

MOVIE MAKER

THE ART AND BUSINESS OF MAKING MOVIES

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A Night in the Life of *The Blue Tooth Virgin*

by by Russell Brown

http://www.moviemaker.com/directing/article/the_blue_tooth_virgin_russell_brown_20090730/

We were down to the last scene, and after seven action-packed, 15- to 20-page days, our small crew was exhausted. It was going to be the second marathon night in a row, from 7p.m. to 7 a.m., moving at breakneck pace to make what by any moviemaking standard was an extremely challenging schedule.

And this evening involved extras. Lots of them.

On my first feature, I had learned the hard way that extras can be difficult. Coordinating the action to make an empty space seem crowded takes a skilled hand, and it's one of the elements that can make a low-budget movie look cheap. Oftentimes the production team can't generate enough friends and family to show up and that wild party or packed urban bar ends up feeling a little desolate, no matter how loud you pump the music track or the background.



But even if enough people show, extras can have a difficult time repeating the same action consistently, which makes it difficult to cut. You can spend hours in the editing room trying to figure out how to make a scene work because the background wasn't properly cued and choreographed. On a low-budget film set, you just don't have the money to spend on personnel to watch and make it happen correctly, take after take, or the time to rehearse it until it's perfect. And on this shoot, the crew was bleary-eyed, our extras had never met any of us, it was going to be all night and it was a very long scene. This felt like a brewing disaster.

If this wasn't enough, our production coordinator had come down with horrible food poisoning. She had a great deal of set experience, and I had been counting on her to function as an AD and wrangle our volunteer actors. One of our production assistants had taken over her duties, so our team was a member short. The producer had scrambled to find more help, and for the last day, she hired Carrie, a young lady interested in developing a career as a production sound mixer, but who was willing to do anything to gain experience. With our crew stretched incredibly thin, Carrie was the only person who could be spared to help me with the extras. And she had never done it before.



When I arrived for the shoot, I could tell immediately that Carrie was a person who loved film sets: Her pockets full of pens and markers, tape and walkie hanging from her belt, the script sides ready and waiting for use. She bounded up to me, full of enthusiasm, ready to tackle the challenge for the evening. I loved her from the start, and as I explained how it was going to work, I realized I had a smart and resourceful ally. She got what needed to happen with little explanation, and, intuitively, she knew exactly how to do it.

For that night, Carrie was the best partner a director could have. She was meticulous in prompting each actor to move at the precise right moment. She was inspiring to the actors as it progressed deeper and deeper into the evening and early morning. She had creative ideas about how to solve little problems or make the shots more interesting. More than anyone else that final shooting day, I looked to Carrie for strength... and I'd never met her.

I haven't spoken to Carrie since the night of the shoot, but I think about her a lot when I watch the film. I hope she's having a successful career. For me, this is a type of experience that makes moviemaking such an unexpected pleasure. You come together with people in ways that you don't anticipate, and they always surprise you about what they are (and sometimes aren't) capable of or willing to do. For one night, Carrie was my best friend, my confidant, my creative collaborator and my therapist. She made a big difference in a small way, and I'm grateful.

The Blue Tooth Virgin will be released on September 25, 2009. Visit <http://www.thebluetoothoothvirgin.com> for more information.

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