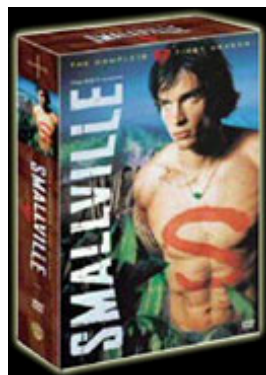




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Smallville At The William S. Paley Television Festival

Writeup by Wendi

Having attended a previous seminar with Al Gough and Miles Millar hosted by the WGA, I already had a good idea that Smallville was created by two men with a vision of how to bring a cinematic feel to the small screen and the will to remake a modern myth into a story that could reach an entirely new generation.

Smallville creators Millar & Gough, Jeph Loeb, Mark Verheiden, Ken Biller, Ken Horton, Joe Davola (president of Tollin/Robbins productions), Mark Snow, Mat Beck (who recently won a special effects awards for the show) and director Greg Beeman. Tom Welling, Annette O'Toole and Sam Jones III brought cast insights into an evening filled with humor and the recurring theme of dedication to quality and mutual respect on both sides of the camera.

Once the cast and crew were introduced, the audience was treated to a large screen viewing of "Exile," largely in part, because as Al admitted, they wanted to see this one on the big screen. The episode was visually stunning on the cinema-sized screen and the performances of the entire cast and the production quality really did shine when seen on a larger scale. After the viewing, the assembled crew took their seats on the stage for the beginning of a wonderfully moderated discussion that began with questions about how Gough and Millar felt about taking on the Superman story and trying to make it new. While Gough admits that it's a daunting task, he said it was also an honor to take the myth and legacy to the next generation. Millar said it became apparent from the beginning what aspects of the myth worked and what aspects they needed to change. Gough explained that things have always been added to the Superman mythos as it continues to evolve. In the original radio broadcasts, the actor who portrayed Superman was allowed a two week vacation, and so another actor with a different voice had to fill in for him (to which Tom Welling replied that he could use two weeks off. Thus began a night of Welling's dry humor and a room full of laughter). But to explain these obvious changes in voice, Kryptonite was born.



Necessity has always been the mother of invention with the mythos, and Gough says the meteor shower is one example of how they changed the story. There was no way a UFO was going to enter our atmosphere in the age of satellites and radar without a cloaking device--thus the meteor shower was born, giving a chance for Clark to crash to Earth undetected and spawning the mutants in town that allow Clark to use his super powers on a weekly basis. Another change they

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PLEASE DO NOT TAKE GRAPHICS, NEWS, SPOILERS, ETC. FROM KRYPTONSITE WITHOUT FIRST ASKING PERMISSION AND PLACING A LINK TO KRYPTONSITE.COM. OR, JUST SEND PEOPLE OVER TO THIS SITE! THANKS!

created was to allow the friendship between Clark and Lex, as young men still on the path to becoming their future iconic selves. They wanted this to be not just the story of the journey to good, but the story of the journey to evil, as well. Miles quipped that this was also how Lionel Luthor became the model of bad parenting, and then explained that John Glover was a guest starring role in the pilot, but they kept bringing him back and finally decided that they had to have him on as a regular. The role was expanded for Glover's performance and continues to shape Lex's future.

The questions then moved on to the three cast members. Welling was asked what his audition experience was like to win the role of Clark Kent. Gough broke in to say that they saw a picture and wanted him in it, but Tom didn't want to read for the role. He didn't want to be type cast. There was much joking about how Mr. Big Shot had done all of one other role, which Welling took with grins and much good humor. Al said when they finally got Mr. Big Shot in to read the script, it was a good reading, even though he came in scruffy with facial hair and his hair a mess. By the time they brought him in for a network reading, he looked completely different, clean shaven with his hair brushed back. Miles remarked that Al didn't recognize Tom on sight, but Al said Welling looked "just as sexy" whether scruffy or cleaned up. While the audience laughed, Tom took the opportunity to explain that it actually all happened very quickly, and he was brought in late in the casting process. He said everyone was very nice to him, even though he clearly didn't know what he was doing. He had a reading with Kristin Kreuk in front of a room filled with people (the graveyard scene from the pilot), and a hush fell over the room as they went through the scene. At which point, Tom realized he had forgotten his line. He said Kristin was waiting and her back was to the room, and she whispers to him, "Are you okay?" Tom said his eyes were clearly saying "No. . ." Kristin whispered his line to him, and then the block cleared and the scene progressed. Afterwards everyone complemented him on what a "great moment" that was. "Uh-huh, it was," was all he could manage to get out.

Since Annette O'Toole is actually a Superman movie alumni, her question centered around what it was like to play two different roles within the mythos. She asked if that was referring to Lana, and said she actually never thought of it. (Again, Welling sends the room into laughter with a wide-eyed look of paranoia and "I don't think about it. Ever.") Annette spent most of her time praising the rest of the cast and regretting the fact that Glover, Schneider, Rosenbaum, Kreuk and Mack couldn't be there as well, since they were actually working on the show in Vancouver. She said she was in town because she likes to spend the majority of her time in LA with her family and husband, Michael McKean, who was also in attendance and received much applause when pointed out to the audience (with much pride from TPTB) as Perry White. Annette went on to explain that she initially refused the role of Martha, because of her desire to stay in LA with her family, but then she read the script and saw the pilot and realized that there was something amazing going on here with the retelling of the myth, and knew she had to be a part of it, because she wanted it that badly. She also admitted to being a lifelong fan of comics, and confessed that she vividly remembers selling comics at school in third grade. Al said to look for her on eBay.



When asked about his audition, Sam Jones III's story was unique. He auditioned on a Sunday, during a break from filming a movie. The audition was at Mike Tollin's house, and he described how unusual the situation was, driving up to this big house to audition for a show on a Sunday. He had recently told his father that he wanted to do a series after the movie wrapped, but that he didn't want to play a stereotypical character. His father told him that's what he'd do, then, and Sam was amazed when it actually happened, after he landed the role of Pete Ross. He said it was surreal when Joe Davola pulled up behind him at Tollins' house and came up to the car and told him how much they all really wanted him to succeed with the audition, and even offered to help run lines with Sam if he needed to before going in to read.

Tom then pointed out that he thinks that's part of what makes *Smallville* a success. Of the three of them on stage, none of them had to take the roles, they chose to take them, even after initially reluctance, because they liked the project that much. He said that has absolutely made a difference in the way the show works and the great environment that they have up on the set in Vancouver. Al then explained a little about the casting of Chloe and Pete and how they proved

tricky to pin down with just the right actors, but how pleased they were with their end result. He then joked about how poor Allison had been acting all of her life, since childhood, and the first time she met Tom she asked what he had been doing up to that point. Tom answered some modelling, a role on *Judging Amy*, and now this. To which Allison quipped "Tough year." Tom grinned and added "And that was my first conversation with Allison." Watching the three interact and talk about their fellow cast mates really revealed the warmth they all have for each other and stories continued to sneak into the discussion as questions turned to the production side.



Greg Beeman discussed the look that he had helped bring to *Smallville* and continues to help define. He said from the beginning they knew certain things like Smallville should be warm, Metropolis should be cold, and the colors and lighting reflects these aspects. He tells every director coming onto the set for the first time that everything visually works from Clark's point of view. His home is the place where he feels safest and accepted, so it's always shot with a gentle warmth of light and there are rings of discomfort that radiate out anytime he leaves that environment. School is a little sharper and brighter and by the time you get to Metropolis the angles are extreme and the colors are cold. Beeman also says that since it's all from Clark's point of view, that it's a teenager's point of view--meaning that everything is a big emotion. Whether it's love, anger, fear, it's going to be big. These instructions help keep the original vision alive. Miles also added that Greg brought their vision of extreme close-ups to extraordinary reality. Al explained that they had been told years before that the secret to a good television show as to have something that when someone is channel surfing, they'll stop for, because they haven't seen anything else like it.

Jeph Loeb was asked how you balance action and storytelling to deliver a successful product. Loeb said Al, Miles, Ken and Mark head the up the writers, and that basically they write like you see writing happen in the movies--which isn't the reality of how most television shows are written. Usually, individual stories go to individual writers to tell, but on *Smallville*, they all sit around and work out ideas and outlines in the creative process. Al explained that they did this intentionally, because it brings all kinds of strengths to the writing table for a show like this. They have four essential show elements: Heart, Hero, Mystery and Family. Those are the recurring themes that ground the show and then they can take storytelling risks like the "Biller Thriller".

Ken Biller then went on to further explain the process of how an episode is created. He said there's usually ten or so people in the writer's room at any given time. They toss out ideas, come up with one that works, like--Clark gets infected with Red Kryptonite and acts out. Then they have to get the idea approved by Al and Miles before it can go any further. Once approved, it can take anywhere from a couple of days to a couple of weeks to create the episode itself, depending on the time frame they have to work with. All of the episodes have a theme, and the best episodes tie the B plots to the A plot with that theme. They'll build on the theme and the idea, and begin to fill up four large boards in the room with ideas and actions for Clark and Lana and Lex. Jeph said by the time the four boards are full of notes, it looks like a serial killer's been loose in the room. The notes are then compiled into an outline that's sent to Al and Miles, then on to the network. If the outline gets approval from both tiers, it then goes back to the writers and either one writer or a team of writers (some work individually, some work in duos) takes the outline and writes the teleplay. After it's written, the other writers will critique and edit and revise, which is one of the show's strengths. The show works because everyone has a lot of input. Mark Verheiden mentioned that the remarkable thing that results from this writing style is that you actually can see bits of your input as a finished product onscreen in any given episode, so they're all very proud of the scripts. He said it's a very much a collaborative effort and that keeps things creative, because sixty episodes into the show for him, it's still just as fresh.

Jeph also brought up the fact that another thing that keeps it fresh is the _____

mythology itself. He said the greatness of the Superman mythos is that it can stay fresh after sixty years of retelling, and that the trick in making the same story over and over is having someone like Millar and Gough who have distilled it to a single vision that stretches over five years, with definite beginning and ending points in every season. He says the challenge is to tell the story that everyone knows the ending of, already. You already know that he puts on the tights and cape and flies away someday (Welling sat up in shock and Al covered his ears.) It was also pointed out that the brilliance of the story retelling is that it's not just the tale of the rise of Clark Kent, it's about the fall of Lex Luthor.



Mat Beck was then asked what he finds challenging about working on Smallville. Beck said that the real challenge is that everything has to look good. On the X-Files, he had the luxury of being able to hide things in shadow or disguise imperfections behind blindingly bright lights. On *Smallville*, everything is always clear and you can't take short cuts. He says that the best thing about working on the show is that everyone in the Santa Monica production office feels a sense of protective ownership of *Smallville*. They want it to look good and one of the ways that do this is to keep an open dialogue with the writers. Sometimes this results in him giving them a call to say he needs to do a cut away after an effect for it to work, and sometimes the writers call him and ask him to work some visual magic because they've got nothing for him to work with in the scene and it needs something. He said post-production plays a large part in what he does, and that Ken Horton tells him on the backend what they need pulled off by the Wednesday night viewing, and Beck said that dedication to quality is what keeps the visual team up into the early morning hours so that they can deliver a tape on Tuesday that's ready to go on air for the network on Wednesday.

Ken Horton is given credit for bringing post-production up to par after a wildly schizophrenic first season (universally called Hell Season by the production staff). Horton says his job is like being Tiger Woods' caddy--he just stands there and watches for the most part, but every once in a while says you don't want to do that. Use the eight iron. Horton said basically he tells the production office what works and what doesn't work. Egos get thrown out and everyone fixes things, and in the end it's that collaboration that makes it all work. He said for example, his notes might say it doesn't really have to be raining in the final climatic scene of Crisis when Adam tries to shoot Lana, they could've had a rain machine. But thirty-one degrees and raining worked for them, so it was all good. ("It didn't have to be raining?" Welling quipped. "We should have these notes." More laughter from the audience and crew.)

Mark Snow was asked how he came to work on the show and said it was a strange thing, because initially he thought Al and Miles were one guy. He had no idea who they were. But David Nutter explained to him that basically the idea was to take John Williams' score and put a modern edge to it, to use in the pilot. He said it's been a great job, no one ever bothers him (Al says they're the anti-Chris Carters). Snow says he never has to attend any meetings and every six months or so they give him a call and tell him he's doing a great job. He said there are times when he thinks of how surreal it is to be copying John Williams' on electronics--at which point Al interrupted to say Mark was selling himself short, that he's actually reinventing the music for the show all the time. (Welling adds that the cast thinks of him all the time. Whenever they're shooting a scene that they're all skeptical of it working, the general consensus is, oh, they'll throw some great music over it and it'll all work out.)

Joe Davola was asked how he came on board and mentioned that he was initially behind the idea of a young Bruce Wayne series, but when that got nixed by the studio, he came on board Smallville. Everyone credits him for being the savior of Hell Year, when the Vancouver production was doing insane things (for example, Clark's inexplicable haircut between the pilot and Metamorphosis, which is supposed to happen the following day. No one thought not to let Welling get a hair cut. Tom calls it the half million dollar haircut, because it caused such a production hassle. Beeman said he learned a great deal about hair weaves that weekend, as they worked to resolve the problem.) Everyone also gave props to Beeman for saving them. Al said it was a disastrous production until Beeman sowed up for Hothead. It was the first episode that they watched all the way through, without wanting to throw things at the screen. Al said he agonized over how they'd never convince Beeman to stay, but one day on the way to work, he got a voice

message from Beeman saying how much he'd enjoyed working on *Hothead* and if the opportunity ever opened. . . Al said within the next minute he was on the phone to Beeman's agent to get him on board (to let you know how crazy things were--Metamorphosis actually had five directors--which Al says outnumbered the writers at the time).

Beeman solidified the vision, but says part of the reason that the show looks so good is that they have some gorgeous places to film in, up in Vancouver. The farmhouse was brought up, which was initially chosen as a location by David Nutter because of the great barn it had. The house was originally green, but the farm couple that it belonged to were more than willing to let them repaint it yellow, create what we see as the Kent driveway today, that didn't exist before, and they let them come around every few weeks and blow something up. Beeman says he loves the farm, and that the farmer's wife always bakes them butter cookies when they come on location to shoot.

With the initial discussion finished, the panel moved on to an open Q&A for the audience. The first question by a very young girl was for Annette, who was asked how does it feel to be an actress? Annette said it's hard to describe, because she loves it so much and it means so much to her. She said she wanted to be a singer and dancer when he was the girl's age, but by the time she was seventeen, she wanted to act and it's all she's ever wanted. She said it's amazing to be able to be anyone and anything you want to be, just by doing this job and that she still loves it, every day.



Next, Al and Miles were asked if they had plans of continuing the series into the college years? Al confirmed that they absolutely would continue the show if it was still going strong. They said they've really avoided showing Clark in school besides the hallways or Torch office, because it interferes with the suspension of disbelief to show a guy Tom's age in a desk in school. Al and Miles then went on to explain that when they first started with ideas for casting, they had planned to cast teenagers in the roles, but the network told them to aim a little older, because you want characters that the younger viewers can look up to, so they've never had any problem with the age or complaints about it.

The following question was for Tom and addressed his plans for after *Smallville*, since he's been on a successful television show and in a successful film. Does he have a preference for which he'd like to do after the show's run? Tom said actually he's been so busy that he's usually trying to figure out which script they're shooting next, that he hasn't given any real thought to the future. He did go on to elaborate that he's found that he likes the directing and producing aspects of the show, but that he doesn't really think about it, because he's so busy, now. Beeman took the opportunity to spotlight the tremendous learning curve that Welling has undergone in the past three years. He said that Tom really came into the role of leader of the cast and crew in this third season, that he gets the importance of what he's doing and that he wants the product to be the best it can be, and that it's very impressive for a young actor his age. Al added that Tom was open to learning even as early as the pilot. He would play a scene and ask them if they wanted it angrier, constantly looking to improve the work. They've always told him if you want another take, then do another take and that Tom's come to embrace that so much that he was doing it on the set of *Cheaper by the Dozen*--both in his own scenes and scenes with others (Tom: That doesn't work so well. More laughter because his delivery is so wry and he's very good natured with the teasing).

Tom said that in the beginning, he literally had no idea what he was doing. He said the first day he came on set knocked on the door of hair and make-up and when he went inside he just kind of looked around, lost and asked "Where do I go?" And luckily, he had people around him who were great to learn from. The first season was so busy that he can actually watch episodes now and not remember them at all, and it was really a community effort that got him through the first year. He said Rosenbaum in particular. . .At which point, he had to pause and laugh and say "Rosenbaum . . . is not Lex Luthor. He has his own discipline and he's a per--perfectionist!" Annette doubled over in her chair laughing, then explained, "I thought you were going to say pervert!" Tom laughed. "That, too!" Then he went on to explain that Rosenbaum



really keeps you there in a scene, and won't let you off the hook in a performance. Obviously, the cast has a wonderful sense of family about it, with all the jokes and teasing shown in that display, and the rest of the good natured ribbing going on throughout the evening.

The next question addressed the question of Chloe's future, and whether or not Al and Miles had a definite plan for her, or if they were figuring it out as they go. He said at first, we all thought she was marked for death and that somehow her death would lead Clark to take up the mantle of justice as Superman, but then DC comics talked about working her in as a character. Has she taken on a life of her own? Al and Miles admit that they don't know where Chloe's going, much like Lionel, and that the real fun and freedom of working with those characters is that neither are constrained by the mythology. Chloe is obviously the outsider who notices that weird things happen in the town and she provides a certain chemistry that Clark will later have with Lois Lane, professionally. Al elaborated that Chloe, Lana and Martha all combine to make up Clark's ideal woman, because usually you wind up forming these traits from past relationships with women into what you look for in a future mate and that they all are influencing who Clark Kent becomes. They plan to keep her on an interesting journey.

Someone commented that it was great seeing *Smallville* on the big screen, and asked if they had any hopes of any of the *Smallville* people getting cast in the Superman movie that everyone keeps talking about? Al said at the moment, no. The movie is an entirely different production and that they haven't even seen the scripts, but that it doesn't involve their take on any of the characters, and there's no talk of any movie that does. The understanding is that they'll finish their run of *Smallville* and the movie will do its own thing.

Another audience member asked if Clark owned any other colored shirts besides red and blue and why do we see him in them all the time? Al explained that it's a very deliberate decision on their part. Every character has a color palette and a style book on the show, and that their looks spring from these style books.

Sam was congratulated on being let in on the secret, and asked what it was like to be a periphery character on the show? Sam said actually the reason he was allowed to learn the secret can actually be attributed to the fans who wanted it. He said Al and Miles called him in before the season started and told him that the fans had asked for him to be given a bigger role, so they were giving him the keeper of the secret. He took the opportunity to very graciously thank the fans.

Of course, the question of Bruce Wayne was brought up, in spite of the fact that there is a young Bruce Wayne movie now in production. Al said that the movie sealed the fate of the Bruce Wayne hopes.

The question was asked if the WB has ever shut down any ideas? Miles said no, they're really very flexible, that most of the mandates they've had have been from DC, especially with the new Superman movie coming into play. Al and Miles both agree that they were given the rights to work with Superman because no one really expected the show to be a hit, and that now that it's a success, the movie franchise resents that the opportunity to reinvent the tale was given away.



Tom was asked if he had any funny stories regarding working with the special effects on the show? Tom admitted that the only thing funny that came to mind was how he felt funny sometimes when they do the scenes. He said the 360 degree shots you see where the camera pans all the way around a character are actually the most difficult, because the actors themselves are moving in slow motion while the camera moves really fast. They've had to learn to act in slow motion for effects like that, and some cartoonish exaggerations were given about how Tom literally has to do the jaw flex and slow head roll if he's struck with something across the face/head. They try to do 15-20 takes of a special effects scene so that they give Beck and his crew plenty to work with when they start adding effects in, later.

Beeman said they have fun with the special effects, sometimes. He told a story of a recent shoot

where Jonathan falls from a roof, and they put Schneider in a harness and hauled him up in front of a green screen to let him dangle while giving him instructions of 'you're falling backwards now. . .okay, you're falling forwards, now!'. Meanwhile, the crew on the ground decided to prank Schneider, and after the final take, Beeman called for a print and told everyone to head home for the day and they left Schneider dangling (While the crowd laughed, Welling scoffed with a grin "That's not funny." Many jokes were made about the discomfort of dangling in a harness). The production crew is so open about special effects that literally anyone on the crew that has a good idea of how to make a scene look better, can have input in how it's finally produced. They've recently had stunt guys offer suggestions on how to make a stunt look better, etc. They said it doesn't matter who the advice comes from, if it's good and it make the finished piece stronger, they'll retrofit an idea for the new take.



Horton said that this is the magic of Beck's special effects: he always gives them what they ask for, and then he usually gives them more. For instance, in "Insurgence" when they were faced with the prospect of making Clark's leap seem to be a forward motion. The idea came about to show a flock of doves taking off from the roof at the same time and flying out behind/around Clark. When they got the finished product, Beck hadn't just stopped with the doves taking off with Clark, he showed the doves beside Clark and from behind, flying alongside him. Tom took the opportunity to point out that the great thing about the show is that they use the effects to enhance the storytelling, not to distract from it.

The evening ended with the requisite declaration of love for Tom and proposal of marriage--to which he pulled out a phone and said he'd have to call his wife, first. The panel ended and Tom and Sam left to catch a late flight back to Vancouver. Annette stayed for a while and signed autographs, as did most of the production crew.

A friend of mine remarked to me on the ride home that after attending the Paley Festival night for *The O.C.* the prior week, she had been wary of what would happen at the *Smallville* panel. *The O.C.* panel had turned into a question and answer session for the cast primarily. *Smallville's* panel was a wonderful balance between production insight and values and the creative journey of the cast. It was great to see just how collaborative the effort is to bring us each episode, and how open and unassuming everyone is, all throughout the process. It's clear to see that there is a single vision for *Smallville*--to make a high quality show that redefines the heart and the wonder that has made the Superman legend endure for so many decades. My sincere thanks to everyone on the panel for this rare insight into their collective passion for *Smallville*.

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