

clips

Fires of Namibia

Namibian authorities are clamping down on journalists trying to follow Brad Pitt, pregnant Angelina Jolie and her two adopted children after the couple asked for privacy, according to a newspaper report Sunday. The Sunday Times of London said its own photographer and three French photographers were ordered to leave Namibia or face arrest. Journalists require accreditation to work in the country.

Song of rain

Sheryl Crow, Billy Joel, Lenny Kravitz, James Taylor and Sting will take part in the Rainforest Foundation Fund Benefit Concert on May 19 at Carnegie Hall in New York. The theme for this year's event — produced by the fund's co-founder, Trudie Styler — will be Woodstock, and will feature songs from 1968 and 1969. As a tribute to the evening, the Empire State Building will glow green.

Budding romance

The U.S. Postal Service released a set of four new 39-cent stamps featuring sets of cartoon romantics — Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse, Lady and the Tramp, Belle and the Beast and Cinderella and Prince Charming. Formal ceremonies marking release of the stamps were at Epcot International Flower and Garden Festival in Florida, and the stamps went on sale nationwide Saturday.

Bo's battle

Actress Bo Derek, who keeps Iberian horses and German shepherds at her home in California, is the government's newest advocate for wilder sorts of animals. At an Earth Day ceremony at the State Department on Friday, Derek was named a special envoy on wildlife trafficking.

Prison break

The CIA fired a top intelligence analyst who admitted leaking classified information that led to a Pulitzer Prize-winning story about a network of secret CIA prisons, government officials say. The officer was a senior analyst nearing retirement, Mary McCarthy, the Associated Press learned.

Nick joining Nintendo Revolution

'SpongeBob,' 'Avatar' on next-gen game platform

By Chris Marlowe

Two of the games available for Nintendo's upcoming Revolution console will be based on Nickelodeon programs. THQ's "SpongeBob SquarePants" and "Avatar: The Last Airbender" are among the 20 titles that will be available when the product launches and will be featured when further details of Nintendo's next-generation platform are unveiled next month at the

Electronic Entertainment Expo.

It was important to Nickelodeon that it be part of the Revolution, said Steve Youngwood, executive vp digital at Nickelodeon MTV Networks Kids and Family.

"We have a fundamental point of view that we are No. 1 with kids, we seek to be everywhere that kids are, and we seek to be leaders in that space," he said. "It's hard to say you're everywhere kids are if you're not on

the new Nintendo product."

Although Nintendo is keeping most information under wraps until E3, one thing known for sure about Revolution is that it has a unique controller. Instead of the familiar two-handed button device, Nintendo's new unit comes with a

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EC goes after int'l pirates

Calls for uniform judicial sanctions

By Leo Cendrowicz

BRUSSELS — Copyright pirates face minimum penalties of up to four years in jail and fines of €300,000 (\$370,000) under new proposals by the European Commission.

The EC will call for judicial sanctions against traders in pirated and counterfeit DVDs, CDs, software and other goods dominated by criminal organizations, which are able to produce and ship items on an industrial scale.

The proposal, which could be launched today or Tuesday, aims to align national criminal laws and improve European cooperation to deal with counterfeiting and piracy activities. The measure is similar to one proposed in July by the EC, but a European Court of Justice ruling in November cleared the way for such policies to be adopted on a firmer legal basis.

The new proposal is for an EU directive, which has to be confirmed by EU governments and

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Will 'Palace' make it to Palais?

By Jonathan Landreth

BEIJING — The only Asian film in the running for the Palme d'Or at next month's Festival de Cannes, Lou Ye's "Summer Palace," will withdraw from Competition if it is not first approved by China's state censors, one of its producers said.

Lou's erotic story of youthful discovery set against the back-

drop of social unrest will be submitted to the Film Bureau this week for review, Fang Li, producer at Beijing-based Laurel Films, said Friday.

"The version shown in Cannes will no doubt be the version passed by the Film Bureau," said Fang, who co-produced the film for 20 million yuan (\$2.5 million) with Paris-based Rosem

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Gordon takes 'Special' assignment

By Borys Kit



Gordon

Dennie Gordon is adapting with an eye to direct the best-selling British thriller novel "A Special Relationship" for producer Denise Di Novi. The move brings Gordon, best known for directing comedies, back to the world of dramatic thrillers, the genre where she got her start.

The story follows an American journalist who suddenly finds herself pregnant and married to an Eng-

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Denton

Kattan

'Wanted' pic pairs Denton with Kattan

By Tatiana Siegel

James Denton and Chris Kattan have signed on to star in the comedy "Wanted: Undead or Alive" for producer Linda McDonough and her Odd Lot Entertainment shingle.

The film marks the directorial debut of Glasgow Phillips, who also penned the screenplay.

The story revolves around two cowboys (Denton and Kattan) and an Indian girl

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Fox 21 hooked on Keen, Corson for comedy project

By Georg Szalai

NEW YORK — After the successful run of their short film "Hooked" last month at the HBO-organized U.S. Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen, director-writer-actor Richie Keen and writing partner Heath Corson have signed a TV script deal with 20th Century Fox TV's Fox 21 division for a half-hour comedy project.

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Keen/Corson

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If the project goes to pilot, Keen is set to direct and also might co-star.

The Fox 21 show will not be based on "Hooked." While the two sides are looking at several ideas, they are focusing on a single-camera show idea titled "Living With Abandon."

The show idea revolves around an abandonment therapy group whose six very different misfit members find themselves in trouble when their therapist abandons them by killing himself. The members band together and vow to solve each other's issues one by one.

"We liked 'Hooked' because it had a creative voice, was distinctive and Richie managed to make it on a small budget and still made it look commercial," Fox 21 senior vp Jane Francis said.

Keen's experience as a writer, director, actor and acting coach also appealed to the company. "We like people who wear multiple hats," Francis said. Rob Roy Thomas, writer-director of the Fox 21-produced Fox comedy series "Free Ride" is another example of a multitalented creator in business with Fox 21.

The company leaders "share our comedic sensibility, and Fox 21 is the perfect home for our first (self-developed) TV project," Keen said. "Heath and I could not be more excited to be working with them."

"Abandon" will be pitched to networks soon because Fox 21 wants a network partner early in the process, Francis said without providing more specifics.

"Hooked," which Keen directed and co-wrote with Corson, premiered at USCAF and generated good buzz. The short follows a loser who wins two Oscar tickets next to Steven Spielberg and has his life turned

upside down as co-workers and celebrities suddenly vie for his attention to be his date. The cast includes Jeff Garlin, David Alan Grier, Rebecca Romijn, Zach Braff, Fred Savage and Matt Czuchry.

Keen also is a sought-after acting coach in Los Angeles working with Lesly Kahn & Co., which observers say might help him be a strong director and also help him get talent more easily. He has been seen on canceled ABC sitcom "Hot Properties," as well as in guest roles on such shows as "Method and Red," "Reno 911!" and "Becker."

Keen said he has been cast in several TV pilots over the years, including "Sperm Donor," all of which ended nowhere. "Since none of those projects worked out, I came up with the idea to do a short film and see if I can be funny when all the work and it's success is up to me," he said.

A Chicago native, Keen came to Los Angeles after graduating from Northwestern University, where he had already co-written projects with Corson.

Keen is managed by Scott Fedro. His lawyer is Adam Kaller of Behr, Abramson & Kaller. ■

The Beauty Academy of Kabul

A Noble Enterprise production

NEW YORK— On the face of it, a beauty academy wouldn't be the obvious solution to troubled Kabul's problems. But this quirky documentary about a group of American hairdressers who establish exactly that shows that the power of hair salons should never be underestimated. The women's brave efforts enable their female students to earn a living in a ruined country that discriminates against women in the workplace.

Liz Mermin's docu is not a slick piece of filmmaking — it's better suited to television than the big screen. Her camera is so unobtrusive that it seems like she just showed up and turned it on much of the time. But the work develops a strong personality through the hairdressers. Not only are these formidable women courageous enough to work in a salon that needs to be guarded by troops, but they also lace their



lessons with everything from New Age philosophy to rugged American individualism.

Mermin spent 10 weeks filming the women in Afghanistan as they set up and opened the school. It is mind-boggling to hear their many discourses on the power of hairdressing as a political force. One teacher harangues the inhabitants of this war-torn country for "being stuck in a rut when it comes to hair styles" and then equates the future stability of Afghanistan directly to the level of their hairdressing skills. But there is no doubt that the school helped the students find a degree of independence.

Although Mermin does interview some of the women students — one of whom remembers "seeing three women in burkas doused with petrol and set alight by the Taliban" — the foreigners are the focus. It would have been nice to get to know more about the students, who remain indistinct. But it is clear from what they do say that the school has made a difference. Years of abuse by the Taliban left Afghan women unsure of themselves. Courses like this help them to re-establish an identity.

Richard James Havis

SAG

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Warner Bros. Animation and Cartoon Network Studios.

"This is a significant and well-deserved victory for the many actors who work under this contract, specifically day performers," SAG president Alan Rosenberg said. "I'm proud of the work done by our negotiating committee and staff, who were able to improve this contract for the first time in two decades. This demonstrates that producers and performers can work together to achieve results that benefit both sides and keep our industry mov-

ing forward."

Sallie Weaver, who is retiring May 1, served as chief negotiator, and Loren Lester was chair of the negotiating committee.

With the new contract, the residual rate for voice performers will rise from 12% to 17% of their minimum pay (currently \$716 for a four-hour session) for the first rerun. Subsequent reruns are paid at a lesser rate until bottoming out at 1.5% of minimum for the 13th and all subsequent runs.

The residual gain is estimated at 20% because these animated series have an average of 25 repeats after the initial run.

The tentative agreement between SAG and the production companies was announced March 28 and received final approval Friday as SAG leaders opened a two-day plenary meeting.

It was the first contract negotiated under Rosenberg's administration, which was elected last year on a platform of getting more aggressive in negotiations.

Guild leaders also noted that the June 30, 2008, expiration date will allow them to return to the bargaining table in just more than two years, potentially to secure further gains for those that

work on such shows as "SpongeBob SquarePants" and "The Boondocks."

SAG is separately negotiating a basic cable live-action agreement that, like the animation pact, expired Feb. 28.

The live-action talks have grown tense as the guild has rejected the industry's last offer, an estimated 14% gain in residuals. SAG leaders have since received strong member support to call a work stoppage if needed, though initially the strike authorization is intended to give the union more leverage at the bargaining table.

Talks between SAG and the Alliance of Motion Picture & Television Producers have been intermittent since the strike-authorization vote was taken. That contract affects such shows as "The Shield" on FX, "Monk" on USA Network and "The Closer" on TNT.

AMPTP officials believe their offer is generous because it would raise SAG's residuals to the same rate held by WGA and DGA and leave intact the higher initial compensation actors receive over their peers in the writers and directors guilds. ■

Piracy

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the European Parliament. It also means EU governments will have to comply with the directive's demands and might even face court action if they fail to impose fines and imprison those caught with pirated goods.

Criminal groups involved in counterfeiting and piracy are often dabbling in activities that are more lucrative than other types of traf-

ficking and still carry light penalties.

The counterfeit goods trade in the EU is estimated to be worth about €400 billion (\$492.7 billion) annually, with DVDs, CDs and cassettes representing about a third of all items seized by EU authorities.

Thailand is Europe's biggest supplier of pirated DVDs, CDs and cassettes, accounting for 18% of the seizures, an EU report found, followed by Malaysia (14%), Pakistan (13%) and China (8%). ■