer force of will—even on the level of James Cameron or Werner Her-

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zog—is no longer enough to carry the day, especially since meteoric success is often determined by the mistakes filmmakers *don't* make rather than the really smart decisions they do. Given that making it as a filmmaker today involves dozens of individual variables coming together with a bit of good luck at every step, ignorance can be fatal and for want of a shoe, the battle can be lost.

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1. Many Famous Directors Struggled Famously

Regardless of the genre, production budget, or digital format, independent filmmaking is all about struggle. The sooner indie filmmakers realize that things are never going to be easy, the better equipped they will be to handle the setbacks and heartbreaks that go with every independent project. The struggle begins every time a new screenwriter types FADE IN *or whenever an aspiring producer or director asks a sympathetic friend or family member for money. Struggle binds indie filmmakers together and makes them a brotherhood and sisterhood of fearless entrepreneurs whose product really is themselves. Given the number of moving parts and places where things can go wrong,* nothing *about independent filmmaking is ever simple, and those confident and daring enough to pursue their dream should know that they are about to enter the fight of their lives. Those who don't believe it can ask their favorite indie-film director or producer, since very few—if any—have had an easy road and most have suffered every indignity imaginable before becoming a household name. Many made first films that never saw the light of*

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day several years before debating what ultimately would become their "first" films in the minds of the public. Others had to work as caterers, baristas, waiters and temps, and nannies. While it may seem easy, few filmmakers will have their careers handed to them and it is rare that anyone hoping to make a film doesn't at some point feel lonely, defeated, crushed, abandoned, polluted, ripped off, sick, or everything all at once. Struggle is the silent badge of honor among those who choose to throw themselves into one of the most difficult and collaborative art forms, and as a result, filmmakers should never feel truly alone since they have an army of 300,000 fellow would-be filmmakers behind them. Even during their darkest moments of harrowing isolation, indie filmmakers are part of an extended family of unappreciated risk-takers and entrepreneurs following a well-worn path, trodden by many of the celluloid icons they cherish and admire.

Even someone such as *The Dark Knight* director Christopher Nolan, whose second Batman film has now grossed more than $523 million in the United States and $978 million worldwide, was forced to endure years of poverty. "Around the time I finished *Following* [1998] I moved to L.A. and got a freelance job reading scripts," Nolan recalls. "I was getting $40 per script and I couldn't do more than a couple each day because I really felt a responsibility to try and do it well. A lot of people don't by the way, but I did, so I was really, *really* slow. Before that, I had spent a couple of years doing freelance video production in London, making absolutely no money. I had no personal entertainment budget for anything at all, and when I finally did get a salaried job in London, doing basically the same thing, my immediate response was: 'Well actually, now I can take half of what I'm making every week and buy film with it.' So as soon as I had regular money coming in—or what felt like steady income—I decided to use it to make *Following*. In L.A. I didn't give up my day job for a long time, even after *Following* started getting into festi-

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vals. You have to keep your day job a lot longer than you think, basically to pay the rent."

Many A-list auteurs whom everyone assumes were born successful and rich had it harder than today's struggling HD filmmakers could ever imagine. *Brothers* director Jim Sheridan, a six-time Academy Award nominee, mopped floors and cleaned toilets for years before he directed *My Left Foot* in 1989 and *In the Name of the Father* in 1993. "When I first moved to New York in 1982 I was an illegal alien and couldn't really get a job," Sheridan recalls. "I found a little stage where a guy taught opera and they paid $4.25 an hour to answer the phone and $6 an hour to clean the floors and the toilets. I preferred the cleaning. And whenever I was doing that stupid job, mopping up bathrooms, I would tell myself, 'Well, it can't get worse than this.' "

On top of struggling for his art, Sheridan had a family to support and couldn't pull himself along on Rice Krispies for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or a steady diet of Two Boots pizza and ice water.

"I love New York but it's a city that's very easy to be poor in," Sheridan says. "At first we were living near Avenue B and then I found a place up in Hell's Kitchen. That was a great place and we lived there for about four or five years. Then we moved to Inwood, up at 218th Street, and that was like being in a rural Irish village. Y'know, when you're poor and just searching for a place to live, you have to go wherever you can."

Sheridan's early heartaches trying to make it in Manhattan and his humble living quarters would eventually inform one of his most personal projects, *In America*. "I don't think we played up what the apartment was like in *In America*," he says. "In reality it was even tougher in some ways and we had to start over a few times. I was a struggling director, just waiting for *The New York Times* to review me. Talk about a

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monopoly! You needed that newspaper to give you a good review to survive."

Many directors who today command six- and seven-figure salaries per film were so overwhelmed by early rejection that they considered quitting, even though doing so would have meant missing a wildly successful career.

"Right after *The Tic Code* I wanted to give up," remembers director Gary Winick, who would go on to direct *Bride Wars*, *13 Going on 30*, and *Charlotte's Web*, among others. "It was actually at the Hamptons Film Festival in 1998 and [*The Bridges of Madison County* screenwriter] Richard LaGravenese was there when I said, 'I'm done . . . I'm giving up.' I wasn't proud of *The Tic Code*, it wasn't coming out, I wasn't able to get any more work, I was raising money by myself for all my other films, and I was just thinking, 'You know, my life isn't going so well.' I didn't have a girlfriend at the time—all the personal stuff wasn't there—and I just thought: There's got to be a simpler way or something else that I'd be happier doing. The thing about independent filmmaking is you have to love it so much because it's so hard."

House of Sand and Fog director Vadim Perelman reportedly worked for several years as a dishwasher and gas station attendant before getting his first chance to direct at age forty. Writer-director Dylan Kidd tried his hand at all sorts of day jobs in and around New York City and wasn't happy doing any of them. "I was a doorman, I was a janitor in a tennis club, and I was a home-care attendant for a while," Kidd recalls ruefully. "Let me tell you, they were some grim years. I worked in a couple of video stores, I worked nights at a pool hall. I loaded cameras for [*Two Lovers* cinematographer] Joaquin Baca-Asay, who went on to shoot *Roger Dodger* and *P.S.* for me. I also worked in real estate for three years, which is how I made money for the first short that I did."

Kidd, who graduated from New York University in 1991,

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says he scrupulously avoided getting too attached to any one day job because he didn't want to be defined as anything other than an aspiring director. "I think there was some voice in my head that said, 'You don't want to go and get a job that's going to make you too comfortable.' I had classmates who, right out of film school, got a job at a post house and ended up having that job for eight years. It actually became a curse, because they had health insurance and money, but they weren't able to write screenplays. It's the same as people who always say, 'I'm just going to grip on a shoot while I write my script.' Nobody in New York who thinks that they will have time for writing while they are working as a film technician actually ever does it because that lifestyle is just too exhausting. But there were definitely many years where I didn't do anything in film, where people would say, 'What do you do?' and I was too embarrassed to say I was a filmmaker because I wasn't doing it."

For some reason, many aspiring filmmakers in Los Angeles find it very hard to define themselves as screenwriters, producers, or directors, since without a credit on IMDb, such a statement might inspire nods of quiet pity or derision.

"I guess you just have to get into kind of a Zen thing of not taking people's opinions of your career choices personally," Kidd says. "You have to know that when you're trying to make it as a filmmaker, you're sort of guilty until proven innocent, and that people are going to doubt you until you make it. You just have to keep saying to yourself, 'I know that I am for real. I know that I'm a serious filmmaker. I know that this is a good script. Nobody else knows it, but someday they will.' And you just can't give up. I went to film school with plenty of people who had more talent than I did but I just happened to be more stubborn."

This is especially true for filmmakers hoping to raise financing for edgy or emotionally raw material. "I left New

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York in January 2001 because I couldn't afford the overhead, and moved to Virginia, where I worked all these different odd jobs while I worked on the script for *The Woodsman*," says writer-director Nicole Kassell. "For a year I taught video filmmaking to two different local high school groups, I taught screenwriting to a group of adults, and I was also a wedding videographer. I constantly had all sorts of fears that it wasn't going to ever work out. There was definitely a very loud nagging voice in my head saying: 'What am I going to do if this doesn't happen?' "

Luckily, Kassell's producer on *The Woodsman* was someone who understood difficult storylines that focused on flawed antiheroes trying to make good. "My advice to filmmakers who are trying to make really challenging films is to embrace the struggle required to make them," says Lee Daniels, director of the Sundance Grand Jury Prize–winning *Push: Based on the Novel by Sapphire* and producer of *Monster's Ball*. "All great films come from a struggle. People said *Monster's Ball* shouldn't be made and even asked why I was working on such a film. But struggle puts hair on your chest. You fight so hard for these little movies that sometimes you feel like you must be crazy. Sometimes I think, 'Why don't I just buy into the system? Get myself a house and a decent car?' But when I see a result like *The Woodsman* and the effect the films have on people, it makes me feel like I'm not crazy, that I'm not alone, and that people do appreciate them. And that's why you do it."

The Wrestler director Darren Aronofsky went from being an unemployed screenwriter who frequently dined solo at Van Gogh's Ear in Venice, California, to being celebrated for his daring vision in films like *Pi*, *Requiem for a Dream*, and *The Fountain*.

"I was in film school at AFI [American Film Institute]

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during my first year in Los Angeles so that kept me busy, but after that it was pretty tough," he recalls. "I think the loneliness and paranoia and isolation of Max Cohen in *Pi* is the most autobiographical part of that film because it's very much how my time in L.A. was for two and a half years. I had no one reading my scripts, and when I did finally send out a script I was working on, I think only one company responded out of the fifty I sent it to. But basically I found it a very hard place to be single and unemployed."

While aspiring filmmakers may speak disparagingly of "the suits," many specialized film distribution executives have shared their pain. "When I was in college at Penn State, I was so much poorer than any of the people trying to make movies," says Lionsgate Films president Tom Ortenberg. "I ate ramen noodles for a year and had to donate blood plasma twice a week for beer money. I ate a lot of mac and cheese and hot dogs for a long time. Some friends and I started our own political party while we were in college, and we showed movies like *Revenge of the Nerds* in the lecture halls on weekends to raise money for our political activities. That's how I got my start in film."

SHOW ME THE MONEY

The most common struggle shared by filmmakers, regardless of age, race, orientation, or education, is simply that of raising funds. Money is a lot harder to come by than most people realize, and any filmmaker who is secretly counting on an heiress friend or wealthy pal from childhood to finance his entire picture out of an ATM card, which she certainly could do, is in for a disappointing shock. Most aspiring filmmakers don't learn until it's too late that *very rich people do not typically invest in independent movies*, even if they dated or went to

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school with the director or aspiring screenwriter. Hedge funds aside, most people with huge cash reserves avoid the risk associated with speculative or illiquid investments with "high absolute-value beta."

Of course, the fantasy is hard for many independent filmmakers to shake: the rich-person relationship they have nurtured for years will pay huge dividends when it comes time to "green-light" their indie feature or short. Who can blame them? Oftentimes the idle words of encouragement from this wealthy friend will be wildly misinterpreted as some kind of future "call option" or offer to invest in the project. Other filmmakers simply hope to be introduced to a wealthy person's circle of high-net-worth friends at a party reminiscent of a Dynamite Hack YouTube video. Until the right time to broach the subject presents itself, a filmmaker may work on a screenplay for years or endlessly rewrite a business plan at the exclusion of sleep, love life, personal finances, family visits, getting married, having children, and maintaining health insurance only to be terribly disappointed when it comes time to ask for the big check. Indeed, the most dangerous assumption a screenwriter or filmmaker can ever make is that any one individual wants to finance the entire project, or that any one person with amazing connections is the sole bridge to their film getting financed or produced. Even so, aspiring filmmakers are often shocked that rich friends from childhood or college might be insulted to discover that they were the cornerstone of the filmmaker's nexus of funding sources. The truth is most wealthy people have familial obligations, wedding plans, hedge fund losses, trust covenants, company boards of directors, or other constraints of an undisclosed nature that tie their hands and keep them from participating.

Even Oscar-winning actors, who know *plenty* of potential investors, often have a very hard time raising funds for

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movies they want to make, despite incontrovertible track records and every sort of connection under the sun. "I had difficulty raising money for *Albino Alligator*, I had difficulty raising money for *The United States of Leland*, I had difficulty raising money for *Beyond the Sea*," admits director and actor Kevin Spacey. "Don't make the assumption that just because an actor of a certain note is involved in a project that buckets of money are falling from the sky. It isn't true. It's just not the way movies are made."

Indeed, most independent filmmakers of any renown have had to crawl over broken glass at one point or another. "Everybody has a story," continues Spacey, who has served as the artistic director of the Old Vic Theatre in London since 2003. "If you go to any film festival and you listen to a director talk about how difficult it was to get a movie going, you'll hear how everybody has a tough time. I've had tough times, you know, and my story isn't any worse than anybody else's."

The secret is not to let everything good in a person's life unravel in the belief that chaos is part of the "tapestry" of getting an independent film made. Before quitting day jobs or risking relationships for a dream, filmmakers should remember that fund-raising can sometimes take *years*, not months, and that financing can fall out of a promised, green-lit, or "go" project even on the level of *Gods and Monsters*, *Pieces of April*, *The Caveman's Valentine*, the Diane Keaton–Sarah Jessica Parker indie *The Family Stone*, the Matthew McConaughey indie *Thirteen Conversations About One Thing*, *Young Adam*, Steve Buscemi's *Interview*, director Niki Caro's *The Vintner's Luck*, *Go*, and countless others.

Other indie productions require in excess of $300,000 just to complete reshoots and postproduction. "We got the initial financing for *Shallow Grave*, about one million pounds, which was about $1.4 million at the time, off of Film4, a source that has sadly gone to the wall now," recalls director

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Danny Boyle. "But the funny thing was, we ran out of money. We were first-time filmmakers. They just gave us the money and they weren't going to give us any more. It wasn't like now where you can get some more money off people and things like that. That was *it*. We had four or five days left to shoot and we had no celluloid. So we sold off the set, bit by bit. It's all set in that one flat. We'd finish shooting in one room and then we'd sell all the props and furniture to members of the crew to raise money. They gave us money for the sofa and things like that, and we used the money to buy ourselves some more film for the last few days. We raised thousands of pounds because we sold a lot. It was great, though, because it's such a restriction on you, that you have to come up with other options. You don't have the solution of money as a low-budget filmmaker. And that's what we sort of did on *28 Days Later*, although we imposed the restrictions ourselves because we're lucky enough to be able to raise money now. We still set limitations on ourselves because they do make you more imaginative. It's an old cliché but it's true. When you can't solve your problems with money, you have to find a different way to do it."

Because productions are often not actually "cash-flowed" until the script revisions, shooting locations, cast, and sometimes key crew members have been approved, funds can be pulled by financiers unless certain contractual guarantees are in place. Indie filmmakers who don't think it can happen to them should know that it has happened to a number of well-known directors, including the late Oscar-winning writer-director Anthony Minghella, when 20th Century Fox famously dropped the financing for *The English Patient* in 1995, even though its director, cast, and crew were already on the set in Tunisia. Miramax stepped in and the film won nine Oscars, including Best Picture. But most aspiring indie filmmakers are not so lucky.

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THE WRONG PRODUCER

More often than not, aspiring filmmakers are forced to struggle longer than they might have to simply because they have come across, tripped over, or gotten into bed with someone known as The Wrong Producer. This person talks a good game, seems to "get" the material, and puts the filmmaker at ease by promising to help get the film set up. TWP may even have a screen credit or some other credential—sometimes totally made up and rarely investigated—that makes him seem like he knows what he's doing. Unfortunately, The Wrong Producer is the last person in the world who a filmmaker should be talking to at this stage, as he will steer the project in the wrong direction and guarantee that the film never sees the light of day. The Wrong Producer is also easy to spot since he has usually left a trail of betrayed former friends, jilted investors, double-crossed colleagues, angry vendors, and unpaid actors in his wake. But aspiring filmmakers are the last to know because they never check references. Filmmakers may feel that asking a potential producer for a list of references (or culling their own list from Internet Movie Database) could be considered rude, but it can be the most important request a filmmaker ever makes. After all, few people would consider going into business with a total stranger without talking to *somebody* who has spent time working with that person.

Years before she met up with Christine Vachon and Eva Kolodner, who would be instrumental in backing her vision for *Boys Don't Cry*, director Kimberly Peirce ran into a TWP, and the experience almost prevented her from making *Boys Don't Cry*. By simply trusting a person who promised to follow through as producer, Peirce found her short-film project, "Take It Like a Man," almost derailed.

"I was in grad school [at Columbia] in 1992, working the

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second and third night shifts as a paralegal and a computer consultant. The second shift was from six p.m. to two a.m., and the third shift was from ten p.m. to six a.m. The third shift paid the most. I had saved up twelve thousand dollars—that was everything I had in the world," Peirce remembers. "A guy who had line produced a few small films came recommended to me as a 'producer.' He said he was ready for the step up and my short film was the perfect opportunity, so I hired him. Everything seemed to be on course until one day, about ten days before shooting, he told me that he loved my movie but was very sorry, he would not be able to produce it because he got the opportunity of a lifetime and couldn't turn it down—producing a short film for an indie actress. I was in shock—I didn't have anyone else lined up to produce, I had already spent a great deal of money, and we were moving quickly to production. When I explained all this, he said he had a replacement. I wasn't thrilled with the idea but decided to meet this replacement—turns out it was a friend of his who also had never produced anything, but had done some coordinating. There was no way to stop production without losing everything, so I handed this girl—who shall remain nameless—my savings and hoped for the best. It was a rough road—we made it through the shoot but ran out of money before getting all the scenes shot—and by the time we were done I found out she had used all the money I had given her and racked up a number of debts under my name, including $8,000 in car rentals. I said, 'In car rentals? How is that even possible?' It was possible. I also found out I owed $2,000 in parking tickets from the city of New York. I called the City Parking Division and I told them I didn't know how to drive—I didn't even have a license."

Peirce, who had quit her job a month before to try and make a first attempt at *Boys Don't Cry*, was not able to pay the tickets in a timely fashion, which caused the parking fines to

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double and later triple. She paid them off but still found herself hounded by creditors.

"I was terrified," she recalls. "I didn't answer my phone sometimes because I had bill collectors calling. Then the bill collectors would leave messages saying, 'We know you're there! Kim, pick up the phone!' And if I happened to pick up the phone, they would say, 'Is Kimberly Peirce there? THIS IS KIMBERLY, ISN'T IT???' And they'd say, 'You owe us money.' My phone would get shut off, then I'd pay the bill to get it back on and it would get shut off again. My credit went through a rough spot and I didn't have health insurance for the longest time."

After losing $18,000, which could have paid for one year of a master's program, a new car, or half a year's worth of rent and groceries, most people would have called it a day and given up. Peirce was devastated, but in retrospect she says she should have seen it coming and asked for a reference or two or three from the original producer. "Today I would recognize that guy and this situation, but that's hindsight and whatever wisdom comes from having made a few films. At the time, even though I was coming out of a really good film school and I had a lot of support, I wanted and needed to get my movie made, so someone who had more experience than I had and who seemed like he could get it done was appealing. When he took that other opportunity, he left me in the hands of someone who wasn't up to the job—I could have called it all to a halt right then and there, but then I wouldn't have made the short and I wouldn't have had the footage that led me to Christine Vachon in late 1995. The great thing about Christine was that she had done this before, a lot. She knew what she was doing. I don't think anyone other than Christine could have gotten *Boys Don't Cry* made, in the way we made it. So in the end it all worked out very well."

While many aspiring filmmakers think of film school and

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the independent-film sector as gentle harbors or lagoons of integrity, free of the great white sharks that prowl Hollywood waters, even well-known indie filmmakers have stories of being chomped, dismembered, or nearly bled out when they least expected it. The truth is, the independent-film business is still the film business, and the film business is rough. "It happens every day and filmmakers need to know that getting hurt, sometimes badly, by someone they trusted but didn't really know is epidemic," explains Creative Artists Agency's Micah Green. "It's also very important not to jump into business with the first producer or financier you may meet when you're starting out. Filmmakers need to make sure they're consulting with experienced producers, attorneys, and agents before they enter into a legal relationship with someone. Unfortunately, people don't always do the homework of vetting the person they're about to trust with their project and a lot of them end up get taken advantage of." To avoid falling into this trap, filmmakers also need to recognize that there is never one single producer or line producer who can get their film made. Even in small towns, there is always more than *one person* who can be their game-changer.

It cannot be stressed enough that first-time directors and filmmakers about to spend thousands of dollars in production funds must take an hour or more out of their day to actually call and check references before hiring someone. Further, a lone enthusiastic recommendation amid several unreturned phone calls is not enough to trust someone to produce a short or feature. Of course, what most filmmakers do is rely on a single conversation in which they are snowed by The Wrong Producer's knowledge of one or more arcane aspects of digital filmmaking, such as the importance of white balance or the disastrous nature of a digital time-code break, as proof that The Wrong Producer knows his or her

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stuff and can be trusted. Still others mistake a shared love for the films of Wes Anderson, the ability to quote lines from *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, or insights into the shot complexity of the climactic confrontation at the end of *Buffalo '66* as some kind of production credential.

What many filmmakers also don't realize is that they can reasonably include separation or termination clauses triggered by "bad faith" into any production contract. In the face of this, The Wrong Producer may argue that he or she needs to receive full payment up front, but directors should consider whether they are acting rashly by granting this demand, since a separation clause should benefit the production and not unduly penalize the filmmaker. The argument The Wrong Producer will use is that he or she has already turned down a number of lucrative assignments to take this one and therefore should be paid in full, regardless of his or her incompetence or participation. This type of employment agreement should never be granted, and a producer who demands payment for the entire shoot on day one should be carefully vetted. Instead, a filmmaker would be far better off with even a neophyte film student who is inexperienced and enthusiastic rather than someone with more experience who is simply working for a day rate and not willing to go above and beyond what is necessary.

One of the best ways to suss out The Wrong Producer is to ask what his or her opinions are about postproduction. Self-described or wannabe producers usually know nothing about postproduction or have no opinion, even though it is where all the magic captured during the shoot can be completely undone. Indeed, because the post interval often dictates how certain scenes need to be shot, not having a position or list of suggestions about post is a huge red flag. Does The Wrong Producer want to choose a post house

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before the shoot begins? Does he want to have a conversation or two with the post supervisor? Does he even know what a post supervisor does? A knowledgeable producer or line producer doesn't have to be asked. Another question to help weed out The Wrong Producer is whether or not it's a good idea to use a "free" camera in an outdated or obscure digital format, such as JVC's D9, that anyone would know cannot be imported into Final Cut Pro 6 or Avid without a huge expense, since stand-alone decks to lay off obscure or exotic tape formats are often wildly expensive to rent. The answer is no.

DON'T QUIT YOUR DAY JOB

Given the ephemeral nature of financing, aspiring filmmakers should hold on to their day jobs and take paid vacation or sick days to work on their films until they are actually on set blocking out the first shot of a fully financed film. Peirce quit her day job when she was assured that the funds to finance an early version of *Boys Don't Cry* would be forthcoming, a misstep many aspiring filmmakers make.

"Getting *Boys Don't Cry* made was tough," she recalls. "I mean in some ways it was one struggle after another. Getting the money, getting the actors, and surviving the whole period of making it took five years—the walls were closing in all the time. But long before any of that, when I was still a floater at a law firm, I was told: 'We have a green light on the film. You need to quit your job and go out to Hollywood.'

"I had health benefits, which was a big deal, but I quit and we went to Hollywood in 1997," Peirce continues. "I say that because I had never been there before. So I went around 1997. I had a meeting at a studio and I remember saying, 'That's great! Thank you!' because it was apparently a done deal. Then I got this strange look from the executive. I came

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back to New York. We waited but nothing happened. They were interested, which meant they wanted to see what it might amount to, but it was going to be a long process. My lawyer at the time and I went out to lunch and he said, 'That project's DOA. You should move on.' "

Peirce was lucky in that the law firm where she had worked previously hired her back. "I had spent three years trying to put *Boys* together. I was brokenhearted. But the woman in charge of the office said she wanted to help me make my film, and she knew giving me the job would allow me to continue my pursuit," Peirce recalls. "A few more financing possibilities came and went. Then suddenly one day Christine called and said we had enough money to start preproduction, not *all* the money to make the movie, but enough to get far into it—it was a risk, but we weren't going to get all the money. She told me, 'I think this is the moment to make your movie and I think if you don't leap now you may never make it.' So I leapt. One of Christine's great assets as a producer is her instinct, knowing when to move forward, when to take the risk. She was right in this case. Young filmmakers often ask me what advice I would give them. Every situation has its specifics, but generally I would say make what interests you, what you like, stick with it, and bring people inside your process, people who love making movies and have done it before."

The lesson for filmmakers who are still working to make ends meet is that they must keep their day jobs and day-job mind-set for as long as possible, or at least until they receive a certified bank statement proving that the funds are actually in the production's bank account and cannot be revoked or otherwise pulled by investors. There's a reason people often say "Don't quit your day job," because in a difficult economy, it's good advice.

"Often what's holding you in it is your love of the story or

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the idea of being a filmmaker as opposed to the affirmation that you're not getting," says Peirce, who went on to direct *Stop-Loss*. "There were times during the five rejections from 1993 to 1998 that I just thought, 'Why am I persisting through all these rejections?' But maybe that's the course *Boys* needed to take. And if I had quit before the sixth time, the movie wouldn't exist. You're going to be very judgmental against yourself, but you have to realize that rejection doesn't actually mean anything. It's very hard to accept, but failing and rejection have little to do with how good a movie will be."

In some ways, long intervals of frustration and personal reflection can serve some benefit, says Vachon. "*Boys Don't Cry* took Kimberly a very long time to get made, but the film was ultimately better for it. All that time allowed her to keep working on the script, and as I've often said, 'The film gets made when it's ready to be made.' "

FAMILY COMES FIRST

The tug-of-war between the demands of filmmaking and the maintenance of family ties or romantic relationships can be extremely difficult, given the level of commitment production requires. Aspiring filmmakers often get it into their heads that their current girlfriends or boyfriends or their families are somehow keeping them from getting their screenplays or first films completed. This impression eventually gives rise to a manifesto—enunciated in an e-mail or expressed in a dozen passive-aggressive ways—that screenwriting or filmmaking requires a level of intensity, focus, concentration, and commitment they will never understand. Unfortunately, this destructive screed or letter will end up costing many filmmakers the one real thing many of them have in their lives. The truth is, indie filmmaking requires

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the emotional support of loved ones, who should not be spurned, talked down to, taken for granted, or ignored.

Unfortunately, the tension between the Ed Wood–ish lunatic optimism needed to make a film and the pragmatic realism required to support a family or just pay rent on time can easily break up relationships. Even the mere act of writing an independent-film script can have a devastating impact on a person's home life or marriage. The escalation of commitment that invariably kicks in makes every would-be Sundance superstar want to double down and risk the house, the car, the family, and the works: to safeguard all the sacrifices that went before, aspiring filmmakers feel they have to mortgage everything for that one shot at Sundance glory.

With that logic for justification, filmmakers often decide, as Ash does in *Alien* and as Burke does in *Aliens*, that everyone is expendable, a decision that has huge repercussions for years to come. The terrible thing is that they make this decision not knowing that only a dozen or so films accepted to Sundance each year actually get theatrical distribution and the other hundred *don't* wind up in movie theaters or on television. In fact, for the 2009 festival, there were an estimated 4,000 feature films submitted, an increase of 10 percent over the 3,624 feature films submitted to Sundance in 2008 and an increase of 21 percent over the 3,287 feature films submitted in 2007.

Filmmakers should also know that independent film is a mature sector of the entertainment industry and a notoriously low-margin business that in 2008 and 2009 was facing incredible pressure. According to longtime entertainment reporter Claude Brodesser-Akner, host of the popular podcast "The Business," the specialized film sector peaked in 2006 with grosses of $418 million, fell to $330 million in 2007, and still had not reached $200 million by October 2008. Overall box-office attendance was projected to

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be down by 5 percent in 2008 with projected revenues flat year after year at roughly $9 billion, despite the enormous popularity of *The Dark Knight* and *Sex and the City* that year.

Therefore, whenever possible, filmmakers need to temper their outlook and try to balance their topsy-turvy filmmaking reality with their real-world day-to-day. As Alec Baldwin's character pointed out in *The Departed*, being married (or at least being in a relationship) is an important part of getting ahead. Few video gamers would trade the people in their lives for an avatar they just met in World of Warcraft or Warhammer Online. Unfortunately, this is exactly what many independent filmmakers do even though their chances of getting into a festival are slimmer than they think, because the competition is shooting on 24p HD or 3k and because of the sheer volume of submissions.

"A lot of people don't realize just how many films are made each year—I really don't think they get it," says IFP president Michelle Byrd. "They don't get how many films are produced each year that are also vying for a slot in the same handful of festivals and that are trying to get on distributors' radar. There are also a lot of filmmakers who think they have made it once they've been accepted to a festival, when in fact there are *hundreds* of films each year that make it into a major festival but never receive distribution. It's a competitive, very aggressive marketplace."

And with consolidation hitting the specialized distribution sector particularly hard in 2008 leading to the closings of Paramount Vantage, Warner Independent Pictures, Picturehouse, and *Lord of the Rings* and *Austin Powers* producer New Line Cinema in a single year, there are fewer buyers attending screenings at Sundance in 2009 and 2010 with checkbooks in hand.

"There simply aren't enough distributors to handle all the

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movies that get made each year," notes Fox Searchlight co-COO Nancy Utley. "When you think about all the independent films being made today, including the ones people never hear about, the truth is that very few independent films get distribution."

Indeed, getting accepted to Sundance remains an incredible long shot, something filmmakers often choose not to acknowledge. For 2009, there were more than 3,600 feature films submitted to the festival—up from 2,600 in 2005—with only the same 120 accepted in dramatic competition, a 3.3 percent acceptance rate that is far tougher than the acceptance rates at Harvard (7.1 percent), Princeton (7.8 percent), Yale (8.3 percent), Columbia (8.7 percent), or Stanford (9.5 percent).

Of course, some couples make it work. Laura Lau produced *Grind* and later *Open Water* with her husband, director Chris Kentis. Chris Nolan and his wife, Emma Thomas, together produced *Following*, *The Prestige*, and *The Dark Knight*. Similarly, Baz Luhrmann and his wife, the Oscar-winning costume designer Catherine Martin, have worked together on projects from *Strictly Ballroom* through *Australia*. Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, another professional couple, collaborated on the writing, directing, and editing of both *Half Nelson* and *Sugar*.

For others, independent filmmaking is a lot like the monologue Michael Biehn gives Linda Hamilton in the first *Terminator*: "It can't be reasoned with, it can't be bargained with . . . it doesn't know pity or remorse." It doesn't care about aspiring filmmakers or their personal lives, or what bad things happen to them while they're trying to make their film. It's not a compassionate system. The business just wasn't set up that way, a situation that is difficult for many new filmmakers to reconcile with their view of how it should be.

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Having one's filmmaking dreams wreck one's personal life may have been part of the process for many who have made it, but it should be a red flag to today's indie filmmakers that they might want to reconsider their approach and safeguard whatever finances, personal lives, and job opportunities they have left. "For all the success stories you read about, there are thousands of filmmakers who are still struggling to pay off credit card bills years and years later," says documentary filmmaker Marina Zenovich. "You shouldn't let your filmmaking dreams mess up your life. I spent five years working on *Polanski*, but during that time I worked other jobs to pay for life. Since 2004, I have made documentary shorts for a series on the Arts Channel, *Gallery HD*, so I worked consistently doing what I love. But the last three years were tough: I was making five of those shorts while working on *Polanski* and being a first-time mom. Fortunately, I have a fantastic husband and 'manny.' "

Indeed, persistence in the face of adversity is one of the most important traits a filmmaker can have, along with unflagging courage. Aspiring producers, screenwriters, and directors will have to endlessly pick up the phone and call whoever has received a copy of the script and ask if they are interested in buying it, investing in it, or helping to get it produced.

"Every successful person in the independent-film world, no matter what they do, whether they're writers—writing for magazines or screenplays—directors, producers, distributors, marketers, whatever they do, every person who has any level of success in the independent-film world has been told no a lot and yet kept going," explains Ortenberg. "I was told no a lot before I came on board with Lionsgate, and we have had the success we've had because we have been persistent. So you have to persevere and you have to be able to

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sustain yourself in the face of rejection. My advice to all struggling young filmmakers is 'Don't be discouraged by the word *no*."

WORKING THE SLIME LINE

Writer-director Chris Eyre, today a director of episodic TV such as *Law & Order* and PBS documentaries such as *We Shall Remain*, might have had the toughest road of all. Although he had written a first screenplay in college in Oregon, in 1991 he had no idea what to do next.

"I had just graduated with a BFA in media and I wanted to make a film I had written, but I had no money and I had no resources or network of any kind, so when I heard about a job in Alaska, I decided to move there to take a job cutting fish on a 'slime line,' " says Eyre, who is Cheyenne and Arapaho and who since directing *Smoke Signals* in 1998 has directed six films, two of which were produced by Robert Redford. "Most people, when they buy fish fillets at Citarella or Whole Foods or Vons, have no idea what goes into preparing that fish or what actually goes into getting fish in a can. They think it must be handled by machines or something, but it's not. What it actually entails is putting on a full-body rain suit and thick rubber gloves and grabbing a giant salmon or a black cod or a snapper by the tail, finding its anus and ripping it with a knife up to its gills, and standing next to one hundred other people doing the same thing as literally thousands of fish come down the slime line.

"The first person guts the fish and the second person cuts it and the third person makes sure that the blood line in the back of the spine is clean. The next person may be a quality control person who inspects the work," Eyre recalls. "Then the fish go through a whole other process, depending on

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whether they're going to be canned or cut into fillets or whether they're going to be frozen. So I did that in different capacities for about six months."

To avoid backing up the line or conjuring images of Lucy Ricardo working in the chocolate factory, Eyre and his fellow workers had to stand in place for literally twelve to eighteen hours at a clip and cut a new fish every few seconds. Harder still, however, was shouting down daydreams of directing films and someday attending Sundance, since indulging in flights of fancy could mean losing several fingers or even a hand.

"You could very easily cut your fingers off if you weren't careful, but it was actually more dangerous than that," recalls Eyre. "You got extra 'hazard pay' if you were doing the 'right' job, so at one point I graduated to working with chains on my wrists so my hands wouldn't go into a cutter that was slicing the heads off the fish—cutting through the heads of these giant king salmon—every two and a half seconds. So you're standing there for twelve hours or more on what's called a header. And you have these cables attached to your wrists to limit your range of motion so your hands won't get caught in the machine, because without exaggeration, if you got your finger stuck in there it wouldn't just take your hands off, it would pull you into the maw of this thing and take your arms off."

Rather than checking out the East Village nightlife or hanging out at Lola's on Fairfax or sampling the cool bars and clubs that run along Sixth Street in Austin, Eyre would simply try to stay awake so he could write screenplays in the modest apartment he shared with his coworkers. Every morning he would imagine a day when he might be able to sit in a director's chair—or sit at all in a day job—rather than cutting fish on his feet for double time and triple time. "The pay held out as long as you held out," recalls Eyre, who notes

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that state laws required workers to have six hours off in between shifts. "But after my roommate lost three fingers on one of the other machines and was fired, because it was somehow ruled to be his fault, I decided to get a job on a fishing boat in the Gulf of Alaska, which is just as dangerous but for different reasons.

"People watch *Deadliest Catch* on the Discovery Channel and they wonder if they could do that kind of work, but let me tell you when you have the cold frozen water blasting in your face and you're seasick day after day, it's a whole different story. The job of a fisherman on one of those boats is literally like running a marathon," continues Eyre, who in 2007 was named a USA Rockefeller Foundation Fellow. "I mean, you can handle it for a little while. People can handle it, but you know what they never show on TV is how all the fishermen get carpal tunnel syndrome from grabbing a fish tail one thousand times a day. You grab a fish tail over and over and over again, and the muscles at the base of your thumb and base of your index finger start to cramp up and get sore from the constant gripping motion. You're working fifteen hours a day, six or seven days a week on the boat if they'll let you, and it just wears you down and kills you. You can do it fine for a day or two, sure. You can handle the freezing water in the face and being cold and you can take falling down and getting seasick day after day, but when you're doing it week after week and starting to live it for two full seasons like I did, that's where you start to think, 'You know what? I don't think I'm cut out for this.' "

It would be six more years and several other grueling jobs in and around Alaska and Oregon before Eyre would get to direct *Smoke Signals* from a script written by bestselling author Sherman Alexie, who was himself an aspiring director and screenwriter at the time. "I learned two things from that experience," says Eyre. "I realized, number one, that I didn't

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want to do that kind of work. Ever again. And two, I remember this one day where I had worked an eighteen-hour day, after a series of eighteen-hour days, realizing that I *had* to get my first movie made come hell or high water."

THE SIEGE MENTALITY

The struggle that takes place during development, preproduction, production, and postproduction is often cast in military analogies by those who have been to the front lines and returned to tell the tale. "You have to have courage to be a soldier of cinema," explains Werner Herzog, director of *Rescue Dawn* and *Grizzly Man*. "You have to expect, as I did on *Fitzcarraldo*, that you are going to run into logistical problems, that you are going to run into this, that, and the other. Why should we as filmmakers be deterred from difficulties that come into our path en route? On some occasions I have not been able to get a film financed, but so what? It happens to everyone. I keep working all the time. I have never stopped working and I am not frustrated. And this is what I tell younger filmmakers who often ask me for advice. I tell them: 'If you have something of real substance, it will get made. You will manage somehow to do it.' And nowadays it has become easier to make films because the technical side has become much easier, much more lightweight, and much more inexpensive."

Spacey, who has seen his share of ups and downs as both filmmaker and theater director, echoes Herzog's advice to aspiring filmmakers: "The best advice I can give is: 'Don't give up. Don't ever give up.' Don't ever listen to anybody that tells you, 'You won't make your movie.' Don't listen to anybody. It doesn't matter how big they are, how important they are, how much money they have, walk away from people who are negative, and keep people around you that will

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help you make your movie. Because every film festival is filled each year with incredible stories about how people were able to pull it together, and that's perseverance. That's never giving up."

For Baz Luhrmann, one of the film industry's most innovative directors, this perspective not only served him through the lean years of working in theater but helped him raise the financing for *Strictly Ballroom*, the film that paved the way for *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, which in turn allowed Luhrmann to resurrect the movie musical with *Moulin Rouge!* "The tagline of *Strictly Ballroom* is 'A life lived in fear is a life half-lived,' and in a sense that's what the lead character in that film and all struggling filmmakers have to keep saying," Luhrmann says by way of advice. "In the film, Scott Hastings unites with an outsider. She helps him confront the fear and together they overcome the all-powerful federation who says: 'There's only one way to cha-cha-cha.' I always felt that way, and even when people said I was crazy for even attempting it, I never stopped believing."

Miles Beckett, cocreator and codirector of *Lonelygirl15*, has some personal experience with taking big risks to follow his dream of becoming a filmmaker. "I spent six years languishing in a career that I really hated," he says. "And finally I reached a point where I realized that I could either look back on my life with regret or I could pursue my dream of becoming a filmmaker. I quit my surgery residency and hit the ground running in L.A." Some in Beckett's shoes might have been reminded of Brutus's speech to Cassius about "taking the current as it serves" or losing their ventures.

"The worst part for me was that 'doctor' carried a lot of prestige. I can't tell you how many times I heard, 'How wonderful . . . you're a doctor,' while inside I was yelling, 'But I hate it!' Aspiring filmmakers need to have the attitude that they must succeed *no matter what*, and if that means working

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seven days a week, fifteen hours a day for a year, then they need to be willing to do that. It's definitely a competitive business, so people need to make sure they are doing it for the passion and not for the money. I think the most important thing when assembling a team is to find people that you trust who are really good at what they do. A willingness to work all night helps also, but the number of people is less important than their talent and passion."

Of course, filmmakers who are in it for the long haul know when to dial the fervor back and reintroduce the concept of balance into their lives. "It's funny because I remember when I was making my baseball film that Pete Rose said, 'I would go through hell in a gasoline suit to play baseball,' and I feel that way about filmmaking," says the master of the documentary Ken Burns. "Fortunately, my family is very much involved in it. I make my films where I live, I make my films with my friends and my kids nearby."