

388 Arletta Avenue Production Notes

SHAKY HOME VIDEO CAMERA FOLLOWS JAMES AND AMY DEAKIN AS THEY GO ABOUT THEIR LIVES. AT FIRST IT IS A LONG VIEW, THEN CLOSER, MUCH CLOSER.

A mid-sized house in a nice middle-class neighbourhood in Toronto.

James and Amy Deakin are a typical married couple, but tensions are present. Whoever is watching them seems to have decided to manipulate those tensions. Odd things start happening: an radio alarm goes off too early, a mixed CD appears in their locked car with music neither one likes. Individually, each mishap is manageable, but together, they create mistrust that turns to tension, then tension turns to anger and then Amy disappears. James is concerned, but assumes this is her idea of payback.

Strange occurrences continue. Suspecting people from his past, he fixates on an old acquaintance named Bill. An awkward confrontation does nothing to reassure him, and James now believes Amy is in grave danger. The unexplained incidences become bolder, even macabre. Dread mixes with bewilderment, as James make his move to save Amy, asking the only question he can. "Why?"

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388 Arletta is the unsettling Hitchcockian thriller written and directed by Randall Cole. The actors are Nick Stahl, Mia Kirshner and Devon Sawa. The film is executive producer by Vincenzo Natali, and produced by Steve Hoban and Mark Smith of Copperheart Entertainment.

388 Arletta was filmed quietly in a house in Toronto shortly before Christmas, 2010.

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The Beginning of a Very Disturbing Idea

November 26, 1989. "America's Funniest Home Videos" debuts on North American television. At the time, it struck Randall Cole that we laughed loudest at the worst moments in real people's lives

More than two decades later, this benign, low-brow, feel-good, reality-styled entertainment that owed a huge debt to Alan Funt's "Candid Camera" (the show that introduced the world to the idea of "catching people in the act") sparked something in Randall Cole's mind that eventually lead him to write the cold-blooded thriller, **388 Arletta**. But it was the invention of the affordable camcorder (video and sound together) that made these home videos possible.

In 1989, however, it was just the seedling of an idea and the idea was the footage of real people living their lives, not playing for the camera.

As technology evolved - specifically, shrunk - Cole amused himself with the idea of making a movie about someone, without that person knowing the movie was being made. The notion of hidden cameras appealed to him. So did the idea of subversively toying with someone's life.

In 2008, all the elements wove themselves together into a concept for a screenplay. The big production values of *The Truman Show* concept were now unnecessary. What Cole had in mind was something much more lo-fi, something that anyone with some small cameras and a lot of time on their hands could do, something that locked into the society's reluctant acceptance that privacy is now a privilege, not a right.

Cat & Mouse- Taken to a Diabolical Level

James [speaking to Bill]: "It's messed up. To you it must have seemed totally random. You must have asked yourself why? Why me? And to be honest, I can't even answer that question...It was just our screwed-up idea of having fun."

Executive Producer Vincenzo Natali believes that we are living in a time where people have every reason to be paranoid. Our lives are now online as digital information and people feel vulnerable because there is no way to control that information, nor are we sure how that information is being used. The idea of someone spying on us through a video camera or cameras secreted into our homes doesn't feel far from the realm of possibility. Natali recognizes that Cole's script has captured an essential existential dread of someone being toyed with for no discernable reason, something reminiscent of Kafka's novel, *The Trial*. **Arletta's** James is like Kafka's Josef K. in that neither man has any way of understanding why or how these things are happening to him, and it's all about their struggle to grasp the reason why. For Natali, existential questions like these are very disturbing, yet contemporary, but will also stand the test of time.

Rather than relegating **388 Arletta** to the confines of the found-footage genre, Natali endorses this film as a classic, character-driven story of suspense, the result of a beautiful script that's tightly constructed, and very Hitchcockian in the way it is constructed. That the movie happens to be shot on security cameras is precisely the conceit of the movie which, to him, is really what is so brilliant about it.

For Producer Steve Hoban of Copperheart Entertainment, the company which produced Natali's *Splice*, **388 Arletta** is in many ways the antithesis of most of the films Copperheart has made: no special effects, no creatures, and negligible stunts. That said, **388 Arletta** is something Hoban rarely sees anymore – an amazingly taut thriller that also works in a modern way, allowing audiences to focus completely on performance, character and story. The hidden security cameras are the excuse to tell the film in a more unconventional way than you would normally see. They are not 'documenting' as in *Blair Witch Project*, nor are they 'bearing witness,' as in *Paranormal Activity*. These cameras are secretly filming James Deakin and Amy Walker in their home. It's a giant step beyond voyeurism, which is inherently passive. This is full throttle covert-aggressive behaviour.

388 Arletta reminds Hoban of Polanski's early work because of how much audiences do *not* see on the screen, which is a huge contrast to how much audiences are accustomed to being allowed to see in a film these days. Less suddenly becomes much more engaging.

For Producer Mark Smith, an essential key to **388 Arletta** is that while the story follows James, it is told completely and unremittingly from the point of view of the cameras that belong to the person stalking this couple. There comes a point in the film when the awareness of the cameras is replaced by the awareness of being right there with James as he is being tormented - and the action is so gripping that the voyeuristic instincts of audiences will take over. The other reflex of the audience will be to piece together what bits of information they can deduce about the stalker's personality and intent.

Apart from the cerebral intrigue of the plot, **388 Arletta** taps into the far more basic, gut-level phobic fear that has terrorized people as far back as Gothic horror: the strange noise in the basement, an intruder in the house, being watched while you sleep. James Deakin can check the doors and windows as much as he likes – he is still not alone.

With a 20 day shooting schedule and a small, tight crew, the remarkable thing about making this film was the almost invisible footprint it left on the locations where it was shot. Typically, it is hard to miss a film crew on location – trucks and trailers lining the street, crew and equipment everywhere. For **388 Arletta**, people, even visitors to the set, could easily walk right by, oblivious that a movie was being made – even when exterior shots were being filmed. Smith, as well as Hoban and Natali were amazed that you'd see a group of people, one, maybe two actors, a car and no visible cameras or microphones. All the technology was hidden away because it had to be invisible. Yet, on average, there were three to five cameras rolling on every take.

When casting, Cole didn't want James and Amy to be the kind of people you'd see on reality TV, but rather the kind of people who *watch* reality TV, as if they are caught in their own involuntary, horrifying reality show.

The role of James Deakin is played by Nick Stahl, an actor whose performances have always been highly naturalistic. This is exactly what Cole needed. Stahl described his character as your average married, almost-yuppie guy who works at an advertising agency. He's the kind of person who has changed a lot since he was younger. In contrast to his more liberal, free thinking wife, Amy, his quiet demeanor is covering a tightly-wound persona that only comes out in sharp flashes when he argues with Amy. It is not until we meet Bill that we see what kind of person James was previously and subtle evidence of that can only be detected by watching how Bill responds to him.

As an actor, Stahl was presented with an interesting, if somewhat unorthodox challenge. Alone for most of the scenes of the film with three to five hidden cameras rolling at any given time and telltale evidence of filmmaking in sight (because the almost 360 degree scope of the cameras prevented equipment on set), he found the experience to be freeing. This kind of environment had a calming effect, he said, even relaxing and out of that came much more natural tendencies and much more candid footage.

Mia Kirshner plays Amy, James' wife, who is sweet, but just flakey enough that when strange things start happening to this couple, it is easy for James to lay blame at her feet. After all, she has been working on her PhD for the last eight years. What once was

an endearing relationship, Kirshner explained, has lost its charm and what remains is a yawning gulf between the two of them. When an unexplained CD appears in their car, setting off an argument about who put it there, she knows these fights about music and mixed CDs are really about their marriage falling apart. What Kirshner liked about the character was the brief, but fragile moments of looking into Amy's psyche.

The concept of this film, she continued, is a very frightening and cruel form of violation. That it sprang from the mind of Randall Cole was symptomatic of a man she found to be wonderful, very smart, and very gentle. His intelligence is such that he doesn't intimidate, but she is convinced that his ideas are quite loud. Kirshner, who has been based in LA for many years now, said Canadians are like that: quiet with noisy minds.

Whereas many roles involve rudimentary backstory, leaving the performance for on screen, the role of Bill Burrows, played by Devon Sawa, is the diametrical opposite. What leads up to Bill meeting James again after many years is intense backstory. Bill and James were good friends. Then everything changed and for most of high school, James made Bill's life an ongoing nightmare. After school, Bill entered the military. Now he is back and, as Sawa describes his character, Bill's not all together upstairs. Long gone is the weak kid who was the favourite target of the school bully. In his place is a man with the skill set and the rage to do some real damage.

The Security Cam Aesthetic – A film Without Close-ups

The usual method of shooting a scene in a film begins with the director and actors blocking each scene in terms of movement, and then the crew is brought in to address camera placement and lighting. For **388 Arletta**, that process was turned upside down. In place of one or two main cameras getting coverage, there were three to five cameras filming every scene. As dictated by the script, each of those cameras stayed in position for the entire film, and those positions, chosen by the stalker, were based on where the inhabitants of the house would most likely be active.

During pre-production Cole and Gavin Smith, the Director of Photography, scouted different locations, bringing along little spy cameras so they could test various nontraditional camera positions for their potential to invoke different emotions. A Dutch tilt creates uneasiness, a high angle suggests powerlessness, and partially obscuring the view frustrates audiences, thereby ratcheting up the tension. Obstructed views were a big part of the approach. Sometimes audiences are unable to see the full person, sometimes the person would pass into and then out of frame and on occasion would be fully off camera. Cole and Smith felt the suspense this created more fully engaged the audience than when they are able to see everything all the time.

Even blocking an actor's movement was done in a fashion closer to working on a thrust (or open) stage rather than film. Movement within a scene was massaged, rather than directed. As Smith explained, if the light, setup or composition was too perfect, it wouldn't feel real, so we played for imperfection. Thanks to YouTube, the general public is familiar with unsophisticated filmmaking which makes it all the more 'real'.

Normally, audiences are asked to suspend their disbelief and pretend there is no camera between them and the action. Once again, the opposite takes place in **388 Arletta** because the audience's only ability to access the events as they transpire is through the choices of the stalker –and as he adds more cameras into the house, more information

becomes available. On a subliminal level, this increases the satisfaction of the viewer. It also creates cognitive dissonance: watching feels immoral, but it's impossible to stop watching. Once engaged, the intrigue increases because unlike James Deakin who doesn't understand why his life has stopped making sense, the audience does - and this triggers an almost reflexive curiosity to piece together the available pieces of information about the stalker.

What is most unusual about the aesthetic of **388 Arletta** is the absence of close-ups, ordinarily used to focus on the emotion of the action. Logically, this makes perfect sense, but this choice works to keep viewers at arm's length. It denies the emotion, leaving the audience in the same remote viewing position as the stalker: both curious, both voyeurs, and because the stalker and the audience experience their own emotion watching James Deakin's life fall apart, both are ethically compromised.

Curiosity is lying in wait for every secret. -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall into a sewer and die. – Mel Brooks

ABOUT THE CAST

NICK STAHL (James Deakin) After an impressive feature film debut at the age of twelve, Nick Stahl has continued to display a broad range of talent. Stahl recently was seen in *Kalamity*, directed by James M. Hausler, *The Chameleon*, directed by Jean-Paul Salomé, also starring Marc-André Grondin, Famke Janssen and Ellen Barkin, *Burning Palms* starring Zoe Saldana, Jamie Chung and Rosamund Pike, *Sleepwalking* playing the lead role opposite Charlize Theron, AnnaSophia Robb, and Dennis Hopper. Upcoming projects include *Afghan Luke*, directed by Mike Clattenburg and *The Boarding House*, directed by Bruce Van Dusen.

Stahl was also most recently seen in the feature film, *Quid Pro Quo* opposite Vera Farmiga, and in *Sin City*, an action thriller starring Bruce Willis, Jessica Alba and Brittany Murphy. He also starred on HBO's critically acclaimed series "Carnivale," as 'Ben Hawkins' and the pilot for the television series, "Locke and Key", based on the graphic novel by Joe Hill, Stahl also starred opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger and Claire Danes as "John Connor" in Warner Brothers' *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* and was seen in the indie film by Jacob Tierney, *Twist*, as well as the Sundance feature, *Bookies*.

Over the years, Stahl has had stellar roles in a number of films, most notably the Academy Award nominated film, *In The Bedroom*. Also memorable was his chilling performance in director Larry Clark's, *Bully*, opposite Brad Renfro and Bijou Phillips. He also co-starred with Sean Penn and George Clooney in Twentieth Century Fox's, *The*

Thin Red Line, directed by Terrance Malick, and New Line Cinema's, *Safe Passage*, opposite Susan Sarandon and Sam Shepard.

Born in Harlington, Texas and raised in Dallas, Stahl began performing in children's plays at the age of four. At 10 he had his first professional role in the television movie, "Stranger at My Door", with Robert Urich. He followed with another TV movie, "A Woman with a Past," opposite Pamela Reed. Thereafter he played a young boy who brings out the love in a physically and emotionally scarred man (played by Mel Gibson) in *The Man Without a Face*. Gibson gave him the role over thousands of others after being impressed by his screen test.

The following year he completed another movie for television, "Incident in a Small Town," with Walter Matthau, and the Disney feature, *Tall Tale*, in which he co-starred opposite Patrick Swayze. Stahl also co-starred with Martha Plimpton in Tim Blake Nelson's directorial debut, *Eye of God*, which premiered at the Sundance Film festival.

Each of the roles he has played in his professional career display his impressive range and diversity - the ultimate goal that actors many times his age find difficult to achieve.

MIA KIRSHNER (Amy Walker) Born in Toronto, Canada, Mia Kirshner came from a family of Holocaust survivors; her journalist father was born in a displaced camp in Germany and her mother was a Bulgarian-Jewish refugee. Kirshner studied Russian literature at McGill University in Montreal while pursuing an acting career in the early 1990s. Kirshner portrayed a young, clairvoyant, dominatrix in Deny Arcand's *Love and Human Remains* before her memorable turn in Atom Egoyan's *Exotica*. In 1995, Kirshner had supporting roles in the Southern coming-of-age tale, *The Grass Harp*, starring Sissy Spacek and Walter Matthau. She then played the lead opposite Vincent Perez in *The Crow: City of Angels* (1996). Kirshner revealed a lighter side with a featured role in the spoof comedy *Not Another Teen Movie*. In 2001, she appeared throughout the duration of the series as a professional assassin in the action-filled drama, "24" starring Kiefer Sutherland. The talented actress was then cast in the critically acclaimed series "The L Word," which centered on a small, close-knit group of lesbians living in Los Angeles. She played a twenty-something writer, Jenny Schecter. After the "The L Word" she starred in Brian De Palma's movie *The Black Dahlia*, alongside Josh Hartnett, Aaron Eckhart, Scarlett Johansson and Hilary Swank, playing the young actress Elizabeth Short, who was horrifically murdered in 1947.

Kirshner also has co-written a book, [I Live Here](#), published by Pantheon Books, which is a four-volume anthology detailing the lives of refugees and displaced people focusing on hidden stories. Kirshner traveled and collected stories from Ingushetia (on the border of Chechnya), Burma, Juarez (Mexico) and Malawi. She has also founded I Live Here Projects, which runs a full time school in Kachere Juvenile Prison, located in Lilongwe Malawi.

DEVON SAWA (Bill) began his career in 1992 as a children's action toy spokesperson, after which his acting career rapidly developed. He has been a lead in films such as *Little Giants*, *Casper*, *Now and Then*, *Wild America*, *Idle Hands*, and *Final Destination*. In 2000, he portrayed the role of Stan in the Eminem music video "Stan" alongside singer Dido who played Stan's girlfriend. Sawa continues to work steadily, appearing in independent films such as *Extreme Dating*, *Shooting Gallery*, *Devil's Den*, *Creature Of*

Darkness, and *Endure*. In 2011, Sawa recurred on the CW television drama "Nikita" as 'Owen'. He also joined the cast of the upcoming horror film, *Sibling*.

AARON ABRAMS (Alex) has appeared in several roles for film and television, he can currently be seen on ABC's hit cop drama "Rookie Blue." Aaron was also a regular on the Emmy nominated series "The State Within," The Sundance Channel's "Slings & Arrows" and CW's "Runaway" with Donnie Wahlberg. Aaron also had major roles in the biopics *Amelia* starring Hilary Swank, *Flash of Genius* with Greg Kinnear and the upcoming *Chicago 8*. Also coming out this year, Aaron will appear in the comedies *Jesus Henry Christ* produced by Julia Roberts and Sarah Polley's *Take This Waltz* as Seth Rogan's brother. Aaron also wrote, produced and starred in the hit film *Young People Fucking* produced by Copperheart.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

RANDALL COLE (Writer, Director) lives somewhere near you.

VINCENZO NATALI (Executive Producer) The Canadian-born fantasist director Vincenzo Natali is no stranger to dystopia; each of his four produced features thrusts ordinary human characters into the middle of an inexplicable and darkened future realm governed by seemingly impenetrable logic and follows the subjects as they struggle to come to terms with their environs. Natali burst onto the scene in 1997 with his surreal, low-budget sci-fi thriller *Cube*. This enigmatic film weaves the tale of a group of people clamoring to escape from some obscure cubic labyrinth where the casualty of a misstep involves full dismemberment by the cube itself. The film understandably impressed viewers and critics alike with Natali's ability to stretch cinematic boundaries on a shoestring budget; it also received multiple Genie (Canadian Oscar) nominations for art direction, sound, and an original score, and in time became something of a cult favorite. Natali was nothing if not prolific over successive years, and kept his feet planted ever firmly in the postmodern realm. Natali's 2002 follow-up to *Cube*, *Cypher*, stars Jeremy Northam, Lucy Liu and David Hewlett, in the tale of a man who assumes a new identity in preparation for an espionage career, but instead gets systematically brainwashed and finds himself engulfed in a shaky, paranoid reality. The film performed admirably on all fronts and paved the way for a tertiary effort, 2003's *Nothing*. Described by Natali as "a buddy comedy set in a void," the film involves a couple of eccentrics who literally wish the outside world out of existence, and (along with their house and pet turtle) turn up on a seemingly limitless white landscape. The film like its predecessors -- garnered worldwide critical kudos. Natali then contributed a segment to the 2006 *film-à-sketch Paris Je T'aime* along side The Coen Brothers, Alexander Payne and Gus Van Sant, and that same year, announced production on his fourth feature project, *Splice* starring Adrien Brody and Sarah Polley. *Splice* premiered at the 2010 Sundance Festival. It was subsequently acquired by Joel Silver through his Dark Castle label and received a wide summer release through Warner Brothers.

STEVE HOBAN (Producer) Hoban is founder of the Toronto-based film and television production company Copperheart Entertainment. His productions include the Academy Award® winning computer animated short, *Ryan*; the world's first Imax 3D animated film, *Cyberworld*; and several live-action feature films including the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy, *Black Christmas* and last years' Warner Bros released science-fiction thriller *Splice*.

Upcoming projects include an adaptation of Anne McCaffrey's bestselling science fiction novel series, The Dragonriders of Pern, a 3D animated feature, *Lovecraft*, that will be directed by Chris Landreth, and the dramatic television series "James Ellroy's L.A. Shakedown"

MARK SMITH (Producer) was born and raised in Montreal, Quebec. He began working as production coordinator for the IMAX Sandde (TM) Animation Studio in Montreal. The studio collaborated in the creation of the unique IMAX (R) feature, *Cyberworld 3D*. It was on *Cyberworld 3D* that Mark first met Steve Hoban, who recruited him as head of production at his upstart production company, Copperheart Entertainment, in Toronto. Since making the move from Montreal, Smith has been involved in several feature film projects, including the Vincenzo Natali directed films *Nothing* and *Splice*, and two sequels to the cult horror film *Ginger Snaps* on which he acted as associate producer. The Oscar-winning animated short *Ryan* directed by Chris Landreth represents the auspicious debut of Mark Smith as a producer. His recent producing credits include the animated short *The Spine*. Currently, Mark Smith continues to work for Copperheart Entertainment in Toronto, Ontario where he lives with his family.

GAVIN SMITH (Director of Photography) returns to work with Copperheart Entertainment again, having previously been the cinematographer on *Ginger Snaps: Unleashed*. His credits also *Ice Men*, "Combat Hospital", "The Border", "Degrassi: The Next Generation", "Ghostly Encounters", "Queer as Folk" as well as the television movies "Sibs", "Another Day", "My Louisiana Sky" and "Lucky Girl".

KATHY WEINKAUF (EDITOR) is an award-nominated film editor working in Toronto for the past thirteen years. She began her editing career cutting music videos and went on to cut short films, documentaries, TV series and feature films. Films she has edited have won awards around the world. They include *Monkey Warfare* (Grand Jury Award, TIFF '06), *Small Town Gay Bar* (Best Documentary, LA Outfest '07), *Surviving Crooked Lake* (Kodak Vision Award for Best Cinematography, Slamdance '08), the multi-award winning film *Interviews with my Next Girlfriend* (Best Short Film, Inside/Out Festival '02), as well as the multi-award winning film *Evelyn, the Cutest Evil Dead Girl* (Grand Jury Award Best Short, No-dance Festival '02). She was nominated for a Golden Sheaf Award for Best Editing in 2006 for her work on *Santa Baby*. She also edited *Leslie, My Name is Evil* (TIFF '09) which she was nominated for a 2010 DGC Award for Best Editing, *Toronto Stories* (TIFF '08), an omnibus film featuring some of Toronto's finest directors, as well as *19 Months* (VIFF '02), and most recently *Mystico Fantastico!* which had its world premiere at the 2011 Cinequest Film Festival in San Jose, California. She has also edited various TV series including "The Bridge" for CTV/CBS, the highly acclaimed first season of "Rick Mercer's Monday Report" as well as "What It's Like Being Alone" for the CBC, "It's Me...Gerald" for Showcase, "Tell it like it is" for WTN, "How Do They Do It" for Discovery International and a TV pilot for Fox called "Sell". This past year she edited "Vacation with Derek", a TV movie for Shaftesbury Films airing on the Family Channel as well as the TV pilot for "Skins" airing on MTV in the States. Her education includes a degree in Film and English from Carleton University, an apprenticeship at Sound By Deluxe and a diploma in Digital Editing from the Academy of Design. She is also a graduate of the Canadian Film Center's Editor's Lab 2000. She recently wrapped the feature film, *Stag*, for Fresh Baked Studio.

PETER COSCO (Production Designer) has worked as an award winning Production Designer since 1997. Peter's designs for feature films include *Victoria Day*, *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl*, *Collaborator*, *Nothing*, *Nemesis Game*, and *Perfect Pie*. His extensive work for television includes episodes of the HBO series "Tell Me You Love Me", "Beautiful People", and "Total Recall 2070", as well as the telefilms "Widow on the Hill", "Naughty or Nice", "Gracie's Choice", "Mr. Rock 'n' Roll: The Alan Freed Story" and "Time Shifters". Variety magazine praises Peter's strong contribution of "down-to-the-last-1930s-detail" production design in Patricia Rozema's *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl*, and received a 2009 nomination for The Director's Guild of Canada Award. Peter's work on *The Nemesis Game* won the New Zealand Film and Television Award, and DGC Award Production Design nominations for the feature films *Kit Kittredge* and *Nothing* directed by Vincenzo Natali. Peter studied sculpture and film at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto and Florence, Italy. Peter is passionate and knowledgeable about all genres of film and has worked on productions in cities across Canada, the US, and the Bahamas. Peter works closely with Directors and Directors of Photography to develop the visual language required to realize the unique story and sensibilities each project demands.

PATRICK ANTOSH (Costume Designer) started his film career in wardrobe on the set of *Johnny Mnemonic* as a wardrobe assistant to the award-winning Designer Olga Dimitrov. After several projects he branched out on his own as a Costume Designer on such diverse projects as Showtime's "Queer as Folk", a slew of Disney Channel movies and the NBC/CTV action series, "The Listener" to name a few. A regular on "Fashion Television" as well as a judge on "Making it Big", Patrick has also been a personal stylist to celebrities such as Cyndi Lauper and Olivia Newton John. He is also V.P. of Wardrobe for Nabet700 and a voting member of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (the Emmy's).