

The Hollywood Reporter

Tuesday, July 21, 2009

\$2.99

a Nielsen Business Media publication **THR.com**™



BACK TO THE PODIUM: Barack Obama is having words with the American people again Wednesday.

Primetime president Obama health plan pitch roils net skeds again

By James Hibberd

After some hesitation and a time shift, three major broadcast networks have agreed to carry Barack Obama's latest prime-time news conference.

The event was announced Friday afternoon as Obama battles to bolster congressional support for an ambitious health-care overhaul while facing dropping approval ratings.

But broadcasters are struggling with falling approval ratings of their own; Nielsen's audience measurements show viewership in a summertime slump.

Wednesday's conference will mark the president's fourth primetime press event since he took office six months ago. Such *continued on page 13*

Lionsgate's Rand plan: mini 'Atlas'

By Steven Zeitchik

The 37-year effort to bring "Atlas Shrugged" to the screen is finally gaining momentum. Sort of.

Oscar winner Charlize Theron has been meeting during the past several months with Lionsgate and producers Howard and Karen Baldwin, who are developing the project's latest iteration, about starring as



Charlize Theron

main character Dagny Taggart. Theron has been eager to play the role but has been concerned that a feature would lose many of the nuances of the monster-sized Ayn Rand novel. So the adaptation would — under a plan she and producers discussed in detail — be turned into a miniseries for Epix, the pay-cable network Lionsgate is forming with MGM *continued on page 13*

WB, in-demand writer say let us 'Prey'

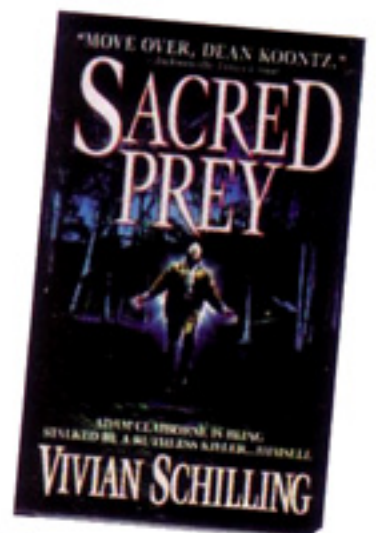
By Steven Zeitchik

Hot scribe Brad Ingelsby and Warner Bros. will develop a feature based on "Sacred Prey," Vivian Schilling's novel about a hitman who becomes the

victim of his own takedown.

The high-concept thriller centers on a loan shark who kills a man he believes duped him, only to wake up and find himself in the body of that man three days before the murder. He then must undertake a furious effort to prevent the murder he committed.

Although tentatively dubbed *continued on page 13*



Yauch determined to maintain his film career

By Steven Zeitchik and David Prince

Adam Yauch, the Beastie Boy who recently launched a second career as an indie-film exec, said Monday that he has cancer and will undergo surgery.

Yauch posted a video on his Web site saying that he was diagnosed with a cancerous tumor in his left salivary gland. The condi-



Yauch

tion is not considered life-threatening, but it requires immediate surgery.

"It's a little bit of a setback, it's a pain in the ass, but this is something that's very treatable," he said. "The good news is that they did scans of my whole body, and it's only localized in this

one area, and it's not in a place that affects my voice."

The Beastie Boys have canceled their summer tour and delayed the release of their new album, "Hot Sauce Committee Part 1," to allow time for his recovery.

The development, however, likely will only minimally impact Yauch's nascent film business, Oscilloscope Pictures, which has *continued on page 14*



'Atlas' project still in flux

continued from page 1

and Viacom/Paramount.

The project, according to this plan, would be to make the mini one of the fledgling network's programming linchpins. While insiders are not ruling out the possibility of releasing a condensed version to theaters, the main thrust would be the network, where the mini could be used to lure the book's legion of fans to subscribe.

Theron, who recently signed with WME after years without an agent, has a history of embracing difficult roles. She played a prostitute-turned-killer in "Monster," which won her an Oscar. She also has had parts in the sexual-harassment drama "North Country" and the upcoming apocalyptic tale "The Road."

But her involvement in "Atlas" remained uncertain at press time.

While those familiar with the discussions say she has been driving the development process, her reps say that she has recently come to a decision but has not yet informed the studio or producers. WME and longtime manager J.J. Harris told THR late Monday that Theron "is not moving forward with the project."

The uncertainty surrounding Theron's involvement continues a long tradition of murkiness for "Atlas," the project with more go-rounds than Rand's book has pages.

Regarded as a difficult book to film, an "Atlas" project nonetheless has been tried by countless producers, dating back to an attempted effort with writer-producer Albert Ruddy in 1972; he and Rand couldn't see eye-to-eye on creative issues.

Most recently, the Baldwins and Philip Anschutz tried at Crusader Entertainment and the Baldwins, who produced "Ray" and other well-regarded pics, took it with them when they split from Anschutz.

Angelina Jolie had been loosely attached to the material with the Baldwins but has a number of projects that could go first, and producers are keen to shoot "Atlas" next year. That's in part because of the timeliness of the material but, more important, because an option with the Rand

estate expires if principal photography does not begin in 2010.

With Theron's involvement, it could finally get a boost, especially since financiers also have come aboard; a high-net-worth individual who finds the themes resonant is said to be close to investing in the project. If Theron's involvement falls through, Lionsgate and producers could bring on another lead; several other well-known actresses have expressed interest.

A 1,000-page novel filled with Rand's ideas about the future of Western civilization, "Atlas" centers on Taggart, a railroad executive trying to keep her corporation competitive in a world she sees as hostile to innovation. Among its most famous passages is a 50-page speech from mysterious character John Galt, regarded as a veiled expression of Rand's own ideas.

The book, which has sold tens of millions of copies since its 1957 publication, has gained new traction in this era of Wall Street bailouts and corporate responsibility. Those opposed to Washington intervention frequently have cited it as a cautionary manifesto.

Producers own several drafts of the script adapting the difficult material, including one by "Braveheart" scribe Randall Wallace, which compressed the longer, more miniseries-friendly version by James Hart. It's possible that several drafts could be synthesized to create the basis for a mini.

Although the miniseries idea is a new twist for Lionsgate, it has been considered before for "Atlas," most recently as a development project a decade ago at TNT.

Epix was created in part as an output pipeline for the films of the three studios but also is developing original programming. This year, it announced it was developing the pilot "Tough Trade," a country music-set drama from "Weeds" creator Jenji Kohan.

Epix has yet to sign a carriage deal with cable or satellite operators, but insiders hope the fact that there's now another outlet for premium programming — and a climate favorable to prestige long-form projects on the small screen — could ensure Hollywood finally is shrugging no more. **THR**

Fox on Obama pre-emption: No we won't

continued from page 1

interruptions tend to wreak havoc with network schedules and can cost millions in lost advertising.

CBS, which airs only repeats that evening, agreed early Monday to cover the conference.

But for NBC, Fox and ABC, the decision was tougher. During a summer otherwise strewn with repeats, Wednesday includes all their top-rated reality shows.

Fox declined outright to air the

"In speaking with various media outlets, we found that rescheduling for one hour earlier would help us to arrange for as many Americans as possible to hear directly from the president at the press conference."

— White House representative

news conference. NBC and ABC fell into line late Monday after the White House shifted the event's time from the previously announced 9 p.m. to the lesser-watched hour of 8 p.m.

The stakes were particularly high for NBC, which airs summer's most-watched show, "America's Got Talent," at 9 p.m.; this week, it includes a heavily promoted interview with "Britain's Got Talent" singing sensation Susan Boyle.

Sources said NBC demonstrated reluctance to carry Obama's news conference live, and faced with the prospect of only two major broadcasters — CBS and ABC — covering it, the White House moved its start to 8 p.m.

"In speaking with various media outlets, we found that rescheduling for one hour earlier would help us to arrange for as many Americans as possible to hear directly from the president at the press conference," a White House representative said Monday night.

NBC normally airs "Talent" repeats in the 8 p.m. hour; that will be pre-empted this week.

ABC's top reality show, "Wipeout," which airs at 8 p.m., will be pushed to 9 p.m., with "I Survived a Japanese Game Show" moved to 10 p.m. The ABC News special "Over a Barrel: The Truth About Oil," originally slated for 10 p.m. Wednesday, will air Friday as a special edition of "20/20."

Fox airs its top-rated two-hour "So You Think You Can Dance" on Wednesday nights and will direct viewers to Fox News for the news conference.

This is the second time Fox has ruled against covering an Obama press conference, a move the network has made in the past when the event's purpose seemed less than urgent. **THR**

Ingelsby's hot streak continues

continued from page 1

"Sacred Prey," the project might get a new title, with "Hit Man" among those names being considered.

Steven Schneider is producing through his Room 101 banner, and Brooklyn Weaver will produce via his Energy Entertainment shingle. Matt Reilly and Nijja Kuykendall are overseeing for Warners.

During the past 15 months, Ingelsby has climbed from an unknown to the top of the screenwriter pile.

An insurance salesman from Pennsylvania, Ingelsby created a sensation soon after the WGA strike with "The Low Dweller," a spec he wrote on a lark. The dark thriller, which Leonardo DiCaprio

and Ridley Scott quickly signed on to produce, ignited a bidding war that Relativity won.

The WME-repped scribe soon had other projects set up all over town, including the Todd Field-directed "Nancy & Danny" at Paramount and the Marc Forster-produced "Die Bad" at Universal.

Weaver, who exec produced Jim Carrey thriller "The Number 23," is producing "Dweller" and the romantic comedy "The Pre-Nup" at the Film Department, among other projects. Schneider is behind Par's upcoming supernatural thriller "Paranormal Activity" and also is developing the horror title "The Colony" at Participant. **THR**