

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE BATT



Screenwriter Shane Black



Shane Black is one of Hollywood's most successful screenwriters. Black's last few screenplays have all been major Hollywood productions and attracted major Hollywood stars. Black first found success with the action classic *Lethal Weapon*. His next screenplay, *The Last Boy Scout*, starred Bruce Willis. His most recent screenplay, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, sold for over \$4 million — the most expensively bought screenplay of all time. In addition to writing, Black has also acted in films, such as *As Good as It Gets* and *Predator*. *The Battalion* spoke with Shane Black about screenwriting and his role in Hollywood blockbusters.

Q: Did you always want to write screenplays, or was it something you stumbled across?

More of the second. I had a friend who wanted to write screenplays, and one day I took a look at one of his. Until that point, I guess I thought screenplays floated across the ether and somehow wound up on the screen. When I read my friend's script, I realized I could do that. It wasn't as complex as I thought. And having stumbled across that, it seemed the most profitable.

Q: What do you think sets your scripts apart so that they attract some of the biggest names in Hollywood?

I try to tell a good story, a compelling story. I study pop culture, and I ask myself if this is Grisham read so often, why this author isn't read that much. I think he is a great writer, something about his writing makes you want to keep turning the page. That's goal one. Goal two is I try to write characters that make an actor want to play them. They just want something to sink their teeth into. I think you do this by avoiding stereotypes and letting some of yourself creep through into the character.

Q: How long does it usually take you to write a screenplay?

In the first two years of working, I wrote three scripts. Then it was another two years before I wrote the next one. Then for the next one it was three years. Now I am writing on four years, so it seems like I am going slower and slower. I can't say why except that, unfortunately, the process doesn't get any easier. That's what makes it so sad. You think after you've written a few screenplays, it'll be a cinch. But it's worse. Worse than it ever was when you started.

Q: Are you working on anything presently or have you written anything recently?

I am trying to do an original piece, a spec script, sort of a dramedy. Technically, I don't know if you could call it a love story, but certainly a relationship film. It's a little bit out of my realm, so it is taking a bit longer.

Q: So are you doing this for the challenge of it instead of writing another thriller type film?

Yeah. When I sat down and asked myself what I wanted to do, I did not have as much enthusiasm as for a thriller. This is something I felt I had to do and not just to prove something but because I like the shape of it. I like what it has to say.

Q: I saw something on the Internet that had your name attached to a project called AWOL. Is that you?

The Internet gets everything wrong. I am not involved with that project.

Q: Are you through with your acting career?

One of the reasons I haven't gone back to it is I've been kind of lazy, and I don't like pursuing acting. The times I've acted are the times someone has come to me and said "Hey, just as a favor, you want to come have some fun with us?" It's been sort of a courtesy business, and I haven't actually pursued it.

Q: Are you interested in directing ever?

Yeah. I imagine that the next thing I complete, if it is good and it's under \$10 million, that I would want to direct it. I think if I could write something really compelling that is low budget, even like two million, I could probably swing that. I would very much like to direct.

Q: Have you ever been kicked off a set?

No. I've had to quit a movie I was writing because of disagreements. But I've never been kicked off. I am not very belligerent. I always try to be productive. If something bothers me too much, I argue eloquently, and then if they still say no, I walk away.

Q: You obviously don't write with a partner much. Is there some reason for this?

The ones I have written on my own have performed better at the box office. I wrote *Last Action Hero* with a partner and I must say it was a blast. It was so much easier. It's like someone else is in the sinking boat with you.

Q: How was it producing on *The Long Kiss Goodnight*? Did you have more input or power?

Well, they listened maybe a little more carefully, the director and the stars. Mostly we kind of respected each other, and I don't think the credit really mattered. I wound up in the editing room with Renny (the director), and it was a lot of fun. It felt so much different, the experience of talking things over that way. It was gratifying that he was that nice, that he respected my input enough to do that. We ended up being friends and had a great time. I love it when I can discuss things with the star and the director.

Q: What is your worst enemy as a screenwriter?

Fear and doubt. It's very common for screenwriters to have a lot of doubt and I think I have it tenfold. I can't emphasize enough how much misery goes into putting one of these things together, because it is just so much self doubt. Everyone hates writing and loves having written. It's almost so bad so that if I was good at something else, I would do that. This stuff really bites till you're done.

REEL CRITIQUE

MOVIE REVIEWS

Eye of the Beholder
Starring: Ewan McGregor and Ashley Judd
Directed by Stephan Elliott

Sure to be too grim and dark for many people, *Eye of the Beholder* is an eerie thriller of surprising depth and power which offers ample rewards for those who dare to brave its harrowing journey into the human psyche.

The Eye (McGregor) is an intelligence agent with a knack for surveillance. While on assignment watching his boss's son, he sees Joanna (Judd) for the first time and is intrigued by her unusual actions. He begins his obsession.

Director Elliott demonstrates a remarkable savvy when he directs a talented cast in a gripping story. This is a fabulous film for its many shades of gray. There is no good guy vs. bad guy in this movie, and everything is not black and white. The struggles within this film are mainly internal, and every character has ambiguous qualities.

McGregor and Judd bring to life their characters with such reckless abandon that one cannot help but sit in awe. McGregor infuses his characteristic intensity into every scene, and Judd lends her beautiful looks and blossoming talent to a role that is her most richly textured to date.

Like peeling an onion, this film removes one layer at a time revealing a small piece of the puzzle and giving the viewer a chance to savor each little piece before moving onto the next layer and the next piece.

Steeped with symbolism, *Eye of the Beholder* is a haunting movie experience, pulling the viewer into a surreal setting filled with danger, only to reveal that for many people, the true danger lies within. (Grade: B)

— Matt McCormick

Play It to the Bone
Starring: Woody Harrelson and Antonio Banderas
Directed by Ron Shelton

Woody and Antonio are hilarious as two over-the-hill boxers in *Play It to the Bone*. An offer of \$50,000 each if they fight each other in Las Vegas leads the two on a road trip from L.A. with their ex-girlfriend Grace (Lolita Davidovich).

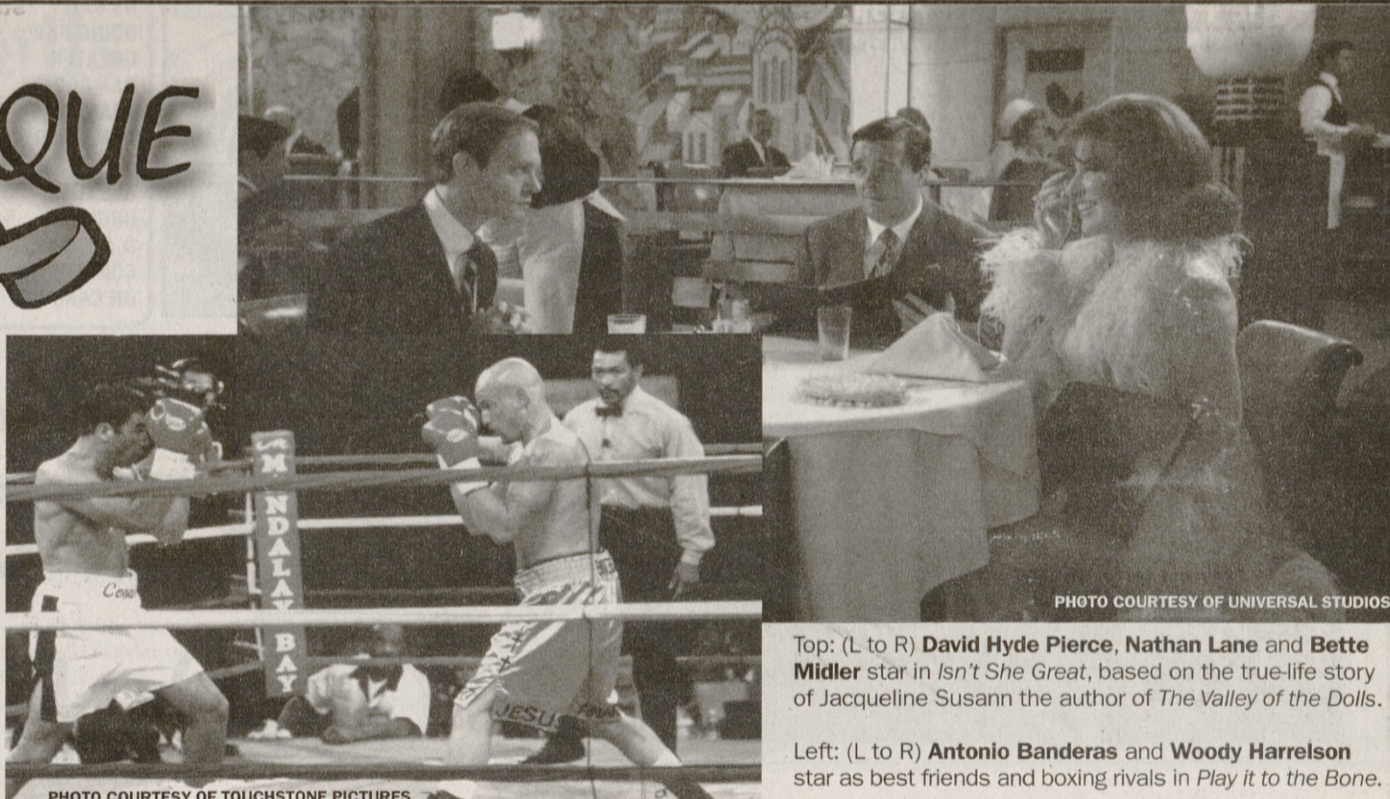
Writer/director Ron Shelton (*Bull Durham*, *White Men Can't Jump*) creates another clever, sexy comedy set against the backdrop of a sport — this time it is professional boxing. In many ways, this movie is more subtle and dramatic than some of Shelton's other work, but in other respects it is lacking. Two-thirds of the movie is spent watching the film's three stars in a car talking. However, with the strength of really sharp performances from its talented stars, *Play It to the Bone* still packs one heck of a comedic punch. (Grade: B-)

— Matt McCormick

Down to You
Starring: Freddie Prinze Jr. and Julia Stiles
Directed by Chris Isaccson

Down to You, starring Hollywood's newest pet, Freddie Prinze Jr., is a cheesy love story that targets junior-high girls and looks better in movie previews than it actually is.

Alfred "Al" Connelly (Prinze Jr.) and Imogen (Stiles) are supposed to be an average college couple who fall in love at first sight. The couple meets in a bar that serves to mis-



Top: (L to R) David Hyde Pierce, Nathan Lane and Bette Midler star in *Isn't She Great*, based on the true-life story of Jacqueline Susann the author of *The Valley of the Dolls*.

Left: (L to R) Antonio Banderas and Woody Harrelson star as best friends and boxing rivals in *Play It to the Bone*.

Isn't She Great
Starring: Bette Midler and Nathan Lane
Directed by Andrew Bergman

Sweet and funny, *Isn't She Great* is an engaging movie — but, unfortunately, it is not a great movie. In fact, it is a shame that such outstanding talent was assembled for such a weakly directed movie.

The movie relates the true-life story of Jacqueline Susann (Midler), a woman obsessed with becoming famous, and her publicist/husband Irving Mansfield (Lane), who was determined to see her dreams come true. Her mission suffers many setbacks until the publication of *Valley of the Dolls*, a novel which creates a stir of controversy for its brazen, and often vulgar, story of sex and drugs. The book becomes a nationwide sensation. Many older viewers will probably remember the

— Emily Harrell

book even if they never read it and consequently may find the story more interesting than younger viewers who are unfamiliar with the book.

No matter what your age, it is extremely entertaining to watch Midler turn in a delightful over-the-top performance.

Utilizing a screenplay with funny one-liners and not much else, director Bergman (*Striptease*) creates a light-hearted movie. Every scene is brightly lit, even at night, and the sets are decorated with bright and flamboyant colors. While this seems to have been done intentionally, one wishes there could have been more depth to the storytelling. For those interested in a light comedy that is fairly straightforward, this is the movie for you; however, for those who expect more realism in movies based on true-life events, this movie will be sorely disappointing. (Grade: C)

— Matt McCormick

Drummers of West Africa storm their way through Texas A&M

BY JUSTIN GARRETT
The Battalion

Masters of their genre, the world renowned Drummers of West Africa have performed across the globe, opened for the Rolling Stones and attained international status as one of the most creative and talented percussion ensembles in the world. The group will fill Rudder Auditorium with thunderous tribal rhythm Saturday at 3 p.m.

The orchestra is conducted by the

legendary Doudou N'Diaye Rose and consists of 35 performers.

"The Drummers of West Africa recently opened for The Rolling Stones. Unfortunately it was one of the tours I didn't get to see," Dave Salmon, program adviser for MSC Town Hall, said.

Rose has also collaborated on various projects with other popular artists such as Miles Davis, Peter Gabriel and Dizzy Gillespie. Native to Senegal, the group's music is rooted in traditional African melody.

However, Rose, a conductive master, incorporates rhythms popularly used in rock, jazz and other distinct genres, giving his music a rich, worldly quality. Rose experiments regularly with new arrangements and styles sometimes incorporating up to 100 drummers.

Salmon said although he has never seen a live show, he said he was still drawn deeply into the experience which includes dancing and elaborate costumes.

"The cultural value of witnessing this event is phenomenal," Salmon said. The Drummers of West Africa are currently on a world-wide tour.

When MSC Town Hall discovered the group's tour went through Texas, they acted quickly to secure a date.

"I found out they would be coming through Texas; I saw the opportunity, and I took it," Salmon said.

After Texas, the performers will venture west for more dates, bringing a truly African experience to each city.

Who: The Drummers of West Africa

When: Saturday, Jan. 29 at 3 p.m.

Where: Rudder Auditorium

