

# ON THE MARK

## TWO PRODUCERS PULL BACK THE CURTAIN ON THE WORK THEY DID TO EARN THE PRODUCERS MARK.

Innovation and dedication are requisites for any producer applying for the Producers Mark. But to earn the Producers Mark, those producers must also demonstrate that they performed, in a decision-making capacity, a major portion of the producing functions on a motion picture.

Because each project offers its own unique set of circumstances, the challenges and triumphs vary wildly across budget, talent, location, distribution and more. But the denominator common to each producer who receives the Mark is the quality of contributions they made to each phase of production—

development, preproduction, production and postproduction.

Here, the producers of two forthcoming features share details about their Mark-certifying work.

### **The Bad Guys 2**

Damon Ross, p.g.a.

In this DreamWorks Animation comedy sequel based on the best-selling book series about a crackerjack crew of animal outlaws, the now-reformed Bad Guys are trying hard to be good. Instead, they find themselves hijacked into a high-stakes, globe-trotting heist, masterminded by a

new team of criminals they never saw coming: The Bad Girls.

### **HAVING RECEIVED THE PRODUCERS MARK ON THE INITIAL INSTALLMENT OF THE BAD GUYS FRANCHISE, HOW SOON AFTER THAT RELEASE DID YOU BEGIN DEVELOPING THE SEQUEL? WERE YOU ABLE TO STREAMLINE DEVELOPMENT BASED ON EFFORTS FROM THE FIRST MOVIE IN THE FRANCHISE?**

We actually got started on developing *The Bad Guys 2* about five months before the release of the first film,



The Bad Guys trying to stay on the good path.

which is highly unusual. But I wanted to bet on success and be ready if things worked out at the box office. Thankfully, the studio leadership—Margie Cohn and Kristin Lowe—supported this strategy. In fact, they were thinking the same thing—let’s get ahead of it! We all felt confident in the movie, but of course you never know with an original, and we especially didn’t know what to expect since we were just coming out of the pandemic. The audience appetite for a theatrical experience was still very much in question.

But again, in success, we wanted to be prepared, so I pulled together a group of roughly a dozen members of the first film’s brain trust, including our writers, a few animators and story artists. We started riffing on what we’d like to see in the sequel, with an eye toward key ingredients from Aaron Blabey’s book series. By the time the first movie was released, and thankfully surpassed expectations, we

had already launched our writers on the first draft of *The Bad Guys 2*.

The development process after that was relatively streamlined—our writers did a revision on the first draft. Then soon after, we started storyboarding. By this time, Pierre Perifel, the director, and Luc Desmarchalier, our production designer, had collaborated on designing over 90 colorized beat boards. They really brought the screenplay to life and helped us and the studio visualize the big new elements and set pieces, while also helping our writers problem-solve certain visual mechanics.

**CAN YOU DESCRIBE SOME OF THE QUALITATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS YOU MADE THAT HELPED SHAPE THE FILM AROUND THE SUBJECT OF ANTI-RECIDIVISM AND CULTURALLY SPECIFIC CUSTOMS?**

So glad you asked this question! From the outset, we knew we wanted to start with our newly minted (good)

Bad Guys struggling to reinsert into society after having served time in prison at the end of the first movie. We needed Mr. Wolf and his crew to discover that the “good life” wasn’t all it’s cracked up to be—and that you can’t just expect the world to flip a switch and suddenly embrace a group of ex-cons.

Our writers had written a first draft, and it was clear that the introduction of our guys in their new life needed more richness, nuance, and, frankly, honesty. So I asked our head of inclusion, Morenike Dosu, to put us in contact with Sam Lewis, who was the executive director of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition. Sam uniquely understands the various obstacles, challenges and difficulties that the prison and reentry populations face.

We met with Sam on several occasions throughout the script-writing process. Our sessions were genuinely inspiring, as he illuminated for us and our writers the experience



Damon Ross (center) in a recording session with director Pierre Perifel and Craig Robinson, who voices the character Shark.

IMAGE COURTESY OF DREAMWORKS ANIMATION. RIGHT: PHOTO BY NOLWEN CÍFENTES FOR DREAMWORKS.

of formerly incarcerated men and women transitioning back into society, and even helped us find authentic opportunities for humor.

We also reached out to Ruben Zamora and Kevin Kleinrock from Masked Republic, a media organization that promotes the emerging growth market of lucha libre (Mexican wrestling) in the U.S. and beyond. Our big Act 1 inciting incident takes place at a lucha libre event on the outskirts of Los Angeles. While we did plenty of research, none of our core filmmaking team are from Mexico or had first-hand experience with lucha libre—although I did coproduce the Jack Black/Jared Hess comedy, *Nacho Libre*, back in 2006.

In short, I knew we needed a consultant to make sure we were honoring the culture surrounding the sport. We shared the Act 1 sequences as well as the supporting lucha libre



Damon Ross

art and assets with Ruben and Kevin, and they were truly ecstatic.

Lastly, our opening set piece takes place in Cairo, Egypt. Our production designer, Luc, and art director, Floriane Marchix, did extensive research on Cairo with the aim of creating

a set that bears more than a vague resemblance to the actual city. Once we had the opening set piece boarded and cut in editorial, and before we got too far down the road in asset production, we reached out to Maha Awad, a consultant who lived for many years in Cairo. Again, we shared the materials and asked for any suggestions or guidance that would help us make the set piece as authentic as possible.

**GIVEN THAT THERE ARE 20 INSTALLMENTS IN THE BOOK SERIES, CAN WE EXPECT THAT YOU'VE STARTED DEVELOPMENT ON A THIRD BAD GUYS?**

I can't confirm or deny, but let's just say, based on my answer to your first question, we all believe in betting on success.





## The Woman in Cabin 10

Debra Hayward, p.g.a.

**T**he *Woman in Cabin 10* twists the concept of a relaxing cruise into an edgy thriller when a travel journalist witnesses a passenger being thrown overboard during the night and risks her own life to dive into the truth behind the murder. Based on the best-selling novel by Ruth Ware and starring Keira Knightley, Guy Pearce, Gugu Mbatha-Raw and Hannah Waddingham, the Netflix film is directed by Simon Stone, who also cowrote the script with Joe Shrapnel and Anna Waterhouse.

### CAN YOU SPEAK TO THE UNIQUE HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS AROUND SHOOTING AT SEA?

The challenges of working for so long at sea were unique. The yacht is designed for 12 or so guests, and we had an 80-plus cast and crew. Few of the cast and crew had any significant experience filming at sea, and there were

so many things to consider in terms of their safety and welfare—not least of which was seasickness, but also how to cater for that many people while at sea, adequate toilet facilities, how to best use the limited space safely and effectively, and so on.

There had to be constant monitoring of cast and crew activity when the yacht was at sea, at anchor or docked. As well as a full supply of life jackets, we had at least two safety boats with highly trained swimmers and divers in close proximity at all times, as well as a larger safety ship on constant alert. It was never more than 15 minutes away in case of a more serious actuality. We had constant 24/7 monitoring of the weather and wind conditions, and planned our shooting days according to that.

There was a unique chain of command with regard to health and safety. The captain had overriding authority over all activities and personnel on the yacht. The director, the producers, the first AD, and the marine and stunt

coordinators all had to abide by his authority. All cast and crew undertook safety protocol talks given by the marine team, port police and the yacht captain. The number of cast and crew members on board at any one time was constantly checked, so it could not be exceeded. Emergency plans and muster stations were circulated daily.

### HOW DID YOU NAVIGATE CHARTERING A YACHT WITHIN THE FILM'S BUDGET WHILE ENSURING YOU HAD ENOUGH SPACE TO ACCOMMODATE THE NECESSARY CAST AND CREW?

For authenticity, the director wanted to film as much as possible for real on an actual yacht out at sea. After much research into the superyacht world, we determined early on that filming as much as possible on the yacht would mean fewer high-end sets had to be built and VFX costs could be controlled. In short, although filming on the yacht was challenging at times, it was less expensive than shooting in a more

The cast and crew of *The Woman in Cabin 10*.



conventional studio build setup.

Each department had to tailor their needs to the reality of the yacht's minimal space and the precious nature of the yacht exterior and interior finishes. With the exception of some yacht crew living quarters, the whole yacht was at some point a live set and therefore there was limited space for people and equipment. Departments had to reduce their numbers appropriately and could only take the equipment on board that would fit into the storage space allocated to them.

So what might be considered standard equipment was reduced—no camera dollies, no sound station, minimal use of lighting and cables. All walls, floors, railings, permanent furniture and fittings, while not on camera, were covered in protective materials. There was a dedicated team whose sole job was to remove or reinstate these materials, depending on where filming was happening in at any given time.

No equipment was allowed to be placed on an uncovered floor or carpet

without protection. Cast and crew had to leave their backpacks, bags and shoes in a specially allocated locker room on the dockside and could only bring on essential personal items.

A number of cabins were allocated to cast, but there were no trailers, and minimal dressing room and greenroom space. The yacht was mostly at sea all day, so there was no getting on and off the yacht unless prearranged or urgent. Our very agreeable cast would come to set already in costume, hair, and makeup, ready for the day. They also had to follow all the same protocols as the rest of the crew. One aspect that we all appreciated—because the number of people who could be on board was limited—was using real yacht crew as supporting artists. They appear in many scenes.

#### WERE THERE SOME UNIQUE PHYSICAL PRODUCTION CHALLENGES YOU WEREN'T EXPECTING?

There was exceptional synergy

between the film crew and the yacht crew. We started working together even before prep in order to anticipate and solve any unforeseen problems. Many of the health and safety protocols were designed and established in this early period, including special shoes for crew and cast to wear for interior work and overshoes for exterior decks.

One of the biggest challenges was the constantly changing weather and having to adapt our shooting day or week accordingly. While we often had built-in weather cover on the yacht, there could easily be continuity issues because most of the time filming in the interior spaces meant that the outside was visible.

Extra time needed to be factored in for getting people on and off the yacht at the start and end of the day, and sometimes, especially if the weather wasn't great, docking the yacht could take longer than expected. This involved a great deal of patience from everyone. We are grateful to have had such an amazing cast and crew. ■

Debra Hayward, director  
Simon Stone and first AD  
Ben Howard on the set of  
*The Woman in Cabin 10*.

