

Hollywood meets insurance fraud

Risky cinema venture *Blanston* gets good reviews in and out of industry

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by Pat Healy
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DENVER — The legal profession has films like “12 Angry Men,” and “The Firm,” and television shows like “The Practice,” and “Law and Order.” The medical profession has “ER,” and even undertakers have the show “Six Feet Under,” but until now the insurance industry has never really been the basis for many notable works of entertainment.

The movie “Blanston,” by Denver-based Double Edge Films, focuses on four scheming insurance agency employees who concoct an elaborate “fifth claimant” fraud plan that goes sour and threatens to land them in prison.

Shot on a shoestring budget in one location in two days, the film is getting rave reviews from festivals such as Cinequest, and is even making an impact within the insurance industry itself.

Professional Investigative Engineers, based in Westminster, CO has invited filmmaker Jamin Winans to speak at their September meeting, and the group even ordered 100 videocassettes of the movie, to help educate their employees on fraud.

Winans said the film is succeeding within the industry because of his knowledge of insurance. His father was a risk manager, and his grandfather was a State Farm agent. “I think it’s really great for people who work in that field to see a film about their business,” he said. “And there’s enough lingo for them to realize that we did our research.”

Producer Joe Sekiya said the insurance industry is an untapped source for Hollywood, and he saw in “Blanston” a chance to change that.

“One of our goals at Double Edge Films is to explore characters that you don’t normally see in the movies,” he said.

Winans said industry feedback has been so positive, he’s thinking of re-directing the promotional campaign for “Blanston.”

“I think when doctors watch ER on television they see a lot of the medical aspects being totally unrealistic, but I’ve had enough people tell me how realistic this is, that we’re going to start marketing it towards the industry a bit more,” he said.

The film is also accessible for those outside of the industry, detailing the roles of each of the four employees and how they put their scheme together. A claim adjuster, and insurance investigator, a secretary and a tech guy named Blanston, played by Josh Ritcher, come across a multi-million dollar settlement for an accident involving four people. In this they seize an opportunity to create a fifth claimant, and split the money.

The plot is a little cloudy at times because of the incorporation of a role-playing theme. Blanston, who works out all the technological details for creating a fifth claimant likens the practice to that of a Dungeons and Dragons game.

The inclusion of Blanston’s D&D enthusiasm forces dialogue that can make the viewers’ eyes roll at times. An example includes a scene where he is talking about having to start anew after reaching a highest level as an evil character: “I had to start with the simplest, weakest druid: A character that was forced to run from even the smallest troll.”

It just doesn’t translate.

Also when the insurance investigator Steffan, played by Steve Sealy, tries to calm the rest of the group as they panic about getting caught, the writing is a little unconvincing.

“Listen to me Chris,” he reasons. “This is a white-collar crime. We do time and we do it in a minimum security prison.”

The rest of the film works perfectly though. Shot in the outskirts of Erie, CO, the desert-type scene could be anywhere, and the sweeping soundtrack paints a paranoid sketch of the despair and regret of the faltering conscience. At times the movie seems just like a long public service announcement reminding people not to commit insurance fraud, until the ending that ties everything together and twists the plot in a way not many viewers would suspect.

For more information on “Blanston,” visit www.doubleedgefilms.com. □