

Your Half Pictures, LLC.
and
Adakin Productions
presents

A film by Jay Holben

DESCENT

Six weeks after witnessing the brutal murder of her best friend, Andrea is starting to put the pieces of her life back together. Immersing herself in her work, she accidentally stays too late and finds herself the last person in a darkened office building.

She makes it to the safety of the elevator, already wishing she was home safe and sound, when the elevator makes an unexpected stop and to her absolute disbelief - the man she witnessed standing over her best friend's bloody body GETS ON THE ELEVATOR with her!

She's paralyzed with fear as the doors snap shut and the elevator begins to descend again. He has no idea who she is, but there is no question that this was the man who killed her friend. All she has to do is make it to the bottom floor and get to the security desk to call the police...

But, as fate would have it, the elevator - prone to such problems - gets stuck between floors and Andrea is trapped inside along with a brutal murderer!

The first collaboration between Your Half Pictures, LLC and Adakin Productions, ***Descent*** is a thrilling short directed by Jay Holben, whose previous works include the Stephen King adaptation, ***Paranoid*** and the touching drama ***The Night Before***.

Descent stars April Adamson and Robert McLaughlin with Renée Madison Cole and Anthony Backman. Written and produced by Jay Holben and Christopher Probst, production designer Kevin Boyle, editor Dan O'Brien, original score by Buck Sanders, director of photography Christopher Probst, associate producer Douglas Bankston, executive producers Ryan Harper, Eric Arlt, Rusty Gray and Josh Jaggars.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Descent was originally conceived as an elaborate camera test to put the new Sony High-Definition cameras through their paces for *American Cinematographer* magazine. “Doug Bankston, one of my editors at *American Cinematographer*, came to me one afternoon and asked me if I wanted to test the new generation 24p HD cameras before they went off to George Lucas for the third **Star Wars** prequel,” recalls director Jay Holben, additionally a professional director of photography who has been a contributing writer for *American Cinematographer Magazine* for six years. “Christopher Probst, who is the technical editor of the magazine, was trying to set up a test with Sony but the project he was mounting fell apart and Doug came to me to see if I wanted to tackle a project myself. Although I had a considerable amount of work on my plate – including a feature film I was producing and smack in the middle of post-production – I jumped at the chance to play with the new toys.”

Holben didn’t actually have a project to shoot so he began the painful process of trying to put together a story. The idea was not to just take the equipment to a sound stage and shoot technical charts, but to really put the cameras through their paces in a real-world practical situation. Holben reached out to a small network of writer friends to see if anyone had any ideas, but came up dry and decided to examine an idea of his own from many years prior. “Back in the days when I fancied myself a writer, I had this idea about a woman who had secretly witnessed a murder and then was trapped in an elevator with the killer. I have always been a bit intrigued by the psychology of human behavior in elevators. It’s one of the only times in our daily lives when we’re locked in close quarters with total strangers and most people are incredibly uncomfortable in that scenario. The idea of kicking it up a notch by being locked in with the person you fear most in the world was very intriguing to me.” The catch, however, was that Holben had given up creative writing. “A few years back I realized that although I’m a competent writer, I am by no means a great writer and I’d really rather direct a great writer’s script than pen a mediocre one myself – so I quit writing. Since that time, any kind of creative writing is very difficult for me.”

As Holben and Probst had collaborated recently as director and cinematographer on *The Night Before* (www.adakin.com/thenightbefore), and the test was originally supposed to be Probst’s project, Holben immediately teamed up with him as a producing partner on the new project. “We brainstormed the script together, tossed around the ideas and really worked on it as a team,” expounds Holben. “Christopher was hesitant about the whole idea at first, but the more I thought about it the more I really wanted to explore this concept – so I began writing the script. Then Christopher and I would ping-pong the various drafts back and forth until we got one we were happy with.”

With a script locked, Holben began the process of casting. “In the six months prior I had seen literally over 1,000 actors in auditions for three different projects and the last thing I wanted to do was another casting call!” he explains. “Luckily, I didn’t have to. I knew immediately that April would be perfect for this

role, especially after having worked with her on a short thriller called **Mindgame** that I co-produced and photographed. I was thrilled when she read the script and said she would do the project. Finding a killer was a little more difficult. I didn't have anyone in mind immediately so Christopher went to a couple cast members from **Boomtown**, the TV show he was working on, but scheduling conflicts kept them all out of the running. I then remembered a mutual friend, also an actor, who had a wonderfully devious look and gave him a call. We met quickly one afternoon and talked about the script and his ideas and I welcomed Rob aboard the project."

Renée Madison Cole was the next to come on, but in a different capacity than the ill-fated Vanessa, Andrea's (Adamson) best friend. During the search for viable shooting locations, Renée foolishly offered up her apartment in Los Angeles' famous Park LaBrea complex. Christopher and Jay went to scout the apartment and immediately fell in love with it – although the logistical details of how they would shoot in the highly secure facility without permits or official park permission was a heavy question. As the production was put together with a near shoestring budget, such formalities were not economically viable and had to be carefully worked around. Once Renée was aboard, Christopher and Jay were discussing the role of Vanessa and both immediately thought of Renée. Luckily, she was an incredible trooper and actually took great joy in lying for several hours in gallons of slowly coagulating movie blood.

Of the principal cast, the final actor aboard was Anthony Backman. Fresh off of Jay Holben's **Hunger**, where Anthony played the hapless dinner to a pair of savage cannibals, he was quite willing to come in and play the wonderfully benign Brad, a fellow office worker. Having co-starred with Holben in the early 90's on a regional Emmy Award winning sketch-comedy TV series, **TV or Not TV**, Holben reunited after nearly ten years initially for a twelve-minute workshop short directed by Holben for Group 101 (www.group101films.com) called **Turbulent Seas**, that was shot in a single day on a 42' yacht off the coast of San Diego.

As the production neared its shooting dates, trouble loomed on the horizon. Due to the extremely limited access to Sony's brand new equipment, the production was forced to push its shooting schedule more than a month as the technicians at Industrial Light and Magic required the only record deck available in the US to complete tests for the new **Star Wars** prequel before they could relinquish the deck to the *American Cinematographer* production team.

"I was crushed when we had to push," recalls Holben. "In the feature film world, these things happen all the time, but in the short film world – where everything is done on favors and donations – things can fall apart so easily if they run into a couple bumps in the road."

One of the casualties of the schedule push was production designer Marny Nahrwold, whose work brought to life the hospital room in Holben's **The Night Before**. Stepping up into Nahrwold's shoes was Kevin Boyle, part owner of 360 Degrees (www.360degrees.net), a design firm specializing in commercial and music video art direction. Kevin originally signed on just to design and construct the elevator set, but wound up offering his shop as a sound stage as

well and constructing a key prop at the last minute. Kevin's contribution to the end result was invaluable.

With only two weeks notice, new dates for the equipment availability were secured and looming quickly. "The more I sat with this project in my head, the more I really wanted to make this movie," expounds Holben. "It became more than just a test of equipment; I fell in love with this story and it was really a movie that I wanted to see. Christopher and I went to Doug Bankston at *American Cinematographer* to try and make sure that nothing would fall through this time – but there was nothing he could do. We were at the mercy of Sony and the availability of their specialty equipment and personnel. Unfortunately, we had nearly 20 production members, services and locations on the line and we couldn't push them again." As a back-up plan to another bump in the road with Sony, Bankston pushed up the testing of another piece of imaging equipment as and enlisted the help of Panavision as a reserve provider of the previous generation of Sony High-Definition Cameras.

As it turned out, the new shoot dates, which fell on the week of July 4th, made it impossible for any of the qualified service personnel to accompany the new equipment and the Sony test fell through. The back up test was now the hero!

Falling back to 'Plan-B', preproduction moved quickly forward, but securing a few key locations proved problematic. The toughest location to secure was a fully functional practical elevator necessary for some sequences, and an office building lobby location for the film's finale. From the onset the filmmakers knew that the majority of the elevator interior scenes would have to be shot on a stage set with removable walls and open ceiling, just to be able to get the camera and lighting in to the tight, restrictive space. Therefore, the challenge became finding a practical location that could nicely tie-in with their set. "Initially, Christopher and I were looking for something very specific, but any building with an elevator had corporate ownership and getting permission to shoot for free, or next to free, was nearly impossible so we began scrambling for *any* place to shoot."

The first day of shooting was scheduled for Monday, June 30th 2003, but by Friday, June 27th, no location had yet been secured for the practical office building. With more than a dozen phone calls between Probst, Holben and executive producer Ryan Harper, the decision was finally made to pull the plug – just a little over 72 hours from the scheduled start of shooting – because it was deemed too risky to financially support a short film that might not be completed within the schedule due to a missing key location.

However, Probst was convinced that a location could be found, even if it meant a pick-up shoot and requiring additional financial demands beyond the current budget. In a passionate push to save the project, Probst offered to completely financially back the production until the completion of photography and buy the filmmakers the additional time they needed to secure their missing location. Through sheer stubbornness, the project was back on.

With equipment pickups happening in the morning, filming was to still set begin on that same evening of Monday, June 30th at a small office in Santa Monica where scenes for Andrea's workspace were shot. As the camera and lighting packages were being picked-up, the diligent efforts of *Descent's* associate producer, Douglas Bankston, paid off with the securing of the office lobby and functional-elevator location. As Probst had gambled, the entire film would be shot within the originally planned schedule. "The whole period of pre-production was an incredibly nerve-wracking time for me," confesses Holben. "Not only were the logistical details of putting *Descent* together a very draining experience, but I was fresh off of photographing two other projects (one of which I was also producing) and was *also* in the middle of post-production on a feature I produced that May. I was already tired and drained, and now all of the trials and tribulations we went going through to put this film together were beginning taking their toll. Added to that, all of the locations we were shooting at were offered to us as favors. As with nearly all short filmmakers, and most independent feature filmmakers, I was infringing on friendships to get this film made and it was an incredible imposition on the location owners every place we went. That's very hard to deal with when you're directing a picture. You're off in the corner thinking 'yeah, I think that take was good, but shit – are we going to be able to get that powder out of the carpet and damn... I hope we didn't hurt anything when we blew that breaker...' Then you're doing everything you can so that no one outside notices that there is a movie being shot and phones the police who then come and shut down the production! I had done a lot of shooting on the sly before, but this was a fairly sizable production: we wound up utilizing eight different locations to shoot the film – all in five days."

With filming now in full swing, the production moved the following day to Renée's apartment for the scenes depicting Andrea witnessing her murder. It was determined early on that the filmmakers would keep the bulk of the shoot – the elevator interiors – as late as possible in the schedule to allow production designer Kevin Boyle the time necessary to design and fabricate the elevator set. Since a practical elevator location wasn't found until after construction on the set had begun, Boyle had to work backward and create his set and then augment whatever existing location was found to match the set.

Working within the highly secure Park LaBrea apartment complex was tedious and difficult for the production. To keep a low-profile, gear was kept on the production truck and the crew was jammed inside the apartment most of the day. "It was very frustrating and slow going because every time we needed something someone had to go out to the truck, unlock it, carefully and quietly climb in the side door and crawl their way through the equipment inside to pull out the necessary item and return to the set. Even with all our caution, we were visited by Park security three times during the day and nearly shut down. Renée's sweet-taking saved us each time," recalls Holben.

The following two days, the production moved onto the more comfortable confines of the elevator sound stage set at Boyle's 360 Degrees facility in Gardena, California. With the procurement of the practical lobby/functional-elevator location, the original schedule needed to be juggled a bit and the second

day of stage work was then split by a company move to the practical office location in Sherman Oaks. Although originally slated as a 4-day shoot, it was then determined that an additional “skeleton unit” half-day shoot was required at the end of the schedule to finish off some much-needed inserts, as well as an interior closet scene – where Andrea (Adamson) cowers from the killer – and the nighttime exteriors of Vanessa’s (Renée Madison Cole) apartment building in addition to an establishing exterior of a downtown office high-rise.

Taking a much need “holiday” day off for the 4th of July and the following Saturday, the subsequent final half-day shoot comprised a 3-man crew and delivered some of the film’s most memorable shots. Principal photography was wrapped on Sunday July 6th, 2003.

ABOUT THE CAST

April Adamson – Andrea

Born and raised in Minneapolis, April Adamson moved to New York City as a teenager to attend The American Academy of Dramatic Arts. She left the Academy after a year to study at Circle in the Square Theatre School, where she was nominated for the prestigious Princess Grace Acting Award honoring outstanding potential. She has appeared in several independent films and on television's *Law and Order* in addition to Jay Holben's *The Night Before* and the short thriller *Mindgame*, directed by Jamie Neese.

Robert McLaughlin - The Killer

Born in Vancouver, BC, Robert McLaughlin moved to California with his family in 1986. He first met director Jay Holben through a mutual friend about five years ago, but the duo have been traveling in odd parallel circles for much longer. Rob caught the production bug about a decade ago with roles in *Turning Chick* and *Runaway Gossip* in addition to a considerable commercial acting resume, including a pair of national Coors commercials, both in the states and across the border. Rob is also an accomplished director with several music videos and short films to his name. Recently, he was commissioned to pen a feature-length comedy screenplay and will be directing two more short films before spring 2004. On weekends Rob can be found working his magic behind the bar at the Sunset Strip's famous hot-spot Red Rock.

Renée Madison Cole – Vanessa

Born and raised in Oregon, Renée Madison Cole excelled in athletics. She was an All-State Basketball player and a top gymnast in the state of Oregon. After graduating from UCLA with a degree in Sociology, Renée began pursuing a career in entertainment and became a professional wrestler for a syndicated television show call *Women of Wrestling*. After that stint, Renée has continued to pursue a career in front of the camera, in addition to taking a crack behind the camera as a producer. After two years of producing several short projects, she has now begun producing her first feature film. In addition to her production efforts, Renée has also started her own non-profit company the Northwest Film Foundation, and is putting together a national high school film festival called **TakeOne Film Fest**.

Anthony Backman – Brad

Making his start in theater and forensics in Arizona, Anthony Backman worked with Jay Holben in the early 1990's as co-stars on the Emmy Award winning series *TV OR NOT TV*. Anthony was also the star of Jay Holben's *Hunger*, and worked with Holben on the Group 101 workshop short *Turbulent Seas* shot aboard a 42' Yacht off the coast of San Diego. He has performed with the Utah Shakespearian Festival in addition to starring in five world premiere stage productions.

ABOUT THE CREW

JAY HOLBEN, Director, Producer, Writer

Making his start in the theater community in Phoenix, Arizona, Jay Holben directed several plays before moving into the filmmaking world. He has directed five previous short films (***Wall***, ***Fly***, ***Paranoid***, ***The Night Before*** and ***Hunger***) in addition to working for several years as a Director of Photography.

Prior to his work as a Cinematographer, he worked as a Gaffer on many popular music videos for Korn, Brandy, Shaquille O'Neal and Ice Cube in addition to feature films such as ***Free Enterprise***.

His short, ***Paranoid***, which was adapted from the poem by Stephen King, garnered overwhelming praise for its stylistic excellence and the personal endorsement of Mr. King. His short ***Hunger*** appeared as one of horrormeister John Carpenter's favorites on American Movie Classics as part of a Halloween special and was also listed as a favorite of New York Post's film critic Linda Stasi. As a Producer, Jay has also made three independent feature films in addition to more than a dozen short films and commercials. Additionally, he is a frequent contributing writer for *American Cinematographer magazine*.

CHRISTOPHER PROBST, Director of Photography, Producer, Writer

Although Holben and Probst have been working side-by-side in various capacities for more than a decade, ***Descent*** marks the duos third collaboration as director and cinematographer respectively. Their previous outing, the dramatic short film, ***The Night Before***, garnered Probst the International Cinematographer's Guild Film Showcase Award for Artistic Achievement in Cinematography.

Probst broke into the industry as a camera assistant and second-unit director of photography on independent films, commercials and music videos - working with such artists as Britney Spears, Janet Jackson, Destiny's Child, Korn, Christina Aguilera, Sisqo and Wu Tang Clan.

As a skilled handheld camera operator and second-unit cinematographer, Probst has lent his talents to such feature and television projects as the ASC Award-winning NBC epic mini-series ***Uprising***, the NBC hit-series ***Boomtown*** and the upcoming Sci-fi, serial-adventure, ***Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*** starring Jude Law, Gwyneth Paltrow and Angelina Jolie in addition to the adrenaline action picture ***Torque***.

In addition to his on-set work, Probst also moonlights as the technical editor of ***American Cinematographer*** magazine, where he has been writing since 1995.

KEVIN BOYLE, Production Designer

An East Coast transplant, Kevin Boyle is a graduate of the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, where he studied film, photography, fine art and sculpture. A true jack-of-all-artistic-trades, over the years he has worked as a technician for a film and video equipment rental house, as a postproduction coordinator and he worked his way through the trenches of production from 3rd grip on up to 1st assistant camera.

Although *Descent* is Kevin's first collaboration with Holben as a production designer, he has previously strutted his stuff in front of the camera for one of Holben's 30-second speculation commercials, and had worked with Probst in the camera department for several years prior to co-founding 360 Degrees.

DAN O'BRIEN, Editor

Although born in Los Angeles, Dan O'Brien's formative years were spent in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. He made his way back to Los Angeles to attend business school at the University of Southern California, but eventually decided to forego his business ambitions to enter the world of post-production.

For the past seven years, O'Brien has worked as a commercial editor at Harley's House in Santa Monica. Branching out from TV Spots to films, O'Brien's moonlighting work includes the short films *The Great Upsidedown*, *QIK2JDG* and Holben's *The Night Before*.

BUCK SANDERS, Composer

Raised in South Carolina, Buck Sanders moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in music in 1989. He spent his time playing guitar in bands while working at a laser disc specialty store to support his music habit. During his stint at the video store, he found an untapped passion for film scores and received a full education on film composing from the team of professional film geeks working there. One of these geeks happened to be acquaintances with film composer Marco Beltrami, who had just completed work on Wes Craven's *Scream*. Sanders was introduced to Beltrami and a professional match was made. He began working as Beltrami's assistant in 1997 and the duo completed the *Scream* trilogy together in addition to *Mimic*, *The Minus Man*, *The Watcher*, *Dracula 2000*, *Joy Ride*, *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys*, *Angel Eyes*, *Blade II*, *Terminator 3* and most recently Guillermo Del Toro's *Hellboy*.

Sanders also scored three other of Jay Holben's projects: *Paranoid*, *Hunger* and *The Night Before* in addition to the short thriller *Mindgame*.

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April Adamson

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Directed by

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Executive Produced by

Ryan Harper, Eric Art, Rusty Gray, Josh Jaggars

Written and Produced by

Jay Holben and Christopher Probst

Associate Producer

Douglas Bankston

Director of Photography

Christopher Probst

Production Designer

Kevin Boyle

Editor

Dan O'Brien

Original Score by

Buck Sanders

Andrea – April Adamson

Killer – Rob McLaughlin

Vanessa – Renée Madison Cole

Brad – Anthony Backman

Security officer – Andy Dylan

Security desk clerk – Jamie Neese

Man in elevator – Steve Bordelon

Assistant Director – Jamie Neese
Production Coordinator – Jacqueline Cruz
Casting Assistance – Scott Wilder
Hair/Makeup – Brie Ford

Assistant Camera – Ken Bender
Markus Turner
Ryan Pervis
Production sound mixer – Brandon Kubison
Boom operator – Jim Smith
Key Grip/Gaffer – Dwayne Barr
Best Boy – Peter Levermann
Swing Grip/Electric – Markus Turner
Stunt Coordinator – Andy Dylan
Sound mixer – Art Wright
Downconversions – Laser Pacific

24p HD Cameras and lenses provided by
Panavision

Lighting provided by
Illumination Dynamics

Additional lighting provided by
Kino Flo

Editorial services provided by
Sugar

Post-production sound services provided by
Thunder Audio

Running time 15 minutes
Original format 24p HD
Aspect ratio 2.40:1
Color
Dolby Stereo

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For more information visit www.adakin.com/descent

Or contact Jennine Dwyer, director marketing and public relations: jdwyer@adakin.com

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