

The Red Machine

by FIXER

I am a screenwriter and director, and if anyone were to ask me what it's like to make a movie, I'd have to say that it feels a lot like solving a cryptogram. The same studying of the problem and looking for patterns, the same testing out of ideas...then the same satisfying flash of enlightenment, as a solution suddenly becomes clear. With a feature film, that process happens over and over, for months or years, like the world's biggest issue of *The Cryptogram*.

I wouldn't have known this similarity, of course, if I hadn't been drawn into the ACA by a feature film called *The Red Machine*, which I co-wrote and co-directed with Alec Boehm. The movie, which was reviewed by **FASTERCAT** in the November-December, 2010 issue of the *Cryptogram*, and which played at last August's ACA convention in Annapolis, MD, will opening theatrically starting on January 20, 2012.

The movie is a caper adventure, set in Washington DC in 1935, about a spy and a thief who must work together to break into a Japanese attache's home and figure out the workings of a top-secret new machine that the Japanese military has begun using to encode its messages. During the post-production phase of the movie, while we were editing and doing the sound and visual effects work, we began wondering if we could hide additional codes and puzzles in the movie, tucked into the end credits, perhaps, or in materials that we could give out at our screenings. Looking for someone who could help us, I found my way to the ACA and wrote to then-president **THE RAT**.

Fortunately for us and the movie, **THE RAT** found our project an interesting challenge, and so we drafted him to be the movie's head cryptographer. For our world premiere of the movie, which took place at the Mill Valley Film Festival in Northern California in 2009, **THE RAT** created a series of cryptograms related to movies, codebreaking and history, and we put those on the back of trading cards that we gave out to all the members of

our audience. (Stuffed In the issue is your Red Machine trading card.)

The Red Machine has taken us from Scotland to India, and all over the United States; it won many awards, and it was praised by critics, including by Roger Ebert, who gave us three and a half stars and called the movie a "lean, intense thriller." (My mother was particularly thrilled – Roger Ebert has always been her favorite film critic.)

But for us, the most exciting part has been meeting our audiences as we've traveled with the movie. While making *The Red Machine*, we tried to craft a story that would ask the audience to pay attention – and to solve a few puzzles of their own. As we wrote the movie, then shot it, then edited it, we were often faced with narrative decisions in which we had to choose between giving an easy answer or trusting in the audience's intelligence and letting them figure things out a little bit more. We always made the harder choice, because we assumed that our audience would be a smart one – and that has proven to be the case. And more than that, we find that we genuinely like the people who come to see our movie – a fascinating group that ranges from people who've worked in intelligence, to great puzzlers, to cineastes, to people who just want something a little different from what they may be getting from today's multiplex fare. It's an unexpected pleasure to find that when you create work that you love, you'll find yourself equally in love with the people who are drawn to that work.

We haven't completely solved our Red Machine puzzle yet; there's still one major part left – its venture into the world as a theatrical movie, and then its appearance in other forms such as DVD, cable, streaming, and so on. All through, we've entrusted the movie to others – to our cast, our crew, to the festivals that supported the movie and the journalists who wrote about it. Now, it's the moviegoers' turn, and we're looking forward to this next phase of the movie's journey, and to the people that we'll meet along the way.

Book Reviews

Dedicated to the memory of MEROKE



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The Red Machine. Argy, Stephanie and Alec Boehm, Mental Slapstick, 2010.
<http://RedMachineTheMovie.com>

The year is 1935 and the Office Of Naval Intelligence has a team promptly decoding Japanese encrypted traffic. **The Red Machine** movie starts with a snappy opening showing the operations of the team smoothly handling these cipher texts when suddenly things change. Operations come to a halt when a new code appears in the mix. Getting an idea of how the machine is made makes up the rest of the movie.

Eddie Doyle (Donal Thoms-Cappello) is a jewel thief that has his luck run out and gets pinched by the two outside cops not receiving his normal 'Get Out Of Jail Free' packages. His luck suddenly changes when Navy Lieut. F. Ellis Coburn (Lee Perkins) requests Eddie come help the Navy on a special mission. Not wanting a partner, Eddie attempts a few times to escape only to finally get with the program and help the Navy out.

After the brief introduction to the current situation and players, we follow the pair on the adventure to steal The Red Machine. Eddie starts to plan, only to be interrupted by Coburn stating "We have to steal it without really stealing it." They don't want the Japanese to detect the theft for they would simply replace the system with a whole new one. Not Eddie's normal M. O., but he quickly adapts, after all, it is his ticket to freedom.

Their first step is to case the tightened down Washington DC Apartment of Ichiro Shimada and his wife (Eddie Lee and Madoka Kasahara). He serves with the Japanese military. The job will be a tough one and it's quickly shown that Coburn has a history with many of the players in the game. This provides enough tension to keep the movie together and provides a few plot surprises as well.

Our own **THE RAT** was the movie's Head Cryptographer and did some great work. It is even a bit unclear where the props end and the Easter egg cryptography starts. Rest assured it is there. Hopefully when the movie is available for purchase some of the cool marketing goodies are included as well.

The *New York Times* newspaper makes a few cameos in the movie. With the new Japanese code, The Navy must rely on the paper's reporters for information. Its famous crossword puzzle has a showing on the desk of Agnes 'Aggie' Driscoll (Meg Brogran), the head cryptographer. According to Stephanie Argy, one of the directors, Donal is an avid NYT crossword aficionado and would work on the days puzzle between scenes. Eventually filming

a scene would be ranked on a NYT crossword puzzle Monday-Sunday scale of difficulty.

The Red Machine is not yet available for purchase, but is currently making the film circuit. Check the website, <http://RedMachineTheMovie.com> for more information on current screening opportunities and availability updates.

Rubicon, Warner Horizon Television (producer). Aired on AMC 2010. AMC is available across all platforms, including on-air, online, on demand and mobile. <http://www.amctv.com/originals/Rubicon/>

Rubicon is a new TV series on the AMC channel with some great drama, cryptography, puzzles and pattern matching content. It follows Will Travers (James Badge Dale) an analyst for API, a New York City-based federal intelligence agency. He is an ace at the crossword puzzles and pattern matching, able to come up with the most obscure facts and connections without problem.

The season opens with a cloverleaf being discovered by a man that then kills himself. We are introduced to Will with a co-worker asking his help on the day's *New York Times* puzzle only to give up and give the paper to Will. Will continues to work on the puzzle for some recreation but quickly realizes there is something odd going on. Pouring over other prior crossword puzzles he detects a pattern and brings it to the attention of his boss David Hadas (Peter Gerety). The very superstitious David dismisses it as a coincidence and tells Will to go home. However, David knows the true meaning of the calling card and quickly alerts the other players, assuring them that he is the only one that has seen the clues. The adventure is now fully in play.

The rest of the season has the 'Cloverleaf Gang' as its backbone of support providing continuity between shows. Various other puzzles and intelligence gathering fill in the gaps and provide more pieces to the complex puzzle the show is exploring. The slowly unraveling plot makes it hard to jump in and watch episodes out of order. It is best to start at the beginning and enjoy each one in turn. Although it can be a bit complicated at times to follow everything, it is worth the effort.

The show has some good cryptography moments as well as puzzles. *The New York Times* ran a special Rubicon sponsored crossword puzzle, available on-line and in the paper, to kick off the show. A similar one appears in the show and the opening credits, but why is it different? A quick look at the very cool opening credits shows the possibility that there may be more Easter eggs to be found and perhaps even the show is hiding some as well.

THE RED MACHINE

soulmate

betrayal

love

reawaken

beauty



Madoka Kashara as “Naomi Shimada”

(HAPPY)

B VZHQIS QJ GZEI KIJKFI LZKKX,
BC JHFX CJO ZH LJRO. MRPMX MI-
OEIFIX

Card 5 of 18 -- COLLECT THEM ALL!

The Red Machine was co-written and co-directed by FIXER.

The cryptograms were created by THE RAT.

www.redmachinethemovie.com