

BROLLYWOOD



Mission: Implausible

RUNNING THE SEAWALL CARRYING A FISHING rod and a cell phone, I feel like the monster of multi-tasking. Sweating in my civvies, I move against the crowd, desperately scanning faces for an old man with a grey beard. The Stanley Park strollers give me a wide berth. I'm panting when I spot an elderly gent in a cap lighting his pipe. A perfect Old Man and the Sea—good for 20 points! Rod in hand, I ask if he'll accompany me to the Rowing Club so I can photograph him trolling from a paddle-boat. He looks at me cautiously, glancing over my shoulder, perhaps to check if I am being properly chaperoned. What he sees instead is a van with its hazards on blocking cars at the roundabout, several faces expectantly pressed to the windows. Now maybe he's thinking we've overpowered our driver and launched ourselves on some misguided crime spree—shades of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. In fact, the movie connection he at least has right. But with one van, six teammates, 20 clues, three maps, two phone books and a dictionary, this one is more like *Quiz Show* meets *Cannonball Run*.

after the \$15-million Trilogy/MGM feature shooting in town on which several of my teammates work. So far today, we've swapped clothes with physicians (*Trading Places*), stolen bicycles from children (*The Bicycle Thief*) and had our picture taken at a cemetery with four (different) wedding photographs (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*). My favourite was *Hockey Night In Canada*, where we posed for our own

Film shoot? No: this movie crew's on a scavenger hunt. BY JOHN NICOLLS

NHL bubble-gum-card photo complete with jerseys, helmets and sticks. A 10-point bonus was offered if the shot was taken "on ice." Other teams tried to bribe GM Place security guards with walk-on parts in a Hollywood feature in exchange for just five minutes in front of the Canucks bench. No deal could be struck: the guards held out for recurring roles in a major series. Meanwhile, our team went

Officially it's called Shootout, an annual fund-raiser for the Vancouver chapter of Women In Film & Video, in which 21 teams from local production crews, companies and agencies compete for prizes and prestige. With team names like The Dirty Half-Dozen and Warrior Princess, it's surprising that, at least in this year's contest, there were no arrests. "Last year," says Shootout producer Mary Anne McCarthy, "your team had to be photographed with a 'mounted' police officer. Well, if there were no horses around at the time, you kind of had to...improvise."

When I turn around, our Old Man and the Sea is Gone With the Wind. Back in the van, we're onto the next clue. I call my sister on the cell to ask her if she knows anyone with a model-plane collection. More specifically, we're looking for a Twin Otter. "With or without floats?"

"Doesn't matter," I shout. "As long as it's got two engines." We're all mighty peeved because earlier, our team arrived at the model store on Broadway—apparently the only one in town open Sundays—to find the *Stargate SG-1* crew had bought up all of the Twin Otters (with and without floats), leaving the remaining competitors with bubkes.

We're the Creature team, named

Illustration by Kathy Boske W.

to Sports Junkies on Sixth Avenue, broke open a few bags of 7-Eleven party ice and posed standing on the cubes. Of course, we were careful to disperse the playing surface before leaving, in case another team showed up and stumbled upon our idea.

It's the kind of silly ingenuity that people will tell you has no practical purpose in the real world. But in fact, it's precisely the skill set that can be so valuable to a

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movie production. For example, if the director wants a shot of a live cougar, as was required in one recent local shoot, but the budget won't allow for a real animal (and its trainer) to the tune of \$5,000 a day, the clever propsmaster can source a stuffed cougar, fit it with an air-bag—operated remotely—and make it look like it's breathing. A stuffed cougar can't maul a set of school children on cue, but it will exhale steamy air and lock eyes magnificently, all for under a grand.

Fortuitously, a trolley car pulls up beside us at a stoplight. We all storm out and pose in traffic to capture *The Streets of San Francisco*—five points. For 10 points, I get into the upper half of some formal wear and pretend I'm the pianist at the Sutton Place while our version of Michelle Pfeiffer sprawls across the piano à la *The Fabulous Baker Boys* (five extra points because she's wearing a red dress). We pick up 15 points when my fellow escapees are photographed with a live lobster (*Lobster Men from Mars*) across the street at the Dynasty Chinese Restaurant and a big 30 points for a shot of *The Pillars of Wisdom* at David Lam Park. Linda, a small but feisty production staffer on *Creature* and our team captain, earned the "C" on her sweater by single-handedly fashioning that elusive Twin Otter model out of

a magazine photo and two soft-lead pencils stolen from the Sutton Place. The Shootout history books show that this kind of innovation does not go unrewarded.

Last year, Pacific Motion Pictures proved they were Top Guns by being among the few teams to snap a photo of a woman on the beach wearing a black-and-yellow polka-dot bikini. Rather than combing the bathing-suit stores for such an item, as most teams did, PMP bought yellow stickers at a novelty shop and took them to the beach in search of a black bikini to stick them on. What if there were no black bikinis on the beach that day? They bought black stickers, too. That way, black or yellow bikini, they still scored a hit. This year's PMP-sponsored team reportedly outfitted itself with a portable fax, a world atlas, scuba gear, *Roget's Thesaurus*, 12 colours of construction paper, scissors, scotch tape, the collected works of Shakespeare, \$100 in bribe money and a dozen glow-in-the-dark condoms. Imagine the petty-cash report on that one.

While perhaps not as well-equipped physically, the *Creature* team had been preparing mentally for the Shootout throughout the previous eight weeks of production. During that time, a number of mishaps had occurred on and off the set that would have unhinged a less determined film professional. *Creature*, based on one of writer Peter Benchley's great white sequels to *Jaws*, was this year's untamed production beast, leaving a swath of violence and destruction in its wake ever since the first part of the shoot in St. Lucia. In July, a barge full of equipment from Florida arrived at the tiny Caribbean island right on schedule. One small problem: there was no way to unload it. The only known crane on the island was pressed into service, but it couldn't handle the load and dropped a two-ton grip truck on top of a picture car and the catering truck—just two days prior to shooting. Later that month, the production warehouse was wrecked when a cargo plane crashed at the Miami airport, killing the plane's crew and several people on the ground. One *Creature* staffer who was supposed to be collecting gear from the warehouse at the time would have been among the casualties, but he was half an hour late for the pick-up. The warehouse was off-limits for days while the FCC investigated the crash site.

In August, when the production was scheduled to move to Vancouver, UPS went on strike. Urgently needed equipment had

to be re-routed by truck, causing further delays. When the production finally got installed up here, a *Poltergeist* truck blew up at Bridge Studios. Two *Creature* trucks happened to be parked beside the fireball-on-wheels. One burned to the ground, and the other—the star's trailer—was scorched beyond repair. "We talk about the St. Lucian curse around here," says Michelle Demers, an on-set *Creature* colleague and Shootout co-producer. "We're convinced there's someone back there with a voodoo doll gleefully sticking pins into us."

Needless to say, finding creative solutions to such production problems had become a way of life for my fellow Creatures. That these people, most of whom log 12- to 14-hour working days, want to spend their day off on the Shootout could mean only one thing—they're entirely unbalanced.

We run out of time to go to Cars from Mars for a shot of the orange-and-green '68 Beetle, opting instead to turn in our shot-list early—thereby grabbing an equivalent number of bonus points and being among the first to partake of the post-game refreshments at Mavericks. After several hours and several rounds of beer, we learn that we've tied for first with the perennial favourite, Pacific Motion Pictures. A representative from each team is ominously called forward to break the tie. Linda, the most sober and determined of our group, gets up on stage. PMP sends Alan Lee, an athletic man who, at 6'3", has at least a foot—and about 100 pounds—on Linda. Fortunately for us, it's not a contest to be settled mano-a-mano, but rather yogi-a-yogi. Both competitors are asked to assume the tree, a yoga pose in which the subject stands on one leg and places the flat part of the other foot against the inside thigh of the supporting leg (i.e. like a tree). Whoever keeps this stance the longest, wins. While Alan holds like a rock, Linda wobbles. Then she wavers, holding her arms aloft as she desperately tries to balance.

When she knows she's going down, Linda hurls her miniature body into her opponent in the most aggressive, yet self-sacrificing, manner seen this side of Theoren Fleury. She bounces off him like a ball striking a wall, but—like the true savage *Creature* she is—rams him again with all her might. Alan bats her away like an annoying insect. She crumples to the floor, and we place second.

The sad thing is, this is just an ordinary day for Linda. Back at the office tomorrow, she'll do it all over again. ●