

Vulcan Productions in association with Launchpad Productions  
Presents

# **HARD CANDY**

Directed by  
David Slade

Written by  
Brian Nelson

Starring  
Patrick Wilson  
Ellen Page  
and  
Sandra Oh  
Jennifer Holmes

<http://www.hardcandymovie.co.uk/>

## **Synopsis**

Hayley's a smart, charming teenage girl - but even smart girls make mistakes.

She's hooking up in a coffee shop with Jeff, a guy she's met on the Internet. And even though he's a cute, smooth high-end fashion photographer in his early 30s, Hayley shouldn't be suggesting that the two of them go back to his house - alone.

When they get there, Hayley quickly finds some vodka and starts mixing screwdrivers. She even suggests a photo shoot and strips off some clothing. Everything is going well for Jeff... until his vision blurs and fades, and he passes out.

It turns out Hayley has spiked Jeff's screwdriver, and when he revives, he's tied down with Hayley searching through his place. She doesn't think it'll take too long to get a confession that she's not the first teenage girl Jeff's brought home and, more importantly, that her prisoner knows what happened to Donna Mauer, another girl who disappeared from Jeff's favourite coffee shop. And if he's unwilling to confess, well, she has another plan -

She uses an icepack as a homemade anaesthetic... She starts shaving an incision site...

She's learned a lot from the internet - including this little surgical procedure she's dying to try...

Patrick Wilson and Ellen Page star in *HARD CANDY*, a provocative psychological thriller directed by David Slade, written by Brian Nelson, produced by David Higgins, Richard Hutton and Michael Caldwell, and executive produced by Jody Patton and Rosanne Korenberg. It is the latest film produced by Vulcan Productions (*FAR FROM HEAVEN*, *TITUS*) in association with Launchpad Productions and will be released in the UK by Lionsgate UK.

## **About the film**

### **A conversation with Producer David Higgins and Writer Brian Nelson**

Producer David Higgins first conceived the idea for HARD CANDY from a news story. He and Writer Brian Nelson collaborated on the script to find just the right balance for the two characters of Hayley and Jeff. Here they speak on the genesis of the story, the relationship between the two main characters and what it took to bring the script to the screen.

#### **David Higgins (DH)**

The initial idea came from an article I saw in a news story about young girls in Japan who were starting internet relationships with older men; when the older man would come over the girl would have several friends waiting and they would beat him up and mug him. I thought what an interesting take on who the predator is and who the prey is.

Then I thought it'd be cool if it were just one girl doing that, one girl going after guys who were preying on other girls on the internet.

So I called up Brian and said, "I've got this idea," and I pitched it to him and there was this very long pause before he said, "I've got to call you back." I was sure I blew it! Then he called the next day and said, "Okay, I'm in. I think you've got something there."

#### **Brian Nelson (BN)**

You hear a lot of ideas from a lot of producers all the time so I always need to say, "Let me think about that," because my writer's process is a little bit more dilatory.

#### **DH**

I knew I wanted to find a playwright because if you lock two people in a room for ninety pages you need someone who can write character, not just plot. There's no car chases, there's nothing to fall back on except character. I'd read a previous play of Brian's that I liked, and we'd been looking for a long time to find something to work on together and this was that good find.

#### **BN**

It's funny because I think I responded to it for reasons I didn't really even understand at the time. Quite some time earlier, I'd written a play about this guy who breaks down in the desert and this woman mechanic arrives allegedly to help him, but instead she methodically takes his car apart and then takes him apart, and teaches him this lesson about "here's what happens if you let yourself get helpless."

On some level, I think there were seeds of that still running through my brain and that was applicable to this. After I'd written it, time and again, I'd see something or hear of something and think, "Oh, that was an influence on me." Things I hadn't even realized

at the time, things from Buffy the Vampire Slayer to that Abel Ferrara film, MS. 45. And I think Hayley is somewhere in the continuum between the two - there are times when she's the whip-smart image of Buffy and then times where she's got that indicative darkness that you see in MS. 45.

## **DH**

In my mind it was always Hayley's story because she's the one who always popped into my mind first: I'd never seen a 14-year-old vigilante do-gooder. In a very simplistic way - and I even pitched her this way to Brian - she's a little 14-year-old Hannibal Lecter. She was always the more interesting character because I'd never seen a version of her on screen before.

Whereas Jeff, as much as I like him, I've seen versions of him before. But Hayley feels completely fresh. I love her. Even though Brian and I plotted this out, and I'd read draft after draft, when Brian finally handed her to me with dialogue she blew me away. Even though I knew who she was meant to be, I never saw her coming as fully realized as she was on the final page.

## **BN**

Maybe I'm more diplomatic. To me, they need each other. Hayley can't be Hayley if she doesn't have Jeff and Jeff comes to realize who he is through Hayley, so my feeling is that it's both of their stories.

When you think about great, two-character pieces (SLEUTH for example), the characters need to be woven into each other. And that's something that I was really pleased about how Patrick [Wilson] and Ellen [Page] work. It was so great to see them bounce off each other, and whisper little things to each other about what they can do to help each other out - because on some level, even though they're in this little dance of death, that's what's going on with their characters as well. Hayley and Jeff need each other; they are helping each other - although not necessarily to the ways either had planned.

I love them as characters. I have daughters and I like having - I won't say a role model because Hayley's not really a role model - but kick ass female characters out there. But as much as I love Hayley, it's not her story alone. I think she and Jeff are absolutely reliant on each other.

## **DH**

One thing we tried hard to do is not give the audience a pat ending. We didn't want to wrap up why Hayley does what she does. We felt the audience should decide. Let them decide if people got the justice they deserved or if it went too far. I'd love to have the audience argue about it when they leave the theatre. Should more have happened? Should less have happened? I hope they walk away with what a fantastic little creature Hayley is and what a fantastic story that was.

**BN**

I hope that audiences argue too. This is not intended to be something that just leaves you with a flat polemic message: "yes, child pornography is bad." Of course that's true and it is a part of the story, but that's not what people should ultimately be leaving and thinking about.

If you take vengeance, what happens to you? We all have fantasies about what we would like to do to murderers and paedophiles but if we actually do those things what kind of person do we become? To what extent is Hayley the protagonist and to what extent is she the antagonist? It's been interesting as people have read the script, men in particular, and they'll say it made them start thinking about their own behaviour. To that extent it's a provocative film.

**DH**

You can take the story on its most simplistic level, which is that a bad guy got what was coming to them. Or you can take it on much more complex level and ask who really gets punished?

**BN**

That's the really interesting question to me - who really gets punished? It was an interesting moment in the evolution of this script. Originally, we had Hayley being more proud of herself and her actions. Now, Hayley is still partly proud, but also worn and tortured as well. All the emotions of the world play over her face. Bringing that level of nuance to the material is what Ellen, Patrick and [Director] David Slade have all been so great about.

**DH**

Brian's agent flipped over the finished script, so we went with the traditional route of sending it to the studios as a writing sample, but we also went to the mini-majors as a project for them to finance. They all asked us for the complete package: who was going to direct, etc. Word got out we were looking for directors and I was sent a lot of reels from agents and managers about their clients.

David Slade's was the first that really jumped out at me - his style, his visual sense. Slade was the first director I met who immediately spoke about character, the story, the script. All his notes were right on; he didn't want to compromise the same things we didn't want to compromise. Everyone else would only speak about the visuals, how they'd shoot it. Slade was the only one to focus on the characters. He came around to the visuals, because that's what he does and he's better at it than probably 95% of people in the world, but that wasn't his initial focus. It was all about character.

And part of the process was protecting our baby, so to speak, because we wanted someone who would fight the same battles as we would to keep the film the way we wanted it. On low budgets, you're always fighting the fight not to change things.

Some of my favourite scenes are scenes others would probably have wanted to change. I love watching the scene in the media room where Jeff has finally broken her

down, finally got an edge on her, and Hayley just turns her back on him. She just flips it on him.

I also think the castration sequence is just hard to beat. It's powerful because it's never been seen before, but also because it's got a major twist to it.

## **BN**

I will say that I have great affection for the coffee shop scene and the banter there as well as the first moment when Jeff wakes up in the chair and starts to realize what's going on. The castration sequence, in a very disturbing way, is a lot of fun. The Girl Scout cookie business with the neighbour (played by Sandra Oh) is fun; heading on to the roof, even her final exit is fun. There are just so many moments in this that are fun. Among the things I've written, as disturbing as it is, this is one of the smoothest writing projects I've ever had.

## **About the filmmakers**

### Director - David Slade

Although, technically, HARD CANDY is his feature film debut, David Slade came to the film from nearly a decade of directing for commercials and music videos. He's been nominated for over 65 awards, and is internationally recognized for his unique visual sense and style. HARD CANDY was shot on Kodak 200 T(5279) 35 mm film using mostly a Panaflex Platinum package over 18 days in California with the same key crew Slade always works with: cinematographer Jo Willems, gaffer Walter Bithell and first assistant director Barry Wasserman.

The film was edited in London by world-renowned commercials-editor Art Jones and colour-graded by Jean Clement Soret (28 DAYS LATER).

### **Director's statement: David Slade on HARD CANDY**

Nicholas Roeg's early work made me want to make films. I was always interested in relationships between characters that leave you harrowed. The HARD CANDY script was the closest thing to a Nic Roeg film I'd read in America.

Brian's script showed a world where you had to question values and prejudices. A 14-year-old girl puts you in the untenable position of identifying with a suspected paedophile. Halfway through the film, you despise this girl. Now you have a dilemma - you're not supposed to have sympathy for a paedophile.

Brian's work was more about character, and the best writing I'd seen from all the scripts I'd been offered.

When I read it, I did so straight through; I didn't put it down. It made me question myself. It was an emotional reaction, completely visceral. I thought to myself, "no one's going to make this film."

There are two kinds of directors: one who believes the film serves them and one

who believes they serve the film. The work we do will last longer than we will. Therefore, I believe we owe that work a great responsibility.

HARD CANDY was a great emotional challenge, but I believed I could serve the film. Next I had to convince David Higgins, and once that worked out I asked Brian to stay on the project throughout production, through rehearsals and often on set whenever I wanted to change dialogue. I have great respect for Brian's writing and we were always on the same page.

This is a very stylistic film that was shot on a ridiculous schedule. I came to the production very technically well prepared, with a crew who knew me. It allowed me to move at lightning speed as we worked in a sort of shorthand. Due to that technical ability, I was able to work at the speed of my own thought process without compromising the visual sense of the film. It's a very controlled film, as are the characters. We worked out a very precise visual language for the film, and we specifically constructed the set to allow for specific shots.

What my technical experience didn't teach me, however, was about human dynamics. There's 18 days and that's it, there's no time to get into an argument, there's no time to disagree and spend hours discussing a scene, there's no time to think ahead once day one begins because by the time the thought has come into your head it's been replaced by the reality of the day's issues and you are onto day two.

The film was held together by preparation and goodwill, and the reality of that preparation came down to the team's experience. We wrapped on schedule and went into overtime 1 think three times.

We went through a months of pre-production as we tried to find the right actors.

It was my job to protect the script, and we had to have just the right person for these roles. I was so happy to get Patrick as Jeff.

Its one thing to read these scenes on the page but to go through the physicality and the emotional aftermath of committing the acts to celluloid, I was drained at the end of each day, god knows how Patrick dealt with it. His intuition was spot on, his physical performance was staggering, those purple hands as he is bound for hours on end -none of that was make up.

So many actors loved the part but couldn't play a role this dark at this stage in their careers. Patrick was perfect. And while we tried to shoot in sequence that put us in the unfortunate position of knocking him through hell in sequence. For three days we beat the crap out of him - we hanged him, we castrated him, we tasered him in a bath in wet clothes often working where it was safe with a live taser!

Ellen is amazing as Hayley. In script form, I had moral issues with Hayley but I rationalized forgiveness due to her age and hormones. Then I saw Hayley in the edit room and equally loved and hated her! Ellen's performance did that to me; changed my perspective of the story and, to a degree, of Hayley; she made it so much more personal and three-dimensional.

Again Ellen's intuition was equally precise often finding those movie beats that seem ok on the page, but play out either redundant or awkward and eliminating them one at a time leaving a performance that was always fresh, always questioning.

Some of the audience may feel as I did in the editing room, my position shifts occasionally when I rewatch, while some may flat-out despise Hayley. Others may be jubilant and never doubt Jeff's guilt. Every human being will react differently to this; sometimes based on gender sure but also based on background. Some will not like the film as it interrupts the thought process most people live with.

Believing the story is a different issue, but sympathy with a character against type is difficult. Men will question themselves and how they view pornography. It's different, viscerally, once they're on that table with Jeff.

No doubt this is a provocative story. Certainly, men will be crossing their legs at a certain point - my editor and I were always having to take breaks, our teeth clenched, trying to shake it off! I'm only qualified to speak as a man, but I think this film will also make them question how they view their ability to commit violence.

I think that if a film can ask just one question like that, then it's doing something vaguely important.

#### Writer - Brian Nelson

Brian Nelson makes his screenwriting debut with *HARD CANDY*; other writing includes plays (*Consolidation*, *Radiant*, the Taper Literary Cabaret adaptation of *The Joy Luck Club*), teleplays (*20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*, *Jag*, *Lois And Clark*) and books (*Earth Bound*, *Asian American Drama: Nine Plays*). An adjunct professor at the School of Theatre at USC, he holds honours degrees from Yale and UCLA. His awards include an Alfred P. Sloan Playwriting Fellowship, a Prism Award for television writing and an Ovation nomination for his Los Angeles staging of *Twelve O'Clock Nite* O Wateva. Nelson lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two daughters.

#### Producer - David Higgins

David W Higgins is President of Production of the Paramount-based company LATHAM ENTERTAINMENT, responsible for the *KINGS OF COMEDY* concert movie and currently has a half-dozen projects in development at Paramount.

Prior to joining Latham, Higgins formed the feature film production company Launchpad Productions to produce *HARD CANDY*. Higgins is also involved in a sequel to the \$180 million grossing *BIG MOMMA'S HOUSE*, which Higgins Co-produced. The sequel is being produced by David T Friendly and directed by John Whitesell.

Previously a Senior Production executive at Beverly Hills-based Deep River Productions, Higgins will be involved as an executive producer with many of his projects, including the comedies *DON'T SEND HELP* and *UNCLE RAY*. Before working at Deep River Productions, Higgins served as Senior Exec for Development at Friendly Productions on the 20th Century Fox lot. He also worked as VP of Development with Mark Gordon at Mutual Film Company, where he worked on such projects as *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, *HARD RAIN* and *CAPTAIN AMERICA*.

A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, David worked as an assistant at Imagine Films and Writers & Artists Agency before becoming an executive.

### Producer - Richard Hutton

Richard Hutton is Vice President of Media Development and oversees the feature film and documentary teams at Vulcan Productions and manages a variety of content partnerships, business and distribution deals. Feature films produced under Hutton's direction include *HARD CANDY* and *BICKFORD SHMECKLER'S COOL IDEAS* (to be released in 2005); and the award-winning *FAR FROM HEAVEN* (2002). Hutton's achievements at Vulcan also include oversight of the documentaries *STRANGE DAYS ON PLANET EARTH* (to be released in 2005); and *BLACK SKY: THE RACE FOR SPACE*; *BLACK SKY: WINNING THE X-PRIZE*; the Emmy and Grammy-nominated *THE BLUES: MARTIN SCORSESE PRESENTS*; and the *LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE* concert film (all 2004). Hutton was formerly the executive producer of the critically acclaimed PBS series *Evolution*, co-produced by the WGBH/NOVA Science Unit and Vulcan Productions.

Before *Evolution*, Hutton was senior vice president of creative development at Walt Disney Imagineering. Prior to Walt Disney Imagineering, Hutton was vice president and general manager of the Disney Institute, where he directed the transition of the organization from an idea into an operating business. Before Disney, Hutton was senior vice president, television programming and production, for WETA Television in Washington DC, and earlier, director of public affairs programming for WNET Television in New York. His projects have included the award-winning *The Brain* (1984) and *The Mind* (1988), as well as various books, medical texts and articles for national publications, including *The New York Times Magazine*, *Omni* and *Cosmopolitan*.

Hutton holds a BA degree in history from the University of California at Berkeley.

"We produced *HARD CANDY* because we loved the drama in the script," says Hutton. "We thought David Slade had a powerful vision of how to make the film. But beyond that - besides being a wild psychological thriller - *HARD CANDY* is a movie about subversive behaviour; it imagines what might happen to people who succumb to temptation. It's the kind of film we not only want to make; it's a film we'd love to see."

### Producer - Michael Caldwell

Michael Caldwell is Director of Motion Picture Production for Vulcan Productions.

Michael Caldwell oversees development, production, and post-production of all motion pictures produced by Vulcan Productions. Feature films produced by Vulcan include *HARD CANDY*, *BICKFORD SHMECKLER'S COOL IDEAS* (in post production), *COASTLINES*, *THE SAFETY OF OBJECTS*, *THE LUZHIN DEFENCE*, *TITUS* and *MEN WITH GUNS*.

Prior to joining Vulcan Productions, Caldwell served as a production executive with New Line Cinema, where his credits included *AUSTIN POWERS: THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME* and *LOVE JONES*. Before that, he was a production executive with Walt Disney Studios, where his credits included *THE JOY LUCK CLUB* and *MIAMI RHAPSODY*.

Caldwell holds a BA degree in business and accounting from the University of Washington, Seattle, and an MFA degree in Cinema/Television Production from the

University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

HARD CANDY is the kind of story that grabs you by the throat and doesn't let go," says Caldwell. "David Slade's strong approach to the characters and his unique visual style made this project rather irresistible."

#### Executive Producer - Paul G Allen

In 1997, investor and philanthropist Paul G Allen founded Vulcan Productions, the independent film production company behind HARD CANDY, BLACK SKY: THE RACE FOR SPACE, Todd Haynes' FAR FROM HEAVEN, winner of five Independent Spirit Awards, THE SAFETY OF OBJECTS by Rose Troche and starring Glenn Close and Dermot Mulroney, Julie Taymor's critically-acclaimed debut film TITUS, the 2001 Evolution series on PBS, and The Blues, executive produced by Martin Scorsese in conjunction with Allen and Jody Patton. Allen creates and advances world-class projects and high-impact initiatives that change and improve the way people live, learn, work and experience the world through arts, education, entertainment, sports, business and technology. He co-founded Microsoft with Bill Gates in 1976, remained the company's chief technologist until he left Microsoft in 1983, and is the founder and chairman of Vulcan Inc. and chairman of Charter Communications. In addition, Allen's multibillion dollar investment portfolio includes large stakes in DreamWorks SKG, Oxygen Media and more than 40 other technology, media and content companies. In 2004 Allen funded SpaceShipOne, the first privately-funded effort to successfully put a civilian in suborbital space and winner of the Ansari X-Prize competition. Allen also owns the Seattle Seahawks NFL and Portland Trail Blazers NBA franchises.

#### Executive Producer - Jody Patton

Jody Patton, president of Vulcan Productions, is responsible for managing all elements of Vulcan Productions film and development projects. Patton's creative vision defines the composition of the slate of projects undertaken by Vulcan Productions, and she has served as producer or executive producer on various projects including features such as HARD CANDY, FAR FROM HEAVEN and TITUS, and documentaries such as BLACK SKY: THE RACE FOR SPACE, THE BLUES, and Cracking The Code Of Life and Evolution.

Patton is also president and CEO of Vulcan Inc., the project and investment management company founded by investor and philanthropist Paul G Allen. Patton is co-founder of Experience Music Project, Seattle's one-of-a-kind interactive music museum, and the Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame. In addition, Patton is the executive director of the Paul G Allen Family Foundations and is on the board of Charter Communications.

An active member of the arts and education communities, Patton serves on the board of directors of the University of Washington Foundation, the International Glass Museum, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and the Theatre Communications Group.

### Executive Producer - Rosanne Korenberg

Rosanne Korenberg is the President of Traction Media, a packaging and repping company founded in 2002. Traction also provides consulting services to Vulcan Productions. Traction has executive produced independent feature film projects, including HARD CANDY; RX starring Colin Hanks and Eric Balfour; and BICKFORD SHMECKLER'S COOL IDEAS starring Patrick Fugit (premiering in autumn 2005).

As a former Vice President of Acquisitions for 20th Century Fox, Ms Korenberg was involved in the acquisition of critically and commercially successful feature films for all divisions of the studio, including SWIMFAN, KISSING JESSICA STEIN, WAKING NED DEVINE and BOYS DON'T CRY.

Prior to Fox, she was Vice President of Acquisitions for The Samuel Goldwyn Company and Senior Vice President of German producer/distributor Constantin Films, where e.g., she oversaw production of SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW and HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS.

Ms Korenberg graduated from Hamilton College and has a law degree from Boston University.

### **About the cast**

#### Patrick Wilson (Jeff Kohlver)

Patrick Wilson has quickly emerged as one of the hottest acting talents in years. His unique blend of talent and understated charm has endeared him to critics and audiences alike. Patrick can currently be seen starring in ANDREW LLOYD WEBER'S THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, directed by Joel Schumacher for Warner Bros.

Patrick has had the opportunity to show his acting range in several high profile projects; he starred in and received Golden Globe and Emmy nominations for Angels in America, directed by Mike Nichols for HBO. In this 2004 Golden Globe and Emmy recipient of Best Miniseries, based on Tony Kushner's play, Patrick starred opposite Meryl Streep, Al Pacino, Mary Louise Parker and Emma Thompson. He went on to star opposite Jason Patric, Dennis Quaid and Billy Bob Thornton in Disney's THE ALAMO, directed by John Lee Hancock.

Patrick starred in the Broadway musical revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein It's Oklahoma! for which he was nominated for a second consecutive Tony Award for best lead actor in a musical for his portrayal of Curly. Previously, he originated the lead role of Jerry Lukowski in the Broadway musical The Full Monty. The role garnered Patrick rave reviews from critics and numerous nominations including a Tony nomination for Leading Actor in a Musical, Drama Desk Nomination, Drama League Award, and an Outer Critic's Circle Nomination for this role. Time Out New York voted Patrick's role "One of the best performances of 2000."

Patrick first earned attention from New York audiences in the Off Broadway musical adaptation of Bright Lights, Big City. His role earned him a Drama Desk Nomination and a Drama League Award. Soon after, Patrick starred in the Broadway

musical *Fascinating Rhythm*, a revue of George and Ira Gershwin songs, which also garnered him a Drama League Award.

Born in Virginia, Patrick spent most of his years growing up in St Petersburg, Florida. His mother is a singer and voice teacher while Patrick's father is a TV anchor in Florida. Patrick received his BFA from Carnegie Mellon University. Patrick is also a singer/songwriter of his own music.

### **Patrick Wilson on the role of Jeff**

From their opening scene, one can already see that the unconventional pairing of this 32-year-old man and 14-year-old girl, is full of suggestion and erotic tension. This is not a relationship that can be easily condoned or easily understood; it's not meant to be. As the story progresses, you see how their relationship grows, but more importantly you begin to see who these people are as individuals. What the film doesn't do is outright define who's the good character and who's the bad character. Obviously, one is the predator and one is the prey, but part of the excitement for me as an actor, is how often these roles switch. This film is not going to go the way you think it's going to go.

You always feel you need to classify movies; although this is a very serious film, with some comedic moments to alleviate the drama, you cannot put it into a single category. The basic plot is clear; a guy meets a girl on the internet. Who the guy really is and who the girl is and who's telling the truth and who's not; this part is not so clear and that's a good thing. The story unfolds with one unexpected turn after the other. Jeff is a photographer; he loves beautiful things and by the very nature of his profession, has access to them. To me, Jeff is smart, almost cunning, and if he makes risqué choices, he's wise enough to know the importance of a good cover up. His cunning is vital to the story, but in portraying him, I wanted to show an even more important side; his vulnerability. A good person doing bad things is tougher to condemn than a bad person doing bad things. I don't ever want play someone as "the bad guy"; that's too easy. What I want the audience to feel toward Jeff is a kind of empathy. You don't have to agree or accept, but maybe you can see why he does what he does,

Without getting into sordid politics, a 32-year-old man and a 14-year-old girl have very little in common; this kind of relationship shouldn't happen. What drew me to this seemingly sinister story was a chance to make a dark character more than one-dimensional.

There just aren't many movies made with just two central characters talking for 107 minutes straight. And they aren't just talking about the weather, either. The topic, the language, the intensity - it was all there and I went through lots of physical, emotional strain. But it's exciting too. As an actor, you read the script once and say to yourself, "I'm going to have a lot to chew on here."

Roles built around sensuality and sexual conflict are about animal instincts, and anything geared around that is exciting to play. You don't want to be flippant about it, but we are sexual beings. Jeff is definitely a sexual being; what was challenging and interesting for me was to explore how his sexuality became distorted and took over him.

When I read the script for the first time, I read it as an audience member and I was so surprised by the twists. This film succeeds in capturing a very creepy realism.

Something that people want to turn away from, but are compelled to watch, because on some level they can relate, disturbing as it is.

The film takes two seemingly regular people and turns them inside out. Edgy, eerie and intense, the movie shows us what darkness we are all capable of, what kind of darkness lies within all of us.

I've never done a film like this. Maybe it's that we shot it so quickly, or that it felt so intimate. I sat across from my scene partner (Ellen Page) every day and there were no helicopters and gunshots going on around me; no special effects; just us. Yet, each scene was a surprise; there was danger, mystery, fear, and desire. Every scene becomes so important. A character doesn't know where the scene is headed, so the actor has to stay surprised. What Jeff goes through in this movie is a complete shock and as an actor, that's what I have to do - expect the unexpected. The thriller aspect of the story will undoubtedly captivate the audience; I hope the inner life of each character is just as captivating. You don't have to like Jeff, you don't have to like Haley - but at the end of the day you should care what happens to them. Then, we've done our job.

### Ellen Page (Hayley Stark)

At the age of 17, Halifax-born Ellen Page has established a name for herself as one of the busiest young actors in film and television in Canada.

At the age of 10, Ellen began her career on the award-winning television movie Pit Pony and received a Gemini nomination for Best Performance in a Children's Program and a Young Artist Awards nomination for Best Performance in a TV Drama Series - Leading Actress for her role as Maggie MacLean. Her next role was Love That Boy, followed by the role of "Joanie" in MARION BRIDGE, winner of the "Best Canadian First Feature" at the Toronto International Film Festival. The part won Ellen an ACTRA Maritimes Award for Outstanding Female Performance for her performance. Ellen has also appeared in the cult hit TV series Trailer Park Boys.

Most recently, Ellen played the lead in Alison Murray's MOUTH TO MOUTH, which was shot in Europe. She will also be seen in WILBY WONDERFUL, a film by Daniel MacIvor. Ellen had the pleasure of working with Michael Ontkean, her on-screen dad in Mrs Ashboro's Cat (Ghost Cat), a cable feature for The Movie Network. Other TV movies include, Homeless to Harvard: The Liz Murray Story, starring Thora Birch, and Going for Broke with Delta Burke and Gerald McRaney, both for the Lifetime Network. Although everyone agrees Ellen is a true rising star she still enjoys doing the same things as most young people, including soccer, cycling, snowboarding, running and playing the guitar. Ellen currently stars as "Lilith" in ReGenesis, a new one-hour drama for TMN/Movie Central, playing the daughter of microbiologist "David Sandstrom," played by Peter Outerbridge.

### **Ellen Page on the role of Hayley**

I got the script a while ago and when I first got it, I remember reading it and becoming completely engrossed; it was a race to the finish. I was tired when I was done. So you kind of know right then it's something you'd like to do. And the character was amazing. You don't usually come across a 14-year-old girl written so well - she had so

many layers. She was so passionate. I was excited to get into her head.

The story always comes back to passion for me. Hayley's just tired of things happening in the world, and she's taking it into her own hands because everyone else turns a blind eye to the way teenage girls can be looked at in a sexual manner. I think she's just sick of that. That's what she's trying to get across in the story. And after that it's a simple battle of who's right, who's wrong. Who crosses a line? Who's good, who's evil? Who knows?

Often, when you first read the script, there's always going to be a voice in your head. It's good to come and start rehearsing and start speaking, and moving like her and getting into her wardrobe. That helps a lot. It's nice to get into her emotional aspects ahead of time, but the physical aspects are really helpful as well.

It's just about figuring out where she's coming from and getting connected to that; finding parts of her that are similar to me even though there's not much shared experience here. You just have to find it in you.

At the end of the day, I shook off part of her and did bring a little of her home. Elements slip home, and you keep elements when the shoot is done for a long time. She's such an amazing character to play, I doubt I'll ever forget about her.

Describing the story is hard. I'd say it's about a young girl who meets an older man on the internet and they decide to meet up, and when they do - things happen.

I think it's both their stories. It's also Donna's [the missing girl discussed in the film] story. It's like everyone is a victim and everyone is also persecutor and perpetrator. It is compromise and life/death decisions and passion all at certain points. There are so many elements that are the same that the characters go through at different times.

I wouldn't want anyone to take the film literally, but it's really beautiful, the drive and confidence this character has, how she takes it in her hands and moves forward with it. Of course, she crosses a line. The whole concept of good versus bad is askew in this movie. And I'm hoping people's minds will get twisted with it. Brian (Nelson, the writer) was great creating it, and (director) David Slade is also great at creating these moments where you both love and hate the characters. I hope it makes people aware of some of the concerns about teenage girls.

I was anxious to find out who would be playing opposite me, and I'd seen Patrick in *Angels in America* so it was very exciting when I found out it was him. I came down, met him, he was a down-to-earth, nice guy. We trusted each other. We got along. Trust was huge on this movie.

## **About the production**

Producers Richard Hutton and Michael Caldwell, and executive producer Rosanne Korenberg discuss how *HARD CANDY* first came to them and why they found it such a riveting project.

### **Rosanne Korenberg (RK)**

I got a copy of the script from a friend with good taste and it grabbed me, and

never stopped grabbing me, so I gave it to Michael.

**Michael Caldwell (MC)**

Actually, first you pitched me with a two-sentence pitch. And based on that pitch, it was like Holy Cow, yeah! You sent it over, and I looked at it and thought what a wicked little gem, which is how I was characterizing it and catching flack for it until others read it and went yeah, what a wicked little gem. This was the pitch:

"A 32-year-old man and a 14-year-old girl meet on the internet and decide to get together. She's the predator."

**Richard Hutton (RH)**

Vulcan Productions is all about artistically driven films. When Michael brought in HARD CANDY, we picked it up because we loved the script.

**MC**

We met with the filmmakers right away because part of making films at this level is not just about the script but about the filmmakers. Making these films is really tough. So we met with David Higgins and were immediately impressed and felt the project was in good hands.

**RK**

I read it before David Slade was attached...

**MC**

And we met and looked at David's reel...

**RK**

And his reel was so great even though he'd never done a feature before. You're always a little nervous with a first time feature filmmaker, but not only was his work amazing, but when we sat down his vision was so strong. He'd turned down a lot of higher profile feature projects first, but this was the one he wanted to make.

**RH**

I think we all thought the director extraordinarily gifted with a strong vision.

**RK**

Casting took a little while because of the challenge of finding someone who could play 14. We needed someone older and emancipated, and that was the biggest challenge. So we started the casting process with Hayley because we knew she'd be the bigger challenge. We always felt if we couldn't find Hayley we couldn't make the movie. 125 girls and seven months later, Ellen put herself on tape (she's from Canada) and she

was so striking.

### **MC**

Once we found Hayley, it really clarified in our mind the qualities we needed in an actor to play Jeff. We really needed this guy to be able to come across as sweet but yet be believable as the monster. And when I saw Angels in America, and saw his performance in that, I thought he probably was the best actor out there for this role. So we called him up, sent him the script and he was intrigued. We met with him, showed him Ellen's tape, and he was challenged by the script and whether this was the kind of character he wanted to play. But, once you read the script it grabs you and, just like us, he was grabbed as well; he said sign me up.

The first audience for the film are people who like intelligent filmmaking. It's an unusual film in that it is aimed at a general audience who will respond to it as a psychological thriller but also to those who respond to the artistry of the film. It covers both worlds.

### **RK**

I think the audience should go through the ride, and the characters minds. One thing we always thought was that the audience should leave the theatre and talk about the film. It's not neatly wrapped up for you. It's supposed to leave you wondering.

### **MC**

There are lots of guilty pleasure scenes for me. It's all about struggle between these two characters and when you see one of them almost getting on top of it, and then the rug is pulled out from under them. This constant battle back and forth, so many unexpected twists and turns, is great. In one scene you think Jeff has finally figured out Hayley's vulnerability and then his hope is stripped away from him. Every time Hayley succeeds in fooling Jeff, she also succeeds in fooling us, the audience.

I think it's a story about both of them. She's driving the action. But he's the one who goes through this cathartic experience. It's two amazing roles. It's not one or the other. It's mirror images. The only reason Hayley is strong is because Jeff is strong.

### **RK**

Ellen will be the discovery of the film since American audiences don't know her yet, but she can't control the action unless she has a strong protagonist.

### **MC**

Even those terms, protagonist and antagonist, are confusing in this film because you just never know. Did he do those horrible things or is she a sweet little psychopath?

### **RH**

It is, also, in my opinion, besides being a psychological thriller, a movie that

matters about a very controversial issue and it lays out the consequences of that issue.

Vulcan Productions has made a shift to smaller budgeted films, but no shift at all from the importance to us of having artistically driven films. We are simply very interested in movies that matter - movies that have a strong artistic sensibility, strong script and a director with powerful vision. We've had that with our other films (TITUS, THE SAFETY OF OBJECTS, THE LUZHIN DEFENCE, FAR FROM HEAVEN) and I believe this film has that feeling: a feeling of a powerful vision behind the camera.

## Cast and crew

### Cast

Jeff Kohlver

Hayley Stark

Juday Tokuda

Janelle Rogers

Nighthawks Clerk

Patrick Wilson

Ellen Page

Sandra Oh

Jennifer Holmes

Gilbert John

### Crew

Directed by

Written by

Produced by

Produced by

Executive Producer

Executive Producers

David Slade

Brian Nelson

David W Higgins

Richard Hutton

Michael Caldwell

Rosanne Korenberg

Paul G Allen

Jody Patton

Co Producers

Hans Ritter

Director of Photography

Production Designer

Editor

Digital Colourist

Original Score by

Casting

Brian Nelson

Jo Willems

Jeremy Reed

Art Jones

Jean-Clement Soret

Molly Nyman

Harry Escott

Valerie McCaffrey