

THE BURNING PLAIN

EEN FILM VAN GUILLERMO ARRIAGA



WILD BUNCH
HAARLEMMEERDIJK 159 - 1013 KH – AMSTERDAM
WWW.WILDBUNCH.NL

THE PUBLICITY COMPANY
PRISCILLA@PUBLICY.NL

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PROJECT SUMMARY

EEN PRODUCTIE VAN	2929 Productions in samenwerking met Costa Films , A Parkes + MacDonald Production
TAAL	Engels/Spaans
LENGTE	111 minuten
GENRE	Drama
LAND VAN HERKOMST	Verenigde Staten
FILMMAKER	Guillermo Arriaga
HOOFDROLLEN	Charlize Theron, Kim Basinger en Jennifer Lawrence
RELEASEDATUM	14 mei 2009
AWARD/NOMINATIE	<i>Film festival Venetië 2008</i> <i>Winnaar Marcello Mastroianni Award – Jennifer Lawrence</i> <i>Nominatie Gouden Leeuw – Guillermo Arriaga</i>

PREMISSE

THE BURNING PLAIN is een drama film van regisseur Guillermo Arriaga (*schrijver van Babel, 21 Grams and Amores Perros*).

Sylvia (*Charlize Theron*) is een hardwerkende vrouw die verdoofd door het leven lijkt te gaan. In Mexico woont een jong meisje, Maria, zonder moeder. Ze is gelukkig met haar vader, totdat een tragisch ongeluk hier een einde aan maakt. In Las Cruces, een Mexicaans grensstadje, worden de twee tieners Mariana (*Jennifer Lawrence*) en Santiago verliefd na de plotselinge dood van hun ouders. Gina (*Kim Basinger*) en Nick hebben een hartstochtelijk affaire die ze, tegen beter weten in, niet willen beëindigen.

In een meeslepend verhaal over verboden liefde ontdekken de hoofdpersonen uit THE BURNING PLAIN dat schuld en liefde desastreuze emoties kunnen zijn en dat vergiffenis essentieel is, hoe onbereikbaar het soms ook lijkt.

CASTING	Debra Zane
COSTUME DESIGNER	Cindy Evans
MUSIC SUPERVISORS	Dana Sano & Annette Fradera
MUSIC BY	Omar Rodriguez Lopez & Hans Zimmer
EDITOR	Craig Wood
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Dan Leigh
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Robert Elswit
CO-PRODUCERS	Beth Kono, Eduardo Costantini, Mike Upton
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	Charlize Theron, Alisa Tager, Ray Angelic Todd Wagner, Mark Cuban, Marc Butan
PRODUCED BY	Walter Parkes & Laurie MacDonald
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY	Guillermo Arriaga

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CAST

<i>Sylvia</i>	Charlize Theron
<i>Gina</i>	Kim Basinger
<i>Mariana</i>	Jennifer Lawrence
<i>John</i>	John Corbett
<i>Nick Martinez</i>	Joaquim De Almeida
<i>Santiago</i>	Danny Pino
<i>Young Santiago</i>	J.D. Pardo
<i>Carlos</i>	Jose Maria Yazpik
<i>Laura</i>	Robin Tunney

ENGELSE SYNOPSIS

From Guillermo Arriaga, the internationally acclaimed writer of *Babel*, *21 Grams* and *Amores Perros*, comes *THE BURNING PLAIN*, a romantic mystery about a woman on the edge who takes an emotional journey back to the defining moment of her life. Oscar-winner Charlize Theron plays Sylvia, a beautiful restaurant manager whose cool, professional demeanor masks the sexually charged storm within. When a stranger from Mexico confronts her with her mysterious past, Sylvia is launched into a journey through space and time that inextricably connects her to these disparate characters, all of whom are grappling with their own romantic destinies. In Mexico, a young motherless girl, Maria (Tessa la), lives happily with her father and his best friend until a tragic accident changes it all. In the New Mexico border town of Las Cruces, two teenagers, Mariana (Jennifer Lawrence) and Santiago (JD Pardo), find love in the aftermath of their parents' sudden deaths. In an abandoned trailer, a housewife, Gina (Oscar-winner Kim Basinger), embarks on a passionate affair that will put Sylvia and the others on a collision course with the explosive power of forbidden love.

THE BURNING PLAIN is the directorial debut of Oscar-nominated screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga. From 2929 Productions (*Good Night and Good Luck*, *We Own the Night*), the film was produced by Walter Parkes and Laurie Macdonald (*Catch Me If You Can*, *Sweeney Todd*) and executive produced by Todd Wagner, Mark Cuban, Marc Butan, and Ray Angelic.

While the films Arriaga has previously written often span worlds, classes, and cultures to convey their themes, for his first work as a director Arriaga chose to "let the intimacy of landscapes give emotional and physical space to the characters, as if the landscape itself becomes another character. I didn't want the setting of the film to get in the way of what is ultimately a story about love and its effect on one character across her life."

Arriaga's vision for *THE BURNING PLAIN* was supported by Oscar-winning cinematographer Robert Elswit (*The Will Be Blood*), and award-winning editor Craig Wood. The film was scored by two of the most influential musicians in their fields: Oscar-winning composer Hans Zimmer (*The Dark Knight*) and the musician Omar Rodriguez-Lopez (of the prog-rock band *The Mars Volta*).

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Author and screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga believes that you can't simply sit down and write a story: "You have to wait until the story is mature enough to be told," he says when explaining that the idea for his screenplay, *THE BURNING PLAIN*, evolved over almost fifteen years before he began putting it down on paper in 2005. The multi-narrative drama where the seemingly unconnected past and present eventually intersect continues a signature style that garnered him critical acclaim and worldwide commercial success for his screenplays for the films *Babel*, *21 Grams*, *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* and *Amores Perros*.

To help him bring his vision to the screen, Arriaga approached what at first seemed like unlikely auspices for the project: producers Walter Parkes and Laurie MacDonald, who in the past have been known for producing big studio-based movies which have found both critical and commercial success, such as *Men In Black*, *Gladiator*, and most recently *Sweeney Todd*.

"It's not hyperbole to say that Guillermo has pretty much invented a new way of telling motion picture stories," says Parkes. "What particularly excited us here, beyond the evocation of the "four elements" as the basis of a script, was the fact that Guillermo wanted to use his unique structural approach to unravel and elucidate the emotional mystery of a central character – Sylvia, who is in really the lynchpin of the entire story, and who we knew would attract a great actress."

Adds MacDonald – "It was both a creative opportunity and a challenge to work with an artist of Guillermo's stature. The normal rules of screenplay development really don't apply – but what surprised us was how open and collaborative he was in the process, despite the fact that the story is such a personal one. We didn't know it at the time but it would bode very well for Guillermo's ability to direct his movie."

It wasn't until after submitting the screenplay to Parkes and MacDonald, and executive producer Alisa Tager, that Arriaga expressed interest in directing. "In some ways, it was a very easy decision to support Guillermo as the director of the movie. His approach to the material is so singular, so personal, and so specific that it is hard to imagine someone else interpreting it," says Parkes, "The movie existed fully on the page." Adds MacDonald: "There's also an inherent excitement in supporting a first-time director, particularly if he has already proven himself as a creator of original material."

At this point, Todd Wagner and Mark Cuban's 2929 Productions came on board to finance. 2929 President and executive producer Marc Butan cites the rich characters, the cinematic backdrop, and Arriaga's unique storytelling style as his main attractions to the script: "This is not a classically structured movie and audiences will have to figure it out on their own, as it unfolds on the screen," said Butan. But Arriaga disputes the notion that his style is unconventional or unique: "If I want to tell you how I grew up in Mexico maybe I will start with my grandfather who came from a remote state in the south, and then go to my son because my son looks like my father, and then I'm telling that story. This is natural for people, even if cinema hasn't always approached storytelling that way," asserts Arriaga.

On Arriaga's first time behind the camera, Butan notes, "a big part of the decision is whether this is a person who can inspire and command loyalty among a group of people for a period of time." Arriaga's material belies his presence on set. Says Angelic, "He writes these dark, emotional, often times tragic stories and when you meet him he's one of the warmest, most lovable guys I've ever seen on set," recalls Angelic of Arriaga's daily interaction with the cast and crew. Butan calls Arriaga "a very straightforward person," whose richly detailed scripts "are his vision for the movie." So there

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were very few surprises from Arriaga, both as a person and from his goals as a filmmaker. And because Arriaga was very actively involved in the productions of his previous scripts, 2929 didn't consider him "a writer who had been sitting at home writing and all of a sudden wants to direct," says Butan.

With 2929 committed to making his film, Arriaga needed to find his cast. To play Sylvia, a beautiful but scarred woman hiding from her past, Arriaga knew he needed an actress who would be able to convey a deep interior trauma but who also would be compelling to audiences. Charlize Theron, who had won an Oscar for her portrayal of a woman damaged by a traumatic youth in *Monster*, was the obvious choice. Arriaga approached their one-hour lunch meeting with trepidation. But as the meeting stretched to five hours and the conversation deepened, Arriaga realized he had his Sylvia. "When Charlize said yes, that really helped to make this film possible," concluded Arriaga.

Theron was haunted by the story after her first read through the script. "I found myself thinking about it nonstop and that's always a good sign," says Theron. "This story and the other characters in the film force Sylvia into a corner," continues Theron, who saw in her character parallels with her personal convictions about the human condition. "You get to a place in your life where you have to step up and face your demons, face your reality. That's the difference between us and every other animal: we can overcome our initial instinct to protect ourselves from pain." Of Sylvia, Theron says, "She's not naturally the kind of person to look into the mirror and say, 'Okay these are things that you have to deal with.' But by the end of the film, that's where she has to be."

"From our first meeting I realized that we collaborated really well and that we were definitely on the same page with the character," recalls Theron, who also joined the production in the role of executive producer. "I have to feel that I'm going to have a clear partnership with my director and that there's going to be a constant dialogue and communication," says Theron. That's the only way she'd be able to "really get to the bottom line of the character and what the story is about." The relationship between actor and director immediately took root as Theron and Arriaga talked and sent text messages continually before she arrived on location in New Mexico, her character's childhood home.

The feeling of partnership was mutual and Arriaga appreciated the early dialogue that he developed with Theron. "The character's journey is very painful," explains Arriaga when reflecting on Charlize's subtle, minimalist approach to Sylvia's troubled past. "Charlize did it without simplifying it because this kind of material can easily become melodramatic or stylized." Theron felt Arriaga's way of telling her character's story was very original in that it shows the audience Sylvia's pain long before giving it context. Says Theron, "It gives you the feeling of dislocation, like the pain has become something separate from the event that caused it. That's what Sylvia's experiencing and that's also what the audience is experiencing." And because she's been suppressing her emotions for so long, Sylvia's expression of these emotions during the course of the story would necessarily be small and telling, rather than explosive and dramatic.

Though 2929's Butan concedes that there was a very short list of actresses considered for the role of Gina, the idea came from Theron, wearing her executive producer hat. The role is a delicate one—a married woman and mother of four children who has a passionate affair with a married man from a different background. The only way for the film to work was to get the audience invested in this extramarital affair—the event that causes the cascade of both trauma and redemption. Arriaga found in Basinger's work to possess "a kind of fragility that suited the character very well." On working with Basinger, Arriaga says, "Kim trusted me, which is very important in the relationship between actor and director." For Arriaga she embodied "this contradiction between what is going on in the mind and the heart. These contradictions are so hard to show but Kim did it."

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THE BURNING PLAIN was shot over eight weeks on location in the Chihuahuan Desert region of New Mexico and the brooding coastal region of Oregon inland to Portland. Not only were the two regions presented as full-fledged characters in the story, but Arriaga feels that their dominant elements represented events and emotions in his characters' lives. "It's part of the storytelling so I was very careful with how the landscape was portrayed," says Arriaga.

"We scouted the entire state of New Mexico with three or four separate scouts," says executive producer Ray Angelic. "Guillermo really responded to Las Cruces in particular and specifically to the Organ Mountains. Each time we went back he spent more time in Las Cruces and really felt that was the place." The completely unobstructed stretch of land along the foot of that mountain range provided the perfect sense of vastness and isolation for the love affair between two of the film's main characters.

For his ensemble of talent, Arriaga wanted actors who would convey the sense of reality that is so elemental to telling his story. To that end, casting director Debra Zane, who cast ensemble dramas like *American Beauty*, *Seabiscuit*, and *Traffic*, scoured both the southwestern US and Mexico for actors who could lend this earthy quality to the story. Arriaga describes working with Zane as "a very intense and beautiful process. She has impeccable taste and was like a rock in the construction of the film."

Citing Theron as her inspiration for becoming an actress, Jennifer Lawrence got the part of Mariana, the impulsive adolescent reeling from the death of her mother but still oblivious to the consequences of her actions. "After I finished reading, Guillermo came over and kissed me on the forehead," recalls Lawrence. "Debra asked me if I wanted to see anybody else for Mariana," reiterated Arriaga, "and I said 'Nope! This is the one!'"

Lawrence, who plays a teenager confused and burdened by a mother's rejection of the family after surviving a bout with cancer, displayed an internal intensity during the casting that Arriaga sought for Mariana. "When you first meet my character she's been the de facto mother of her siblings for the past four years and hasn't had a chance to be a kid," explains Lawrence. It's that resentment, says Lawrence, "that really drives the story for the rest of the characters." During shooting, Lawrence maintained that separation off-screen, avoiding her character's mother, Basinger. It was a relief to Lawrence, however, when the two enjoyed a hug at the end of filming.

At 17, Lawrence's age belies her maturity as an actor and Arriaga found that she had the same kind of commitment to the film as Theron. "They're both willing to do anything on behalf of the character," acknowledged Arriaga. "I had two Charlizes on this film!"

JD Pardo, who plays young Santiago, the teen-aged boy whose family has been torn apart by the revelation of his father's death and infidelity, needed to have a certain tragic chemistry with Lawrence. "A lot of the weight of the film is in the story between Santiago and Mariana," elaborates Arriaga. "They both have undergone similar traumas but handle it in different ways—for that reason they find each other mysterious. There was a lot of this same weighty chemistry between JD and Jennifer and I had no doubt that they would do it right."

For Pardo this "true growing-up story" provided all the nuances of what young men go through when trying to get close to their fathers. "You're asking yourself questions about who your father was and you're searching...and this really hit home," says Pardo of his hopeful take on Santiago's heartbreaking loss of his father.

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Arriaga insisted on bringing in Jose Maria Yazpik from Mexico to play Carlos, the older Santiago's best friend and partner in a crop-dusting business. "Guillermo was very passionate about Jose Maria in that role," said Butan, who acknowledged that there were several high profile Mexican-American actors interested in it. Arriaga met Yazpik 10 years ago after viewing a short film a student showed him featuring the actor. "I was mesmerized by this actor and told him that I wanted to work together some day," recalls Arriaga.

To prepare him for the role, Yazpik explains that Arriaga "told me stories about his friend Melquiades Estrada. He really exists and he based this film's character upon Melquiades' sort of bipolar personality, very happy in one instant and then the next he will just not speak." Yazpik believes this "Arriaga-esque" love story honors not only the feelings between lovers but also the love between friends, and the love between parents and children. "Carlos is not happy about his friend's situation or the changes it could engender, but will endure the stark 'fish out of water' journey required to make things right again."

The story takes emotional hairpin turns, often without dialogue. Arriaga admired the actor's pitch perfect portrayal of Carlos and says, "in Jose Maria's performance we see this man whose innocence and loyalty to his friend is palpable. He pulled Carlos exactly to where I wanted him to be." Danny Pino, who plays Carlos' best friend, the older Santiago, "brought the character some lightness," says Arriaga. "He had this kind of hope to his performance, and in this film we needed someone that would represent a guy who has worked his way up in life and makes it even with difficult circumstances: He's lost the love of his life but manages to find hope and take comfort in the fact that he has her daughter." Similarly, Pino finds that the story evokes forgiveness and second chances. "Santiago has managed to raise his daughter with the help of his best friend, but has an obstacle that forces him to reach out to the estranged mother of his daughter," explains Pino. He was drawn to the story's complex but very real characters. "That's part of the genius of what Guillermo has been able to accomplish," says Pino of Arriaga's script. "He's been able to give you a true taste of what these people's lives are like."

When a serious injury forces Santiago to send his friend, Carlos, to track down Maria's mother, all of the pain of Maria's estrangement from her mother comes to the surface. On finding his Maria, Arriaga says, "I really put a gun to my own head when I wrote the script. Not only did I need a girl who speaks perfect English and perfect Spanish, but she had to be beautiful enough to be the daughter of a Mexican man and a blond-haired blue-eyed woman!" After endless casting sessions in LA and New York, Arriaga and casting director Debra Zane spread the word in Mexico. A tape of Tessa made its way to the casting office. She met all the physical and language criteria, so she flew to LA to meet with Arriaga. "During the casting session I saw that she had a fierce glance when she looks at you, so I hired her" says Arriaga.

"Maria has never had a mother and is used to living only with her Dad," says la of her character. "She thinks it's monstrous for someone to leave a baby. But she's also the only one who can put everyone beyond the pain their past." In working through the delicate reunion scenes between Maria and her mother, Tessa recalls "Maria is afraid to get close when she meets her because she might leave again, but afterwards she lets her come to her world," explains la.

Just as Basinger embodied Gina, Arriaga felt so strongly that Brett Cullen was the only actor who could play her husband Robert—in fact, that he ran after the actor to tell him he'd gotten the part. "When he auditioned he began talking about his own family and I saw something deep inside this guy," remembers Arriaga. In talking about his character, Arriaga asked Cullen something that was very difficult for him to answer. "I asked him if Robert knows how to swim, and he said yes," recalls Arriaga. "Then I asked him 'Where, living in the desert, did Robert learn to swim?' and he replied that

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he needed to think about his answers. So he wrote a beautiful story about his character and he sent it to me. This is something I will be thankful for the rest of my life." For Cullen, Robert embodied the universal 'shattered man' who he says "has been through a very tough period of time with his family and I think it puts in question his belief in himself, his belief maybe somewhat in God."

Nick, the Mexican-American whom Gina falls in love with, was another difficult character for Arriaga to cast. He had to be someone who still looks and feels Mexican. "We looked at many very fine actors but the problem wasn't whether they were good actors," said Arriaga, "the difficulty was the chemistry between him and Kim Basinger. We were running out of options when we finally got to Joaquim, who is not Mexican—he's Portuguese. But it was one of these lucky moments when the gods looked down and said, 'Hey, here's this guy for you.' Joaquim is a man who looks virile, who looks like he belongs in the landscape and I think he has a sexiness, which made me feel this married woman could be in love with him." The role is complicated by the fact that, unlike with Gina, the film would never reveal Nick's backstory. The depth of their passion would have to be implied through performance rather than exposition. "I wanted the audience not to know how they met, just as Mariana and Santiago don't know how their parents met—I just wanted the audience to feel the connection between Nick and Gina, obscure but powerful."

"I only write of things I know and things that have touched me personally," says Arriaga who would use his own life and stories when discussing an upcoming scene with actors. "He had a very clear vision of the whole movie in his head," confirms Angelic. "He knows what each character is wearing, where they live and what kind of car they drive. He was great with the cast."

At their first meeting Arriaga told Angelic that he was looking to create a real feeling of family and team spirit with the cast and crew, and that they would come onboard because they were passionate about the material. From their time together preparing the film Angelic was very aware of Arriaga's strength as a screenwriter, so the focus of his work was "a matter of surrounding him with creative department heads who could really support, guide and help him in obtaining his vision."

"One of my luckiest choices in this film was hiring Robert Elswit who was not only my director of photography, but would become my teacher," says Arriaga. "He taught me many things on this film and I will always be thankful to him. When he came to my office to talk about this film, he only talked about the story. He never talked about lenses or camera equipment or technical things, he just talked about the story, which really impressed me."

"Robert's such a hard worker and accepted this film already being committed to another film with a slight schedule conflict, so the last part of the picture was photographed by John Toll," explains Arriaga. "The film is basically four stories and Robert shot three of them and John Toll shot one of them with the help and preparation of Robert, and I think that having two of the greatest DPs in history was a luxury that not every director is privileged to have."

Elswit actually brought up the idea of having a different DP do the Portland portion of the film explains Angelic, "and going from one great DP to another made sense to the story too. Oregon is a completely separate story line with a completely different look and different geography from the rest of the film. Elswit and Toll are friends and when we found out that John was interested and excited by it then we became interested and excited about the idea of switching DPs."

Production Designer Dan Leigh cites the time/space continuum that Arriaga toys with in this story as "a puzzle that makes an audience participate in watching a film." He was drawn to the challenge of visually helping an audience solve the puzzle, and in his first meeting with Arriaga learned that the original title was "The Elements," for the medieval concepts of earth-air-fire-water. These elements,

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and using the film's locations to emphasize the elemental quality of the story, were a major focus of their first discussion.

"Guillermo identifies certain characters with each of those elements," said Leigh, so a seamless color pallet between the outside colors and the interiors established that nature force of the characters' environments whether the earth and air of the desert or the sea and rain of the Pacific coast. One of the most striking uses of color in is the vast red plain of sorghum fields. "Guillermo has always said that one of his feelings about screenwriting is to always bear in mind that you want to show your audience something that they haven't seen... and I can't think of a time that sorghum has ever been seen in a movie."

"Dan Leigh was the gatekeeper of my visions", affirms Arriaga. "If he had any doubts about the suitability of a location, he was the first to say that it was not what we were looking for. He helped me keep my vision in mind and he was very much into the storytelling."

Cindy Evans was also an important element to the film. As costume designer, Arriaga says "Cindy brought a sense of reality and storytelling to the characters, adding personality and emotion. Directing the actors was made easier by the sensible work of Cindy, who helped define the characters through their costumes. Going to Cindy's workplace was like going to an oasis. Everyone was relaxed, happy and working extremely hard."

Producers Walter Parkes and Laurie MacDonald recommended editor Craig Wood and Arriaga was impressed with his previous work. "He and I have a great connection and he has a sense of the pace and of the characters," reflects Arriaga who began the editing process with Wood while shooting in New Mexico. "His attention is focused on cuts that will help the character development and he tends to keep the scenes as long as possible and doesn't feel the need to cut and cut and cut." Because of the unconventional narrative structure, Wood needed to the scenes to play out elementally, with long takes and traditional cutting styles. "There is a certain geometry to the way Craig cuts," says Arriaga, "He orients you so quickly that, even if it can be jarring to go from Portland to Las Cruces, he makes you feel as though you are gently entering a new world, like all the worlds are connected—which they are."

It was extremely gratifying for Arriaga to go from the solitary life of a writer to actually interacting with characters he created. "After being so lonely, writing so many years, it was the ultimate pleasure being in the desert and beautiful landscapes in Oregon with all these wonderful friends working along so hard with me," says Arriaga. "It was very tough— all movies are—but I felt on this set everyone was a filmmaker," says Arriaga, "and for the first time I say to everyone this is not my film; this is our film."

For Arriaga, that, ultimately, is the paradox of filmmaking: "It's something that is so difficult and yet people love the process so much." But it's also the paradox of The Burning Plain's story. Says Arriaga, "How does something as beautiful as two people making love cause such an obstacle for love in other characters? That is one of the great romantic mysteries and just to able to explore it even a little bit through cinema is a gift I'll never forget."

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ABOUT THE CAST

CHARLIZE THERON (Sylvia/Executive Producer) has treated audiences to an incredibly wide spectrum of performances, ranging from emotional drama to action-adventure to quirky comedy.

In 2004, she won an Oscar® for Best Actress for her emotionally devastating turn as female serial killer Aileen Wuornos in the independent film, *Monster*, co-starring Christina Ricci. She also won the Independent Spirit Award, the National Broadcast Film Critics Association Award, a Golden Globe and several other awards for her performance in the film, which she also produced. In 2006, Theron was nominated again for an Academy Award® for Best Actress, as well as for a Golden Globe, SAG and Critics Choice awards for her performance as Josey Aimes in the drama *North Country* opposite Frances McDormand, Sissy Spacek and Woody Harrelson.

Theron began her career as a model in her native South Africa before coming to the United States to dance with the Joffrey Ballet. Moviegoers were first introduced to her in 1996 in *2 Days in the Valley*, with James Spader, Eric Stoltz, and Jeff Daniels. The following year she co-starred with Al Pacino and Keanu Reeves in the Warner Brothers thriller *The Devil's Advocate*. Later that year, Tom Hanks cast Theron in his directorial debut, *That Thing You Do!* That film was followed by Woody Allen's *Celebrity*, Disney's *Mighty Joe Young*, and the Oscar®-nominated John Irving adaptation *The Cider House Rules*. In 2000, Theron tackled back-to-back roles in Robert Redford's *The Legend of Bagger Vance* with Will Smith and Matt Damon, Fox 2000's *Men of Honor* with Robert DeNiro and Cuba Gooding, Jr., John Frankenheimer's *Reindeer Games* with Ben Affleck, and Miramax's *The Yards* co-starring Mark Wahlberg, Joaquin Phoenix, James Caan and Faye Dunaway. In 2001, Theron shared the screen again with Keanu Reeves in the Warner Brothers romance *Sweet November*, and reunited with director Woody Allen in *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion*. In 2003, Theron illuminated screens in the Paramount's hit caper movie *The Italian Job*, co-starring Mark Wahlberg, before taking on the role of both star and producer in *Monster*. Following *Monster*, she portrayed actress Britt Ekland in HBO's *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* opposite Geoffrey Rush, for which she received Best Supporting Actress nominations from the Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild Awards and the Emmys. She then starred in the Paramount action adventure *Aeon Flux*, based on the hugely popular MTV animated series; showed her lighter side with a guest-starring role in the acclaimed comedy series "*Arrested Development*"; and played a detective in Paul Haggis' critically acclaimed follow-up to *Crash*, *In the Valley of Elah*.

Her appetite for producing increased rapidly over these years and she, along with her film company, Denver and Delilah Films, produced the documentary entitled *East of Havana*, an unflinching look at Cuba through the eyes of three hip hop artists. She then went on to produce and act in *Sleepwalking*, starring Nick Stahl and Dennis Hopper. Theron also made an appearance in Stuart Townsend's forthcoming directorial debut, *Battle in Seattle*. Theron is now in theaters as a traumatized superhero in this summer's box office smash, *Hancock*, with Will Smith and Jason Bateman.

KIM BASINGER (Gina) made her debut opposite Robert Redford in Barry Levinson's *The Natural*. Since then, she has appeared in more than 40 feature films and 14 established herself as an international screen icon. In 1998, Basinger received an Academy Award for her role in Warner Brothers' critically acclaimed film *L.A. Confidential*, based on the classic James Ellroy crime novel. The film, directed by Curtis Hanson, earned nine Academy Award nominations and also earned Basinger a Golden Globe Award, a Screen Actors Guild Award and a BAFTA nomination.

In 2007 she starred alongside Billy Bob Thornton and Brandon Routh in *The Informers*, an ensemble drama based on short stories by Bret Easton Ellis. Before that, she finished production on the

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independent film *While She Was Out*, directed by Susan Montford and produced by Guillermo Del Toro.

In 2006, Basinger starred as the First Lady caught up in a plot to assassinate the president in *The Sentinel* opposite Michael Douglas and Kiefer Sutherland. The same year Basinger starred alongside Danny DeVito, Nick Cannon, Forest Whitaker and Jay Mohr in Mark Rydell's *Even Money*. Also in 2006 she starred in the Lifetime Television film "*The Mermaid Chair*" based on the novel by Sue Monk.

In 2004, Basinger received critical praise for her moving performance opposite Jeff Bridges in Focus Features' *The Door in the Floor* based on the John Irving novel, *Widow for a Year*. Basinger also starred in New Line Cinema's crime thriller *Cellular*.

In 2003, Basinger starred opposite Eminem in Universal's *8 Mile* and in 2002, she starred in Miramax's *People I Know*, opposite Al Pacino and Tea Leoni. In 2000, Basinger starred in Paramount's *Bless the Child*, directed by Chuck Russell, also starring Jimmy Smits and Rufus Sewell. That year, Basinger also starred in Hugh Hudson's *I Dreamed of Africa* for Columbia Tri-Star. The film was shot entirely on location in Venice, Italy and South Africa and is based on the best-selling true story by Kenyan activist Kuki Gallmann.

Basinger's film credits also include the Warner Brothers' box office blockbuster *Batman*, Adrian Lyne's sensual thriller *9 1/2 Weeks*, Robert Altman's *Ready to Wear* (*Pret a Porter*), *Fool For Love* and opposite Richard Gere in both *Final Analysis* and *No Mercy*. Additionally she has been in *The Marrying Man*, *The Getaway*, Blake Edwards' *Blind Date* with Bruce Willis, *The Man Who Loved Women*, *Cool World*, *The Real McCoy* with Val Kilmer, *Nadine* opposite Jeff Bridges and the Bond film *Never Say Never Again* as Domino. Basinger resides in Los Angeles.

JENNIFER LAWRENCE (Mariana) is on the rise to become one of Hollywood's most promising young actresses. Lawrence will soon begin production on the second season of the TBS series "*The Bill Engvall Show*," reprising her role as Lauren Pearson. Written and created by Engvall and Michael Leeson, the comedy is set in a Denver suburb and follows the life of Bill Pearson (played by Engvall), a family counselor whose own family could use a little dose of counseling.

Other film credits for Lawrence include a lead role in Lori Petty's *Poker House*, opposite Selma Blair and Bokeem Woodbine, as well as roles in *Devil You Know* and *Garden Party*. Her television credits include roles on "*Cold Case*," "*Medium*" and "*Monk*." Hailing from Louisville, Kentucky and a childhood of local theatre experience to her credit, Jennifer traveled to New York at age fourteen to explore a professional career in acting. She quickly caught the eye of casting directors and successfully started acting in film and television during the summer of 2005.

JOHN CORBETT (John) Coming off a successful tour around the country with his band, John Corbett was most recently seen in the Sony film *The Messengers*, directed by Danny and Oxide Pang. He also starred in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the highest grossing romantic comedy of all time. He is also known as the sexy "*Aidan Shaw*" playing opposite Sarah Jessica Parker in HBO's "*Sex & the City*," which earned him an Emmy nomination in 2002. John also starred on the critically acclaimed F/X series *Lucky*. Other credits include Garry Marshall's *Raising Helen* opposite Kate Hudson, and *Raise Your Voice* with Hilary Duff.

Corbett will always be remembered as the disk jockey, Chris Stevens, on the CBS series "*Northern Exposure*," where he received both Emmy and Golden Globe nominations. Corbett was most recently seen in the Fox Searchlight Pictures release *Street Kings* with Keanu Reeves and Forest Whitaker.

THE BURNING PLAIN – GUILLERMO ARRIAGA

JOAQUIM DE ALMEIDA (Nick) has appeared in over forty feature films in Europe and the United States and has worked with some of the world's most distinguished actors and directors.

De Almeida made his American film debut in *The Soldier* and went on to appear opposite Richard Gere and Michael Caine in *Beyond The Limit*. He also starred in Norman Jewison's *Only You* with Marisa Tomei and Robert Downey, Jr., and in *Clear And Present Danger* opposite Harrison Ford. Most recently, De Almeida was featured in Steven Soderbergh's *Che*, with Benicio Del Toro as Che Guevara during the revolutionary's 1964 trip to New York to address the United Nations.

His latest releases include the independent feature *La Cucina*, Antonio Cuadri's "The Heart Of The Earth" with Bernard Hill, and *The Death And Life of Bobby Z* opposite Laurence Fishburne and Paul Walker. De Almeida's other notable feature films include Robert Rodriguez's *Desperado* with Antonio Banderas and Salma Hayek and John Moore's *Behind Enemy Lines* opposite Gene Hackman. Some of the many European film productions in which he stars include Sostiene Pereira (According To Pereira) opposite Marcello Mastroianni, and with Daryl Hannah and Denise Richards in Luna's *Yo Puta* (The Life: What's Your Pleasure?).

Among De Almeida's many television credits are recurring roles on NBC's "The West Wing" and a season arc on Fox's award-winning "24" with Keifer Sutherland. He also recurred on "Kingpin" for NBC and "Falcone" for CBS.

DANNY PINO (Present-day Santiago) is a versatile actor who has enjoyed success on the big and small screen as well as on stage. He recently wrapped production on the thriller *Across The Hall* directed by Alex Merkin for Universal and starring Brittany Murphy.

Pino has portrayed a wide array of characters ranging from the drug-lord sociopath Armadillo Quintero on the acclaimed series "The Shield" to a Wyoming horse-wrangler in the feature film *Flicka* to the iconic Desi Arnaz in "Lucy", a movie of the week that focused on the tumultuous love-life of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. He is currently shooting his 5th season as the laconic Detective Scotty Valens on Warner Brothers' hit series "Cold Case".

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Writer-director GUILLERMO ARRIAGA is one of today's most original storytelling voices and makes his directorial debut with *THE BURNING PLAIN*. As a screenwriter and now a director, Arriaga spins exhilaratingly complex, emotional and provocative tapestries of human lives under intense pressure. His acclaimed and award-winning films—which include *Babel*, *21 Grams*, *Amores Perros*, and *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, the latter of which won the Best Screenplay Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005—traverse a dazzling range of subject matters, characters and moods, yet share in common a visceral, often luminous, portrait of humanity.

For his insightful, thought-provoking work on *Babel*, Arriaga received numerous honors, among them an Academy Award® nomination for Best Original Screenplay and nominations from the Writers Guild of America, BAFTA and the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. The film garnered a total of 7 Academy Award® nominations, including Best Picture and was named among the 10 best of the year by over 90 groups and publications, including The National Board of Review, American Film Institute, The New York Times, Rolling Stone, and received the Golden Globe Award for Best Dramatic Film of 2006.

THE BURNING PLAIN – GUILLERMO ARRIAGA

Shot in three continents and in 5 languages, BABEL explores with shattering realism the nature of the barriers that separate mankind. The film encompasses many of the resonant themes that Arriaga has continued to explore for the last 25 years: the challenges of communication, the importance of love, the consequences of our actions, the contradictions of human nature, the clashes between differing cultural points of view, and the enigma of contemporary isolation, both physical and emotional.

Born and raised in Mexico City, and educated at the Ibero-American University, Arriaga first came to the fore in Mexico as a novelist. His works, rife with a trademark sense of humor and irony, include *Guillotine Squad* (1991), *A Sweet Smell of Death* (1994), and *The Night Buffalo* (1999), as well as a book of short stories, *Retorno 201* (2003), written when he was just 24. They have been translated in 18 languages and Arriaga has been cited by several critics as being among the most influential writers of our time.

In 1985, Arriaga suffered a serious car accident, which he later used as the basis for the film trilogy that began with *Amores Perros*, the first of three collaborations with director Alejandro González Iñárritu. Starring Gabriel García Bernal and Adriana Barraza, the film explores the radiating effects of a single automobile crash on its various participants: the injured, the guilty and the witness.

The success of the film brought Arriaga his first taste of the global reach of cinema. After winning over international critics who hailed *Amores Perros* as an instant cinematic classic, the film received an Oscar® nomination for Best Foreign Language Film, and won the BAFTA Award in the same category in 2001. It would also soon become regarded as one of the first Mexican films to cross over into the Hollywood spotlight, presaging a new generation of filmmakers who have energized international moviemaking.

Amores Perros also introduced Arriaga's fresh, invigorating style of piecing together emotionally gripping stories as intricate, interlocking human puzzles. With this film, Arriaga announced his ambitious intention, followed ever since, to explore screenplays as literary creations, using the same care for language, structure and character development as any novel. Academics and critics who have followed his work have seen a close interplay of themes, vital concerns and structures between his novels and his screenplays.

Arriaga's on-screen exploration of the nature of fate and coincidence continued with the second film of his trilogy with González Iñárritu: *21 Grams*, starring Sean Penn, Naomi Watts and Benicio Del Toro, a film on which he also served as associate producer. Arriaga received a BAFTA nomination for his screenplay, and the film received Oscar® nominations for Watts and Del Toro, and was included on many year-end "Best Of" lists in 2003. Arriaga constructed the three intertwining stories of *21 Grams* around a freak accident which sets in motion an intricate emotional web among a group of intriguingly disparate characters: a critically ill mathematician, a grieving mother and a born-again ex-con. Arriaga's contributions to the film were further celebrated that year by the Independent Spirit Awards which gave *21 Grams* its Special Distinction Award.

Before completing his trilogy about the consequences of modern life, Arriaga took a detour. He next embarked on a piercing yet poetic journey into justice, loyalty and friendship with his screenplay for *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, directed by and starring Tommy Lee Jones in the story of a man who sets out to bury his friend in his Mexican hometown. Arriaga won the prestigious Best Screenplay Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005. A wholly unexpected take on the American Western, *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* further demonstrated Arriaga's capacity to develop spellbinding stories in vastly different genres yet rife with his very personal themes.

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In addition to his feature films and novels, Arriaga has also directed, produced and written short films, documentaries, television series, radio and television commercials and has been a college professor for more than 25 years.