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10 Producers to Watch: Dan Lin

Ex-exec anticipates studio's needs

By MICHAEL FLEMING

When Dan Lin transitioned from Warner Bros. creative exec to producer, he hoped his finance background (Harvard Business School), understanding of studio politics and talent relations would make him a valuable bridge between studios and makers of global-minded tentpole fare.

Apparently he was right.

With five pictures on the WB release calendar for 2009, Lin's already off and running. He's exec producer on the McG-directed "Terminator Salvation" and the Robert Rodriguez-helmed "Shorts," and he has producer credits on Richard Kelly's "The Box," starring Cameron Diaz, and the Ricky Gervais/Jennifer Garner comedy "This Side of the Truth." He's lead producer on Guy Ritchie's "Sherlock Holmes," which begins shooting with Robert Downey Jr. in October, and is waiting for WB's marching orders on "Justice League."

The toughest part of this for Lin is the challenge of living on film sets and being a good dad to his two young children.

Lin has been able to grow quickly, thanks to lessons learned at the studio and connections that go back to his days at Harvard. Indeed, his classmates there were Media Rights Capital chairmen Modi Wiczynski and Asif Satchu; Lin is producing three MRC films that WB will distribute domestically. He credits Harvard alum Jeff Sagansky and WB topper Alan Horn as mentors.

"Coming from Warner Bros. has given me a better sense of what the studio needs, and I can communicate those points to filmmakers," Lin says. "I became a producer to be more entrepreneurial, and I'm expanding into digital filmmaking and exploring television. When I was an exec, I worried only about production, but now it's everything down to marketing and distribution strategies. I love it."

"Terminator Salvation" helmer McG is among Lin's fans: "He's professional and talented, two characteristics rarely found in one individual. Dan is a straight shooter, which over the long haul is appreciated by both the studio and talent. Most importantly, he loves movies. I find him to be a huge asset on the set, helping balance writers, actors and directors. He lets everyone be heard while maintaining leadership."

Fluent in Chinese (which was his first language; he moved from Taiwan to the U.S. as a child but summered in Hong Kong, where his father was an exec in international food),

Lin has surrounded himself with a staff that speaks French, Spanish and German, and he's aggressive in mining offshore properties that will lead to movies with global appeal. He's optioned "Tokyo Underworld," plans a remake of the Korean thriller "The Chaser" and is negotiating properties from France and Scandinavia.

"My goal has been to make big event movies for the studio, with big, established directors or up-and-comers that I believe in," he says. "In the next 10 years, distribution pipelines will be changing, but right now, I'm enjoying the creation of content for the pipeline that currently exists."

BACK STORY

AGE: 35

PROVENANCE: Taipei

INSPIRATION: He grew up watching U.S. films and Hong Kong actioners like the "Once Upon a Time in China" series and John Woo's "The Killer," which were his faves. He also grew to love gangster and cop genre pics "The Godfather," "Goodfellas" and "Heat"; superhero movies such as the Richard Donner-directed "Superman" and Tim Burton's "Batman"; and "Star Wars" and the "Indiana Jones" films.