

THE HURRICANE HEIST

PRODUCTION NOTES

Contents

The calm before the storm	1
A perfect storm.....	3
Sweeping across the Atlantic	4
Casting the Hurricane Heist	5
Enter the Dominator	8
Landfall	9
The eye of the storm.....	12
Evacuation	13
The aftermath.....	15

THE PERFECT STORM

PRODUCTION NOTES

On the Alabama coast, two forces of nature collide: a category 5 hurricane, and the American dollar.

It's 1992. A cruel twist of fate takes the life of devoted father and professional stormchaser Bruce Rutledge, leaving his two sons Will and Breeze at Nature's mercy. 25 years later, Will is a government meteorologist tracking Hurricane Tammy - the fiercest storm in US history, headed for Gulfport, AL. As the locals evacuate, the US mint race against time to shred \$600m in old bills before Tammy hits: but they aren't the only ones who have plans for the money...

Foresight Unlimited and Entertainment Studios present *the Hurricane Heist*, starring Toby Kebbell, Maggie Grace, Ryan Kwanten, and Ralph Ineson, directed by Rob Cohen. Produced by Moshe Diamant p.g.a., Christopher Milburn, Rob Cohen, Mark Damon, Michael Tadross, Jr., Danny Roth and Damiano Tucci, Karen Baldwin, p.g.a. And William J. Immerman. The Screenplay is by Scott Windhauser and Jeff Dixon, and the story is by Anthony Fingleton and Carlos Davis. Cinematography is by Shelly Johnson.

The calm before the storm

A farmhouse in Alabama: a peaceful, cosy, home-sweet-home. Suddenly - a howling rush of wind and rain sends the roof whirling into the sky, exposing two frightened children huddled under a kitchen table to a swirling black void looming overhead... the 'storm of the century'.

It's a nightmare all too real for many Americans - including director Rob Cohen: "The hurricane is a beast," he says. "I lived through some hurricanes when I was a young boy, living on the East Coast of America. And to me, they felt like an angry monster."

Humans vs nature - both in the great outdoors and within ourselves - is an ongoing battle playing out front and center on the world's stage: approximately 40% of the world's population lives by the coast. With natural disasters are on the rise, a new reality of living in the path of Nature's fury combined with humanity's worst flaw - greed - create a deadly mix that explodes onto the screen in a riot of practical effects, white-knuckle moments and human performances.

Imagine a massive engine, bigger than anything humanity has ever produced, fuelled simply by warm air. That's a hurricane, or, technically, a 'tropical cyclone', as hurricanes are the name given to storms which form over the Atlantic or eastern Pacific: a belt known as one of the most dangerous environments for massive storms.

As warm, moist air rises off the ocean, cooler air swirls in to take its place, creating barriers of high and low pressure in an accelerating spiral of wind and evaporating clouds. As the hurricane gets faster and faster, its one gigantic eye slowly opens to reveal a high-pressure core, inside which everything is calm, and normal. In the eye, all is eerily silent... until the

eyewall hits and everything from cars to homes and buildings, trees and roads gets sucked up into the swirling vortex.

This is the destructive force of nature that ended the life of Will and Breeze Rutledge's father in Alabama in the summer of 1992: and while Nature makes it look easy, creating the storm of the century on camera proved to be more of a challenge.

Luckily, Rob Cohen had some tricks up his sleeve, with a formidable reputation built on high-octane blockbusters such as *xXx* and *Dragon: Bruce Lee*. He is also the creator of the *Fast and Furious* phenomenon (Universal's biggest franchise to date). But Cohen found his break decades before.

After becoming a reader for Hollywood agent Mike Medavoy, he plucked a neglected script out of the slush pile and promised Medavoy it was, "the great American screenplay and ... will make an award-winning, major-cast, major-director film." Medavoy would try and sell it - but if there were no takers, Cohen would be fired. Universal bought it that afternoon: ever since, Cohen has been known as "the kid who found the *Sting*".

His intuition and guts have fuelled his work ever since, balanced with down-to-earth innovation in explosive practical effects: from using hydraulics to fire cars out of moving trains, to placing cameramen on go-karts to film stunts at low level.

Now, in order to film a waking nightmare - one all too real in the memories of thousands of Americans - as the backdrop for the heist of the century, meant a whole new approach to the gritty, visceral style that has come to be the hallmark of Cohen's work.

Cinematographer Shelly Johnson, whose work includes popcorn crunchers like *Captain America* and *The Expendables 2*, soon realised effectively showcasing the destructive power of the hurricane meant abandoning CGI for practical effects that would see farmhouses destroyed, trucks whipped into the air like *Hot Wheels*, and actors truly tested to their limits: he, like Rob Cohen, once witnessed the carnage.

"I got sent to Florida when Hurricane Matthew was coming in, so I made it within several miles of the eyewall," he says. "Rob said from the very beginning, 'I want to get the camera in there, right in the middle of the storm, and I want the audience to experience what it's like to be standing in a 100 mile an hour wind.'" He laughs. "For instance, the first scene where they're taking refuge in a farmhouse, he said, 'I want to feel the speed in that car. I want to feel the intensity and the rush of them trying to get away. So I want the cameras handheld.' So he said, 'Shelly, I need for you to get a camera operator to the side of that car,' and he said, 'Hold that camera.' I said, 'Okay, yes sir!'"

"I knew exactly what I wanted to do with this film from the day the producers told me the concept," explains Rob. "The idea of a heist going down in a hurricane immediately hit me as a new way of doing an action film, because it wasn't just, 'we're breaking into Fort Knox' - it was, 'we're going to have all the traditional elements of a heist, the takeovers, plots, guns, safes, combinations, breaking in, \$600 million' - all the stuff... but it all becomes different when the story is set within in a vicious category 5 hurricane."

In 2010, 2.6 billion \$1 bills were destroyed: shredded by the Federal Reserve and sent to waste energy facilities for disposal. Old money gets thrown out all the time, and most of the time no one notices - unless a category 5 hurricane happens to be headed right towards where it's kept.

When that happens, you'll get a few people watching very closely.

But months before audiences would see piles of notes transported out of the Gulfport treasury in a daring heist, director Rob Cohen was experiencing his own rollercoaster ride when it came to the movie's fiduciary status. "It was an indie movie, indie financed," he explains. "So it had its moments of falling apart and coming back together and so on, but Moshe Diamant (producer) and I held it together even when the money didn't show up and we were already getting close to the start date. Somehow, we both worked very hard to hold it together until we could really get going." He laughs. "So there were heart stopping moments going on behind camera as we were creating the storm of the century in front of the camera, on a limited budget. It was definitely a challenge." Finally Producer Chris Milburn's UK production company together with Oscar Winning VFX house Double Negative and UK's Post House Lipsync teamed, to put the missing financing into place along with Headgear films and Rob was given the way forward to make his storm and with Prime Focus' help in 3D as well.

A perfect storm

On a sunny day, in a peaceful field just outside Sofia, Bulgaria, a large crew are busy putting the finishing touches to an idyllic old American farmhouse

This is the farmhouse where Will Rutledge and his brother, Breeze shelter from the storm - and it will soon be demolished by 100mph winds, flying debris and crashing rain and hailstones.

Three months later Artem Miniatures are creating the same farmhouse but at one third the scale.

Its roof is gently lowered onto the reinforced steel frame, complete with hundreds of hand-painted balsa wood tiles, each a subtly different shade of red. Miniature tyres lay casually on the porch, an unfinished chore left by their owner. Artem, who have been crafting Hollywood practical effects from their workshops in London and Glasgow for over 29 years, boasts an extensive portfolio producing effects, props and sets in productions such as Robot Wars, T2: Trainspotting and Prometheus. The farmhouse began life on their laptops: a computer generated wireframe subjected to routine tests of virtual physics and rounds of structural revisions before it became the blueprint for the real smaller-than-life home.

But why use miniatures at all? When it comes to the destruction of the farmhouse, Matt Beckwith, Senior Technician at Artem, had this to say: "You can't do that for real. A house is just too big to do that, so this is where you come to either CG or miniatures. And in this

instance, it's probably best to go with a miniature because it does things which are unpredictable.”

Like the storm, the effects have to be unpredictable: or they lose their edge. As any blockbuster fan will tell you, CGI gets boring after a while: when hundreds of technicians painstakingly choreograph a single vehicle flip or exploding house, it can appear flat, unrealistic, or forced on the screen.

Sometimes, you need to blow things up.

But if - or when - practical effects go wrong, it's messy - and expensive - to press rewind and try again. So, Artem's team had to ensure the farmhouse, would collapse in just the right way. This involved extensive research into building materials, hurricane physics and midwestern architecture, to first get an idea of how the farmhouse needed to move in order to look realistic.

“It had to twist and fall off its foundations,” explains Beckwith, “which caused the front to collapse and the back to go up slightly, which made the rationale for the wind getting under the structure and blowing it up on its front, and getting under all the tiles. All the tiles flew off.”

And in order for that to happen, in true Cohen style, pyrotechnics and huge mechanical rigs were involved. On the day of the shoot, the crew knew they only had one chance to get it right. “Just at the last minute, you go around and you weaken all the things that you really want to break and you put some pyrotechnic devices there to help break it,” Beckwith says. “Then, you stand back and you cross your fingers and your toes.”

As the cameras rolled and the wind machines howled, Artem technicians triggered the mechanical rig beneath the scale model farmhouse, pile-driving air rams at structural weak points to initiate collapse. Jets of fire spewed out to look like the stove had caught fire. The farmhouse twisted and cracked, splinters rising in the air as it was swept up by Hurricane Tammy.

Everyone cheered: it had gone perfectly and worked beautifully with the scenes shot in the first few days of the shoot. That's the nature of a Rob Cohen film months can pass and then the sequence is complete. It's all planned down to the last detail.

Sweeping across the Atlantic

Principal photography began in the eastern European country of Bulgaria on 29th August 2016, and would wrap up 11 weeks later when the area's breathtaking landscape shed its mantle as the fictional town of Gulfport, complete with car chases, flying wreckage and frantic shootouts. And after the cast and crew were done on the continental mainland, filming would continue for another week in the UK.

But when you need coastal, checkered-drapes, deep south charm, how do you make Bulgaria look like the US of A? Well, in a word - you don't.

“For green screen to work, to do the number of shots that I anticipate, that’ll be between 750,000 and \$1 million just for that - for nine pages of talk in a car,” says Cohen, lamenting the cost of the kind of high-end CGI it would take to make a realistic-looking natural disaster. “About a year and a half ago I read an article in *American Cinematographer* about the advent of these new LED screens that could be used in many different ways,” explains Rob Cohen. “They were 1 foot by 1 foot, and could be snapped together to create any size screen you wanted.”

It proved to be the perfect way to create a hyper-realistic landscape ripped apart outside shattering windows - even in the tranquil hills of Europe.

“We sent a unit to Fernandina, Florida to photograph - or ‘plate’ - the American south. Then we were able to make these long runs that took place in various vehicles, and have America outside the window, which was impossible in Bulgaria because every bit of architecture is completely different. It’s all red tower roofs, it’s all these stucco buildings - you just can’t fake it. You might find one location here, one location there, but to get a run at an American landscape, you have to really build it or do it this way.”

When the farmhouse is being ripped apart, when the Dominator is racing through the evacuated streets of Gulfport - it’s all just a trick of practical effects, no CGI needed.

Starting its journey as a germ of a script in Hollywood, USA it spread to Alabama for principal research and location scouting before sweeping across the ocean to cast British actors Toby Kebbell and Ralph Ineson, who plays introverted antagonist Perkins - picking up Artem Miniatures in Glasgow along the way, hopping across the continent to Bulgaria, and finally back to Manchester to wrap up shooting.

Casting the Hurricane Heist

We reunite with Will Rutledge (Toby Kebbell) 25 years after the farmhouse tragedy that claimed his father. Now a meteorologist, he’s drawn back to his hometown and to the memories hiding inside the Rutledge Tow and Repair Shop to complete one mission: find his brother, Breeze (Ryan Kwanten), and tell him it’s time to get the heck outta Dodge before Tammy hits.

But Breeze is having none of it. Grumpy and freshly-woken from a deep sleep on the couch, still wearing his work clothes with beer bottles and pills strewn around the sun-drenched living room, Breeze insists it’ll ‘be fine’. As the brothers argue, on the other side of town, lights begin to flicker in the treasury: the generator is giving up. Unaware of the criminals poised to steal \$600m as soon as their moment arrives, US treasury agent Casey Corbyn (Maggie Grace) heads out to find the contractor responsible for fixing the generator: Breeze.

In other roles, you’d be hard pressed to recognise Toby Kebbell - this is the man behind Koba, a coldly calculating primate in the *Planet of the Apes* franchise, and Durotan, noble chief of the Frostwolf clan of orcs in the hugely successful *Warcraft: the Beginning*. But lately, he’s shown his face as Messala Severus in *Ben Hur* and Jack Chapman in *Kong* - as

well as drawing on his *Planet of the Apes* experience to play the role of the titular gigantic ape. His experience in highly demanding physical roles, as well as exploring the darker side of nature, made him a natural choice to play Will Rutledge.

But not everyone was convinced at first - least of all Kebbell himself. "The truth is, the first time I read the script I'd been sent it by a friend of mine who originally was going to play Will," Kebbell explains. "I asked who was in charge of the film, who was going to be doing it, and he said, 'Rob Cohen'. And I said, 'man, I've been trying to work for Rob for about nine years!'" But after exciting preliminary talks with Cohen, the situation soon changed. "Rob, in the end, came to me and said, 'you should play Will'. And I was like, 'You're out of your mind,' and as he does, in such a charismatic way and so convincingly, he said, 'No you are. You're definitely him and you can definitely play him.' We went through a few bits and yeah, he just convinced me. Convinced me I could do it and gave me the support I needed all the way through. I love these kinds of films and I'm honoured to be part of it."

Ryan Kwanten, who portrays down-to-earth repair man Breeze, echoes Kebbell's sentiments about working with the director. "Obviously the first thing you see is the title, but then the next thing that kind of struck me pretty profoundly is the name Rob Cohen." Kwanten smiles. "He's obviously pretty synonymous with making great films, and to sort of be a part of his legacy was kind of huge."

From the moment Kwanten picked up the script, knew this was the kind of movie he'd always wanted to do. "The script is also one that just takes you on a hell of a ride from the get-go. You're brought into this world of Gulfport in Alabama, and what's normally a sleepy town is just pervaded by this permanent sense of ominousness. You're never quite kind of let out of it. It's this relentless ride, and Rob's notorious for that kind of movie: once you sit down, you literally do not move. I remember not being able to put this story down."

In *True Blood*, Kwanten played ladies' man Jason Stackhouse: would the role of Breeze be any different? According to Kwanten, this movie wouldn't see him nude on screen like his vampire counterpart, but playing Breeze would demand a somber, brooding subtext that Kwanten could bridge with this past role. "There was a philosophical side to Breeze that I really kind of gravitated towards, that he's surrounded by these books. He's separated himself from his one remaining family member, his brother, so he lives a pretty kind of solemn, lonely life. And this is, like I said before, his chance of redemption."

Redemption is the web that connects the Rutledge siblings to Casey Corbyn, US treasury agent struggling to move past a deeply-held regret. "I once had the honor of seeing Brian Stevenson speak," says Maggie Grace, who comes to the role of Casey, like Kwanten, from a bloodsucking role: hers being the record-breaking *Twilight* franchise. "One thing he said which really stuck with me was, 'we are all greater than the worst thing we have ever done'. And I think Casey is so much more than that bad decision, but there are certain times where I think she feels defined by it."

Recently, Grace has continued her role as daughter Kim to Liam Neeson's former CIA operative in the *Taken* sequels, and dramas on the big and small screens. But *the Hurricane Heist* is not a title you can easily ignore - and like Kwanten, it was the story that first attracted

Maggie Grace to the role of Casey Corbyn. "It was like five action movies in one. You have that huge set piece at the center of an action movie and there were like four in a row where I was like, 'oh my God', and then another car crash, and the mall, and it was just... it was awesome. There was never a dull moment but it all made sense."

Her on-screen persona pulls no punches, but what does Grace think of the role? "I loved the sense of partnership between the lead characters. As a feminist I just thought, it's not every day you get to play a character who's active and not passive." She laughs. "Mostly the female characters, especially in action movies, are like, 'please don't go do that dangerous thing'. And Casey's so active and capable and just pragmatic. What was really the *coup de grâce* for me is, at the end, you think it's a damsel in distress moment and she's going to magically get saved by the knight in shining armor - and she saves herself." So were Kwanten and Kebbell no help at all? She disagrees. "They all manage to get back together. But in terms of actually saving her own life, in that moment, I was like, yes! This never happens!"

Meanwhile, James Cutler was finding his own inspiration for the role of Clement Rice, the muscle of the movie's band of antagonist criminals planning to rob the treasury of millions of dollars. No stranger to physical roles, Cutler played badass supervillain henchman Goggles in *Kick-Ass 2* as well as dabbling in short films like *the Boxer* and *Nasty*. When asked how he drew inspiration for his backstory in the role, Cutler commented: "I actually found it through a real story of a real marine, named Andrew Walker. He was like a lucky talisman in his platoon, and a result of that he was put on too many missions than was normal. He eventually came back home, but was suffering with PTSD and got dismissed for any help from the veterans association." Remarkably, Cutler found this real-life story had incredible parallels with the subtext in *the Hurricane Heist*: "And what he did to kind of curb his feelings was rob banks. That was the only thing that he felt which calmed his energy, this inner storm going on inside him."

For director Rob Cohen, finding the perfect cast was one part of the production that just fell into place. "It's been a very fast film schedule considering most films take much longer to get together," he says. "I wrote the first real draft of the script in January 2016. We started shooting in August 2016, and now we're finishing the movie in August 2017. So a year from the start of shooting to the actual finish of the film - that's fairly quick, actually."

With roles in *the Office*, *Game of Thrones* and the last three *Harry Potter* movies, Ralph Ineson is no stranger to blockbuster material, and found international acclaim playing the role of devout father William in chilling 2015 hit *the Witch*. But when he became attached to the previously straightforward role of the 'inside man' who spends years in a dead-end job before he makes it possible for the criminals to infiltrate the mint, Rob Cohen was determined to make the most of his talents - and his distinctive baritone voice.

"Rob made changes around my casting, which really helped me," Ineson remarks when it comes to discussing how he fleshed out Perkins' character. "Once we got on set, we agreed what he was about and where he was, and that he wasn't an utter lunatic. He turns into a crazy man by the end, but he's a very reasonable guy who's got a plan, and he doesn't want to hurt anybody." He then reveals Perkins' true motivations for stealing from the drab

government building where he's worked a dead-end job for years: "He just wants the money. He just wants a decent retirement - he doesn't want anybody to get hurt."

Enter the Dominator

Leaving Will behind at the repair shop, Casey and Breeze roll back up to the treasury to fix the generator in time to buckle down before Tammy hits. Everything seems calm - too calm.

Shots violently erupt: the criminals failed to tranquilise all the security in their attempt to rob the locked vault. They already have one panicking hostage, and now they're hunting another: they know Casey is the only one who has the code.

Breeze is captured as leverage, but Casey manages a narrow escape - just in time to be picked up by Will and the Dominator. Knowing the money is safe and they have to get Breeze out of there, they race to the police station.

Breathless, they explain the situation - only for Sheriff Dixon to pull a gun on them. Perkins' distinctive Yorkshire accent crackles over the radio: the sheriff was in on the whole thing.

Meanwhile, dark clouds begin to gather as Hurricane Tammy chews at the horizon, barrelling closer and closer...

When Rob Cohen talks about Hurricane Tammy, he describes her as an almost supernatural force: a metaphysical as well as tangible threat to our homes and loved ones. But when buildings crumble like a house of cards and guns and bombs are useless - what on earth would stand a chance against such a monstrous force of nature?

A 1,000 horsepower, 10-tonne storm chasing truck equipped with the latest satellite technology and top of the range survival gear, of course.

The Dominator is not your average car: more like a stealth tank got chewed up and spit out into a monster truck before rolling around in meteorological equipment. A veteran stormchasing battle-vehicle designed and built by Niles (Stewart McCorrie), its armour-plated bulk is driven by Will and Casey into the eye of the storm.

In the movie, the Dominator is one intimidating vehicle.

In real life, it's a masterpiece of practical effects wizardry - but no less impressive.

Wireframes were created using the latest CAD software and assembled from 3D printed parts by mechanics experts. Then, the Dominator was fitted with every screen, dial, radio and cable necessary to monitor a category 5 hurricane.

Toby Kebbell gives us some insight on what he had to learn to get what it takes to drive the Dominator: a PhD in synoptic meteorology. "Basically storms work in a very specific manner, so, technically Will's the guy who sees all of this information and it calculates to one thing," Kebbell explains. "And then after the fact, he's a data logger." But, it doesn't just take brains

to drive the Dominator: it takes brawn, too. "I had been sent picture after picture from Rob of what the Dominator was, but in in drawing form. So when I turned up and saw it and then drove it, I mean, it's phenomenal. But everything had that level of detail. All of that does actually change the way you can perform in a situation because the world is real. So yeah, the Dominator was badass, man."

Cinematographer Shelly Johnson recounts what it took to commit the Dominator to film from a technical standpoint: "So Rob Cohen said, 'Shelly, we're going to be shooting a lot of scenes in our storm chasing vehicle. It's like a lab on wheels, and it's a big vehicle and we have' - whatever it was - '30 pages of dialogue inside this vehicle. All in a storm, all during the hurricane.' Immediately, Shelly knew this meant his standard method of bolting cameras onto the side of the vehicle - a la *Fast and Furious* - wouldn't work. The Dominator's armour plating was simply too thick, and the interior too crowded with meteorological instruments, to even fit a camera anywhere inside. It was a sealed vehicle.

This was a problem.

For this complex scene involving pages of dialogue performed by actors who are simultaneously driving, making calculations and checking meteorological forecasts while honing back-and-forth chemistry, it needed to look like a category 5 hurricane is raging outside - without the need for the actors to deliver exceptional performances while dodging flying mailboxes and broken glass.

"So that was a pretty good challenge," Shelly quips.

The answer? PRG - the snap-together screens which had transformed Sofia, Bulgaria into hurricane-ravaged downtown Gulfport. By assembling screens showing the Fernandina hurricane footage all around the vehicle, Shelly and his crew could shoot from any angle they wanted - without ever being in motion.

"We tested them, and they're going to work amazingly well instead of shooting with green screen," explains Rob. "Because then you have trouble using the water, you have the trouble of keying your image through the rain. It all becomes very tricky and sometimes not very effective - it look's fake. And you're going, 'okay, I got this very hyperrealistic movie and suddenly we get in the car and it's fake'."

The LED screens had other advantages, besides looking more realistic. Shelly and his crew were able to get inside the Dominator with handheld cameras to pile on the realism, and no detail was missed out. "To me it was very important to have the storm light permeate into the Dominator," says Shelly. "And by being able to light with actual images of the hurricane, we got that very natural feel in there." He laughs. "And that was strictly through Rob pushing and pushing me to do something that I didn't know how to do, but directed me to learn how to do it."

Landfall

A hellacious chase ensues between the Dominator and the criminals' armoured truck down the abandoned streets of Gulfport - peppered with rapid fire, Casey and Will take advantage

of a hold up to try a plan B: pull down the town's cell tower to render the criminals' radios useless.

Will scrambles to the top of the building just as Perkins' truck rolls into view and the full force of Tammy begins to rain shrapnel on the chaos. In the midst of a firefight, Sheriff Dixon rolls up to the treasury. It's a double-double cross: he's the boss of this town, and he's fixing to get that money for himself.

But mild-mannered Perkins, by his own admission, is at the end of his rope. Coolly taking out Dixon, he recruits the deputies for his own nefarious organisation and issues Will and Casey an ultimatum: head to the nearby mall, and they'll trade their hostages for Casey - who'll finally grant them access to the vault.

Ironically, portraying a storm as unpredictable as Tammy, meant weeks of planning down to the last detail - and while real props were being flooded, crushed and destroyed, the actors were facing serious physical challenges in the name of realism.

"It's so much easier when you say, 'you get out of your car and you're almost blown over', but you create a situation on set where you make that happen," says Cohen. "So, if he gets out of the car and he doesn't protect himself, he will be blown over. There was no acting required when you dumped 44,000 gallons of water onto a group of stuntmen and actors. That literally knocks their legs out from underneath them and sweeps them away like a real tsunami would. You look at it and you go, 'that's not fake'. You know."

As Hurricane Tammy descends on Gulfport, and all the residents have evacuated, it's just Casey Corbyn and the Rutledge brothers left to square up against Clement Rice's band of aspiring tech-savvy heist criminals. It's the action-packed sequence that sees Casey racing to the police station only to be crushed when she learns Sheriff Dixon - played by *Star Trek* and *Banshee* actor Ben Cross - was in on the heist the whole time, when the actors were faced with conditions like none of them had ever faced before: on or off camera.

Lead actors Toby Kebbell and Maggie Grace, who play meteorologist Will Rutledge and US treasury agent Casey Corbyn respectively, regularly endured pummeling by crushing rain, 100mph gusts of wind and routine 16-hour days on set to film the realistic storm. What did it mean to have to perform under such atmospheric and artistic pressure?

James Cutler, who plays villain Clement Rice, says: "All your senses are just alive, and it really just grounds you in the reality of what's happening right now." He takes a minute to reflect. "It's beautiful because you don't have to do any acting because you're just getting battered in the face." So what did he think of Cohen's practical approach? "I'm sure there are ways around this sort of thing - but I think it's admirable that he was like, 'we'll do it for real'. Because, again, that feeds back on you."

Maggie Grace agrees with him on that one. "It really takes the acting out of it, you know what I mean? So much of this movie, like here in Manchester, there's been a little more scene work. But most of the three months in Bulgaria, our job was just to be present and try to overcome the obstacles in front of us which, as an actor, it's a pretty cool, different

challenge.” She remembers the first day of shooting, back in August 2016. “It was the scene outside the police station. And they would crank up the 100 mile an hour wind fans, and the rain, and the glass broke - the wind was so strong. The first time they turned on the fans, the potted trees slammed over and it blew me over. I wasn't expecting that! I was expecting some wind but it was just like...” Here, she's lost for words. “Toby and I both looked at each other as we were about to wrap, 16 hours in, and we were like: ‘oh my god. What is going on?’ Cause it's August - and what's it going to be like in November in Bulgaria?” Elli, the stuntwoman who filmed one or two of the most challenging scenes in lieu of Grace, was used to facing adverse weather conditions in her professional life. But what about Casey Corbyn? “I'm so black and blue right now, I look like a dalmatian,” says Grace. “It's just bruises the whole way down!”

Toby Kebbell had more pragmatic worries: “Shouting over hurricane wind, and every time I opened your mouth, your mouth would fill with rain... I want to swear a lot, that's what you're seeing in that resistance. That motherfucking rain. There was no preparation, and I thought I'd prepared, is the truth. But I was fucking absolutely wrong.”

In order to achieve a sense of realism that would have audiences on the edge of their seats, Cohen and his crew employed a painstaking approach to even the tiniest details. The inhabitants of Gulfport, Alabama would be evacuating in a hurry: and that meant a lot of debris.

Hollywood is no stranger to improvisation, especially when it comes to recycling innovative uses for stuff nobody wants. On the set of *Volcano*, they famously made recycled paper pulp rain down over the city of Los Angeles - on camera, it looked exactly like hot ash. For the *Hurricane Heist*, they needed trash - and lots of it.

Municipal authorities were contacted to source, and eventually stockpile, as much natural debris as the crew could possibly get their hands on. Huge bales of domestic trash were held on standby, to float in the waters creating rivers of the streets and create an eerie ‘just-abandoned’ atmosphere around devastated homes.

And, of course, the environmentally-conscious crew tidied up every bit of it afterwards.

Battling through conditions like these were no mean feats for the actors involved - or the crew. “Rob had said, ‘this is going to be incredibly physically draining,’ and I said, ‘no, I've got it. I'm good. I'm fit. I'm aware’,” says Toby Kebbell. “I don't think Rob was aware either, because he said to me, ‘man, that looks phenomenal’.” But of course, the challenges of acting in a storm and directing one couldn't have been more different. “Rob would wear clothes because he's going to go and direct. He's not there to be wet and join us in all that nonsense. But he would get in that storm and lean into it and feel it - because the rain becomes like bullets. It was hard, man. That was hard work. And it doesn't really matter that they're wearing North Face and you're wearing red flannel or whatever. The pain is the same. We're all there - that's why these things become like family because you go through a hardship together. Things happen, like balloons don't stay up, or the wind gets too high and whips and rattles things around, or there's too much sunlight - everybody's in it.” Does he have any tips to cope with shooting in such extreme conditions? His answer, of course,

comes with a stiff British upper lip. “The best thing to do is, if you possibly can, find the hilarity in the pain,” he says. “Crack jokes, and that’ll make it all right.”

The eye of the storm

Smuggling \$600m out of a US mint in the path of an impending hurricane seemed like a good idea at the time - but everything starts to go wrong when the criminals neglect one tiny detail: the only one who has the code to access the vault is Casey. This sets in motion a death-defying chase between the Dominator and by members of Rice’s team, skirting perilously close to the eyewall of Hurricane Tammy - exchanging fire all the way.

Arriving at the mall under an uneasy truce, the villains are on edge, and unpredictable. Casey and Will, however have a plan – and it involves an adiabatic-subsidence pressure inversion.

Under heated discussion, Casey shoots out the mall skylight: the shattered glass falls for just a second, then gets sucked upwards like a reverse implosion thanks to an immense pressure inversion - taking the bad guys, and anything not nailed down, with it.

Unfettered by conventional Hollywood and bolstered by a fearsome reputation, there’s the crucial message Rob Cohen wants to communicate to audiences all over the globe, hidden not so deep beneath the surface of this movie.

Toby Kebbell sums it up as it relates to his character’s principal interest in synoptic meteorology:

“You really have to delve into it - and it’s very clear that this is about global warming. Now, this is a bone of contention for a lot of people. We’re in an interglacial period - so the earth is always warming, that’s what’s happening, but we’re in an interglacial period. It could shift back or forward, but with the amount of industry we’ve had over the last 100 plus years, it’s driven it forward exponentially. I spoke to some guys at NASA, and they said, ‘we’re already doing this, this is already the situation’. There’s no reversing it, it’s just a situation that’s occurring.” But, he remains optimistically down-to-earth about the situation: “I feel like it’s wrong for an adult male who wears makeup for a living to sit and pontificate about anything - but being a human being, it’s just fascinating.” Does he think the movie is laden with a heavy message? “By no means. We’re letting you know the facts: this is why it’s occurring. That’s it. It’s quite plain and simple and quite sweet in that way.”

One of Kebbell’s best-delivered lines in the movie is this: “As the oceans warm through global warming and all due deference to Donald Trump, there is man-made climate change.”

Rob Cohen has a neatly succinct view when it comes to the matter. When speaking about Trump, he says: “He better get with it or maybe he’ll get blown away.” He adds under his breath: “Which would be a good thing in my opinion.”

He goes on to state: “I feel that people who deny climate change are troglodytes. They still live in caves. There is no doubt that the overpopulated Earth, and the overuses of fossil

fuels, and the overbreeding of cattle, and all of the things that lead to the atmosphere being altered have created a growing problem that is getting very severe.” He recounts a particularly alarming bit of news: “A piece of ice just broke off from Antarctica that’s as large as a country. And when the polar ice caps melt and the sea levels rise, there are countries like the Maldives that will disappear. They’re only six, eight inches above sea level to begin with. The tides will change. The flow of currents will bring new kinds of storms, hurricanes or typhoons. We will have much more to deal with - and we will have less air to breathe and that will affect the animals, the insects, the balance with humanity. And we are living on such a fragile orb that people who deny it are like Holocaust deniers to me. They’re in the same class of willful denial of the facts of science. And obviously, for their various reasons, mostly to pad the bank accounts of their friends that do well when deregulation and lack of concern about the environment is allowed to flourish.” He pauses. “So again, I go back to people like Trump. That’s why I wrote the monologue Toby gives about global warming and how the storms will increase in intensity and what a profound impact that’s going to have on the future. I think you can’t make a move like this and not address the subject, because the reason it’s a category 5 hurricane is because the Gulf of Mexico keeps getting warmer. And the more it warms up, the more power the cyclonic movements off the surface of the water have to create a hurricane.” He sums up his argument in one statement: “I think it’s irresponsible and ignorant to deny what’s really going on, and what solid science has told us.”

Despite portraying biblical-scale floods and tangible Judgment Day-style catastrophes, does Cohen link his work with a more religious message? As he affirms, absolutely not. “I’m a Buddhist,” he says. “My parents were atheists but I’m a practitioner of Buddhism, in which God is not an issue. It’s not even brought up.”

Evacuation

Cornered by Rice, Perkins and their last remaining allies, a tense stand-off in a gardening center ends in a 20-foot tidal wave demolishing the store - sweeping Casey into the enemy’s hands.

Forcing her to open the vault before they shoot their last remaining hostage, the criminals load up the money and leave the facility in a convoy of trailers emblazoned with Alabama National Guard badges - with Will, Breeze and the Dominator thundering closer, closing the gap as the eyewall of Hurricane Tammy eats up the road behind them.

Rob says, “The flood scene was an interesting technical challenge because like everything else in the film I wanted it to be in-camera, so I brought in my favorite special effects team, led by Elia Popov. So Elia and I worked out how to do the storm, what kind of equipment we needed, how many millions of gallons of water we needed, and how to make it very dangerous looking - but still workable for actors. We decided to take two cargo containers which held 22,000 gallons of water each, and put them on a mechanism that would tip the huge 40-foot long cargo containers. Then, with pyro bolt cutters, we would blow the doors open and hit that set with 44,000 gallons of water in a matter of seconds.”

On set, the effect was immense. “There’s something really biblical about the sequence,” says Rob, “the way our characters survive and struggle in it. I just felt like I wanted the coast

to be hit by a storm surge or kind of tsunami, and it picks up cargo container ships and breaks the sea wall and the ocean comes pouring into the lowlands of Gulfport, and floods everything in sight, including where our heroes and villains are having a confrontation. So, in a way, nature intercedes with the puny human activities and sweeps everybody away.” Slyly, he lets slip a crucial part of these final scenes. “And... not everybody survives.”

As if orchestrating the logistics of unleashing a crushing deluge of water on willing actors wasn't enough of a challenge, Cohen and the visual effects crew paid attention to detail when it came to the actual design of the arena where this beat in the disaster takes place: the Gulfport gardening center.

Cohen knew it was important to provide a cool backdrop to events, and went so far as to give the gardening center a little of its own backstory: “Let's say you got a woman who wanted to have a gardening shop. She's an eccentric gardener, which you have many in the gardening world. She builds herself a container store - a store out of containers. And from your point of view as the gardener, what's the difference between having a 10-foot ceiling with translucent material so that the plants can get light, and a 20-foot?”

The ceiling height was of paramount importance. It was meant to play on a large section of the audience's worst fear: drowning in an enclosed space.

“The whole idea is to make it claustrophobic,” Cohen says of this scene. “The whole idea is to remind the audience at all times that there is a ceiling on this place - so that when the wave comes, it's like their worst nightmare.”

Garden center architecture may not be top of everyone's list for blockbuster scene considerations, but it proves to be a crucial part of what makes this scene so frightening: with a twenty foot high ceiling, Will and Casey would simply float out of the door. Reduce the ceiling to ten feet, however, and you've got a deluge which exerts a huge amount of pressure on a smaller space: a water piston crushing everything in its path.

But no matter how spectacular the effects, or complicated the logistics, cinematographer Shelly knew he only had one mission: tell a good story.

“I think what every film has in common is the real wanting to tell a great story. Even the large summer films have that same kind of idea. The spectacle might be different and the technique might be very technical and very fantastic, but ultimately it comes down to framing and lighting one image in a viewfinder, and that's always the same.” As a director more concerned with entertaining audiences than pandering to critics, Cohen agrees with Shelly's approach. “The pursuit of great storytelling is always the same, no matter how fantastic it is,” Shelly goes on. “And I think for a cinematographer, it's important to not get too distracted by the technical side of it, and all of the glitz and all of the fancy equipment. How can you tell a story in the simplest possible way to guide the audience through what the characters are experiencing?”

The actors found this one of the most physically challenging scenes, not just in the movie, but in their whole careers. Ralph Ineson recalls: “You read it on the page and you say, ‘oh,

it's great. It's going to be really exciting'. All the stuff's going to be flying around, and you imagine that a lot of that stuff's going to be done by visual effects and post-production. You don't quite realize how much Rob and Shelly have decided to put in front of the camera." He laughs. "So yeah, working in these conditions has been really hard at times. If you don't concentrate, you will get blown off your feet." He goes on to elaborate on the punishing conditions concocted by the effects crew. "Into that wind that the machines are generating, there's ice-cold water going in from a huge hose - so the water's flying out at a pace horizontal to the ground. There's debris, leaves, and twigs, stuff flying in it, and so you're constantly trying to keep that out of your eyes." He describes filming a crucial point in the movie: "I was doing this scene the other day, I had to drive a truck into a flooded street, get out, and walk up towards the camera, and deliver a line in close-up. It brought me a lot closer to the big fan than I'd realized... so as I'm walking there, and it was coming in from that side to me, and it was so hard, the rain hitting on the side of my head, around here, that the next morning, when I woke up, I was bruised all the way down the side of my face and my head from the water." He doesn't seem too worse for wear, though. "It's quite painful at times, but it's also very exhilarating!"

The aftermath

Rice is gone. Will, Casey and Breeze are clinging onto control of the careering trailers as they escape the storm and pursue the last man desperate to hold onto the stolen fortune - Perkins.

A classic pincer movement orchestrated by the Rutledge brothers sees them slamming his truck from both sides: crushed and stalled, the trailer wrenches free and uncouples - only to be sucked up into the whirling vortex of Hurricane Tammy, bearing down upon them. Perkins' dream is gone: the heist was for nothing. And just as he realises what he's done, the 40-foot trailer plummets back to earth - crushing his truck in an explosion of whirling green currency.

Casey hangs out of the trailer and reaches for Breeze, who makes a terrifying leap of faith - and narrowly escapes the trailer as it's torn up into the sky. Casey and the Rutledge brothers race out of the path of the hurricane, towards a brighter horizon.

A couple of days later, an Alabama farmer stands in the middle of a flattened field, shielding his eyes against the sunshine and contemplating the hopeless task of recovering his crop... then, a \$100 bill flutters to the ground at his feet. The farmer looks up and grins: it's raining money all over Alabama.

Ralph Ineson remains upbeat about his character's fate: "I thought it was great. It was a wonderful death. To be crushed by my own greed is a great way to go, and I can't wait to see it on screen."

For Maggie Grace, the connection with her character will last off-screen: "I think as I get older I become more Casey," she grins. "I feel more and more comfortable in my skin, comfortable taking up space. I definitely have a lot of affection for her." She draws parallels between Casey's relationship with the Rutledge brothers and her own working relationship with Rob and the cast and crew of *the Hurricane Heist*. "There's a sense of, I think 'ease' is

the word I would use, not only for her but with Rob and the cast. Both of those things, which is freaking awesome and rare. So yeah. I think ease is the word.” So what got her through the punishing weather, long hours and professional challenges apart from an awesome rapport with her workmates? “We kept pretending we were making a fake trailer and sort of a zombie super-sequel and things like that,” she says. “Of course the tagline was, ‘there will be rain’.”

Old bills go out of circulation all the time - but until they’re physically shredded, even torn-up bills are valid currency. Given Cohen’s love of realism on-screen, would the money raining down on ordinary Alabama folk be these outdated notes, or fake?

Turns out, a little more real than some of the actors were used to - but not so real that they were stuffing it in their pockets at the end of the day.

“Rob made all those dollar bill stacks, all those hundred and twenties, look so real,” reflects Toby Kebbell. “They were individual pieces of paper, they weren’t just clumps of foam blocks cut together.” Turns out, that attention to detail would trigger a bigger impact in the quality of the film than simply authentic-looking money. Kebbell explains: “All of that does change the way you perform in a situation, because the world is real.”

As *the Hurricane Heist* was acquired for domestic distribution by Entertainment Studios from Mark Damon’s Foresight Unlimited with a release date of early 2018, audiences will soon be gripping the edge of their seats - and waiting with their eyes on the screen for the storm to pass.