

Casey Affleck as Patrick Kenzie in *Gone Baby Gone*

PHOTO: CLAIRE FOLGER
COURTESY: MIRAMAX FILMS

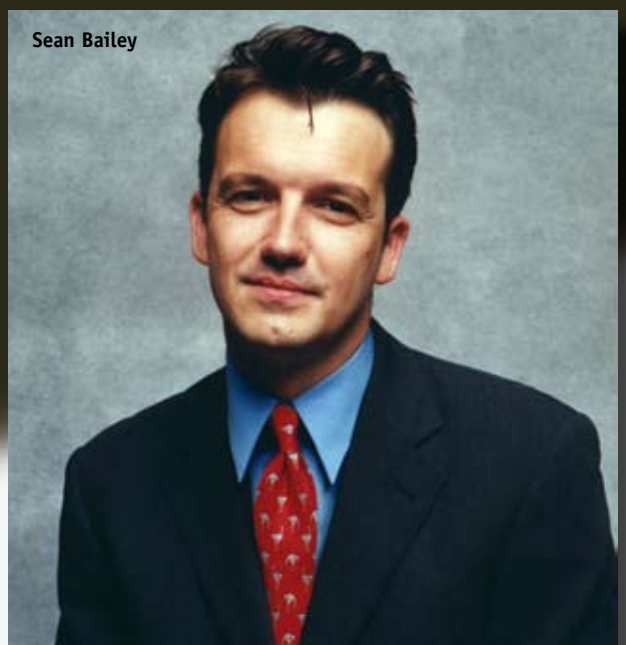
LivePlanet

Sean Bailey has had a long day.

It's 6:30 p.m. on a hot summer evening in Southern California, and he's just returned to his office to catch up on things and is gracious enough to squeeze an interview with *Script* into the mix. He mentions he just returned from a three-hour story meeting at Sony about an animated project he's been working on and will probably leave the office around 10:00 p.m. which, according to him, is typical.

“It's a pretty long day,” the 37-year-old admits. “I mean, it starts around 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. and goes until about 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. Tomorrow we're on *Tron* and we're going to be in the room for four to five hours trying to figure some stuff out. So, that's kind of how we do it.”

In addition to the highly anticipated new *Tron* film, Bailey's more immediate concern is with LivePlanet's recent release, *Gone Baby Gone*. His partner and fellow LivePlanet co-founder Ben Affleck's directorial debut is the company's first with a principal at the helm. Released October 19, the film is also Affleck's first script—with co-writer Aaron Stockard, based on the novel by Dennis Lehane—since taking home the Oscar® for Best Original Screenplay in 1998 for *Good Will Hunting*.



Sean Bailey



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“For me, to go produce Ben’s directorial debut with Casey [Affleck, Ben’s younger brother] in the lead, it was just thrilling,” admits Bailey. “I guess it’s what you kind of dream moviemaking is about.”

As chairman and co-founder of LivePlanet, Bailey is the less-recognizable face of the management team that includes himself, Affleck and Matt Damon. (Fourth co-founder, Chris Moore, moved on to work on his own projects.) Bailey, who himself has leading-man looks and an incredibly gracious personality, exudes a comfortable charm that’s refreshing in an industry known for its “me first” attitude.

Currently located in the non-trendy part of Santa Monica (there is only one Starbucks in a one-mile radius of the office, as opposed to four), LivePlanet’s origin isn’t as glamorous as one might think, despite having two of this generation’s most popular actors as founders. In fact, its beginnings were a simple matter of office space.

In 1996, while Damon and Affleck were penning what would be the screenplay that

would change their lives forever, they put their do-it-yourself ethic to work by forming Pearl Street Productions as a way to look legit to the studios. Eventually, Pearl Street came to share the same office space as Bailey’s HorsePower Entertainment and Moore’s Fusion Studios. “It’s funny, we all had these high-powered titles like president and chairman,” Bailey laughs, “when really it was just two guys in an office.”

He adds, “We’d see each other all the time and bounce ideas off one another.” Bailey explains as his and Moore’s respective companies grew, and as Affleck and Damon shot to superstardom following the success of *Good Will Hunting*, the four men’s close friendship, similar passions, and creative vision prompted them to combine forces and form LivePlanet in June 2000.

Combining Old and New

From the beginning, LivePlanet was not going to be your traditional production company. Realizing that entertainment was more than just television and film, and knowing

that Internet and new media were changing the face of storytelling forever, LivePlanet decided to meld both old and new media together with a first-of-its-kind undertaking: Project Greenlight.

Launched in September 2000 as a joint venture with LivePlanet, HBO, Miramax, and Samuel Adams, Project Greenlight was conceived as a contest to give budding screenwriters the chance to follow in the fairytale footsteps of Damon and Affleck. The premise was simple: Write a high-caliber screenplay, win the competition, see your screenplay made into a Miramax-released movie with a \$1 million budget. It morphed into a reality TV series capturing the behind-the-scenes drama, warts and all, of making a film from conception to execution. The show garnered a large cult following and proved, as Bailey says, “that decisions about what most of the people around the world get to see in cinema are made by 10 guys in suits in Burbank.”

Believing there was enough great undiscovered talent out there and knowing that the

studio system made it nearly impossible for new talent to emerge, Project Greenlight was a career catalyst for the person with a stellar script but no means to produce it.

"None of us in the company—not Chris, not myself, not Matt and Ben—had an uncle who was a big agent, and no one was chummy with a studio head," says Bailey. "The way we all kind of got our first break, in one way or another, was material. Matt and Ben obviously had *Good Will Hunting*, and I wrote a few things that helped myself get a start. Matt and Ben had also grown really close with Kevin Smith, who broke in with his own voice. I had been working a lot with a writer named Ted Griffin who, when we met, was working at a dry cleaners—literally at a dry cleaners—folding laundry and writing scripts ... and *Ocean's Eleven* came out of that.

"So, we thought if Ted's there in the laundromat writing, and Kevin Smith is writing *Clerks*, and Matt and Ben are writing *Good Will Hunting*, these people are out there, maybe they just don't have the conduit."

The show *Project Greenlight* lasted three seasons; the contest, three cycles and resulted in three films: *Stolen Summer*, *The Battle of Shaker Heights*, and *Feast*. While the reality series turned out to be much more popular than the films it spawned, Bailey is still quite pleased with the risk they took and the subsequent cult following the show garnered, adding that he is currently looking to bring the franchise back as a strictly online venture in the near future.

"We've talked a lot about an all-digital version, which is what I think we're probably going to do," he says. "We really did like the community aspect that sprung from it. You know, you have a production designer in Pittsburgh talking to a director in Houston talking to a director of photography in Louisiana—that was really cool. We'd like to bring it back in a way where those people can actually really work together and make things ... so yeah, maybe an all-digital version."

Pushing Boundaries

With Project Greenlight firmly placing LivePlanet on the map, they ventured into another daring project in 2002 with *Push, Nevada* (co-written by Bailey and Affleck). A mystery-drama that was also a contest gave viewers a chance to solve a mystery for a prize of \$1,045,000. These types of projects have given LivePlanet a reputation for creating an interactive entertainment experience—and building a relationship between storyteller and audience.

"It all starts with: What do we think we can contribute?" says Bailey. "There are certain genres you don't see us doing because, honestly, I wouldn't know what to say to make it better or worse or how to give a note. As a producer, it begins with that, what do we think we can succeed with and do our job well? And those tend to be

more plot-oriented stories, or, if they're comedies, they're more subversive. We do like to push boundaries in the traditional practices. For example, with *Push, Nevada*, [we asked] why can't new media and a television drama co-exist in a different way? We really like to try things."

While LivePlanet excels with daring new media ventures, they are still in the traditional filmmaking business, having produced such films as *Matchstick Men*, *American Wedding*, *Joy Ride*, *The Emperor's Club*, and *Gone Baby Gone*, and are currently developing more than 20 projects for both film and TV. Bailey is quick to point out, even when it comes to more traditional fare, LivePlanet still likes to approach projects from an askew point of view.

"We tend to go from the ground up a little bit more than some companies who are bugging the agencies about that hot spec," he says. "For us, it's got us more gratification. I think the luxury of being a producer is that you get to love your movies. The blessing of my job is I get to say, 'I love that and I really want to dive in and work on that.' So the 20 or so [projects] where we are now, I'm finding are

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Nicolas Cage and Alison Lohman in 2003's *Matchstick Men*

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the peak of what we can handle the way we want to be able to do it. All that said, we're in the idea business. When somebody tells you something you love, you can't help yourself. But, it's a pretty high bar."

Creative Freedom

Having the names of two sought-after actors on the door doesn't hurt when seeking great material. And while LivePlanet has made a conscious effort to keep Damon's and Affleck's star vehicles separate from their producing gigs, an ideal project is one that can merge one of the principals with the production mission, as is the case with *Gone Baby Gone*.

"We're a little bit different, at least from what I understand, than other big, actor-driven companies," explains Bailey. "And I think it's based on how we came up, in that we've always been free to pursue anything the partners want to pursue. We don't specifically develop for Matt and Ben as actors. So, we do a couple of things different. Number one, if you're at that place and you're going to offer [a project] to Matt and/or Ben, I'm not coming in. It's your movie and we don't want to be that company. Conversely, a lot of what we develop and do isn't specifically for Matt or Ben as actors, and, in fact, I'd say of the 20-plus projects we have, maybe three or four have them attached. For

us, the dream situation is when those interests overlap, like *Gone Baby Gone*. That, for us, is really a win."

A win in execution is not always a win crossing the finish line. Another attitude that sets LivePlanet apart is one that values creative freedom above the bottom line. While the production company is always concerned about the commercial success of their films, they do a tremendous job balancing their fiscal responsibility to the studios with the integrity of their creative vision. "I think we care about [the studios'] money and succeeding for them a lot more than most people in Hollywood," admits Bailey.

He continues, "On *Gone Baby Gone*, we take ownership of the movie's success or failure in the sense that we won't—and shouldn't—point any fingers in the event the movie doesn't succeed commercially. For better or for worse ... it's Ben's movie. It's Ben's vision entirely. Nobody at the studio made us change the ending, and no marketing guy did something we felt was creatively wrong in the campaign. We've had our hands in and are accountable on every decision, and whether those decisions add up to commercial success or failure, it's on us and we accept that."

A writer at heart, Bailey has also been busy trying to get his own projects off the ground. His screenplay *Liberty* is currently



Casey Affleck, Ed Harris, Michelle Monaghan, and John Ashton in *Gone Baby Gone*

PHOTO: CLAIRE FOLGER
COURTESY: MIRAMAX FILMS

in development at Touchstone Pictures, a subsidiary of Disney where LivePlanet has a three-year first-look deal. *Liberty* is described as a big-budget action movie that takes place after an electromagnetic pulse disables the infrastructure of the United States and a group of Americans must use technology from the 1940s and 1950s to defend against a foreign invasion.

When asked about his own writing process, Bailey's demeanor shifts to a noticeably more emotional level. His voice softens, and he pauses for a moment to collect his thoughts. "Writing is such a tortuous, solitary process," he says. "I hope that it makes me a better producer when working with writers because I can better understand what they're dealing with. I know that sitting in my seat as the producer I can't see the complexities and nuances that [writers do] because they were in a room for a week trying to figure it out.

"I know that finding the time to write has gotten much more difficult because writing is, for me, a very hard exercise. I don't know when [inspiration is] going to come. I don't know how it's going to come or if it's going to come. And you need time to just sit with that. I've not been able to write very much recently, you know, I miss it a lot. I love it. There's something really rewarding about it." 🌟



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