



# IMPACT

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## THE SMURFS IN 3D & SCRIPT FROM CFA BOARD MEMBER



Photo Courtesy Sony Pictures Animation

David Weiss remembers chasing the fog. Although it was an illusive chase, Weiss made more than one attempt. The lesson learned would eventually lead him to co-writing the script for one of the most anticipated 3D films in years, *The Smurfs*.

As a boy, from his home in Ventura, California, he would watch the fog roll in from the Pacific Ocean and cover his neighborhood.

"The fog was always thicker across the street," says Weiss with humor in his voice. "The closer I walked toward the fog, the more it seemed to move away. It always appeared to move and become bigger in the distance."

Weiss, a member of the Compass Advisory Board, was using the analogy to describe how new filmmakers sometimes chase an illusion when, in fact, the creative environment is inside them. They simply have to learn how to tap it. "The chase gives them the motivation to head in the right direction. The key is not to become disenchanted, but have faith and stick with it."

Sticking with it is something he's learned, and it's a destination he follows to get inside himself to write some of today's most commercially successful screenplays. His latest script will bring Belgium's charming little blue people to the big screen next summer when

*The Smurfs* makes its nationwide premiere.

Weiss says, "A lot of people are telling me they're really excited to see the movie because they grew up watching the Smurfs." Weiss, along with his writing partner, J. David Stem, earned the job as screenwriters for *The Smurfs* by delivering the most compelling treatment. But it didn't come easy. Nothing worthwhile in Hollywood does. When Sony Pictures called them in for initial meetings, the writing duo were in competition with other heavyweight script writers for the coveted job. "We had to come up with a story-line that would appeal to what they call the four quadrants: male and female 25 and younger, and male and female 25 and older."

Weiss and Stem watched a lot of Smurf DVDs to get a better feel for their subject matter. "I sort of missed the Smurfs in my cartoon-watching days," Weiss said. "So I did research. (*Smurfs continued on page 4*)

## “LIGHTS, CAMERA, ANIMALS”

### - COMPASS THESIS FILMS ROLL WITH THEMES

What could a pig farm have in common with Victorian England or a cutting edge barber shop? All three subjects are part of the stories in thesis films currently being produced by Compass Film Academy's class of 2010. The projects this year are some of the most ambitious and complicated productions in the school's history. Through it all, the students are hitting their marks with industry professionalism.

The first film shot this semester was a dark comedy entitled *A Close Shave*. This film follows a husband and wife as they respond (poorly) to a horrible accident in their small town barbershop.



Students setting up shot on set of *Close Shave*

“I think that all of our planning in pre-production came together really well during filming,” said Eric Sandefur, the director of the film. Blood effects had been tested weeks before so the visual effects operator knew exactly what needed to happen in the moment. The production lasted all night for four nights during the barber shop's closed hours.

When shooting wrapped on *A Close Shave*, the students had less than 24 hours to rest up and drive to Asylum Farm near Lansing, Michigan for *The Opera Farmer*, which is a film that tells that story of a middle aged farmer who is faced with a

choice between fulfilling his dream of being an opera singer or continuing the life he has built for himself on his farm. A unique story, to say the least, and one that immediately broke the old Hollywood dictum to “never work with children or animals.”



Cast and crew of *Opera Farmer*

What the production lacked in children it made up for in spades by wrangling way more animals than any Compass production has ever seen: 4 Pigs; 5 Chickens; 1 Rooster; 1 Dog; 1 Pony; 4 Goats; and over 20 Sheep.

“At first, we were worried about working with so many animals,” says Elizabeth Nelsen, the producer of the film. “But the story was so compelling we had to figure it out.”

The group hired wonderfully talented Christine Mahaney, a professional animal wrangler, whose work includes the Johnny Depp film, *Public Enemies*. Elizabeth adds, “We found the experience on Asylum Farms to be very rewarding.”



Alex Craig behind the lens for *Crashing Man*

*Crashing Man*, the third scheduled thesis film, is yet another first in Compass history. Steven Wygmans the writer and director of the film, along with producer Daniel Overton, put together a film in the genre of Steampunk. The majority of people that hear the term have no idea what it means. In deference to the uninitiated, here's an explanation from Scifipedia.com. Steampunk is a subgenre of science fiction set in an era or world where steam power is still widely used (usually the 19th century) and often set in Victorian era England, but with prominent elements of either science fiction or fantasy, such as fictional technological inventions like those found in the works of HG Wells and Jules Verne.

Sound like a tall order for a student short film? Tall order doesn't even cover how challenging this production was.

“Since I was setting my ‘steampunk’ story in Victorian England, there were countless details that had to be figured out,” says Wygmans. “There were 20-30 major props and costumes not to mention the hundreds of tiny pieces of gears and dials and other minute components that the audience will most likely not even see.” It's that level of detail that makes *Crashing Man*, perhaps, the most fully realized fantasy world that a Compass student has ever created.

The thesis films will premiere August 11 at the Wealthy Theatre in Grand Rapids.

## TOM GREENBERG ON THE ART OF EDITING

Tom Greenberg has a message for film directors, and it's the same message he has for directors of photography. The only person his message might not be for in the creative chain is the screenwriter.

"The screenwriter is first in the production process. The editor is last," says Greenberg, from his edit suite at Compass Film Academy, where he's the senior post-production instructor. "We want students, whether they eventually become directors, producers or DP's, to know how their decision in production can and will affect what happens in post."

What happens there is where the story, the visual puzzle pieces, come together. Greenberg says, "As digital acquisition replaces film as a shooting and capturing medium, there are more responsibilities coming in the direction of the editor." He contends that cameras, such as the Red, and other digital gear, are producing film-like images that are brought forth to their maximum in the editing process. "The editing workflow

often creates environments where rough-cuts and the finished production, with composite layering and graphics, are cut separately, then integrated." Greenberg says. "These new software tools level the playing field, and so it will boil down to who has the skills and the innate sense of story to use those skills creatively. Today's new generation of editors are having to learn and sharpen digital editing techniques. That's something we teach at Compass, it's one thing to learn how all of the this new software works, it's another to know how to apply the knowledge in a developed skill set."



Greenberg has been telling stories through the eye of the camera

and in post production for more than twenty-five years. After a long career producing high-end corporate projects, primarily in the Detroit area, he formed EO MediaWorks, a marketing and media creation company, and he moved his family to West Michigan.

Students coming to Compass will learn all aspects of filmmaking. And when they go through Greenberg's post production courses, he'll teach them the skills they'll need to begin a career in post production. But should they decide to be a producer, director or director of photography, Greenberg says his lessons will impart the message of planning and doing it right in production, too.

"That way an editor doesn't have to fix problems in post. He or she can finish stories."

A message with a future.

## COMPASS ALUMS FILMS AUDIENCE FAVORITES

Compass alumni films shine at both the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Festival of the Arts and at the Waterfront Film Festival. Earlier in June, several Compass students and alumni converged on Grand Rapids to participate in a 24 hour film festival that was held in conjunction with the Grand Rapids Festival of the Arts.

Given specific criteria (location, prop, and line) for their film, the team was required to write, produce, and edit a film in less the 24 hours. Under the creative guidance of Scott McCambridge (09), Noah Sampsel (10), and Alexander Slain, the team produced the fantastical short *Coma Toes*.

The quirky comedy follows a hapless construction worker

(McCambridge) who emerges from a pond into a strange world. A bratty herald hastily informs him he's in a coma and sends him into the woods with a map back to "life" and a spray bottle to protect him from being set on fire. His journey is far from over when he encounters a damsel in distress and a small army of torch-wielding minions.

The film placed second in the competition and received special acknowledgement from the Festival. To watch the film online, visit <http://vimeo.com/12783229>

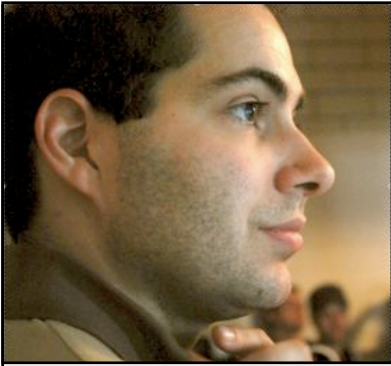
*The Lost and Found Shop*, a top 20 film at the 2010 Doorpost Festival, made its world premiere at the Waterfront Film Festival in Saugatuck, Michigan.

The story, developed by Justin Hall (11), was written and directed by Alexander Slain. It tells the whimsical story of a Lost and Found Shop, its curmudgeon owner, and the little girl who lost her favorite memory.

The film was produced by Compass alums Jared Rummel (07) and Gorilla Pictures: Eric Johnson (00), Eric Machiela (00), and Aaron Smith (01).

Both films are testaments to the filmmakers' talent and creativity, and to the caliber of filmmakers that Compass helps to foster.

## ALUMNI UPDATE



Thousands of years from now, it's quite possible that Jeremy Waterbury's name will still be on lips of Christian artists throughout the world. The 2009 Compass graduate from Muncie, Indiana, is a testament of blind faith, complete trust in God, and his calling to be a filmmaker.

Shortly before the 2008-2009 classes began, Waterbury and his wife, Andrea, toured Compass Film Academy. They met with faculty and staff and fell in love with the community. Without a doubt, Waterbury wanted to attend.

Sadly, however, it seemed to Waterbury there would be no way to make Compass a reality. After all, he lived in Indiana. He owned a house (in a recession), and he still needed tuition monies. How would he be able find funding in just a little over a month? He returned to Indiana and prayed.

When September 2008 arrived, so did Waterbury. He had enrolled full time in the film program, and he and his wife had agreed to put their house up for sale. She would remain in Indiana until it sold; he would live in a fifth-wheel in Jenison on Compass's finance director's property.

In the end, it took six months to sell the house. Waterbury lost money on the deal, so he took a job at a local coffee shop working the early shift. Although stress took its toll, Waterbury's grades and performance were top of the class. He produced the award-winning thesis short *I New Message*, the story of a father's last call to his family on 9/11 from his office high atop the World Trade Center. To add reality to the story, Waterbury had the office built to the exact specifications of a WTC suite. The film won Best Academic Short at the 2010 Detroit Independent Film Festival.

As internship season began for his graduating class, Waterbury was in desperate need of a higher paying job. He was hesitant to take an unpaid internship because, soon, he'd have to start paying on his school loans. Working ten or more hours per day on-set, for free, wouldn't solve that problem. After much deliberation, he took an unpaid internship on TicTock Studio's independent film *What's Wrong with Virginia*. One week later, they hired him, and he was getting paid.

Since then Waterbury's career has had its share of ups and down as he works to become established. Still, his resume is impressive. He has worked on six feature films and has a spec script for an episode of NBC's *Chuck*. He was line producer on the feature film *Frontier Boys*. Currently, he is working as the Director's Assistant on *30 Minutes or Less*, a \$20 MM feature film shooting in Grand Rapids.

### (Smurfs)

but at some point you have to sit down and do it, to write it," he adds

Before the writing began, Weiss had to find a sense of story. One of his methods is to drive the back roads, sometimes with his family in the car listening to movie soundtracks.

"We drove to my parent's home in Ventura, listening to music and talking. It was fun." From the creative road trip, Weiss begins a real journey of the imagination. He and Stem begin to figure out where the story takes place and how to structure it. "Does the story happen today or back in time?" Weiss asks. "If it's back in time, how do the Smurfs get there? We ask a lot of questions and then let the possible answers percolate through the process."

"Screenwriting or good storytelling, includes having talent, faith and discipline," Weiss says. "The discipline to sit down and write the script is the most difficult of the three." He adds that the art of story boils down to giving an audience compelling reasons to watch. "After the percolation process," he adds, "can come the story. But the basic story structure remains the same. Screenwriters have to ask themselves this: Whose story is it? What does the protagonist want or need? What's at stake if he or she doesn't get it? And why will we care?"

Weiss finds the story, and then he finds the discipline to get it written. The success has given the writing duo credits that, in addition to *The Smurfs*, include: *Daddy Day Camp*, *Are We There Yet*, *Shrek 2*, *Clockstoppers*, *Jimmy Neutron – Boy Genius*, and *Rugrats in Paris*. Through it all, Weiss says he's taken direction from a higher power. "God's hand is definitely in all of it," he said. "The entertainment business is like farming. It's a gamble. You, like a farmer, are subject to the changes in the immediate world around you. You can't count on anything going the way you planned. But we need to remember that it's all a gift—just to walk the planet is such a great gift."

One of the perks of the job came when his two children landed bit parts in *The Smurfs*. The production crew filmed in the massive toy store, FAO Schwarz, in New York City. David says, "They closed the entire place for the day we were shooting. My kids got the run of the store with the Smurfs." David smiles and adds, "You know, sometimes you get to catch the fog for a moment."