

Below the Line

Voice of the Crew

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Much Ado About Nothing SAG Settles with Producers

By Jack Egan

Call it much ado about nothing. Just about a year after their last contract expired, the **Screen Actors Guild** finally reached an agreement with the **Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers** last week, following an overwhelming vote by the membership to cut a deal. In the end, a faction-torn SAG membership basically capitulated to the studios, accepting terms they could have achieved last year.



David White

The resolution of the protracted negotiations has the whole town breathing a bit easier, now that the chance of an actors' strike has been eliminated for at least the next couple of years. A number of projects were being put on hold until a definitive settlement was reached. That hesitation spilled over into other Hollywood-related business at a time when the national, state and local economies have all hit the skids.

Though predictions had been for a close decision, the tally on the new contract was an overwhelming 78 percent in favor

and 22 percent opposed, with about a third of SAG's 110,000 members casting ballots. The terms of the two-year accord hardly differ from those offered by AMPTP last fall, which SAG's bargaining team turned down.

In the interim, the actors' guild split into warring factions over what strategy to pursue, leading to the ouster of SAG's executive director and chief negotiator **Doug Allen** last January after a more moderate faction took control of SAG's board.

It took several more months of bitter jousting and maneuvering to reach last week's deal. The only concession SAG got from the studios was an agreement to sign a two-year pact expiring June 30, 2011 instead of the normal three years. This would put SAG back into the same negotiating cycle as the other guilds, which settled in 2008 on three-year agreements.

The results represent a major repudiation of SAG president **Alan Rosenberg**. He had backed Allen in his failed attempt to get a better deal for the actors than what other entertainment unions including the **International Association of Theatrical & Stage Employees** had accepted.

The cutting-edge issue was over residuals for actors when shows are shown on new-media platforms like the Internet

and cell phones. Actors for the first time will get paid for such re-purposing. In addition there was an immediate 3 percent pay increase. The new media arrangement is in line with what other guilds accepted.

Screen Actors Guild interim national executive director **David White** said, "This decisive vote gets our members back to work with immediate pay raises and puts SAG in a strong position for the future."

Rosenberg remained recalcitrant. "The membership has spoken and has decided to work under the terms of this contract that many of us, who have been involved in these negotiations from the beginning, believe to be devastatingly unsatisfactory," he declared. Rosenberg has indicated he will be running for a third term as SAG president in the fall.

AMPTP was sanguine but circumspect: "The ratification vote by SAG members is good news for the entertainment industry. This concludes a two-year negotiating process that has resulted in agreements with all major Hollywood Guilds and Unions. We look forward to working with SAG members—and with everyone else in our industry—to emerge from today's significant economic challenges with a strong and growing business."

DIRECTOR SERIES: YOJIRO TAKITA

Departures: A Bittersweet Journey into the Heartland of Japan



Masahiro Motoki in *Departures*

The 2009 Best Foreign Language Academy Award winning film, *Departures (Okuribito)*, takes the viewer into the heartland of Japan to experience a sacred part of Japanese cultural heritage—the ceremonial preparation of the dead for cremation in the presence of the bereaved. When cellist Daigo Kobayashi's (**Masahiro Motoki**) orchestra disbands, he returns to his family home in the country where, through a misunderstanding, he is hired as a *nokanshi* (an encoffinator) to the dismay of his wife and friends. Encountering death in various forms, he develops a deep respect for life and a profound

empathy for families dealing with the loss of a loved one. **Yojiro Takita** directs this bittersweet story with an acute understanding of character and human nature, delicately interweaving grief and humor while creating an affirmation of life.

BTL: How did you decide to take on a film with such unusual subject matter?

Yojiro Takita: A friend of mine, **Yasuhiro Mase**, a producer who has a production company, brought me a very early draft of the script. When I read it, I was intrigued by how it dealt with a *nokanshi* as a protagonist and the difficult and tricky subject matter of death. It was full of hope for tomorrow. It was not fully developed, but I came on board. As we started location scouting, the producer, screenwriter and I discussed different ideas and modified it quite a bit to turn it into the film it is today.

BTL: The locations showed a different side of Japan than what most Westerners normally see. How did you work with your location manager to find such distinct settings?

Takita: In Japan, it is typically the production manager who is responsible for scouting locations, and yet it is the director's job to determine what direction the film will take and to give parameters for the locations. I was fortunate to have a very talented production manager by the name of **Kaji Tajima** who is from the prefecture of Yamagata where we filmed the project. The location became key to the film because Yamagata is blessed by beautiful country, but as you know, nature has a harsh side as well. It was important to show that harsh reality of life in the countryside, in addition to

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Trend Spotting By Scott Lehane

I.E. Effects Delivers Key VFX Shots for *Drag Me to Hell*

Director **Sam Raimi** and visual effects supervisor **Bruce Jones** recently turned to Culver City-based **I.E. Effects** to deliver key visual effects sequences for *Drag Me to Hell*. The horror film, which tells the story of a woman under a supernatural curse, features some stunning visual effects sequences.

David Kenneth, visual effects producer and founder of I.E. Effects, explained that the facility handled some 35 shots

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