



Scoot McNairy and Ben Affleck in *Argo*; (right) Barry Geller

The Real Story Of the Fake Movie in *Argo*

In 1979, a script for a sci-fi movie helped save Americans in hiding in Iran. Barry Geller wrote that script—but never got the recognition he desired. —JEFF JENSEN

Ben Affleck's *Argo* tells the true story of CIA agent Tony Mendez, who posed as the producer of a fake science-fiction movie to rescue six Americans trapped in Iran.

But if Barry Geller had had his way, the fake sci-fi movie would have been real.

In the mid-'70s, Geller was a geeky beatnik and aspiring producer with a dream:

adapting Roger Zelazny's 1967 sci-fi novel *Lord of Light* into a grand entertainment franchise. He envisioned a \$50 million film directed by Walter Hill and starring Marlon Brando. He hoped to build a \$400 million theme park called Science Fiction Land. "*Lord of Light*," Geller says, "was going to be awesome."

The project attracted great talent, including *Planet of the Apes* makeup guru (and secret CIA consultant) John Chambers and legendary comic-book artist Jack Kirby.

But in late 1979, a scandal involving how the film and theme park were being financed caused the entire project to fall apart. Geller was implicated but cleared of wrongdoing. "I was pretty screwed up from the whole thing," says Geller, 64, who now runs his own software and technology firm.

In 2000, Geller learned of *Light*'s strange afterlife from a PBS documentary on Mendez. He discovered that Chambers had helped cook up the Hollywood cover story for Mendez's rescue operation using Geller's script and Kirby's concept art.



Affleck's *Argo* doesn't mention *Lord of Light*, Geller, or Kirby. Instead, the filmmakers created a true-

ish fiction to dramatize the film-within-a-film misdirection. Geller, obviously, is disappointed. "What I want is for our part of the work, which lent itself so well to helping those people get out of Iran, to be acknowledged."

He may still get his wish. Filmmaker Judd Ehrlich is wrapping a documentary about Geller's ordeal called *Science Fiction Land*. "Barry's vision did [help] alter the course of history: It led to six lives being saved. Perhaps this was its true purpose."



LET THE BUZZ BEGIN!

Argo's Scoot McNairy

Playing Joe Stafford, one of six Americans awaiting rescue in Iran, is just the beginning. The actor has five more movies due in theaters over the next year. Busy man, this Scoot. —SARA VILKOMERSON

ABOUT THAT NAME

"My pops called me that when I was a kid," says the Dallas native, 32. "It's a nickname that stuck." (His birth name is John.)

CHARACTER BUILDING

While preparing to play *Argo*'s Joe Stafford, McNairy and his fellow actors

lived together for almost a week in an L.A. house filled with era-appropriate magazines, books, and fashion. "It was like a 1979 time warp," he says. "They took our phones, our computers, and we had no air-conditioning."

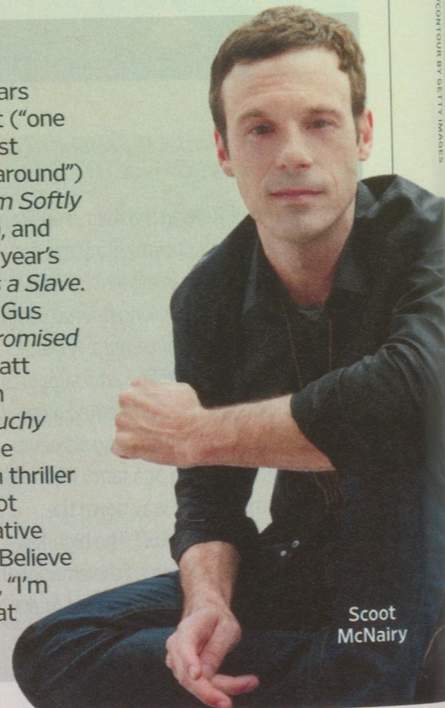
LANGUAGE ARTS

McNairy learned Farsi for the *Argo* role. "I

was working on it all through the shoot, but I had no idea I was going to do a whole monologue in Farsi at the end. Ben kinda sprung that on me day-of." The result? "All I asked was if a person who spoke Farsi would understand me. I was told, 'Absolutely.'"

WORKHORSE

McNairy costars with Brad Pitt ("one of the greatest people to be around") in *Killing Them Softly* (out Nov. 30), and again in next year's *Twelve Years a Slave*. He's also got Gus Van Sant's *Promised Land* with Matt Damon, Lynn Shelton's *Touchy Feely*, and the Liam Neeson thriller *Non-Stop*. Not bad for a relative newcomer. "Believe me," he says, "I'm still like, what the f---?"



Scoot McNairy



Anne Heche and Marcia DeBonis

That's What She Said

STARRING *Anne Heche, Marcia DeBonis*
DIRECTED BY *Carrie Preston*
R, 1 HR., 24 MINS.

By Lisa Schwarzbaum

If you see just one repellent femme-owned-and-operated comedy about unpleasant women and a stubborn case of vaginal yeast infection, you might as well make it *That's What She Said*, since I hope there'll never be another like it. This nadir of equal-opportunity raunch (following the apex represented by *Bridesmaids*) forces viewers to spend time with a needy yeast-infested adult (Marcia DeBonis) who doesn't know how to go on a date with a man; her grating, neurotic monster of a best friend (Anne Heche); and a third, random younger chick (Alia Shawkat), who's crazy-upset about some tedious thing that happened with her boyfriend. The three of them at one restaurant table is reason enough for anyone nearby to change seats.

There is, I suppose, liberation to be had in a team of women—including TV actor-turned-screenwriter Kellie Overbey and TV actor-turned-director Carrie Preston (so fab on *True Blood* and *The Good Wife*!)—getting to make a movie as crude 'n' crappy as one made by a team of guys. But just because one can doesn't mean one should. That's what I say. (Also available on VOD) **F**



MORE ON EW.COM *Alex Cross* and *Paranormal Activity 4* (in theaters Oct. 19) were not screened for critics. You can find our reviews on EW.com.

The Chart

BOX OFFICE

1 Taken 2

The Liam Neeson revenge sequel has shot its way to \$86.1 million in its first 10 days. It's been even more aggressive overseas: *Taken 2* has grossed \$218.2 million globally and will soon blitz past *Taken*, which collected \$226.8 million around the world in 2009.



THE TOP 20

		WEEKEND GROSS*	NUMBER OF SITES†	WEEKEND PER-SITE AVERAGE	PERCENTAGE CHANGE	WEEKS IN RELEASE	GROSS TO DATE*
1	TAKEN 2	\$21.9	3,706	\$5,902	-56	2	\$86.1
2	ARGO Ben Affleck's directorial effort earned a bit less in its debut than his last picture, <i>The Town</i> , which started with \$23.8 million. But <i>Argo</i> achieved an even more impressive feat: It scored a rare A+ CinemaScore grade with polled audiences, solidifying its Oscar chances.	\$19.5	3,232	\$6,020	—	1	\$19.5
3	SINISTER Summit's \$3 million horror film, produced by <i>Paranormal Activity</i> mastermind Jason Blum, got off to a scary good start. Its \$7,126 per-theater average was the best in the top 20.	\$18.0	2,527	\$7,126	—	1	\$18.0
4	HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA	\$17.2	3,375	\$5,109	-36	3	\$102.1
5	HERE COMES THE BOOM	\$11.8	3,014	\$3,921	—	1	\$11.8
6	PITCH PERFECT	\$9.3	2,787	\$3,325	-38	3	\$36.0
7	FRANKENWEENIE	\$7.1	3,005	\$2,348	-38	2	\$22.1
8	LOOPER	\$6.2	2,605	\$2,381	-49	3	\$51.3
9	SEVEN PSYCHOPATHS The black comedy directed by <i>In Bruges</i> helmer Martin McDonagh may have been too offbeat for mainstream audiences, but at least it did better than <i>Atlas Shrugged: Part II</i> .	\$4.2	1,480	\$2,821	—	1	\$4.2
10	THE PERKS OF BEING A...	\$2.2	726	\$2,962	+37	4	\$6.1
11	ATLAS SHRUGGED: PART II	\$1.7	1,012	\$1,725	—	1	\$1.7
12	END OF WATCH	\$1.7	1,551	\$1,097	-58	4	\$36.4
13	TROUBLE WITH THE CURVE	\$1.6	1,812	\$858	-59	4	\$32.8
14	HOUSE AT THE END OF THE STREET	\$1.3	1,866	\$702	-65	4	\$30.0
15	THE MASTER	\$0.8	682	\$1,193	-56	5	\$13.9
16	THE DARK KNIGHT RISES	\$0.5	465	\$1,100	-24	13	\$446.2
17	BRAVE	\$0.5	276	\$1,702	+193	17	\$234.5
18	FINDING NEMO IN 3D	\$0.4	480	\$808	-76	5	\$40.1
19	ARBITRAGE	\$0.3	194	\$1,764	-47	5	\$6.7
20	RESIDENT EVIL: RETRIBUTION	\$0.2	349	\$689	-79	5	\$41.8

SOURCE: Rentrak Corporation; weekend of Oct. 12-14, 2012. *Weekend-gross and gross-to-date figures in millions. †Includes some multiscreen theaters and prints shipped as well as individual screens.