

# Jasin Boland

He may not yet be a household name but Marc Gafen is willing to bet a small fortune that more people will most likely have seen the work of Jasin Boland than any other photographer shooting today, especially if they love the movies.

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It was around this time that Boland became increasingly involved with on-set stills. There was a thriving industry in the Gold Coast and he wanted to be part of it. And it didn't hurt that Boland had a love of the film-making process and being on set. "I love working with a large crew. It's a big happy, dysfunction family," Boland says. "It's like being with the circus. And I was good at it."

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## Changing direction

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## Having the goods

Boland was well placed to transition into movie stills when he did. With over eight years' experience as a press photographer his skill set was particularly suited to the new direction. To be as good as he is at what he does, Boland says that he approaches every shoot as if he is a photojournalist. "I treat what's happening in front of me as if it's a real environment. And my style is very raw, dirty and gritty. A lot like my personality," he says with a smile. Many of the very good motion picture still photographers working today also share Boland's previous press photography experience. Shooting without being shot yourself is critical on set and being entirely aware of the situation and surroundings is paramount, so working unobtrusively is another fundamental aspect of what's required. "On set they call me 'Aqua' because of the fact that I slip into cracks and frequently people won't even have noticed that I have been shooting all day."

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ABOVE: *Stealth* (2004). Huge stunt sequence blowing up an aircraft hangar. Columbia Pictures.

RIGHT: *Safe House* (2011). Denzel Washington, Cape Town, Denzel Washington.

## Coming

from a family with a rich history of involvement with both newspaper and television it was no surprise that Jasin Boland followed suit. The Bolands had been involved with media as far back as his great grandfather who was a journalist. A tradition had started. Boland's grandfather was the managing editor of *News Limited* papers and his father and uncle both held very high positions with Channel 9 in Perth and Adelaide.

Not one for scholarly pursuits, Boland admits freely that he wasn't a great student, and certainly not very interested in school. But his interest in photography had started to grow. He was inspired to start a photography club at school, along with a working darkroom. The darkroom however, didn't get quite as much use as would have been ideal. "What we ended up doing instead," Boland says, "was locking it up, turning on the darkroom 'Do not enter' light and going surfing."

## A shot in the dark

At age fifteen, Boland had a weekend job working as a darkroom technician where he printed images for the *Sunday Times* in Perth. He held this role for a number of years and says that printing for the 10 photographers on the paper was one of the best learning environments that he could have asked for. By printing all their work he could assess what did and didn't work. At age sixteen, Boland left school before

time because my grandfather had given him a hard time, but all he really wanted to do was to try and make me the best photographer I could be," Boland says. "And you know what, he did."

Boland's formal photographic training amounted to an entire 15 minutes. As part of his cadetship he was required to attend college once a week. He was kicked out during the introduction after being asked what sort of photographer he wanted to be. "I said that I wanted to be a war photographer. I was told that there was no place for me in the course and that I would have to leave." He didn't particularly mind being kicked out because he already felt that he was learning on-the-job from some of the best photographers of the day.

This turned out to be a significant turning point for him and just six months later in 1983 Boland won the Australian Cadet Photographer of the Year award. He has no regrets about not having completed formal study and still feels that learning everything in the darkroom was definitely the best training. Nicknamed "The Kid" at work, Boland says that he was fortunate in that the other photographers there looked after him and even though they knew him to be "a bit of a rathag," they could see that he had a good heart.

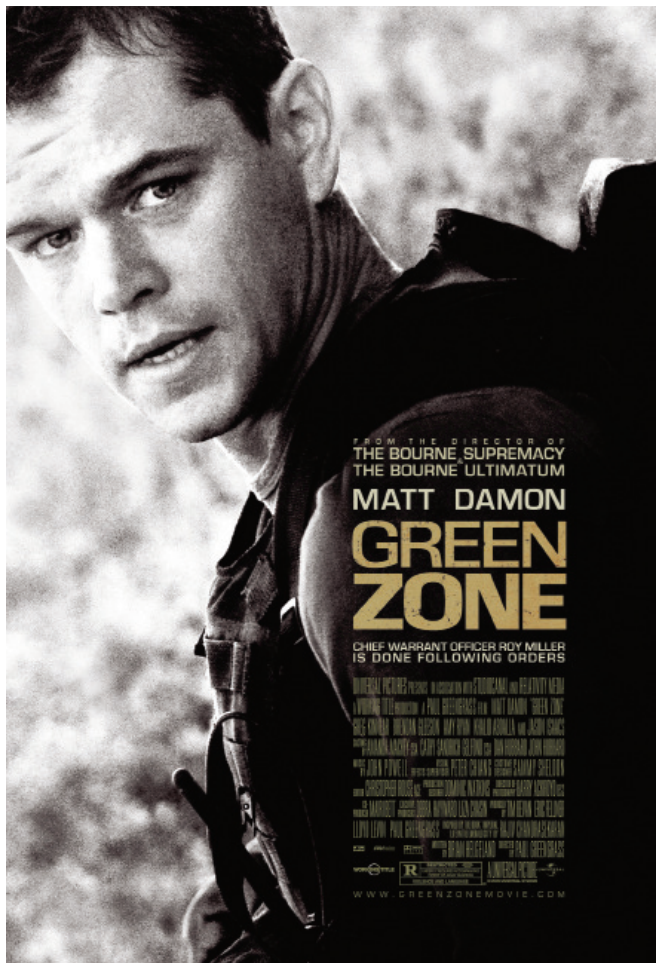
A year later he moved to Brisbane to shoot for *The Sun* and then the *Sunday Mail*. But at the time, his true passion was to be a movie director. Taking his first tentative steps in that direction he left the

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While the role of the big budget Hollywood blockbuster motion picture still photographer may appear to be particularly glamorous and fun, the truth is that it's incredibly challenging and demanding, and Boland contends that the role is not specifically suited to newer photographers because you need a great deal of experience. "It's an end point, not a starting point," he says. "You don't want to get into it too quickly because it will either put you off, or the studios won't have you back."

**On set reality**

Having been in the industry for so long, Boland says that he is in a unique position in that he gets respect from the celebrities from the outset. He says that Matt Damon, Brendan Frasier and Ryan Reynolds are some of his favourites to work. Recently he was in South Africa working with Denzel Washington on *Safe House*. Not terribly unexpectedly, Boland has had his fair share of challenging celebrities to work with, especially those that have issues with being photographed.

**ABOVE: *Green Zone* (2008) poster.**  
Matt Damon.  
Universal Pictures

**TOP LEFT: *Sanctum* (2010) poster.**  
Richard Roxburgh.  
Gold Coast.  
Universal Pictures

**BOTTOM LEFT: *Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) poster.**  
Matt Damon.  
Universal Pictures

This seems somewhat strange given that they will be projected onto massive cinema screens! It's another reason why he reiterates that slipping into the cracks and not drawing attention to yourself when you're working is so important.

With a career in movie stills that has just ticked over into two decades, Boland has worked on approximately 60 films, and many of these very big budget Hollywood action movies, including *The Matrix*, *Ghost Rider*, *The Mummy*, *Mission Impossible* and the *Bourne* films. Typically, he won't receive a detailed brief. "I get hired," Boland says, "because of my style and the ability to provide the client with the art that they require to promote the film." This material to market the film may include anything from the main movie poster to online, billboard, newspapers and magazine. A typical assignment may last anywhere for three to six months and while rates may be up to \$10,000 per week Boland is required to shoot every day and often in challenging, and sometimes dangerous conditions.



The fickle nature of working on set means that anyone there can be literally one to two words away from never working in the film industry again so it's essential to play the game and fit in. Boland says that his job is to interpret what's going on in the director's head and tell the story with a single frame. "I am allowed access to places on set where most people are not permitted to go. And importantly, I know when to walk away from a photograph." Much of the trust instilled in Boland, other than to capture the key moments, is to make sure that he's never in frame. "I am given an edge of a few inches and if I move a couple of inches in the wrong direction, I can spoil a take by being in shot." He recalls that on the *Fourme* films there were up to five cameras shooting at the same time. Literally needing eyes in the back of his head, Boland says that in order to take in as much of the environment as possible he shoots with both eyes open. "I can usually feel when a camera is getting close," he says. And it's not unusual for me to have to drop everything and hit the deck to avoid being in the shot."

#### Tools of the trade

As one of only seven Nikon Ambassadors in Australia, Boland uses nothing else and swears by the gear. He says that the DSS has revolutionised his world because of its low light capabilities, however he will use different bodies depending on the environment he's shooting in. If he has to trek up a mountain or shoot underwater he relies on the D700. "My cameras and I are a team. They are my mechanical eyes." When it comes to lenses, he relies on pretty much everything ever made from a 14-24mm all the way up to a 400mm f/2.8, and everything in between. The lens he finds most versatile is the 24-120mm f/4, but his favourite lens of all time is still the 85mm f/1.4. Other than all the photographic equipment, Boland must also rely on a considerable amount of safety gear including goggles and harnesses as conditions can often be very dangerous whether he's hanging out of a tracking vehicle, at the edge of a cliff or working in a sandstorm.

And if the conditions don't make things difficult enough, while on set Boland is also required to shoot using an AquaTech sound blimp which dampens about 98% of the noise from his camera. "You can't shoot 'naked' because you don't want the noise on the soundtrack and it's also very distracting for the actors." While the blimps in the past have been particularly cumbersome, Boland says that the advances in the last 12 months have been astounding. Previously, he likens the experience to shooting with your camera in a lunchbox. Thankfully,

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these days the new blimps have given control back to photographers. Interestingly, Boland is sponsored by no less than twelve well-known brands including Nikon, SanDisk, Epson, EIZO and BlackRapid. Naturally, this is quite an unusual and fortuitous position to find oneself, unless of course you're an international sports star. And asked how he managed to find himself in such a position, Boland says that he's very particular about what he likes to use and importantly believes that he has something to offer the various companies.

#### How times have changed

Today, Boland's working life could not be further from what he was doing when he started out. "I don't have a job," he says. "I have a wonderful, wonderful life." At the newspapers, he recalls it being close to impossible for work to pay for a hotel even when he was required to drive three hours out of town for an assignment. These days he gets to travel extensively, and often to exotic locations, for up to six months at a time and all at the client's expense. With a typical assignment shooting motion picture still Boland may deliver up to 50,000 frames.

#### Get the show on the road

The most important piece of advice that Boland proffers is that if you want to be a "name photographer" as opposed to just another photographer you have to choose a specific area of photography and then put your blinkers on. "You can't do everything well," he says. "A narrow focus is really critical because the only thing that is going to make you successful is to be the best in a particular field." He also suggests that it's fundamental to believe in yourself entirely and never sell yourself short, notwithstanding the fact that when you're starting out you have to go about getting experience in order to build your portfolio and your profile. And he says that there are ways to go about it without falling into the traps. "If you want to be a film photographer, you don't offer to work for free on the biggest gig in town. You might instead shoot a university production or theatre group and you donate your time to an organisation that is already doing it tough. So it's more charity as opposed to giving someone something for free who doesn't really need it."

The photographic landscape today is almost unrecognisable from

## people profile



when Boland got his start. "I'm not envious of photographers starting out today," Boland says. "I wouldn't know where to begin. I'm so thankful that I started my career when I did because things just seemed a lot easier and less complicated then." And while Boland says that he comes from the "glory days" where you could pick exactly what you wanted to do, one thing has never changed. If you want to be successful today you need to be relevant to your client base. And he believes that it doesn't matter what you're shooting, you're selling something and his job is all about "bums on seats".

But regardless of how challenging things can sometimes appear, Boland fervently believes that the bottom line is that if you have a dream then you can be the best photographer you want to be. "I became the photographer I never knew existed," he says. "You only get to be the best by constantly striving to be the best. My whole thing for the last 20 years is that I keep going out every day to try and better myself."

#### The big jobs

With the particular niche that he specialises in, Boland has found himself in a very strong position. Because the movie stills work keep him so busy he doesn't have to shoot any other commissioned work. And the fact that his work is just so specialised means that there are so few photographers in the world that do the big action movies. Boland believes there are probably about six in total. On any particular production that he's hoping to shoot,

## Small size great light



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Boland may usually only be up against no more than two other photographers for the assignment, and then the battle may come down to the studio and producer fighting over which one to hire. "And anytime I'm ever asked to drop my rate I either hold my ground or put it up."

**You just have to get the best possible shots without making a squeak.**

The work is so specific and Boland says that it's not just about the photography if you want to get hired. Other factors such as whether the client believes you'll get on with everyone as well as where in the world you've shot and how quickly you are likely to acclimatise to the conditions you're shooting in are also factors. Literally the only Australian shooting at this level, Boland says that photographers in this field that go global have to be tremendously easy to get along with.

Boland has just finished working on *Mental* with Toni Collette, and next year he'll spend months shooting on the set of *Mad Max* in Namibia. Exotic locations come with the territory when you shoot big action movie stills and he's been to his fair share over the years racking up 18 countries so far from Mexico to India to Spain and Italy. But it's not always comfortable or typical. Frequently Boland has found himself working for 12-14 hour days in -25 degree Celsius in Europe, but then

he's also spent 10 days on an active aircraft carrier and on another film spent 60 hours per week for six weeks shooting underwater at night.

### Recognition

Recently Boland was inducted into the Society of Motion Picture Still Photographers. One of the primary roles of the society is the archival preservation of still images shot during the production of movies. With only 35 members worldwide this is particularly significant and testament to Boland's reputation in the industry. In order to be accepted he was nominated by other standing members. "It's a really big deal to me being acknowledged by my peers in this way," he says.

Boland sums up his role as a motion picture still photographer perfectly. "It's all down to personality and not being in the way. The biggest thing about being on a film set is that you're not number one. You just have to get the best possible shots without making a squeak and for me three things are essential: light, timing and patience. ▣"

**ABOVE:** *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (2007). Shanghai studio street, China. John Hannah, Maria Bello, Luke Ford, Brendan Fraser. Universal Pictures

### LINKS

Jasin Boland [www.jasinboland.com](http://www.jasinboland.com)  
 Internet Movie Database [www.imdb.com/name/nm0092672](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0092672)  
 Society of Motion Picture Still Photographers [www.smpsp.org](http://www.smpsp.org)