

you might as well just get stock footage. Why do you just want to do the same thing all over again?" Well, he was going to replace me anyway, he was already talking with another writer, but fortunately the Fox executives ended up seeing it my way. He was going to bring someone in for a million dollars to rewrite the whole script, which would have been an unneeded expenditure. But sometimes that's the way it works. You get a hot director who brings in a hot writer and thinks he'll make the picture better, ignoring that there was something there to begin with that propelled all these people to believe in the script and buy it in the first place. The strangest thing is when the people who buy something suddenly forget this.

I read that you had lunch a few times with Hitchcock and told him about your idea for *Phone Booth*.

One day at Universal we had a nice three hour lunch during which we were talking about ideas for movies, and I said "How about one that all takes place in phone booth." I recalled he had a phone booth scene in *The Birds*. He took to that idea, but neither he nor I knew how to make it work. When I ran into him again at a party after the screening of *Frenzy*, and he said to me, "How are you doing on our phone booth story?" I told him, as soon as I licked it I'd let him know. Of course, I was never able to while he was alive. It came to me years later, how to make it work. How to keep someone in a booth for the entire movie? The answer was the sniper. Then everything fell into place. Once I had the sniper, I had to have all these other steps to keep him in the booth. The sniper has to kill someone who's trying to drag our hero out of the booth, people have to think he did it. The police will come and think he has a gun. He'll refuse to come out of the booth because he'll know he'll die. The sniper will threaten to kill the detective, and the hero is then protecting the detective's life. Then the girlfriend and wife show up, and now they're in jeopardy. And then a gun turns up hidden in the phone booth. So, twist after twist to keep the thing going. Once I had the basic concept of the sniper talking to the hero the whole time he's in the booth, everything else fell into place.

I also heard that years later Hitchcock's daughter commented to you about the story.

She was making a speech at the Director's Guild and I happened to be in attendance when she started to mention all the ideas her father wanted to make, and she said "Would you believe he always wanted to do a movie that all took place in a telephone booth." So I knew he never forgot the idea. When I ran into Spielberg at the Oscars he told me, "If Hitchcock were alive he'd want to direct *Phone Booth*." That brought it full circle. That's the best compliment I could possibly get. No matter what the critics say, that will

Absolutely. Great dialogue, Curtis was phenomenal, and it was a great script by Ernest Lehman and Clifford Odets.

Yeah. It was Tony Curtis' best performance. I had lunch with Tony Curtis after he read the script and he was all excited. His career was pretty much over at that point. I told him it was the same character he played twenty-five years ago. He told me it would be a great opportunity. So for a while I flirted with the idea of making the picture myself with Tony. I thought maybe I could get him in shape and make him look a little younger, but it wasn't meant to be. *

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Script Sampling: PHONE BOOTH

Screenplay by: Larry Cohen

From page 38:

The tiny red laser dot dances around Stu's chest and stomach -- then jumps up and remains between his eyes.

VOICE

This takes all the guesswork out of it. You know exactly where to expect it before I even tighten my finger on the trigger.

STU

Don't tighten. Don't even tickle that fucking trigger.

VOICE

How about Geraldo? He'd run his ass off to get in on this.

STU

You're talking about the old Geraldo. Look, I can try and reach cable NBC. They're hungry.

VOICE

I'm disappointed. I wanted to go