Section One: Prep

PREP YOUR MOVIE

You've got the urge to make a movie. You might not know what it's about yet, but you've got something to say and you want people to hear it. This section has 11 chapters designed to guide you through the essentials of planning and preparing your movie as neatly as possible and with minimum hassle.

Chapter 1: **Ideas.** This one helps you figure out where your thoughts lie, what sort of movie would suit you and how to develop it into a more solid form.

Chapter 2: **Buying a Camera.** Need to know what cam to get or even whether to get one at all? Use this checklist to make sure you know what to ask for from your store.

Chapter 3: **Scriptwriting.** Now that you've got the idea looking strong, try it out as a script. Here's how to avoid clichés and try a few different methods to find what suits you.

Chapter 4: **Budgets.** How to make sure you don't get sunk by your movie, and how to get stuff for free.

Chapter 5: **Designing Your Movie.** Give your film your own particular style, and create the image and feel you want.

Chapter 6: **Cast and Crew Online.** Next up, you'll need to find people to work with. How to create the right email postings to attract crew and cast and make sure you keep them.

Chapter 7: **Previz.** That's the part where you plan how it's going to look, scene by scene. Find out how to create detailed images of your movie – even if you can't draw.

Chapter 8: **Script Breakdown and Shot List.** This can be dull, so it's short and painless here. Make it so everyone knows where to be and when.

Chapter 9: **Law and the Movies.** They always win, so avoid getting stung by The Man by making sure your movie is legit from music to story to extras.

Chapter 10: **Working with Locations.** Working anywhere but your home turf can be stressful. Use this guide to make sure you choose the right place and get the most out of it.

Chapter 11: **Brief Directory of All the Paperwork You Need.** Finally, a checklist of everything you might need to prep your movie.

Ideas

OVERVIEW

You can make great movies if you find out what makes you different. Be yourself and put your own fingerprint on your movies. Forget about finding a unique new story or blend of other stories. The trick to being original is simply to give people your own unique way of seeing things. It's not what you say; it's the way that you say it.

FIGURE 1.1 Setting up a shot for the sci-fi movie *The Day I Tried to Live*, by Richard Chance and John Chance.

HOW DO YOU FIND OUT WHAT SORT OF MOVIEMAKER YOU ARE?

1. Follow your instincts.

This means relying on your instinctive, snap decisions. Trust and learn to follow your first impressions and your instincts. If an idea grabs you, chase it.

2. Avoid emulating other people.

The problem with having a big movie collection on your shelf is that it is hard not to be influenced by what you see. If you want more original ideas that are uniquely yours, focus on anything in any art form other than movies. Look at short stories, radio, songs, comics – anything except movies.

3. Focus on your own experiences.

You don't need to make your movies autobiographical – most people don't feel that comfortable with having their real lives splashed up on the screen. But use locations and people familiar to you, giving a made-up story a realistic edge. Or you can use a single moment you experienced and reinvent it somewhere else. Luke Skywalker stuck in a nowhere town on Tatooine and yearning to travel fast and far is arguably his creator George Lucas returning to his own small-town youth and love of fast cars. This grain of truth makes it something we can all relate to.

4. Don't think about the outcome.

One sure way to stay true to yourself is to focus on the day-to-day process of making your movie, rather than how it's all going to look when it's done. Keep your thoughts on the here and now, looking at how to deal with each small hurdle each day.

5. Mix and sample.

Take a look at what is in the news, or ask other people what they are hung up about, what scares them right now. A good way to take your ideas further while still being yourself is to use small parts of your own experiences and mix them with bigger, wider ones – those which make up the zeitgeist. Can you merge these ideas with what you have gone through? Or mix them with genre movies? The results could be interesting – as in George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead,* which mixes zombies with Romero's own feelings about consumerism. Or apply your own experiences to a completely different setting – such as *Blue Velvet*, where a coming-of-age movie gets transplanted into a surreal nightmare setting.

6. Next up, look at the techniques you use to make movies.

Technique means the way you shoot, edit, light, and all the rest and it's where most filmmakers tend to fall over in their desire to copy other filmmakers. The techniques you use should only arise from your main theme. Everything can come from that first germ of an idea. Play around with every different way of doing things until you know you find the one that's right for you.

7. Next, pitch it to a few people and get reactions.

You might find that on each telling the story gets refined and sharpened. The bits that are not important to you get left out and you focus on the essentials.

8. It's fine to get feedback about your movie.

It won't be so weak that any contact with the outside world destroys it. If it feels too vulnerable to people's comments then it needs to return to paper and get mapped out some more. Listen to what people say about your movie, write down their comments, and then later settle on which ones you like and don't like.

9. Next, work with actors to improvise the script and add more ideas as you work with it.

Experts' Tips

Gary Teperman, writer/director, New York

"I think that most originality comes with life experiences; writing about who you are, what you see, what you know and what you imagine. I think that traveling a lot helps, learning about different cultures, reading different kinds of material. It's hard to be original these days because of all the competition in the market and being original doesn't always sell, but it can be done. People shouldn't try too hard to be original; just learn and write."

Ben Rutkowski, filmmaker, USA

"Ask yourself what would happen if the exact opposite thing happened at that moment."

TRY IT OUT

Write down your responses to these questions. But don't think more than a few seconds about each one, just write the first things to come into your mind.

1. What was the worst day you ever had?
2. Who is the most memorable person you ever met and why?
3. What place has stuck in your mind the most and why?
4. Have you ever let someone down, double-crossed someone, had your actions uncovered, given something precious away, been in real trouble?
5. What's your worst nightmare?
6. Who would you most like to meet and why?

AND THEN …

If you want to make a movie about these experiences you could try remaking them in a new way.

- **To start, write down the locations, the individual characters, and the events in your own experience** (say, arriving at a new town to live in).

- Next to it, **write down a new version where line-for-line you create new archetypes for each one** – usually going slightly more over the top than in reality. The new town becomes a dark Gotham city, the characters become alter-egos of the real people, and the events themselves become hyped up and exaggerated.

CREATE MOVIES OUT OF A SMALL IMAGE OR IDEA:
For example, you might come up with a core idea of **a face in a mirror.**

- You think about this some more and **focus on the spookiness of it** and the stillness, darkness and color of it.
- You ask yourself **what the face is, and who is looking at it.** Don't think about the answers long – just go with your instincts to get the answers.
- You expand further to **get a location or setting,** using an old house you pass on the way home each day.
- Then you start to **think about the characters** more – who they are and what their stories are.
- After following this track for a while you can then start to **link up some of these things** and a narrative starts to emerge, based on motives: who is doing what and why?

This can all sound too easy but it should be; it's come from you after all, and you know the idea inside out.

DIG DEEPER
Add in something more by **digging down into the idea you have and adding extra ideas underneath the main events.** It's called subtext, just like it's "under the text" or between the lines. So wherever you have an event, try to add in the subtext to it. Why bother? Because all the motivations, feelings and desires of the characters in the movie don't sound right if they are shouted out loud – instead they need to be hinted at, suggested and just kind of understood by the viewers. It just sounds too cheesy when people announce the subtext out loud.

So **how do you get subtext on screen?** Literally, as you write down what happens in the movie, leave a space on the page (set it to double-spaced as you type) and write what is underlying this moment. Write down what people's feelings are, often contradicting what they say on screen. Tell the actors what they need to say but also what their underlying feelings are.