

# THE FIXER

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### THE CREW

Gathering a crew for “The Fixer” became a long-running task. Original plans were to bring in Nick Michalak’s friend and fellow filmmaker Jason Pavlik as director of photography and producer, but the priorities of his life had changed, making it necessary to seek out new talent for the crew. This turned out to be fortunate in the long run due to the higher grade equipment that future DPs would bring aboard. A call for crew members was posted up on CraigsList in October of 2006 and a few other websites. A few responses came about, but only one was really considered.

Unfortunately, the first crew member to join the production was the first one to leave. This individual, who will remain nameless, came onto the picture as the director of photography at the start of November with a great deal of enthusiasm and resources to tap for the production. He was armed with a Sony HDR-Z1U camcorder, and was also going to be named as a producer, in light of his offered resources. He arranged a location for meetings / rehearsals to be held in the distant western suburbs of Chicago, and never showed any desire but to take this project on full force. Then, on what became the official first shoot day of the film, Saturday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, he no-showed without notice. Actor Glenn Allen had driven out from Valparaiso, Indiana to shoot his first scene with Nick Doetsch, and instead of turning him back (as was done twice on *Vengeance* under similar circumstances), the scene was shot with the consumer (and lower) grade camcorder Panasonic PV-GS120. An obscene number of phone calls and emails sprung from this for the following week, but no word was ever heard from this DP ever again to explain his actions. What was originally tightly scheduled to be shot over the course of a single month faced its first scheduling setback. The shooting schedule had to be extended so a new DP could be found before too long. Timing was critical due to female lead Carmaña Elizabeth leaving for Los Angeles after the New Year.

Robert Sokolick joined the production as both the production manager and a gaffer in mid-November, 2006. He provided lighting equipment from his acrobatic entertainment company Forms in Motion, and even after he was no longer able to be an active member in the production, he allowed his equipment to be used for another eight months of the production through ‘til August of 2007. A rookie location scout was initially brought on, but her lack of time, resources, and results resulted in her being cut loose early on.

On the DP front, it took a couple more weeks, but College of DuPage student Allec Isshac answered the call with his Sony HDR-FX1s, and production was able to move forward, if only for a short time. Allec had mainly worked more with green screen and CGI work, but was game for working on this sort of project. Isshac was able to shoot all the scenes set in the home of Caroline Burnett in December of ’06, and thus, allowing Carmaña to shoot all her material before departing for L.A. Though, after the winter break, Allec’s class schedule left him with little availability for the now sporadic shooting schedule, but his departure was amicable and friendly. In those few shoot days, Allec showed a good deal of talent and innovation. His attitude was great, and the cast got along very

well with him. He would eventually come back to help out in a jam to shoot the first version of the film's climactic fight scene between Vic Simmons & Luther Resnick in late March, 2007.

Still, the director of photography problems continued, and January had all of one shoot. Shot again with the Panasonic PV-GS120, the alleyway confrontation between Simmons & Resnick was taken care of on a windy, cold Sunday night. Though, the hunt was soon on for yet another DP. The plan was to get someone who had very open availability, especially during the week. Two prospects were considered. One gentleman owned a Canon XL2, but lived a ways downstate in Champaign, Illinois. Many emails were traded, just trying to sort out details in a turbulent time in the production, but ultimately, nothing could be worked out, scheduling wise. The second prospect was Eric Woltman – a music educator by trade and an aspiring filmmaker armed with, coincidentally, a Sony HDR-FX1. Michalak & Woltman met at a local community college, and spoke at length for two hours getting to know one another. After a couple weeks of clearing up where everyone stood, Eric was named as the primary DP on *The Fixer*, but would prove to be an ever-evolving greater asset to the production than originally imagined.

Woltman is a music educator by trade who had been teaching for eight years. Up until that time, music had been his main passion as he was also the guitarist in a local rock band. Though, after 15 years of learning, playing, and teaching music, the challenge and excitement has diminished. His artistic expressions turned towards the much broader art form of filmmaking. He purchased the prosumer grade Sony HDR-FX1, and attended the Illinois Institute of Art in 2005, taking several courses to learn the craft of making films. Eventually, he sustained a 4.0 GPA in Visual and Motion Graphics. His knowledge, artistic eye, and accumulated knowledge would benefit *The Fixer* greatly.

Eric's first shoot day was simple, but ironic. It was re-shooting the Vic Simmons' apartment scene previously shot with the original DP who abandoned the production almost two months prior. The scene had to be re-done anyway due to terribly lighting and that the scene didn't work as well as it seemed on paper. Other equipment that Woltman brought to the production included some much needed audio equipment – condenser mics, sound mixer, boom pole, and so forth. Though, beyond 'Director of Photography,' Woltman would earn the title of 'Location Manager' rather quickly.

Two locations that were desperately needed, and no one was having any luck in finding were produced by Woltman. The first was the bar. Two other locations were sought after with Eric's help, but they either fell through or just didn't develop into anything. Time was running short as actor Jonathan Goodman was leaving with a touring company for the stage production of *Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* at the start of April. Though, it was ultimately Mulchrone's Restaurant located in Evergreen Park, IL that hit the spot. Owner John Mulchrone proved to be a very, very accommodating gentleman. The initial shoot there took place between midnight and six o'clock in the morning in late March, and the production was given free run of the place. Though, several employees of Mulchrone's and Sean's Rhino Bar (co-owned by Mulchrone at the time), showed up to appear as extras. This excellent location never would've been discovered had it not been for Woltman and his friendly contacts.

The second location was just as difficult to pin down, if not more so. It was the Office of Victor J. Simmons, P.I. Rob Sokolick had turned up a few possibilities, but they were either too corporate looking or too trashy. Actor CJ Koenig recommended one location in downtown Chicago,

but while it might've worked, in terms of look, it would've been logistically difficult. Between getting all the equipment into the building (several flights up), and the time we would've needed it for, it didn't seem like the most viable choice. But it was Eric Woltman again that came up with a solution. It was a financial consultants' office in Justice, Illinois. Eric was friendly with the owner Alex Rios, and Eric had something very special planned for the lighting setup. Though, it would have to wait sometime until he got the right materials.

As production went on, Woltman's arsenal of filmmaking gear expanded. He obtained lighting rigs, gels, a fader, barn doors, white balance boards, more microphones, and ultimately, even a camera dolly. Other titles gained by Woltman were Sound Mixer and Boom Operator. If production hadn't run as long as it did, much of what was achieved never would have been. The dolly shot inside Simmons' office wasn't shot until December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007. Though, the initial shoot at the office took place in August (the same day as pick-ups at Mulchrone's), and the crucial element of Woltman's lighting setup was called "Commando Cloth." A thick, heavy black fabric that blocks out all kinds of light. It was this that allowed for the soft glow in that nighttime scene between Vic Simmons and Jack Demerest. Woltman was also able to achieve a classic film noir Venetian blinds light pattern in the background (as suggested by director Nick Michalak). The result was probably the most beautifully lit scene in the whole film, and definitely something for Woltman to be proud of. One of the later teaser posters would be inspired by this lighting setup. It featured Vic Simmons smoking a cigarette in his office with the Venetian blinds pattern across his face and wall behind him. It was also the beauty of this lighting that made it an easy choice to be prominently featured in the first teaser trailer, released in February, 2008.

Eric Woltman showed a great deal of innovation and cinematic talent. Between his knowledge of lighting and creative photography, he proved to be an indispensable asset. Much was done to accommodate the shooting schedule around his availability and other film work. Any setbacks or delays ended up proving to be worthwhile. The further filmmaking experience and knowledge he gained from other filmmakers along the way, benefited the final product of *The Fixer*. Meeting and coming to know him has proven to be a great thing beyond production as he and filmmaker Nick Michalak are constantly collaborating on other work, in and out of filmmaking.

And the man who endured every last, seemingly endless obstacle, headache, and nightmare was indeed Nick Michalak. His credits on the film include writer, director, producer, editor, sound editor, music supervisor, location manager, casting director, boom operator, actor, and even director of photography on five occasions. Beyond that, he has been responsible for all the promotion on the film from creating and maintaining the official website and MySpace page, to cutting all the trailers, and designing most of the posters. A small series of posters were designed by friend Jason Dvorak (who appears as the 'Paid Informant' in the film's first montage sequence). Suffice it to say, it would seem as if his work would never be finished, and even a short film noir production was postponed indefinitely because of the volume of work having to be done after principal photography had been completed. Still, an end is in sight, but there is still much left to accomplish. The final phase of post-production is acquiring music and scoring the film, but only time will tell what results can be produced.