

THE FIXER

PRODUCTION NOTES

CASTING

Casting was both an easy and complicated process on this production. In mid-to-late September, 2006, the first casting call was posted on numerous websites, and many submissions came. Some worthwhile, some not, but how things eventually progressed was not uncommon to filmmaker Nicholas J. Michalak. As recent as that past summer, he attempted to cast a short form hitman thriller that received over 25 casting potentials for merely three roles to be cast. Ultimately, only five ever auditioned, and the project was postponed further.

Though, with *The Fixer*, the talent that would audition was not to be dismissed. In fact, almost everyone who auditioned in October & November of 2006 was cast. Nick Doetsch was the first actor to audition followed by Heather A. Schlitt, Lucy Arenberg, and Carmiña Elizabeth. Though, other actors were meant to audition for the film, they either canceled or did not show for their scheduled auditions. Eventually, Doetsch, Schlitt, Arenberg, & Elizabeth were called back for a second round of auditions. At this time, multi-talented actor CJ Koenig auditioned for the role of Jack Demerest, and immediately, the vibe of the Vic Simmons' emotionally supportive friend was felt with him. It was not a difficult decision to cast him in this vital role. Nick Doetsch was also the main choice for Vic Simmons. His look coupled with his potential talent really made the choice simple, and when it came down to it, Doetsch emoted the depth of Simmons' emotional turbulence exceptionally well. Lucy Arenberg projected everything that Caroline was meant to have – strength, compassion, conviction, and sympathy. It was not necessary to look any further than her for this role. Though, one that was difficult to call was Katie Bishop. Heather & Carmiña both vied for the role of Katie, and auditioned alongside Nick Doetsch & Lucy Arenberg their second time around. Though, despite it being a very tough call, Carmiña won it out. Still, Heather was such a good talent, that it seemed like a shame not to utilize it somehow, but a solution would soon come.

Actors and friends Dan Kuhlman and Jake Perry auditioned for numerous roles together. Both were also great talents, and their ability shined through. While Jake was called back for X. Franklin and Detective McManus, only a few open roles remained. Not wanting to turn away Dan just because he auditioned late in the game, a role was written in for him as well as Heather. Thus, the addition of Kurt Demerest and his girlfriend Sandra Wilder. Vic was always meant to have a phone conversation with Kurt, but in an attempt to limit the number of characters to be cast, he was not originally meant to appear. Now, he would be, but unforeseen conflicts would soon cause many troubles with casting.

One of the more difficult roles to cast was that of Detective Kevin McManus. A few actors tried out for him. Though, even if the actor's performance was right, his attitude was not, or the performance was way off. Or in the case of Jake Perry, he was chosen to portray another role in X. Franklin. Ultimately, the realization came to be that actor Glenn Allen would be approached to take on the role. Glenn had originally auditioned for Nick Michalak for a "Friday The 13th" fan film back in the Spring of 2004, but ended up appearing in "Vengeance" as hitman Lucas Blackmore. Glenn had always been a positive presence on a shoot, and a very reliable individual. He turned out to be a

wonderful choice in all aspects of the character, and was quite game for the drive out from Valparaiso, Indiana again. He accepted the role on relatively short notice, approximately two weeks before the scheduled first shoot date.

The casting of the vile, scum of the Earth gutter trash named Luther Resnick was not easy. In the few short months of casting, only three actors auditioned for the role. The first was actor Jake Perry. Though, he put forth so many good auditions with the different characters, he was ultimately chosen to portray - X. Franklin. The second actor was not able to tap into the intensity and darkness that the role required. His desire was there, but was unable to break down his own barriers. Despite the desire to give him a second chance, no second audition could be scheduled. The third and final actor was Louisiana native Jonathan Goodman. He had been doing musical theatre for years, and was very interested in trying something new and different. Luther Resnick was indeed new and different. In his audition, he was able to tap into that darker side, and showed a great enthusiasm to exploring that part of himself. His audition was no longer than most, but he and filmmaker Nick Michalak talked for an hour afterwards just learning about each other. Goodman was soon given the greenlight, and only had about two weeks to prepare for the part. He was given the character references of abusive husband and arms dealer Tony Amato (Bruce Willis) from a first season episode of "Miami Vice," drug lord Franz Sanchez (Robert Davi) from the Timothy Dalton 007 film "Licence to Kill," and of course, Gregg Henry as the violent Val Resnick from the film "Payback." Obviously, that is where the last name came from, but Luther's first name was taken from David Patrick Kelly's role in the 1979 Walter Hill film "The Warriors." Goodman studied the performances and characterizations well, and by the time of his first shoot day, he was more than prepared to give it his all.

Troubles began with the stability of the cast when Dan Kuhlman had to back out of the role of Kurt Demerest just days after the disappearance of the original director of photography. Dan had a prior commitment to a stage play in January, and December was the time consuming preparation time. He did everything possible to negotiate with the producers to stay on board *The Fixer*, but it did not go over well with the people heading up the stage production. In early February, Jake Perry also suggested it'd be best if he stepped down from X. Franklin due to arising conflicts in his availability. Nick Michalak attempted to bring Jake back into the fold once again in late March through the end of May, but it simply could not come to pass. The parting of ways with Kuhlman & Perry were amicable. Though, the seemingly endless search for the new X. Franklin would run all the way into July. Though, Kurt Demerest was eventually re-cast in the month of February with actor Michael Molloy.

Michael did his second audition alongside Heather, who had waited patiently and enthusiastically for three months to start shooting. The two of them seemed to gel together well, and Michael had the natural weight to play the weathered, yet generally upbeat repo man. Michael & Heather had their first shoot together about a month later, and aside from some bar scene pick-ups in August, Michael & Heather's work on the film was done before the start of April.

The final major piece of casting was X. Franklin after all attempts to negotiate Jake Perry's schedule fell through. The first round of auditions were in February, but only one actor auditioned, via a mailed audition tape. The performance did not have the grounded reality and weight necessary for the role. Auditions in June were multiple, but less than great for this complicated and distinct character. Though, that was until actor Ryan R. Salzwedel answered the call. He had previously worked with Nick Doetsch on an episode of CourtTV's "Psychic Detectives," and had a good rapport.

Salzwedel was given two auditions, the second opposite Nick Doetsch. It was obvious that Ryan had the acting chops to portray the role. Though, Salzwedel had somewhat short blonde hair, and X. Franklin called for long brown hair. The decision about altering the look of the character that had been developed over the course of seven long years took sometime to grapple with, but ultimately, Ryan was chosen for the role. The compromise was made that he would dye his hair brown and let it grow for an extra month. It would not be to ideal length, but enough to give him a mangy, disheveled look.

Though, in the time of whether or not to alter X.'s look to even the slightest degree, a new scene had been scripted featuring Vic Simmons meeting with long-time friend and assistant state's attorney Simon Arnold. Once Ryan was cast as X. Franklin, the scene was discarded, and almost no further thought was put into it. That was until January of 2008 when most of the film had been edited, and the first eighteen scenes were strung together. It was decided that the scene could certainly add something more to the character of Vic Simmons, and also, allow for the beginning of the film to have a more gradual pace. To allow an audience to further familiarize themselves with Vic Simmons and the world around him before jumping headlong into the emotional intensity of the plot. Though, there would be no auditions or casting calls. While Dan Kuhlman & Jake Perry were both considered to be contacted about the role, it was Gerrit F. Yank who filmmaker Nick Michalak felt right for the role. Michalak had previously worked with Gerrit on Dead Rose Productions' "Blood Brothers" – a *Sopranos*-style crime drama featuring a tight-knit crew in their twenties. How the actor in his early twenties carried himself in this lead role had stayed on the filmmaker's mind, and the levity mixed with the dramatic ability he had shown made him the best choice for this role. It was a role Gerrit accepted gladly. As with almost all the actors, he was presented with a thorough background profile of his character, detailing his upbringing and motivations in life. On Saturday, January 26th, 2008, the final scene was shot for *The Fixer*. All actors could rest easy.

Ultimately, despite whatever set backs or overlong production schedules came about, a wonderful cast was assembled for this feature length independent film. The most amazing part of it was that there were no paychecks for work on this project. Everyone gave their all based solely on their own passionate, and that of the filmmakers. The characters that were developed had a depth and a history that the actors could all give life to. Their relationships, emotions, and origins had a tangible reality to them, and undoubtedly helped each actor find their character. In the end, after all the prolonged and delayed schedules, they hung in there, most of all, lead actor Nick Doetsch, and the appreciation for that patience (even if it had worn thin at times) was expressed on multiple occasions. The casting process is not an easy or favorable one on either side of the table, but the discovery of great talent is worth all those hardships.

©2008 RavensFilm Productions
<http://www.ravensfilm.com/fixer>