

AAA Grand Prize Winner

Jon James Miller scores with *Garbo's Last Stand*

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT in the movie business, it's all about access. Aspiring filmmakers have been known to try anything to get their foot in the door, from stealing scripts from studio offices to buying pricey billboards space to advertise their projects.

Few, however, have tried muffins.

"When I came out (to Los Angeles) the first time from film school, I didn't know the town at all, so the only way I could get into the studios was to be a Mrs. Beasley's errand boy," says Jon James Miller, winner of the 2008 AAA Screenplay Contest. "So I delivered muffins to all the production houses on the Paramount lot, Fox lot and Sony, and that's how I got to meet people."

But that was years ago, and while the muffin gig did afford Miller certain star encounters — Gregory Peck, Ed McMahon "in his brown velour jumpsuit," a fresh-from-rehab Carrie Fisher — it didn't lead to a big break.

He turned to writing — and got a major boost recently when his original script *Garbo's Last Stand* won the grand prize in the contest, which is sponsored by *Creative Screenwriting*.

Garbo's Last Stand is a fictional drama about what happens when Greta Garbo sets out to assassinate Adolf Hitler, a great fan of hers, in an attempt to pre-empt World War II. Miller says his win has already resulted in some initial queries.

A lifelong lover of film — "When I was growing up, my mom was a huge fan of Garbo and Barbara Stanwyck and Hedy Lamarr and Jean Harlow and all those glamorous movie stars," Miller recalls — he got his B.S. in cinematography from New York's Ithaca College and moved to Los Angeles, eventually work-

ing as a researcher and segment producer on cable documentaries for A&E Channel's *Biography* series, among others.

While working on a documentary, Miller met Seth Moseley, an Associated Press reporter who once encountered Garbo in an ocean liner men's room, where she was hiding from the press.

Ironically, the reporter himself was in pursuit of Garbo, as he'd planned to snap a candid photo of her, sell it and get himself out of debt. That reporter became Miller's friend and the basis of the main character in *Garbo's Last Stand*.

"I like to base a lot of my stories around factual events," says Miller, who has had several other scripts optioned. He's working on another

screenplay, called *Agent Cynthia: America's Mata Hari*, about Betty Thorpe Pack, a largely unknown World War II-era operative who "spied for Roosevelt on the Vichy French and basically came up with the goods for the Allies to have a surprise attack on Hitler's forces in North Africa."

A resident of the Bay Area, where he is director of foundation relations at Children's Hospital Oakland, Miller is long past hoping that muffins will open industry doors. Instead, he is in the process of turning *Garbo's Last Stand* into a novel, and he's hoping to gain traction with his victory in the AAA Screenplay Contest.

"This has been such a great surprise for me — the contest — that it gave me a second wind and gave me hope," Miller says. "I pretty much set my sights on writing this book. Now that I got the award, I'm thinking, 'Well, maybe I can still sell this story as a spec screenplay. Maybe it's still possible.'"

Miller can be reached at www.jonjamesmiller.com. **CS**



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