

HOW TO MAKE IT AS A HOLLYWOOD FILM DIRECTOR

LEARN HOW TO MAKE IT TO THE TOP
IN THE FILM MAKING WORLD



Includes Case Studies of Top Film
Directors and how they made it to the top

How to Make It as a Hollywood Film Director

Case Studies of the Hottest Directors and How to Make Their Magic Work for You

By

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1: What You'll Learn](#)

[Chapter 2: Quentin Tarantino](#)

[Chapter 3: Time-Out](#) – Your Power

[Chapter 4: Ridley Scott](#)

[Chapter 5: Time-Out](#) – 7 Ways to Make It

[Chapter 6: Phillip Noyce](#)

[Chapter 7: Peter Jackson](#)

[Conclusion: Take Action](#)

Introduction

Thank you for downloading this free e-book, I am sure you will be delighted by the quality information about how to become a film director. My name is Colm O'Murhcu and I own International and Australian Film Base. I am a passionate [film maker](#) who loves making exciting indie films. At International Film Base we teach emerging film makers how to be the very best film maker they can be. You can find out more about me on my blog, Colmomurchu.com



Colm O'Murhcu on the Set

Chapter 1: What You'll Learn

In this e-book, I will show you the following:

1. How to become a movie director.
2. How other top Hollywood directors made it and the lessons that you can draw from their experience
3. What to do right now if you want to be a film director



So, what does it take to be a film director?

Certain key attributes are necessary for a film director to make it. You will see these attributes in the directors that we profile in the coming chapters.

Persistence.

This is the number one attribute. Keep at it no matter what obstacles get in your way.

Talent.

It really helps to have a talent for storytelling. Much of this talent can be developed through training and practice, but some people just have it naturally.

Networking skills and a little bit of charm.

Most directors are charming and have the ability to attract the people that will help them succeed.

The ambition to keep improving.

Most talented directors will consistently learn. Every film that a director makes teaches him or her how to direct. directors should always go to Film Making

courses to get the knowledge to make a film happen. They learn as much as they can.

The quickest way to improve and learn how to be a professional film director is to [enroll in a professional film course](#)

Chapter 2: Quentin Tarantino

Famous Film Director Study Number One



Quentin Tarantino is one of the most famous writer/directors. But he was a low achiever at school and found academic studies very difficult. He had a troubled childhood. How did Quentin go from being a sales assistant in a video shop to a famous international movie director?

As an adult he found one obsession, watching films on his VCR. It was from this obsession of watching movies over and over again that Quentin learned about film making.

One of the interesting traits that seems to be consistent with successful film directors is that they seem to have a “calling”; an inner voice that drives them to write and get their films made.

As a result of watching so many videos at his local video shop, Video Archives invited him to work for them.

As a result he got paid to watch numerous films at work. His knowledge of movies was and still is encyclopaedic. Video Archives video shop was the single most important influence on Quentin's eventual success as a director.

Quentin was a great networker was able to get people to help him in his career. Another of the most important influences on Quentin in the early 80's was Cathryn James. She became his personal manager in 1984 and advised Quentin of his options if he wanted to make it as a director.

Cathryn James said, "For someone with no contacts, make your own low budget film and write at least three strong scripts."

This is exactly what Quentin Tarantino did.

He co-wrote a script called *My Best Friend's Birthday* and they started to shoot it. They knew nothing about film making and as a result had a hard time making the film.

Shooting dragged out over three years before wrapping in 1987. It cost \$5,000 to make the film. The Film was processed and an edit was attempted.



The Film turned out to be very amateurish and as a result it received a poor response. It was not the sort of film that Quentin could show and hope to persuade people to raise money.

One of the big lessons from Quentin's experience was that he knew nothing about film making when he started to make the film.

It's so important to first learn **how** to make a film and **then** make a film. It sounds obvious, but if you want to be a Film Maker you will need to know how to make films. The first step for anyone who dreams of being a film maker is to learn from experienced film makers who make films. Quentin Tarantino should have attended a [Film Course](#) and learned how to do it properly.

Tarantino learned many lessons through the process of shooting the film. It was also during this time he got the idea to write *True Romance*.

For the next few years Tarantino would write many of his famous scripts. Most famous directors write scripts when they start out. Directors will always stress that you need three or more scripts to give you the chance to be noticed.



If you've seen *True Romance*, you will probably agree that it is a hot movie. Written by Tarantino and directed by the late Tony Scott, the film was successful when released.

Initially, the Hollywood Studios and major production companies didn't like the script. Cathryn James sent it out to over a hundred sources and it had lukewarm response at best, with vicious rejection at worst.

One rejection letter from a Studio Executive stated:

"How dare you send me this f... piece of shit? You must be out of your f... mind. You want to know how I feel about it? Here is your f... piece of shit back. F... you."

How would you like to be told that about your script? How would you like to be the idiot film executive who wrote that review of a future successful film?

The lesson to be drawn from this is that even the very best filmmakers have problems getting accepted at the beginning. It takes persistence, getting the script package out there and never giving up.



Persistence is one of the key attributes of any successful film director.

So after a year of sending *True Romance* out and getting negative feedback, finally a break happened.

Stanley Margolias, a producer of two feature films called *Bearing Boogie* and *The Dark is Mine* read *True Romance* and liked the script. He promised Quentin and Cathryn that he would try and get a deal in return for a percentage.

Finally Tarantino had a fan other than Cathryn James!

Stanley Margolias put the script out and had a negative reaction. He tried and tried but received nothing but dislike for the script and its content.

One rejection letter for *True Romance* read:

"The Action is not exciting and the characters are under-developed and unbelievable. True Romance is one long hollow adventure."

True Romance received rejection after rejection. One year after Margolias took on *True Romance* he was feeling like he had a stinker of a script, but producer's work hard for their money.

Tarantino was now working on *Natural Born Killers* and at this stage had earned no money from his scripts or his script writing ability. It takes persistence to keep pushing on when nobody takes you seriously in your writing. On top of that, the experts in the film industry hate your work.



In 1990 Quentin's life turned around. He was offered a writing gig, working on a script called *From Dusk Til Dawn*. It was the first time he was offered money to write. The fee was \$1500. Now Quentin had been trying to break into the industry since 1984.

From Dusk Til Dawn died soon after Tarantino wrote it, and didn't re-emerge until 1995 when Tarantino had his power and fame. He acted in the film and Robert Rodriguez directed it.

At this time Tarantino completed *Natural Born Killers*, so he was moving in a forward direction, always writing scripts. The lesson from this is to always be moving forward. Do not get bogged down with one script or one project that's not financed. Move on and write more scripts and make films.

In 1990, most of Hollywood hated Quentin's material. But one thing that he had on his side was his ability to make friends with whoever was remotely involved in Hollywood. People generally enjoyed his company.

This ability to **network** is so important if you want to make it in the film business. So many times, an important producer or financier is two degrees of separation away.

This was the case for Quentin. In early 1990 Quentin met Scott Spiegel who co-wrote *The Rookie* starring Clint Eastwood. Quentin and Scott became best of buddies and hung out talking all about movies incessantly. In May 1990 Scott invited Quentin to a Memorial Day BBQ. This day would change Quentin's life forever.

He had become good at pitching his projects and could give a 30 second pitch on *Natural Born Killers*.



The BBQ had many minor celebrities such as Michael Rooker who starred in *Days of Thunder* and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*. There were also many low budget producers and directors.

At this BBQ, Quentin met Laurence Bender who was frustrated producer and out of work actor. Laurence was actually explaining to somebody else at the BBQ that he wanted to completely give up the movie business. His movie *The Intruder* had gone straight to Video and he was disappointed in people's reaction to the film. He was over Hollywood.

Speigel introduced Bender to Tarantino at the BBQ and as a result, one of the hottest producer/director partnerships was conceived.

They got into a conversation about movies and the machine gun enthusiasm of Tarantino generated an excitement in the jaded Laurence Bender. Quentin pitched *Natural Born Killers* in less than a minute - Bender loved the sound of it.

With the alcohol hitting the bloodstream, Quentin decided to pitch another story about a heist gone wrong. He had titled the story *Reservoir Dogs*. Laurence Bender asked for a look at the script. Quentin had to explain that he had to write it and he would have it written in less than a month. It would be easy to do on a Low Budget.

They swapped numbers and Bender left the party thinking that he was headed back east to the family business.

Quentin watched *The Intruder* the next day and saw that it was shot in a warehouse on a small budget. He felt that he had found a producer who could deliver *Reservoir Dogs*.

That's if he could persuade him to produce the film.

He sat down the next day to write the script. For three straight weeks he wrote and wrote, developing the script that would change his life and turn him into a star film director. After three weeks, he had completed the script for *Reservoir*

Dogs. Over those three weeks he had locked himself away and got lost in the world of his story.

He had just written his first hit film script.

Bender came over to his apartment and read the script. He loved it and instantly wanted to produce the film. Bender thought the writing and the dialogue was pungent and sharp and would make a strong impact on the audience.

Tarantino wanted to make the film now on no budget. Bender had much bigger plans and asked for six months to get a film package and financing together. Quentin was used to five years of bitter Hollywood rejection and didn't want to wait six months but in the end relented and gave Bender the six months he needed to raise the finances for the film.

At the same time as this was all happening, the producer Stanley Margolias was finally getting traction with *True Romance*. Tony Scott became interested in directing the film and very quickly Tarantino's first script became a \$30 million dollar production.

From this Tarantino was paid \$50K.

When you're considered new to the film industry the pay is minimal relative to the budget.

Build a thick skin and take criticism as part of the course of being an emerging film director.

Laurence Bender made contact with an experienced Hollywood director, Monte Hellman. He read the script for *Reservoir Dogs* and instantly wanted to direct the film. Monte begged Tarantino to let him direct.



Tarantino had just received 50k for *True Romance* script and was determined to direct the film himself using this fee. Hellman was extremely disappointed as he

felt it was one of those very rare, incredibly great scripts.

He decided he wanted to be involved anyway as an executive producer and started sending the script out to all of the various studios and distributors. Tarantino called Monte 'The Godfather'.

Most people baulked at giving money to a first time director. One thing Quentin had on his side was that he wasn't desperate.

He had the \$50k from *True Romance* and if his conditions weren't met, he would make *Reservoir* himself. He nearly wanted this to happen so that he would have absolute independence in making the film.

His main condition for finance was that he would direct the film. Tarantino knew that he had a hot script and therefore it'd be successful in any case. Eventually one company relented to Tarantino directing the film. This company was Live Entertainment, headed by Richard Gladstein.

Richard loved the script and decided to take a chance on the inexperienced Tarantino. Gladstein gave them a list of ten actors, saying "if you get one I'll give you a million, if you get two I'll give you two million." Most companies that sell movies want a recognisable name in the film. This is so important.



Harvey Keitel was on this list. Keitel loved the script and committed straight away. The Film was getting legs now. Once Keitel was on board the chances were good that the film would get made.

After some months of tough negotiations, the deal was signed over at Monte Hellman's office. In less than a year the film had been green-lighted for \$1.3 million. Tarantino had been trying to make it as a film director since 1984. That was seven years and finally now his first feature film was green lit with Harvey Keitel heading the casting and a whole swag of top actors in the other roles.

Tarantino made it on his scriptwriting ability. Writing one of the hottest scripts was his entry to film making.

Tarantino now had to go to intensive Directing school at Sundance.

He spent two weeks learning all about the process of directing a film. He'd spent years learning all about films watching videos and studying them.

Reservoir was shot on a tight schedule. Everybody was impressed with Tarantino's enthusiasm and his on-set direction. He naturally slipped into this role showing his talent as a filmmaker. When the film was finished, there was incredible advance buzz. All the actors had been raving about the film and about Tarantino. So momentum was on their side.

At this time Tarantino was signed up by Danny DeVito's company. Stacey Sher, the president of the company reckoned she could get an advance of \$1million dollars for Tarantino's next film.

She knew that Tarantino was going to be hot. This was purely on the buzz of *Reservoir Dogs*.

The Film screened at the Famous Sundance Film Festival in 1992 and the cinema rights were snapped up by Harvey Weinstein of Miramax for \$200,000.



The Sundance art house audience had a mixed response. Some people hated and some loved the film, but everybody was talking about it. Film festivals are very important for an up and coming director.

When you make short films or low budget films, film festivals are where you get noticed and often the film gets sold. This was the same for Tarantino. In the next year of film festivals the buzz would follow him everywhere and doors would open in every direction. Every major film festival wanted his film and for one year he would travel the world with the movie.

He went to Cannes where the film was very well received. He was noticed by all of the powerful stars and film powers at Cannes. He was now considered the new hot director and all the studios distributors and sales agents all wanted to offer him a deal for his next film. He was gearing up to write the film that would make him legendary.

Pulp Fiction



True Romance was now about to be shot with a host of movie stars such as Brad Pitt, Denis Hopper, Christian Slater and Patricia Arquette. Tony Scott would direct the film.

At the same time, Oliver Stone now wanted *Natural Born Killers*.

Reservoir Dogs became a hit film around the world. Miramax were delighted with the response to the film in all territories around the world. Most of *Pulp Fiction* was written in an Amsterdam flat in Holland.

Tarantino once again locked himself away and wrote a 500 page script. That in screenplay rule of thumb terms equated to an 8 hour film. It needed to be trimmed down to 200 pages. Tri-Star had signed a Deal with Jersey Films, DeVito's company, and when they read the script they wanted out.

So they passed on a financial and critical success: *Pulp Fiction*. This film would become iconic and a Quentin Tarantino classic. It also would become a box office smash.

After Tri-Star passed, Miramax came to the party and financed the film and even accepted the casting of John Travolta. Travolta had been in flop after flop and nobody wanted him in their films anymore. He would become a hot star again as a result of *Pulp Fiction*. Originally Michael Madsen was offered the role of Vince but

turned the role down. This opened the way for John Travolta.

On Release, *Pulp* came an iconic film that moved Tarantino to legendary celebrity status. All the success happened in the space of three years, but remember, Tarantino had started his dream of making films ten years earlier in 1984 when he made his first film.



Where could you be in ten years time? What can be learned from Tarantino's story?

The most important thing is you need help to make it as a Film Director. You need the very best [Film Courses](#) on the market

Chapter Three: Time Out – Your Power

What you need to know to make it as a film director

Make Short Films Now: This is the number one priority. A film director makes films!

The Power of a Script

Everybody wants to make a great script and it will through the law of attraction, attract the money needed to make the film. A great Script brings you confidence and with networking you will find the finance.



Photo: From our 4 Month Film School Film Set

Three Properties

Eventually you should have three properties minimum (screenplays). You can buy them, commission a writer, or write the scripts yourself and hope like Tarantino that you have the talent and luck to succeed.

Find a producer who knows how to package a film script with hot actors and film companies attached to the film. This will in turn attract the financing.

You will increase your chances dramatically by also making short films or micro

budget features as you develop your three screenplays. Your three screenplays should do the rounds of the funding bodies, film sales agents and distributors. The goal is to attract the producers, actors and financiers.

The Power of a Pitch

You need to be able to pitch your film story in less than a minute and get the producer or contact interested to read your script.

The Power of Film Festivals

Certain Film Festivals have the power to make or break a film director's career. It gives advance buzz and many times it's where the deals are done for feature films with the distributors. This was the case for *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* at Sundance and Cannes. *Pulp* won Palm D'Or for Best Film at Cannes.



Your short films should be sent to film festivals so that you get noticed.

Robert Luketic went to Telluride Film Festival in Colorado with his short film. They loved it and on the power of the short film he got a three year contract with a studio in LA and eventually three years later directed the hit smash film *Legally Blonde* with Reese Witherspoon. Robert made his short film in Melbourne, Australia.

The Power of Networking

Hang out with film industry people so that you can pitch your film ideas. We show you where and how to do this on our practical film courses.

The Power of Persistence

Make short films and low budget feature length films. Do not ask permission to make them. Just make them. Digital Technology will allow you to make films cheaply today.

This is so important. Make Films and find support from mentors who are experts in the film industry. If you don't have a mentor find one at an [awesome film course](#).

Build Critical Mass

All the directors we looked at built critical mass. They were always doing!

Either they're writing or shooting or editing a film. If they have to, they do it in their spare time on the weekends with whatever equipment they can get. They network at all the industry functions and get to know the right people.

**Make Films.
Write scripts.
Do Both at a [Film Course](#)**

Chapter 4: Ridley Scott

Famous Film Director Study Number Two



Successful film directors tend to have a calling toward their job. They often have an obsession about story and about movies and about their craft. They think about nothing else when they're making a movie.

The film consumes them heart and soul and they put everything into their project. When they're starting out they'll often bore their friends, with another blow by blow description of some obscure Romanian film and how they could have directed the same film better. Master directors have a very strong sense of mission about making films.

One such example is Ridley Scott. Ever since he was a teenager he wanted to be involved in film making and movies. Yet even though he worked at the BBC in his early 20s, it took him until he was forty before he made his first feature film, *The Dualists*. Since then he has made an incredible amount of films.

Ridley Scott was the first to cast and discover such talents as **Brad Pitt, Michael Madsen, Daryl Hannah and Sigourney Weaver**. Of course **Russell Crowe** truly hit the big time with *Gladiator* on his first collaboration with Ridley Scott.

Alien, Blade Runner, Black Rain, Thelma and Louise, Black Hawk Down, Gladiator, and American Gangster are some of the many films that Ridley Scott has directed. He certainly is one of the true A-List master Hollywood film directors.



How did Ridley Scott make it in the film industry and how did he become one of the worlds great Film Makers?

Step 1: Ridley Scott started at the Royal College of the Arts after he left school in 1958. **This was his first step** in becoming a master A List film director.

As Ridley Scott said *"The Royal College of Art was an incredible stimulating, well rounded environment. I used to build a sculpture, do some photography look in on the school of industrial design"*. When he left, he had a diploma in Graphic Design but soon realized that he didn't want to do that. Television was now hitting the big time in the UK and Scott was attracted to the idea of designing sets for TV productions.

Step 2: He did two extra post graduate courses. One which was very important, **Set Design**. There was an interesting guy who taught the course called George Haslam. He was also a practicing theatre and television designer. He taught Ridley how to read a TV script and about the principals of TV.

Scott was inspired by the 50s cinema and the Film Making art was being pushed by the French New Wave and the Italian Neo Realist movement.

Step 3: Ridley Made a Short Film. Scott found an old 16mm film camera and was inspired to make a short film titled *"Boy and Bicycle,"* which was 27 minutes long. His brother Tony Scott acted in the film. He got a grant from the British Film Institute to do a sound mix on the film. The finished cut showed a promising talent and Scott now had his first directorial credit.

In 1961 Scott left the RCA with a short film and a diploma in Graphic Design. At 19 years of age he decided that he wanted to become a film director.

It is so important to get help to make your [early films](#) look professional.

Step 4: His strategy was to apply for a job at the BBC He successfully managed to find a job at the BBC. He managed to negotiate a six months gap to travel to America.

Step 5: In New York he landed a job as a photographer's assistant at Bob Drew Associates, a top ad agency. He became immersed in the New York advertising scene. He lasted a few months.

Step 6: He then landed a second job with Richard Leacock, a famous Documentary Film Maker. He stood around with his portfolios in the lobby and approached the Film Maker, showed his photos and landed a job in the lift.

Ridley spent three months in the editing rooms of one of the top documentary film makers in America. He worked on two documentaries as an assistant.

Many young film makers have cheeky self confidence and a belief in themselves that magically attracts the right people and jobs even when they're starting out. Ridley was on his own in New York with no contacts and was able to land two plum jobs in six months. He then went on a road trip of the US and of course many of the locations he saw can be seen in *Thelma and Louise*.

Step 7: He returned to England in 1962 and worked with the BBC **as a full-fledged Art Director** and designed sets for television.

Ridley said about his time in the BBC, *"I was like a human sponge I soaked it all up. Being a designer was like in a funny way almost like being a film director. You were always inside the nucleus of every project, working alongside the director lighting people and other department heads. The BBC fundamentally taught me to know what I wanted. It also showed me how to communicate and organize others, so that they could deliver what I wanted."*

Step 8: Before there were film schools, the BBC was Ridley's training ground and it wasn't long before he was noticed as a talented future film director. The BBC then put Scott through an internal director's course for five months. **You can learn how to make professional films by attending a [top quality film course](#) at International Film Base**

Step 9: After the film course, he directed TV shows such as a Detective show called *Softly* and *Z Cars*. Even after he left the BBC he would direct as a guest director on TV shows.

Step 10: In 1964 at the age of 27 Ridley decided to give the BBC 10 months notice. After that he wanted to move to the independent world of TV commercials. He formed a company called Ridley Scott Associates (RSA.)

At first he thought he had made a big mistake as he wasn't able to get any commercials to direct. Just as the money was running dry he received a commercial job and from there never looked back.



In the space of a year, Ridley became one of the best commercial directors in the business. The money flowed from the commercials and soon he needed other directors to service the jobs.

RSA is still today regarded as one of the best commercial companies in the world. RSA has offices in LA and London, and has produced thousands of commercials all over the world.

Ridley could have just lived comfortably off commercials but he still had a strong calling for directing feature films.

Step 11: In 1971, Ridley started to focus on ways to realize this dream. It would take him some time. He started to write scripts. He wrote a script called *Running in Place*. Michael York expressed interest in playing the lead. Ridley managed to attract most of the \$1.5 million budget but just as pre-production was about to start, a budget shortfall destroyed the film's chances of being made.

This was a major disappointment and many people give up when they hit a tough hurdle, but dogged **Persistence** is one of the key characteristics of all the A-List

Film directors we study. After recovering from the disappointment of the film falling over in Preproduction, Ridley made a very important decision.



Step 12: He made a decision that he needed to **find a writer** to write the next script. He found that he had no time to write scripts himself and therefore hired the best writer he could find. John Edwards then wrote a draft of a script called *Castle X*.

Robert Stigwood came to the party and promised finance. He stipulated that the group that he managed, the Bee Gees, would have to be involved in the soundtrack.

All looked good and Ridley was out of the country scouting locations in Yugoslavia at that time. Stigwood pulled the finance from the film and another project bit the dust. Ridley was beginning to feel frustrated. Most people will give up at this stage thinking that there's no money and that he's not good enough and that it's too hard.

Step 13: Two more scripts were developed and financing sought. Both were period scripts. One set in the 17th Century and based on Guy Fawkes and his plot to blow up parliament.

The other one was called **Indian** and it was about an Indian who roamed through Arizona, but he couldn't get any of these films financed. It was very frustrating. He felt like he was getting nowhere. At least he had his commercial company RSA which was doing great and making a wealthy man.



Special Point: Virtually every A-List film director developed scripts at the start of their film career. Either they wrote the script themselves or they hired a writer or they bought scripts. But it is essential for emerging film director to have spec scripts that he or she is actively chasing financing for.

Step 14: It was at this point that Ridley was attracted to a Joseph Conrad book called *The Duel*. This was based on a true story of two men who duelled 18 times. At first Ridley thought that it might make a good TV show. He hired Gerald Vaughan-Hughes in 1975 to write the script. The title of the film was called *The Duellists*.

EMI turned the film down. Technicolor turned the film down and so did Hallmark in Chicago. **Ridley was getting used to rejection.**

Ridley then turned to a new English company called Enigma run by David Puttman. David referenced Ridley to Paramount and after months back and forth, Ridley finally managed to lock down a deal to make the feature film, *The Duellists*.



Success!

Paramount wanted some known actors and two of the actors on their list were Keith Carradine and none other than Harvey Keitel (instrumental in Quentin's career).

Both were hired. Ridley also cast some of the best actors in the UK. **He hired the most talented cast and crew** he could find in the country

Special Point: Always hire the very best cast and crew you can find. This will increase the quality of your film. So many emerging film directors cast their friends, the girl or guy they fancy, and settle for the first person with a free camera. Avoid this trap.

Use professionals: You could have a great script but bad acting and poor sound and shaky camera work will destroy your finished product. Alternatively, learn how to shoot a film professionally at a [Film Course](#).

Step 15: Ridley started work on the film immediately and shot the film in the freezing winter of 1976. He didn't wait until spring as he needed to shoot straight away in case Paramount changed their minds.

Step 16: In mid-1977, post-production concluded on the film and Ridley showed the final cut to Paramount. They were very impressed with the quality of the film. It certainly showed the visual flair that Ridley would become famous for.

The Duellists won the Special Jury Prize at the 1977 Cannes Film Festival. It had to be double-reeled as it was still in the finishing process of post-production. The film earned rave reviews and had moderate box office success.

Ridley found music to be one of his most important characters. Since this film, music has played a very important part for Ridley Scott. Think of the haunting track on *Blade Runner*, or the themes from *Thelma and Louise*.



Scott had now finally directed his first accomplished feature film. He had a track record and proved that he could deliver a strong film story over 2 hours. He was now on the way to being an A-list film director.

He'd been involved with film since 1961 had made hundreds of commercials. He had specifically focused on his dream of directing movies since 1971 and it had taken him four setbacks and then the fifth film, *The Duellists*, to finally deliver him the Holy Grail.

In 1977, it took Ridley 15 years of involvement in film and five focused years to become a movie director.

Step 17: Now he had to do the tricky bit and compound his success with an even better follow up. The follow-up films were ***Alien* and then *Blade Runner***.

Fox owned the rights to *Alien* and they began to search for a director to attach to the script. Sandy Lieberman, one of Fox's top executives, sent the script to Ridley who read it right away. Ridley straight away wanted to direct the film as it would have challenging design and visual aspects. Ridley signed up to direct in February,

1978, **only eight months after finishing *The Duellists***. Its success put him in the right place to direct *Alien*.



Alien was shot in 1978 on an \$8 million budget and completed post in early 1979. It was released in May, 1979, in the US and instantly became a big hit film.

Step 18: He then signed on to *Blade Runner*, directing Harrison Ford. There are many stories about the difficulty of making this film. It is well worth reading them. *Blade Runner* was not a hit film when it first came out. I remember seeing it in the cinema in the early 80s which proves to be one of those seminal films in my life. I knew I wanted to be involved in making films after seeing this majestic work.

Blade Runner found its life on video and a re-release in 1992 with the Director's Cut. From here Ridley continued to make great films such as *Gladiator* and *American Gangster* and in 2010 *Robin Hood*.

What we can learn from Ridley Scott?

This was the result of his first Artistic and moderate success, *The Duellists*. He was signed on to Hollywood films. He did not have to search for these projects. They came to him as producers searched for proven directing talent.

One critical success and moderate to strong box office will open the door to opportunities with bigger budget films. Set yourself up with developing script properties and making really hot short films and then low budget feature films.

In Ridley's case it was 17 Steps to a Hollywood Smash hit film. What can we learn from Ridley Scott's story?

1. **Persistence.** He persisted through the failures to get films up.
2. **Networking.** Ridley is obviously a great networker as he landed plum job after plum job and eventually his feature film.
3. **Talent.** Right from an early age Ridley was a talented visual artist.
4. **Passion.** He made a short film when he was 17 and then 100s of commercials where he learned how to make films.
5. **Calling.** An A-List film director has a core belief in their talent and mission that helps them up the mountain.

If you want to make it to the top, learn how to [make films right now](#)

Chapter 5: Time-Out – 7 Ways to Make It

What are the paths that movie directors follow to get started?

Directors come from various different paths.

The First Way

- Make short films on an extremely low budget.
- Get funding for a full budgeted short film.
- Write feature length scripts.
- Raise private investment or funding with market attachment.
- The feature film is shot and becomes a sleeper hit from a so-called “first time director”.

As a result, big budget films and success follow.



The Second Way

- Make short films.
- Make music videos for bands on the cheap as a side project.
- The band hits it big and the director now makes big time music videos and commercials.
- The director gets recruited to direct a movie.

This is how Alex Proyas broke into directing big feature films (*The Bird, Dark City, I Robot*).

The Third Way

- Make short films.
- Make a couple of pretend commercials.
- Seek work making commercials and succeed.
- Become a high paid commercial director.
- Get offered a directors job on a feature length film that becomes a hit.

A Movie director has arrived. Ridley Scott and Alan Parker are both examples of this approach.

The Fourth Way

Scriptwriting.

- Write scripts for fun. Write a feature length script that sells and becomes a hit.
- Become a writer for hire and get to know everyone in the film industry.
- Raise money or leverage money from the network of powerful film people that you know.
- Direct a feature film debut.
- The film becomes a hit film and the director is established.

Examples: Oliver Stone, Frank Darabont, and Quentin Tarantino.

The Fifth Way

Direct Acting in Theatre.

Certain directors have started in theatre and then through their success and after many years in this medium, they have been offered jobs directing feature films.

Example: Ben Mendes (*American Beauty, Perdition, Jarface*).



The Sixth Way

- Make a ripper short film that gets noticed at a film festival by a talent scout. This is a great way!
- The talent scout creates a deal through the studio system hired as a director to direct a studio film.
- This film becomes a hit film.

Robert Lutkic from Melbourne, director of *Legally Blonde* followed this path.

The Seventh Way

Make a no-budget feature film on the weekends with 4K cameras, lights and sound equipment.

This is a great way and is the way that will now happen more and more. It is also lots of fun on the weekends.

- Attend a film course and makes short films first to learn the process.
- Invest \$10,000 - \$20,000 in a camera, lighting and sound equipment tracks and crane and (or networks with others who already own this equipment).
- Make a low budget feature on the weekend.
- The Film becomes a highly successful film at the film festivals and is bought by a distributor.
- The Film becomes a sleeper hit.

- Get offered to direct bigger budget feature films that succeed and become wealthy.

This particular method is now becoming very popular due to the inexpensive cost of making films.

An example of a big success with this way is Robert Rodriguez (*From Dusk till Dawn, El Mariachi, Once Upon A Time in Mexico, Desperado*).

Also, Chris Kentis and Laura Lau made *Open Water* on the weekends. The film sold for \$2.5 million and became a hit all over the world. We'll look at this example later.

This is the way of the future. Over the next ten years we will see more and more no-budget feature films shot on the weekend that will become hit films.

The above are the main ways of breaking in as a Movie director.

90% of successful directors that we surveyed started out by making short films, so it makes sense to take the first step and start making a good 10 minute short film. Then, send it out to the film festivals around the world.

If you don't know how to make a film yet or would like to learn more about making films and writing scripts, we can help. We train the [film director Stars of tomorrow at International Film Base](#)

This is the Key to making your Director Career happen!

Start making short films now.

Chapter 6: Phillip Noyce

Famous Film Director Study Number Three



Philip Noyce worked his way through the Australian system and then moved to Hollywood where he directed several big budget action films. Noyce has directed 11 feature films, two of which were Hollywood blockbusters. From *Backroads* to *Newsfront* to *Dead Calm* and on to *Clear and Present Danger* and *Patriot Games* and *Rabbit Proof Fence*, Noyce has directed a diverse range of films.

One of his key characteristics is that he is a very likable man. Because of his charisma, Noyce was able to charm many people in Sydney and Hollywood. This helps in an industry where people have to work intensely together. Do what you can to charm as this will attract work and opportunity?

When you are on the way up one can never tell who will recommend you to someone else.

Always Remember Work Attracts Work.

Working as a Production Runner on that no budget feature film could connect you with someone working on a TV Program that then attracts a job there. Work on your charm. It goes a long way in the film industry. See what you can do for the production not what the production can do for you. The energy of putting the production interests first goes a long way to attract opportunity and work. If you want to get involved in one of the best film networks, please start with one of our Film.

One of the most important parts for your film career is building the network.

That's why we have a 4 Month Film Graduate Club called the Indie Film Club that meets regularly to network and share productions and work. The club is only for [Film Club Graduates](#)

Philip Noyce was born in 1950 in Griffiths, NSW Australia, where he spent the first ten years of his life. As many children of that time, their exposure to movies was the Saturday matinee at the local cinema. As Noyce said, "I loved movies as I could escape into the stories".



It was not until 1968, a few months before he graduated from high school, that he had that moment that changed his life and would make him commit to making films. He saw a poster advertising American Underground movies and decided to go to the screenings. In September 1968 he joined a full house and saw 17 experimental films.

As Noyce said, "On that night my whole attitude to art, my whole attitude to movies and in fact my whole life changed. I left the cinema that night thinking I'm going to make movies like that. I can do it'

September 1968 was the turning point for Philip Noyce. He was bitten by the bug and the whole trajectory of his life was shaped in that single night. He decided then and there to be a Film Maker

Step 1. The Importance of Networking

Noyce regularly attended the weekly film meetings. He made contact with the people who ran the screenings. He organized a screening at his high school. He then started working for the guys who organized the underground screenings. Something, we now encourage is networking and mentorship for the very talented course participants that attend a high quality film course.

Step 2. Make a Short Film

In the summer break between high school and university Noyce got a job digging ditches for the Water Board. He saved enough money to make a short film. He also distributed the *Ubu* Newspaper and he was paid commission on what he sold.

Eventually he saved enough money to make his first short film, *Better to Reign in Hell*. The film cost \$600 and was shot in 16mm black and white. Every A-List director starts his career by taking the first step. Make a short film and learn how to do this quickly and professionally on a really good [film course](#).

Philip Noyce was pro-active and this characteristic is so important for any film maker. A film maker makes films and produces scripts that eventually turn into award winning films that people want to see.



His first short film was not that good but did screen in the underground screenings and Noyce now had made his first film. He was now a Film Maker.

Step 3 Make More Short Films

It is so important to learn how to make short films. From this process you prepare the ground to make bigger films.

We have numerous film courses that teach you the process involved in making a film. Our courses teach film making by actually making a film.

Philip Noyce became prolific at university saving money and then making short experimental films. The university had camera equipment and basic editing equipment that no one was using. Noyce gladly used the equipment and made numerous films between 1970 and 1971

Megan – A three-minute silent film that featured a woman called Megan that Noyce had a crush on

Intersection – 2 minutes 44 seconds this film was shot in an intersection in North Sydney and Noyce just spun the camera around and around. Well it was an experimental film

Memories – A seven minute colour short film set in the bush and about his childhood.

Sun – A 90 second colour film of the pulsating Sun. It was shot in 100 single frames.

Home – This was a 90 second exploration of Philip Noyce's home.

Yes the films were in the vogue of the time and very experimental in nature. The most important aspect of the above is that Noyce was actually making short films. He was a film maker.

Step 4 Find Work in the Film Industry

During the Summer break 1969 - 70 Philip Noyce proactively got a job at Film Australia in Lindfield where our film courses take place. He assisted one of Australia's renowned doco Film Makers Cecil Homes. He had to drive Cecil to locations and back to his hotel and he learned many film making techniques from Cecil. He found the best way to learn Film Making, was to attend the daily Rushes at the Film Australia screening Room. Peter Weir was making a 30 minute film at this time at Film Australia and he saw his rushes and the rushes of many other films that were shot at Film Australia. Noyce learned a lot from this experience.

Like Ridley Scott, Philip Noyce was proactive at finding jobs and grabbing opportunities.

Step 5 The Film Co-op

In May 1970, Ubu Underground Films decided to re-invent itself as a Film Maker's co-op. They needed a part time manager and Noyce put up his hand to do the job.

He was elected the manager of the Sydney Co-op. His pay at the co-op was a percentage of the screenings that were held. This gave him enough money to live on and attend university where he was doing an Arts Degree.

He met Jan Chapman, his first wife at university. They both shared a love of Films. Philip was always working on something; he was very obsessive about film, very engaging and inspiring about it, too"



Step 6 Student Documentaries

In late 1971, Noyce was contracted by the Australian Union of Students to make a documentary about the Combined Universities Arts Festival. This doco was similar in style to Woodstock.

Step 7 Noyce goes to The AFTRS Film School in Sydney

In 1973 Philip Noyce was accepted into the First Film School intake. This was the first year of the Australian Film and Television School and twelve people were accepted. Gillian Armstrong was also accepted in this year. The initial Film school was all about making Films. This is exactly how we run our Film Schools now.

Noyce made three films at Film School

Film 1 Caravan Park - This was a 30-minute short drama film made on a budget of \$3,000. Noyce based his script on a short story by John Emery.

Film 2 A documentary called *Castor and Pollux*. Budget \$3,000. This was a doco all about bike gangs in NSW. I personally saw this documentary back in 1992. At the time I was amazed that it got such good reviews. The Production standard was rough by today's standards and the film seemed to drag. The documentary did very well for Noyce. He won the Rouben Mamoulian award for best Documentary at the Sydney Film Festival.



Film 3 *That's Show Biz* \$5,000

This film starred Gretel Pinnerger (Madam Lash) and Philip Noyce acted in the film. This was a zany film about Strip Tease Artists.

In June 1974 Noyce travelled the world for about nine months.

Step 8 Worked at Film Australia Again

When he came back in 1975 he once again got a job at Film Australia as a Production Assistant. Before long he was working on *God Knows why* but it works. This film is about the neglect of Aboriginal Health.

Noyce learned one valuable lesson at Film Australia. Work with the best DOP. He also worked as director on different documentaries in a series called *Why can't they be like they were?* Tom Maefield was the producer. Tom had hired Noyce at Film Australia.

Step 9 Philip Noyce meets David Elfick 1976

This is the connection that changed everything and would lead to him getting the directing gig on *Patriot Games* with Harrison Ford. The two would collaborate on *Newsfront* an Australian Film Classic.



David was running a cinema called Manly Silver Screen. He saw *Castor and Pollux*. (The doco Noyce made at Film School.) He liked the film and screened it and Noyce and Elfick connected. In 1976 David approached Noyce about directing *Newsfront* written by Bob Ellis.

Step 10 Philip Noyce Makes His First feature film *Back Roads* 1976

Noyce received \$20,000 from The Australian Film Commission. Russell Boyd was hired as the DOP. The Film was only 60 minutes long.

So on this miniscule budget Noyce made a Road Trip Film. It premiered at the Sydney Film Festival in June 1977. It received luke warm reviews in Australia. However, it was picked up by the Berlin film Festival and Wim Wenders really liked the film. Scala a British Distributor picked it up and it had limited sales in Europe. Still Philip Noyce was on his way and he had made his first feature film on a tiny budget and the best thing about the film is that it set him up for his first big success *Newsfront*.

Step 11 Noyce directs *Newsfront* in 1978, His First Major Success

Bob Ellis wrote the script David Elfick produced it and Philip Noyce directed the film. There was very strong tension between the key players with Bob Ellis not liking the script revisions.

The financing was tough but eventually the Australian Film Commission and the New South Wales Film Corporation financed the film. This was after Village Roadshow distributed it with a minimum guarantee involved in the deal.



Due to his networking with David Elfick and their previous credits they managed to get the film financed. It took two years to develop and attract the finance for the film.

As Noyce said:

"When David first approached me to read the script and then asked me to direct the film, I felt flattered that someone actually thought I could handle a film with a budget of \$700,000. There was nothing on *Backroads* which was shot with a crew of six on \$20,000 that could prepare me for the first day of shooting on *Newsfront*."

Newsfront was a challenging production but it was a massive success for all involved and is to this day a classic Australian Film. It was very well received in Europe and won numerous awards. It also was commercially successful. Philip Noyce had made his first internationally successful feature film. It had taken him ten years to get to this point. Now he was in a position to work regularly in Australia. Now he had a reputation. It would take ten more years before his decade making Hollywood blockbuster films.

Special Note: Be in Film Making for the Long Haul

Be a film director because you love it. When you look at a filmmaker's trajectory, it usually takes them ten years before their first major success. It is so important for you to network and meet like minded people. George Miller and Byron Kennedy met at a film course. Nine years later they had massive success with *Mad Max 1*

and then Mad Max 2. Join a [Join a Film Course](#) and meet a network, learn how to make films professionally.

Philip Noyce continues to make films and work on commercials and music videos. It was three years before Noyce made his next feature film. In 1981, Noyce made his third feature film Heatwave. In Australia, there tends to be a break between films as directors go to film festivals search out a new project and that project attracts finance. In the meantime many directors will still direct commercials and music videos.

The finance for the film was raised via the now defunct 10BA tax shelters, The budget was \$1.4million. Heatwave failed to achieve the success of *Newsfront*.

Step 13 Noyce Works with Kennedy Miller

Noyce became one of a Group of Film Makers that clustered around Kennedy Miller. George Miller and Byron Kennedy had major success with Mad Max 1 & 2 and created a production company that produced mini series and feature films. It was a prolific film company in the 1980s and therefore work was regular for the chosen directors. Kennedy Miller was like a mini studio.

Noyce directed a one-hour episode of The Dismissal. This was a mini-series about the Whitlam Dismissal in 1975.

Then he worked intimately on the Cowra Breakout. The Cowra breakout was a mini series about the Japanese prisoner of war escape during the Second World War. Noyce directed five episodes.

In 1986 he made his fourth feature film "Shadows of the Peacock" which had very limited success.

All these films were financed by 10BA tax shelters. With all these films and TV series Noyce was now a prolific film maker.

Step 14 Noyce Makes Dead Calm

This film felt more like a Hollywood film. It was based on a script by Orson Wells and was once again financed by 10BA tax breaks. This film was Nicole Kidman's breakthrough film. She was noticed in Hollywood and was picked up for Days of Thunder where she met Tom Cruise.

Produced by Kennedy Miller, Noyce was asked to direct the film. Most of the film was shot at the Whitsunday's and one week of the film was shot in Sydney. I fortunately managed to get on the set for two nights as an extra. Dressed as sailor for the opening scenes, I observed Noyce directing. He was energetic and actually spoke to the extras using a loud hailer and somehow managed to get all of us as excited as he was about the film. I can still see myself clearly in the films opening scenes.

I also noticed that he was very likeable even talking to extras on the way into work. Most directors would not be seen communicating with the riff raff of the film set. He seemed to be relaxed and loving the job.

Dead Calm was very successful when released in 1989 both in Australia and internationally and particularly in America.



Sam Neill and Nicole Kidman in her breakthrough film *Dead Calm*

This film paved the way for Noyce to direct films in America

Noyce wanted more regular work and also a chance to work in the big arena of Hollywood.

Who you know makes such a difference in the film business and Noyce networked with the right people and before long he was offered big budget films on the basis

Step 15 He directs his first American Film *Blind Fury*

Blind fury was not a memorable film. It starred Rutger Hauer who had come to notoriety as a replicant in *Blade Runner*. It is probably a step backwards rather than forward.

Step 16 Noyce Directs *Patriot Games* in 1992

Noyce was considered for the director job of *Patriot Games* because of his prolific CV and *Dead Calm*. The producers sought him out. This happens once you start to make notable films. If your feature film is a big success at certain American or European film festivals you will be chased to direct films.

Harrison Ford had to approve Philip Noyce. By co-incidence Ford had recently seen *Newsfront*. He loved the film and Noyce got the gig. *Patriot Games* was Noyce's first big budget Hollywood film and it was very successful worldwide.

Philip Noyce directs Sharon Stone in *Sliver*. From this he got the Directing gig on *Sliver* with Sharon Stone in 1993 who was at the height of her stardom.

He then directed “Clear and Present Danger” with Harrison Ford. Clear and Present Danger was phenomenally successful around the world in 1994

As a result of this success Noyce managed to make The Saint in 1997. This was a personal project that he had wanted to make for years. The film starred Val Kilmer. After the Saint he directed “The Bone Collector” which was Angelino Jolie's breakthrough film.

After that Noyce returned to Australia and made Rabbit Proof Fence and The Quiet American 2000 - 2001 and in 2006 he made Catch a Fire in South Africa. He now has numerous projects in various stages of development. He recently made Salt with Angelina Jolie.

So in summary

1. Philip Noyce knew how to network and get on with people who could help him.
2. He made films prolifically Work always attracts work. Start making short films and work on any project initially.
3. Make sure you enter film festivals. Success at the right festival will attract producers to your projects.
4. Always develop or get attached to film projects as you never know which one will find legs and become a successful film.

Could you imagine yourself making it to the very top in Hollywood? Or maybe one of the most sought after independent film directors of quality films.

What action could you take right now that would start or help your journey to the very pinnacle of the film world. Enroll in a [Film Course and network with other people who want to make films](#)

Do this today and you will have taken your first major step!

Chapter 7: Peter Jackson

Famous Film Director Study Number Four



The Peter Jackson story is inspiring. He is living proof that anyone from any point of the world can make it big in Hollywood. He has now created three of the biggest films of all times. He made 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy and won numerous Oscars in the process. Currently, he is working on the hobbit Trilogy He came from nothing to a Superstar A List film director that makes films on his own terms. He has shot and post produced all his films in his native New Zealand and made it to the very top of the A list directors and Film Makers in Hollywood. **Today he always makes films in his backyard on his terms.**

Yet he started with just a hand held 8 mm camera shooting home movies with his friends. Right from an early age Peter Jackson had a love of movies. When he was a child he saw '*King Kong*' and he was hooked by the film medium.

How did Peter Jackson end up directing and shooting the film version of “The Lord of the Rings” and 'King Kong' and now The Hobbit? How did he do it on his terms in his city?

Peter Jackson, an only child, loved to play with the family camera acquired in 1969. In 1973, Peter Jackson made his first attempt at a film. Only 11 years of age, he had his friends play soldiers. He found that he was fascinated by effects and would endlessly play with the camera trying to obtain different effects. Time Lapse was one of his favourite effects.

In 1978, at the age of 16, Peter shot his first serious film 'The Valley' with his 8mm camera - a fantasy film with different puppet monsters and people and stop-frame

animation. The film actually made an impact and even screened on TV. This was encouraging for Peter Jackson.

Soon after Peter left school he made up his mind that there was only one thing that he wanted to do and that was to be a Film Maker.

Peter Jackson is a prime example of making films from an early age, even though, these films were very experimental. He just got out there and made these films **with what ever he had**. Also, Peter Jackson never went on to other people's film sets. Mainly he made his own films and then found funding and eventually he was making feature films. His film obsession carried him through.

If you have a desire to make films, make sure you first [complete a film course](#) that shows you how to make films professionally. It will save you years working out how to make films and also save you thousands of dollars.

A List Film Makers are obsessed by the medium of film.

When they start, many film directors make micro budget films till they prove themselves and then finance attracts to their future projects.

When he left school in 1978, he found a job as an apprentice photo-engraver. On his way to Auckland he picked up a paperback book to pass the journey. The book was called 'Lord of the Rings' and thus started his long association with the classic.

His Photo-engraver study took three years where he excelled in his class. At the same time, he was working as an apprentice engraver. He would never take overtime as he wanted to keep the weekends free to pursue his passion of Film Making.

He was always experimenting making sequences from favourite films such as 'Sinbad', 'A Clockwork Orange', 'Halloween', and many of these experiments were never finished. But still it was all valuable practice in the art of Film Making. Over the next four years, different experimental films were shot. This all led to Jackson's first self funded feature film, 'Bad Taste'. Peter Jackson had very supportive parents who were delighted that he had found a passion in life and they were going to do all they could to help him out.

In 1982 Peter Jackson visited Los Angeles and the Universal Back Lot.

He vowed to become a professional film maker. He did not know how this would happen. Somehow it would happen. On that day he decided that it was time to make serious films and get them seen around the world. **It was the moment of decision.**



It took till **27th October 1983** before Jackson started to shoot his first serious film '**Bad Taste**'. Here is where the story of Peter Jackson takes a turning point. When he started to shoot 'Bad Taste', it was supposed to be a ten minute short film called 'Roast of the Day'.

Peter Jackson had bought varied camera equipment and therefore used this to shoot on the weekends and make the film for very little money. With hardly any script they aimed at finishing the film in six weeks. In the end it took about three years to shoot.

And the short film had blown out to a feature film that would eventually be a cult hit film in 1988.

These days it is so easy to buy and acquire acceptable equipment and edit on Final Cut Studio and find actors to act in your film. Today it is easy to create an infrastructure to go out there and make your film and then enter it into strategic Film Festivals. **If you have the talent and a great film, the industry will discover you.** It is that simple. However, it is highly advisable to [enroll in a film course](#).

There were many tests and tribulations over the shoot of 'Bad Taste'. As the film grew, Peter would get more and more ideas for the film.

"I kept shooting and shooting every weekend and then I would go to my job at The Evening Post and I would be sitting there bored thinking up ideas for the next weekend shoot."

Progress was intermittent and was based on how much Peter Jackson could afford from his weekly pay packet. Over three years the film was slowly shot.



Peter Jackson learned so much through creating this film. He built his own tracks and crane which gave the film movement. About fifteen minutes into the shooting, Peter Jackson did some intense editing and found that he had a 55 minute movie.

Up to this point he thought he was making a fifteen minute short. He then realized that the then titled 'Giles Day Out (Bad Taste)' could expand to a 90 minute feature film. Suddenly this short film was now his first feature film. So far the film had cost \$8,500 and therefore he needed to raise money to complete it. Peter Jackson applied for funding to the NZ Film Commission. Jim Booth assessed the application and rejected it.

The 23 year old Peter Jackson was devastated. Ironically, Jim Booth would be his producer on his next four feature films, so he did recognize a talent when he saw one. Peter wrote an 8 pages diatribe pointing out why the NZ Film Commission was making a mistake. Of course, the disappointment of the rejection had repercussions on set. One of the key actors, Craig Smith, resigned and like a soap script, Peter had to find a way to write his departure out of the script.

At this point the new title for the film was created. 'Bad Taste' and the shooting continued. Also, the Production Company, Wingnut Films, was born. The company was named after a pet rabbit. Wingnut is today one of the most successful

production companies in the world. In 1985 Peter listed the company and the production in the film magazine, Onfilm.

A valuable lesson can be learned from Peter Jackson's experience. film directors will have challenges and will be rejected. **It is how you handle these challenges and rejection that will decide if you make it.**

Peter just pushed on with whatever resources he had and made it happen. This is inspirational for any would be film maker out there. Just do it! If you have the talent you will be discovered, **provided you enter Film Festivals.**

In 1986, Peter went back to the NZ Film Commission. At this stage, 75 minutes of the film had been shot. Jim Booth watched the film with his assistant, Cindy Treadwell, and she pushed him to help Jackson out. But still, it would take some months before the commission saw the light. After much debate with colleagues, the NZ Film Commission finally funded 'Bad Taste'. Tony Hiles was the man who finally green lit the funding in stages to complete the shooting of the climax and the post production.

So, in 1986, Peter received \$5,000 from the Film Commission and quit his day job at the Evening Post. He was now a full time Film Maker.

Sound Post required a lot of work as the film had poor Location sound. But with the film supported by the New Zealand Film Commission it gained a momentum and support that would see it achieves cult film status. It had the professional finish.

In 1987, four years after the first days shooting, 'Bad Taste' was ready to be screened to the world



Throughout 1987, Peter Jackson, Stephen Sinclair and his future wife, Fran Walsh, wrote '*Braindead*'. They were making sure that there was another project to go once 'Bad Taste' succeeded.

This is very important for film makers to realize that they should have projects ready to go once they have succeeded with a project as there is only a small window of opportunity once you have succeeded with a film. Learn as much as you can and look into attracting [film mentors that show you the ropes](#). '*Braindead*' went through several drafts and then was submitted to the NZ Film Commission with a budget of \$2.5million.

Also, at this time, '*Meet the Feebles*' was created and written. They requested only \$40,000 for this project which mainly required puppets.

This so called small project was to keep Peter busy for the next six months before going to Cannes with 'Bad Taste'. Peter thought that he would definitely get the funding for the project. He was extremely disappointed when the funding for '*Meet the Feebles*' was rejected.

The core group that Peter had pulled together were very angry about the rejection and at a meeting decided that they would self fund the project for \$25,000. They all chipped in the money and over six months made '*Meet the Feebles*' as a short film.

This was a completely different approach to 'Bad Taste'. The idea was to shoot the film in one block of time and post quickly; and in six months the second Peter Jackson film would be ready. However, delays happened and *Feebles* did not start shooting till two weeks before Cannes. Shooting had to stop and Peter went off to the South of France.



Peter went with Tony Hiles and they promoted the film 'Bad Taste' relentlessly. **'Bad Taste' was greeted with a standing ovation at Cannes** and generated serious interest from buyers. A Spanish Distributor bought the rights for Spain and also offered financial commitment for 'Braindead' if a Spanish actress was cast.

The film then screened in Paris at the Festival of Fantasy and Science Fiction. It received a highly enthusiastic response. Peter was supposed to go away for two weeks but ended up away for two months as 'Bad Taste' continued to get rave reviews.

When he returned, 'Bad Taste' became the hottest ticket at the Wellington Film Festival. Everyone had heard about how well the film was received in Cannes.

Peter Jackson was on the way. What had he done to get to this point?

1. He made a Decision that he was going to be a Film Maker.
2. He mad a micro budget film called 'Bad Taste'. This would be his Film School.
3. He continued through to the end even though the NZ Film Commission initially rejected the film.
4. He screened at Cannes and received a great response and.....
5. Peter Jackson the Film Maker was born.

6. 'BAD TASTE' went on to sell very well all over the world. It gained tremendous word of mouth and became a cult hit film.

It only takes one successful Film to turn a career..... [Learn how to make that film happen now](#)

Peter Jackson had to make the most of his opportunities. Back in New Zealand he got to work on the shooting of *'Meet the Feebles'*. Also, Development funding was granted for the *'Braindead'* script.

Ironically, Jim Booth, who had rejected funding for 'Bad Taste' and *'Meeting the Feebles'*, quit his job at the NZ Film Commission and decided to become Peter Jackson's producer. He had sensed an emerging talent and had decided to get involved in day to day film making. **Rejection is part of the game of film making.**

This was a significant development and was a very important step in Peter Jackson's rise. Jim Booth would bring a professional producing element to Peter's films. This is important when raising money.

Two more people entered Peter Jackson's life. Richard Taylor and his partner Tania Rodger, who would later become the creative backbone of Weta Workshop. Weta would create the miniatures and prosthetics and weaponry used in *'Lord of the Rings'*.

Firstly, they would help on *'Braindead'* and the expansion of *'Meet the Feebles'* feature film. In 1988, the New Zealand Commission had offered \$1.5million to fund *'Braindead'*. There was one catch. \$1 million dollars had to be found elsewhere to match the funding. This proved to be very difficult to find.

Jim Booth and Peter Jackson went to Mifed in Milan to raise the money but had no success and by the end of 1988, the New Zealand Commission decided that they could no longer support the project.

After desperate pleas they extended the deadline to raise the missing money to January 1989. And, in that time, they raised no interest in the project.



The film shooting which was scheduled for February had to be cancelled. This devastated the crew who had to be stood down at a meeting. Jim Booth spoke about how it was a postponement. This was a seminal moment because by the end of the meeting all the crew and Peter Jackson decided to expand '*Meet the Feebles*' from the current 20 minute short film into a feature film and self fund and try and raise money from whatever sources would invest.

This is so important!

Peter Jackson consistently had rejections in the first decade of his film making life. However, he would hit back and just continue to make films.

That is what a successful film director does. **They take setbacks on the chin and move on and find another way.**

I personally believe this is the most important characteristic after talent. Take Setbacks and move on. Also your network is so important and why if you wan to make it in film, join [a film course where you meet like-minded people.](#)

Jim Booth went back to his old place of work, the NZ Film Commission, and worked out a funding arrangement. In an ironic twist, the film that Jim Booth, the funder, had rejected the year before was now being submitted again by Jim Booth, the producer

At Mifed, a Japanese company had expressed interest in '*Meet the Feebles*' and they committed a distribution guarantee. Also, a deal was struck with a distributor called Perfect Films in London. The film was taking off.

In February 1989, less than a month after the collapse of '*Braindead*', '*Meet the Feebles*' was up and running. The New Zealand Film Commission doubled the

money raised and invested \$475,000 into *'Meet the Feebles'*. The rest of the film could be shot and made. They hired a railway shed and started making the film.

However, the filming would be challenging and stressful as the film went over schedule. The NZ Film commission threatened to remove Peter as director from the film and relations would become severely strained.



Over schedule, the Film Commission gave a deadline to finish the film and, of course, Peter Jackson did not have the film shot by that deadline. So a Secret shoot happened whereby they told the Commission they had completed and continued to shoot at night. Everyone still got paid. Jim Booth the producer was personally guaranteeing the funding from a bridging loan.

Miraculously a fine cut was ready by July 1989. The Film Commission saw the film and declined a credit. They did not like the film. But the rest of the world did.

From here on, the film received a great response around the world and won numerous film festivals and sales and cult film status. Peter Jackson was now a two time successful film maker and the powers that be in Hollywood were taking note. One of these was Mark Ordesky at New Line Films in LA. They would eventually bankroll *'Lord of the Rings'*. In 1990, they marked Peter Jackson as a man to watch.

Jim Booth finally created a deal for *'Braindead'* with presales in Japan and a deal with Avalon Studios. The NZ film Commission then financed the difference and the film went into production in September, 1991.

This was the first time Peter Jackson directed professional actors. The shooting was smooth and the decent budget was \$2.5 million. This was the first time the whole film was budgeted from start to finish.



In 1992, the film was ready and 'Braindead' did very well at festivals - Rome, Montreal - and sold well all over the world. At the New Zealand Film Awards, the film won awards for Best Film, Best director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, Best Costumes and Special effects. Success was following Peter Jackson and he had made a name for himself as a Cult Film Maker. *Braindead* was screened at Cannes and received critical attention and sales. It also had to be screened three more times at Cannes.

Straight after the success of Cannes in 1992, Peter Jackson applied for funding for a film that he was keen to make, 'Heavenly Creatures'. In 1992, Peter and Fran Walsh became romantic partners. She had been a major writing contributor and now she would come even more involved in future Peter Jackson projects.

This film was about two girls that murdered their parents. While he had been cutting 'Braindead', Peter and Fran had worked on the screenplay at night for 'Heavenly Creatures'. This would be a complete departure from the splatter films and would be a more serious dramatic film.

Peter would also get his first Hollywood Agent at this point. Ken Kamins of Inter talent signed up Peter and he would be instrumental in Peter's future career. The doors of opportunity were opening up. He could now get directing gigs in Hollywood but Peter chose to make films in Wellington, NZ.



"Staying in New Zealand and making low budget independently financed movies allowed me to control my career path and make my own decisions in a way that would not have been possible in Hollywood", Peter Jackson.

Film Festivals are very important for a film career. This is one of the areas we guide and train film makers in. Entering Film Festivals. It is so important you have film festival strategy for your short films or feature films.

In November 1992, 'Heavenly Creatures' was green lit by the New Zealand Film Commission and went into production in 1993.

At the same time that 'Braindead' was screening at Sundance Film Festival, Peter and Fran met Robert Zemeckis ('Forest Gump', 'Castaway') and he agreed to consider a project that Peter pitched called 'The Frighteners'.

They went back to New Zealand and shot 'Heavenly Creatures' with a then unknown Kate Winslet. During Post Production they wrote 'The Frighteners'. At this stage of his career, Peter Jackson was on a roll.

'Braindead' now received \$3million in sales and was a big step up for Peter Jackson as he was proving that his films made money.



If your films make money, The Law of Attraction will attract more film opportunities to you. Hollywood executives love film makers who make money.

Miramax Films took note of Peter Jackson and got to see an early cut of 'Heavenly Creatures'. They liked what they saw and bought the distribution rights for America and The Australian and American Rights for the film.

During the shooting of 'Heavenly Creatures', Peter Jackson's producer, Jim Booth, was diagnosed with cancer and very quickly deteriorated and died. By the end of 1993, earnings on 'Braindead' reached \$3 million and Peter now was a bankable director. In 1995, 'Heavenly Creatures' was released with critical and box office success.

The Script for 'The Frighteners' was delivered in January. As a result of Peter's success, the studio system financed 'The Frighteners' with Michael J Fox as the star and Robert Zemeckis as the Executive Producer. Soon he was shooting 'The Frighteners' in New Zealand. I know it is a clique but nothing breathes success like success. Now he could negotiate to shoot in his home town of Wellington. This was his first Hollywood movie and Hollywood was coming to New Zealand.

In 1994, Miramax signed an exclusive three year first look deal with Peter Jackson. The next time Peter Jackson would make a movie, he would make Lord of the Rings. This would catapult him into the A List film directors and move him into the same company as Steven Spielberg.



If you want to be a film Maker get out there and make a film now. Find out how to make them professionally and also meet like-minded people on one of our part time film schools.

In September 1995, 'The Frighteners' was in Post Production and Peter was trying to think of his next project. He was lying in bed on a Sunday Morning thinking about what projects could utilise the computer effects that they had developed for 'The Frighteners'.

How could they keep the Special Effects Company busy and expand his increasing knowledge on CGI Effects? At this stage the first films had started to use CGI. The breakthrough film had been Stephen Spielberg's 'Jurassic Park' in 1993.

Peter said to his partner Fran, "*You know the genre that's never been done well is the Fantasy Genre?*" Then the conversation moved on to what kind of Story they could write when Peter said that he would like to do a '*Lord of the Rings*' type story.



Then the light went off. **Why had no one made 'Lord of the Rings'?**

From there, Peter Jackson wondered who had the Rights to the 'Lord of the Rings'. Then in the space of another few minutes the excitement hit and it was a case of "let's get the rights to the 'Lord of the Rings'".

From here it would take another four years to attract \$150 million and the first day of shooting would happen. A big break between movies. Then it would take to 2003 to conclude the productions of three movies that would be released a year apart. The scale of the production was huge and it would all be produced in New Zealand.

Why did it take four years? Hollywood machinations would slow down the financing. Also, a script had to be written for three movies from three books. And a mammoth production would have to be created. At the centre of this film would be Peter Jackson and his less acknowledged partner, Fran Walsh.

So, on that Sunday morning, Peter Jackson made **the first phone call** to his agent, Ken Kamins, in LA and asked him to track down the rights for 'Lord of the Rings'.

Miramax would eventually get the rights. In the meantime, Peter Jackson developed a script for 'King Kong' which, at one stage, was going to be his next project but would eventually take to 2005 to happen.



In August 1996, Universal released 'The Frighteners' right during the Atlanta Olympics and the film had a poor showing a Box Office. This was the first time that a Peter Jackson film was not enthusiastically received.

Still, in 10 years, Peter Jackson had come from begging for finishing funds for his film 'Bad Taste' to deals in Hollywood for 'King Kong' and 'Lord of the Rings'.

Anyone who has talent and commitment can make it in the film industry. But it is so important to get the right training. Take action as soon as you can and [enrol on a high quality film school](#)

Due to the deals that happened, *'King Kong'* was written first as they thought that they were going to make that film first. But in 1996, *'King Kong'* financing fell apart.

It was at the time very disappointing and as Peter Jackson says, *"Rarely even at the highest level in the film business, do all the pieces - the financing and all the creative decisions fall into place on a movie. There will never really be a moment when everybody can say with certainty 'This movies going to go forward without a doubt'.*



I believe there is a great lesson to be learnt from Peter Jackson.

He had so many disappointments.

1. Bad Taste rejected for NZ Commission Finance (eventually financed for finishing funds).
2. Feebles rejected for finance (eventually financed for second half of production).
3. Braindead Finance falls apart weeks from production (eventually financed).

4. King Kong Studio Deals fall apart in 1996 (eventually financed in 2005).
5. Also, Peter had wanted to make 'Planet of the Apes' but this project went into limbo (eventually to be made elsewhere).
6. The Frighteners is a Box Office Failure.

What did Peter Jackson do once he had a disappointment? **He regrouped and immediately found a way to make another project happen.**

Many Film Makers fall into the trap of giving up, falling into depressions and losing confidence, becoming bitter, getting jealous and even worse totally giving up. So 1996 was not a good year.

In 1997, Peter and Fran wrote a treatment for 'Lord of the Rings'. At this stage it was only going to be two movies. It was 92 pages and had 266 sequences. It took three months to write.

"That treatment remains the backbone of the film and showed that it was a whole piece", said Phillipa Boynes. She would become a co-writer on the 'Lord of the Rings' Screenplay.

At first Peter agreed to deliver two films to Miramax for \$75million.

When two scripts at 147 pages approx were delivered, the perceived budget ended up being much more. It was assessed that the budget would be \$150million. This caused major friction with Miramax who eventually demanded that only one movie should be made of 'Lord of the Rings'.

This deteriorated into a situation where Miramax and Peter would not budge on their positions. It looked like the film was going to topple over. Peter's position was that he would not make the film unless it was two films.

Miramax wanted one film at \$75million.

In July 1998, the moment of truth arrived where Peter would tell Miramax his ultimatum. He would not make 'Lord of the Rings' unless it was two movies.

He would not be involved if it was only one movie. All ready Miramax had invested \$15 million in Development. A lifeline was negotiated with Miramax by Peter's American Agent, Ken Kamanis.

Peter had one month to find another company willing to finance 'Lord of the Rings' or the project would stay with Miramax and go into turnaround.

Peter Jackson and Fran immediately got to work and rang every company in LA. They also realised that their only chance of getting finance was to show a film sample. The film sample would cost Peter Jackson \$50,000

So in 4 weeks they had to prepare, write, shoot and edit a short film sample of 'Lord of the Rings' and then fly over and persuade another studio to take on the immense budget and draconian terms that Miramax wanted. It really was Mission Impossible but somehow in four weeks they pulled it off.

Ken Kamanis, Peter's Agent, sent the two scripts and a copy of the animatics in the hope that different studios would meet and listen to Peter's Pitch and film screening. Most studios declined to see Peter Jackson. Only New Line and Polygram wanted to see Peter Jackson when he finally got to LA.

Polygram could not finance the film at this point and so Peter Jackson only had one option left - New Line.



The historical meeting took place on Friday, 24th July, 1998. They had left this best prospect to last so that New Line would think that there were other offers on the table and they would have to act fast. Bob Shaye was notorious for just walking out of meetings if the project did not interest him so the sense of foreboding was high.

Bob watched the \$50k film of 'Lord of the Rings' and did not leave. He stayed for the whole 35 minute film and then said,

"Why would anyone want movie-goers to pay \$18 when they might pay \$27?" It was an 'excuse me please explain' moment. Peter and Fran thought that he was indicating the movie ticket should increase for 'Lord of the Rings'. Bob, the head of New Line Cinema, then said, "I thought there were three books. Why do you want to only make two movies?"

Peter and Fran were totally perplexed and thinking that he was letting them down softly. Bob then said, "If you are going to do justice to it, it should be three movies". Peter, still in shock, finally said, "There are three books and yes three movies would be terrific". He could not believe how good this meeting was turning out to be.



Bob Shaye said that before the meeting he did not think that he would like what he was going to see. But when he saw the 35 minute showpiece film, he liked it so much that he decided he wanted to make three movies.

Three films could be shot as one and if the first one was successful then the other two would be too. It could be a bonanza for New Line and was worth the risk. It made better business sense to make three films.

For all concerned it was the most successful meeting ever.

What can you learn from this. The power of actually making pilots or short films to sell your talents and your projects. [Learn how to make films professionally.](#) Peter and Fran went in to sell two movies and came out with three and started on the road to making three of the most successful films of all time.

At the end of meeting, Bob Shaye formally committed to three films and Peter and Fran and his agent stumbled out of the New Line office in a total state of shock.

Three movies and three of the biggest movies. It would take till the end of 2003 to make all three films and it would involve a marathon 14 month shoot and a release of a film per year in 2001, 2002, 2003.

And all from one meeting and a demonstration film that showed how they would make the films.

Mark Ordesky, the New line executive who was put in charge of supervising the deal, said after the meeting, "*One day this will be seen as one of the most visionary business decisions in modern cinema.*"

And so, Peter Jackson moved into the very special category of A+++ league of film directors in the world making the three landmark 'Lord of The Rings' movies.

It is worth reading books about the making of the film as its scope was so big and challenging. After the success of 'Lord of the Rings' Peter Jackson went on to make 'King Kong' and The Hobbit.



So how did Peter Jackson make it to the very top of the film director World?

1. Passion and love for making Movies. [He learned how to make films](#)

2. The ability to take knock-backs and disappointments and move on to another project or another way of making that film.
3. The ability to network and meet the right people to get the film made

Conclusion: Take Action

If you look at how film directors made it in the film industry, the pattern repeats. Therefore it is very important to do what the most successful have done before.



Your Action List:

[1 Learn to make films professionally.](#)

You need to find professional film makers and learn your craft from them. You can do this a few different ways. You could meet a successful film maker and if they like you they will teach you how to make a film. This is a highly unlikely scenario.

You could also go to a full time film school and learn film making. You will need to take time off and invest a large sum of money.

You could choose to learn part time at night and on Saturdays at one of our [Film Courses](#) . What ever way you choose, you need to take action and learn to make films professionally.

[2 Keep making low budget Films.](#)

Once you have learned how to make films professionally, make sure that you consistently make low budget short films. The 4 Month Film School is not the end of the line. Our graduates continue with us making their own short films.

At International Film Base, we consistently support film makers with opportunities to make films on 4 K and make films professionally. See Repressed one of our film students films

We also have a Crew Program where we train crew for paid positions crewing other peoples films.

[3 Network](#)

Keep networking and meeting people who can help you make films. Once again we can help you here

4 It takes time to make it.

It takes time. Allow ten years. Many times it takes ten years or more to make it big in Hollywood. If you make films learn on every film and network with the right people you will make it.



The Film Makers Toolbox

Colmomurchu.com Awesome blog about Independent Film Making

[Film Courses at International Film Base.](#) The wonderful 4 Month Film School

[Online Film School](#) Learn the basics online on how to make films

Making Films

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Training in how to use Adobe Premiere Pro is essential so that you can make your films. Lynda.com is one of the best training tutorials for different Software. Adobe Premiere Pro is available at [B&H Video](#). Lynda.com also has tutorials in After Effects which will add the extra special effects to your film.



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About the Author

Colm O'Murchu is a passionate Film Maker who makes his own feature films that sell all over the world.

He also created the Indie Film Centre called [International Film Base](#) and the 4 Month Film Course at [Sydney Film Base](#) and [Australian Film Base](#)

Colm also writes a regular blog about Indie Film Passion at [Colmomurchu.com](#)