

# BOOMGEN STUDIOS

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## BOOMGEN STUDIOS: COMPANY PROFILE

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### // WHO WE ARE

BoomGen Studios is an innovative and vertically integrated media and entertainment company that has established itself as the leading content expert for motion pictures and transmedia properties relating to the peoples and cultures of the Greater Middle East (GME). The management team has built a successful organization that has partnered with some of Hollywood's biggest and most successful brands.

Under the leadership of Mahyad Tousi and Reza Aslan, BoomGen has provided a wide range of exclusive services on feature films, television programming, and online and mobile content that has attracted, entertained, and informed millions across the globe. In 2010, BoomGen began to aggressively develop and acquire a slate of film, television, and transmedia projects, producing one of the most exciting and diverse portfolio of projects in its area of expertise.

The company's working relationships include such noted entities as Disney, New Line, National Geographic Films, Jerry Bruckheimer Films, Discovery, TLC, Scott Free Productions, and the Weinstein Company, to name a few.

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## // OUR STORY

In 2005, Writer and Middle East expert Reza Aslan and filmmaker Mahyad Tousi came together to write and direct a major TV documentary based on their premise that the youth populations across the Middle East who make up the vast majority of the population of the region would soon transform their societies. Yet as they began pitching the project to broadcasters, they were confronted with the reality that the industry is not adequately equipped to identify and produce cutting-edge projects that transcend the prevailing narrative and stereotypes associated with this region. Recognizing this as a gross shortcoming, Aslan and Tousi decided to build an entertainment company dedicated exclusively to address the inherent obstacles in developing, producing and distributing commercial projects about the stories, peoples, and cultures of the Greater Middle East. Thus began BoomGen Studios—named after the region’s youth bulge.

Three years before Iran’s Green Movement captured the world’s attention and changed the way we consume news forever, and five years before Tahrir Square, BoomGen recognized what was to come and set out to tell the story of this generation for a world that would be inspired by their desire for change. Since launching in 2006, BoomGen has worked on most of the marquee projects released in the last five years become the leading content expert for Hollywood and major television networks, as well as for major producers and distributors.

In 2010, after successfully raising seed capital from a group of private angel investors, BoomGen expanded its activities in the original feature film and TV arenas to develop a slate of diverse and commercially attractive projects. Ranging from a narrative feature comedy to a political thriller to several transmedia properties connected to the legendary epics of the region, each project stays true to BoomGen’s mandate of creating media that effectively furthers the social discourse between the Western world and the Greater Middle East. In 2011, BoomGen gained representation from the United Talent Agency (UTA), which now represents the company’s founders and portfolio of projects.



## // MAHYAD TOUSI CO-FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Born in the US, Tousi grew up in Iran during the revolution and the ensuing war with Iraq until 1986, when he returned to the US. He leads both business and creative strategy for the company, and is the lead producer on all of the company’s projects. For the last 10 yrs Tousi has been traveling the world as a producer and cinematographer, working on a wide range of projects and genres: starting out as a conflict zone documentarian and videographer (Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Burundi, Afghanistan, and Iraq), then as a producer and cinematographer on multiple award winning feature and TV documentaries (Blindsight, Waste Land, Some Assembly Required, Nat Geo Docs). He has produced low budget independent narrative features with Oscar nominated talent (Marevelous, Looking for Palladin) and award winning Television programming (We Are New York), and continues to work as cinematographer on large video installations that have been acquired by and exhibited at some of the world’s prestigious museums, including the Guggenheim, Whitney, MoMA, De Appel, and La Masion Rouge, to name a few.

Tousi has extensive on-set experience as a creative producer, assistant director, cinematographer. And as a consultant and lead manager of BoomGen Studios, he has worked extensively with both the creative teams and the publicity/marketing departments of the Studios and major production houses.

Tousi is a regular guest lecturer at City College of New York (CCNY) MFA program and NYU Tisch's Continuing and Professional Studies Department and appears regularly as a speaker and panelist at seminars and universities to discuss social innovation through storytelling, and BoomGen's activities in Transmedia storytelling.



**// REZA ASLAN**  
**CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER**

An internationally acclaimed writer and Middle East expert, Aslan holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a Master of Fine Arts from the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he was named the Truman Capote Fellow in Fiction. His first book is the International Bestseller, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*, which has been translated into thirteen languages, and named one of the 100 most important books of the last decade. He is also the author of *How to Win a Cosmic War* (published in paperback as *Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism in a Globalized Age*), as well as editor of two volumes: *Tablet and Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East*, and *Muslims and Jews in America: Commonalities, Contentions, and Complexities*.

Aslan is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities, and the Pacific Council on International Policy. He serves on the board of directors of the Ploughshares Fund, which gives grants for peace and security issues; Abraham's Vision, an educational, conflict transformation organization for Israeli and Palestinian youths; PEN USA, which champions the rights of writers under siege around the world; and the Levantine Cultural Center, which builds bridges between Americans and the Arab/Muslim world through the arts. Aslan served on the board of the Sundance Film Festival Documentary Selection Committee from 2008-2009.

Aslan appears regularly on television and radio, including the Daily Show with John Stewart, the Colbert Report, CNN's AC 360, Rachel Maddow, NPR, & Real Time with Bill Maher. Aslan lives in Los Angeles where he is penning his first script and his fourth book and where he serves as Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of California, Riverside.

## OUR PROJECT PORTFOLIO



An interactive comic experience based on the tales from the Epic of Kings – the mythic history of Persia – Rostam is the first installment in a Transmedia story universe set in a world of the Shahnameh—written over a 1000 years ago. Now on iTunes.

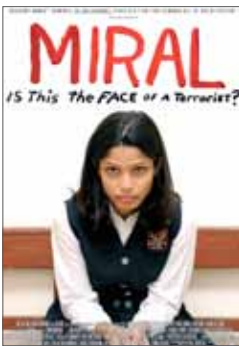
**Original BoomGen Project**



An unprecedented look at life in Dearborn, Michigan—home to the largest Arab/Muslim community in the US—through the lens of five families. All-American Muslim, is an eight part reality series in its first season.

**Client:** TLC/DCI

**BGS Services:** Creative, Publicity, & Social Media Marketing Consultant



A visceral, first-person diary of a young Palestinian girl (Freida Pinto) growing up in East Jerusalem as she confronts the effects of occupation and war in every corner of her life.

**Client:** Weinstein Company & Julian Schnabel

**BGS Services:** Publicity & Grassroots Marketing Consultant



A young fugitive prince (Jake Gyllenhaal) and princess (Gemma Arterton) must stop a villain who unknowingly threatens to destroy the world with a special dagger that enables the magic sand inside to reverse time.

**Client:** Disney Studios & Jerry Bruckheimer

**BGS Services:** Creative, Publicity, & Marketing Consultant



Roger Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio) uncovers a lead on a major terrorist leader suspected to be operating out of Jordan.

**Client:** Warner Bros, Scottfree Productions

**BGS Services:** Script Consultant, Cultural & Religious Consultant



The adventures of Muna (Nisreen Faour), a single mother who leaves the West Bank with Fadi, her teenage son, with dreams of an exciting future in the promised land of small town Illinois.

**Client:** National Geographic Entertainment

**BGS Services:** Grassroots Marketing Consultant



A CIA (Jake Gyllenhaal) analyst questions his assignment after witnessing an unorthodox interrogation at a secret detention facility outside the US.

**Client:** Anonymous Content, New Line

**BGS Services:** Script Consultant, Cultural & Religious Consultant

# The New York Times

Expect the World®

## REALITY TV GOES WHERE FOOTBALL MEETS THE HIJAB

By POROCHISTA KHAKPOUR

November 10, 2011

IF anything made me an American, it was television. I learned English from soap operas — after kindergarten, curled up Mom-my-side — and then beyond, the many hours she abandoned the sofa for the kitchen when I alternated between after-school cartoons and adult crime dramas. English came to me, and with it so many questions about what was happening on TV. But one that never hit home was why the people on the screen did not resemble my family. I suppose when your daily life involves acute consciousness of being a foreigner, you lack that sense of entitlement; self-identification with a popular representation of America was a luxury this newly transplanted Iranian immigrant didn't even know to lust for.



At school in suburban Los Angeles we took TV show residue and dumped it on the playground, recreating sitcoms and cartoon plots during recess. I was always typecast by the director, myself. I played only villains, Catra of “She-Ra,” the Misfits of “Jem,” Nellie of “Little House on the Prairie.” When the fifth grade put on a production of “The Wizard of Oz,” I tried out for the Wicked Witch, knowing I'd settle on Flying Monkey (the other brown girl, the class's sole South Asian, was immediately cast as Toto) and was crushed when I became a Kansan extra. I knew by then that heroines and ingénues were “fair,” as fairy tale convention dictated. Darkness — dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin — always equaled trouble, as if it actually implied a dark side. This expanded as I evolved into a teenage thespian of school drama festival circuits, where, if not Medea or Antigone, I could be the comic relief: the zany psycho at worst and the wisecracking best friend at best.

In other words, part of assimilation was a crash course in sober self-awareness. I gravitated toward the freak, the outsider, the antagonist, the one who did not belong in the protagonist's vision, not because I had low self-esteem but because conditions couldn't have allowed for normal self-esteem. A bottle of water bobbing in an ocean doesn't contemplate its wetness, after all. I knew my place. I was a freak, and I consoled myself with one thought: Of all places, America was a pretty O.K. place for freakdom.

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Compare that reality take on a Middle Eastern people with a news release about “All-American Muslim,” the latest from TLC (the channel behind “Sarah Palin's Alaska”), starting Sunday night: “Through these families and their diverse experiences, we will explore how they blend their values and traditions with everyday life in America.” The author Reza Aslan, whose media entertainment company, **BoomGen Studios**, has been helping TLC with publicity, calls it “a groundbreaking, intimate look inside the lives of a group of Muslim families in Dearborn, Mich., who are struggling with the everyday issues that all families deal with.” He adds, “Except they are doing it at a time of unprecedented anti-Muslim hysteria in America.”

Read here: <http://ow.ly/7pQXA>



## BBC'S TALKING MOVIES INTERVIEWS BOOMGEN CEO, MAHYAD TOUSI, TO DISCUSS HOLLYWOOD'S TAKE ON THE 9/11 ATTACKS

Story Posted by BBC Entertainment & Arts



**Aug 31, 2011**

by [BBC Talking Movies](#)

TRT 12:45

A film looking back at the struggles of five individuals who were traumatised by the terror attacks of 9/11 starts showing in New York on Wednesday.

It's just one of several films which have attempted to capture the horror of both the day and its aftermath.

Ten years on, Talking Movies' Tom Brook has been looking at the impact of 9/11 on Hollywood.

**TALKING MOVIES IS BROADCAST ON BBC WORLD NEWS ON SATURDAY AT 1330 GMT AND IS REPEATED ON SUNDAY AT 0030, 0730 AND 2030 GMT.**

Watch here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-14726893>



## ARAB FILM ON THE RISE? PATIENCE, PLEASE

*A closer look at the players building the film market in the region*

*By David Lipeska*

*February Issue, 2011*

When he first read "South of the Heart," a little-known novel about the search for oil in Arabia, Tarak Ben Ammar fell fast in love, optioning the story straight away. Yet it wasn't until a serendipitous visit to the Gulf some 25 years later that everything fell into place. "When I saw the desert of Qatar, I knew it was right," says the veteran Tunisian producer. Jean-Jacques Annaud soon signed on as director and the pic, now called "Black Gold", was a go. "You have to wait and see sometimes."

The same could be said of film in the Arab world. The opportunity is undoubtedly great – 350 million Arabs, two-thirds under 30 years of age, a growing middle class – and signs of progress are ubiquitous. But hopefuls and industry vets have learned that building a serious film industry in this region requires a great deal of patience.



Since its beginnings nearly a century ago, Arab film has been concentrated in Egypt, though smaller industries sprung up in Syria, Algeria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. Over the past decade wealthy Gulf nations have also thrown their hats into the ring ...

.. But the most exciting collaboration may be "Shankaboot", a highly popular Beirut-set web series about a moped delivery worker named Suleiman. "Shankaboot" is produced by Lebanon's Batoota Films, with funding from the BBC World Service Trust, a non-profit organization, and the UK's Welded Tandem Picture Company.

"Producers have been able to package this product and create content that actually resonates with their audience, both in Lebanon and to some extent internationally," says **Mahyad Tousi**, co-founder and president of **BoomGen Studios** in New York, who works regularly in the region. "That is a very healthy sign of industry moving forward, perhaps more than these festivals."

**BoomGen Studios** is designed to provide creative input, publicity and marketing to Hollywood's production community. Even though it was founded three years ago, the company is still in a start-up phase and what it might lack in financial resources is made up in enthusiasm, film expertise and knowledge of the region.

Michael McDonough is president and co-founder of Dubai Film Productions, a five-year-old multi-national firm with offices in Dubai, San Francisco and Los Angeles that aims to produce smaller budget films that foster understanding between the West and the Muslim world.

Read here: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/48952174/Variety-Arabia-Arab-Film-on-the-Rise-Feb-11>

# Los Angeles

L A M A G . C O M

## THINK AGAIN

### EXPLAINING ISLAM TO NON-MUSLIMS IS PART OF REZA ASLAN'S STOCK-IN-TRADE, BUT THE IRANIAN AMERICAN IS MORE THAN A TALKING HEAD

By Ed Leibowitz

Los Angeles magazine, December 2010

#### Your family moved from Tehran to Northern California in 1979, the year of the Iranian revolution. Why did you leave?

My family thought of it as a temporary thing, which is why we left with almost nothing, just a suitcase each. My father, who is a famous atheist in Iran, didn't believe Khomeini when he said he was going to go back to the mosque and leave the government to the politicians. So as a safety measure my father decided that he would take his family to the United States for a brief while, and after things settled down, we would return. Of course things never settled down, and next thing you knew, 30 years had passed.

#### Did you experience a lot of prejudice growing up?

We faced an enormous amount of bias, no question about it. At the time it wasn't so much anti-Islam bias as anti-Iranian bias after the hostage crisis and the anti-American rhetoric coming out of the Iranian government. There were all these anti-Iran songs and anti-Iran characters on television, so it was hard not to be made fun of and not be afraid of one's identity.

#### How did you deal with it?

I spent most of the '80s pretending to be Mexican, and I was very successful at it. We were living in immigrant communities in Northern California. There were lots of Mexicans around, and I learned Spanish. I look Mexican, and my name sort of has a Mexican tinge to it, so it was very easy to pass as Mexican in the early 1980s.

#### You've said that you started out wanting to be a novelist. When did you decide that was your calling?

In high school. I went to a really, really crappy high school in San Jose—the kind of school where you weren't allowed to wear anything predominantly red or black. And at a very early age I began to take my education into my own hands. I remember in sophomore English the rest of the class was reading *The Last of the Mohicans*, which I found to be unreadable. I was almost done with *The Brothers Karamazov*, and I remember so clearly coming to the end of that book and my



teacher repeatedly warning me to put the book away because we were discussing James Fenimore Cooper. Finally he caught me one time too many. I just want to emphasize that I was kicked out of my English literature class for reading Dostoyevsky. Instead of going to detention I sat on a bench and finished. I remember as clear as day turning the last page and thinking to myself, “This is what I want to do. I want to make other people feel the way Dostoyevsky just made me feel.”

### **How does your film company, BoomGen Studios, figure into your public reorientation?**

It sounds like a cliché, because it is, but movies have the power to not just change people's minds but to change the narrative with which people understand the world and their place in it. We started out first and foremost as a service provider—providing scripts, cultural consulting, niche marketing, and publicity to major studios. Prince of Persia was our first opportunity to work on a film, soup to nuts. We came in at the beginning with the script for Disney; we provided a series of comprehensive notes about the story. Originally as the project was conceived it was very much rooted in a particular historical time—which created not just historical difficulties but brought up some possible cultural sensitivities that we thought would be avoided if you just set it in mythical times. That was the advice they took most to heart. We provided a second set of notes when they showed us the rough cut. Then we put our publicity and marketing strategy to work. We developed this really effective proprietary strategy to target these niche communities: Middle Eastern, Iranian, Muslim American—a core of active, interested participants who want this to succeed.

### **You're going to produce your own movies in addition to consulting?**

Right now we have three scripts we're concentrating on. One of them was written by me—a political thriller, based on an Iranian film from the 1980s, that we are in the process of shopping around and getting some development funds for.

### **Where are you going for financing?**

By mission and design, the Muslim community is our sole source of funding. And, let's be frank, they're rich. These are people who just finished selling their tech companies and people who are enormously successful entrepreneurs. Just look at the executive boards of Google or Yahoo and see the Middle Eastern and South Asian names.

*To read the full interview please go to <http://www.lamag.com/columns/speak-easy/story.aspx?ID=1365621>*



## BOOMGEN NABS MULTIMEDIA RIGHTS TO 'SHAHNAMEH'

*Prod'n shingle to use digital media to reach global aud*

By CAROLE HORST

Oct. 11, 2010



Production shingle BoomGen has taken exclusive global multimedia rights to Hyperworks Entertainment's comicbook series "Rostam: Tales From the Shahnameh."

The books, created by the Kings Letters comicbook label, are based on the 1,000-year-old epic by Persian poet Ferdowsi and chronicle Persia's rich mythology and history. And while the material may be ancient, BoomGen will use 21st century digital media to reach a global audience.

The Los Angeles- and New York City-based label plans on building a "transmedia" universe across different media platforms such as comicbooks, digital motion comics, feature films and videogames.

First project from the pact is the fourth Rostam comicbook, to be released Nov. 15, along with a smartphone mobile comic app. The app, a "teaser," will include 12-14 pages of the book downloadable on digital platforms, including iTunes and Amazon. Full book will cost 99¢.

Idea is to reach as many people worldwide as possible through the smartphone space, said BoomGen co-founder Mahyad Tousi. "It gives us access to the world. This is the exciting part of transmedia -- we bypass traditional stores. And we can tell complicated stories in a new space.

"The idea of creating a transmedia space is to reach maximum audience through all media," he added.

Creating an app is relatively cheap, \$20,000-\$30,000, compared to buying content rights. Tousi would not elaborate on the pricetag for rights to the series.

Although it is in the very early stages, Tousi and co-founder Reza Aslan have been in talks to mount a feature.

Founded in 2007, BoomGen Studios works with entertainment content related to the Middle East and provides cultural, creative, publicity, marketing and social media/community engagement solutions to Hollywood studios, independent filmmakers, distributors and screenwriters, and has worked on projects such as "Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time," "Amreeka," "Body of Lies" and "Rendition." This year, BoomGen began development on its first slate of features and related cross-media entertainment properties.

"It's a crucial time in history to reframe perceptions of the greater Middle East, its culture and its people. We believe that by creating a transmedia universe based on the 'Shahnameh' and giving audiences access to the epic tales that sparked such well known works as J.R.R. Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings,' we are headed in the right direction," Aslan said.

Read more: <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118025482.html?categoryid=13&cs=1&query=boomgen#ixzz124CbWjuP>



## THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST: HOLLYWOOD'S NEXT BIG PAYCHECK

September/October 2010 Vol 30

Usually the Middle East region is grouped with North Africa under the MENA moniker. The problem is that there is confusion about the number of countries to include under MENA, since it has no standardized definition. There is also some confusion between "MENA" and "Arab countries."

For example, U.K. research company Informa, which has just published a report on the area (cost U.S.\$1,566), lists 25 countries, including Turkey and Cyprus, but not Iran and Iraq. As per a program producer in Qatar, there are 22 Arab countries, but not all are located in MENA, while Iran is in the MENA region, even though it is not an Arab country.



According to Patrick Jucaud, who organizes several TV markets in Africa for his Basic Lead, there are five North- African countries: Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt. In addition, commented Jucaud, Israel should be included in the "Greater Middle East region," while the "Broader Middle East" includes Turkey and Afghanistan.

So, for the purpose of this new account, in addition to the aforementioned North-African countries in the MENA region, the following countries are included: Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE and Yemen. It remains to be seen where the Palestinian territories should be located, since Palestine not yet a country.

Informa estimated that there are 78 million TVHH in the MENA (Greater Middle East) region, representing 95 percent of households, with satellite reaching 62 percent of TV families. Pay- TV households are said to number 2.4 million, excluding Israel, which Basic Lead estimated at 1.7 million subscribers.

Key satellite operators in the broader region are: Digiturk (two million subscribers); ART (1.087 million subs); E-Vision (340,000, including cable and IPTV); OSN, which is the result of a merger between Orbit and Showtime (603,000 subs), and HOT (in Israel with 908,000 subs via cable and MMDS). In addition, Canal Plus now reaches North Africa, but it is not a major player in MENA. Because 75 percent of the population of this region is under the age of 35, online TV services are gathering momentum.

In terms of content, sports (especially football), news, movies and drama series are the region's popular fare. Most watched shows come from the U.S. studios. There is also a good number of programs originating and exchanged within MENA areas. However, very little production from the region is seen outside MENA, with the exception of ethnic channels scattered throughout the worldwide Arab communities.

If the region lacks exportable content, it certainly makes up for it in resources, especially financial resources and viewership. And these resources are the leverage of two young entrepreneurs who have taken on the challenge of marrying Hollywood with MENA.



BoomGen Studios (BGS) is a New York and Los Angeles-based cross platform media and entertainment company founded in 2007 by Mahyad Tousi and Reza Aslan that is trying to change the perception of the Middle East by helping to create high profile film and TV shows from or about the region. BGS is designed to provide creative input, publicity and marketing to Hollywood's production community. Even though it was founded three years ago, the company is still in a start-up phase and what it might lack in financial resources is made up in enthusiasm, film expertise and knowledge of the Middle East.

VideoAge asked the two partners to illustrate their strategy and business model.

VideoAge International: Why is the Greater Middle East region interested in financing films produced in Hollywood?

BoomGen Studios: With much of the liquidity out there in the Middle East, the regional players now enjoy greater leverage than they ever did. This, coupled with the failure of studios and independent producers to make the hedge fund/slate model work, makes for much more interesting deals for anyone who holds the purse strings, and gives them unprecedented access to Hollywood, the greatest storytelling factory around.

**VAI:** From a financial standpoint, enlighten us regarding your selection and go-forward process?

**BGS:** We focus on creating and championing commercial entertainment projects that also have the ability to reframe perceptions of the peoples and cultures of the Middle East, North Africa and Central/South Asia — a region with a rich history of storytelling. These could be smaller character-driven dramas, slapstick comedies, or epics rooted in the rich mythology of this vast region. The important factor is that the project fits our financing model. For instance, we are very much interested in projects that have strong “Transmedia” potential. Right now our portfolio consists of two comedies, comic book properties, and an international political thriller.

**VAI:** It is clear in financial terms, but in cultural terms, what unique advantages regarding film development/production does this region possess?

**BGS:** With regards to infrastructure, this region still has a long way to go, though there are major efforts in play to develop expertise and build-out production infrastructure. Some 75 percent of the population of this region is under the age of 35, making it one of the youngest groups in the world. According to the World Economic Forum, this region also boasts the world's fastest growing consumer market. This, without a doubt, is the region's greatest advantage and asset, and the reason why there is so much interest from the majors in being part of the solution.

**VAI:** Despite the soft economy, why do you believe the current time is appropriate for your venture?

**BGS:** The amount of liquidity in the region, and the value of this emerging market, ensures there will be increasing interest from the studios and international players in creating content in our niche. We feel we are uniquely positioned to work with the best of these projects and, from time-to-time, put our own horses into the mix.

**VAI:** Briefly, please explain the BoomGen Studios model and how it differs from what might be considered the traditional indie film model?

**BGS:** BoomGen Studios is a boutique company with a narrow focus and diverse set of skills. We differentiate ourselves by having a first person understanding of content, as well as the in-house strategies and expertise to produce and market projects specific to our niche.

Providing high-end creative, public relations and marketing solutions to major studios and independents allows us to continuously hone the strategies we apply to our own branded projects.

**VAI:** Will BoomGen be actively involved on the festival/trade show circuit?

**BGS:** We commenced our second phase of operations this year and have multiple projects in various stages of development. We will be participating at many of the major festivals and co-production markets, as well as at the bigger festivals in the Middle East, with the intention of closing some deals and looking for new partnerships. We plan to go into production on our first feature film by next summer.

Portland, Oregon-born Mahyad Tousi, 37, is co-founder, CEO and producer. He oversees business and creative strategy for the company while serving as the lead producer for all its projects. Tousi's production experience includes *We Are New York*, a 10-part series for NY Public TV station and *Looking for Palladin*, starring Ben Gazzara and Talia Shire. Tousi's cinematography credits include *Blindsight*, directed by Lucy Walker, which was a winner at the Berlin Film Festival.

Iranian-born Reza Aslan, 38, co-founder and CCO, teaches creative writing at the University of California, Riverside. Aslan holds degrees in religion from Santa Clara University and Harvard; a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara. His first book, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam*, has been translated into 13 languages. He is also the author of *How to Win a Cosmic War: God, Globalization and the End of the War on Terror*, as well as editor of an anthology of modern literature from the Middle East. Aslan has worked as a consultant on feature films including *Prince of Persia*, *Rendition* and *Body of Lies*.

## BOOMGEN: CLIP REPORTS



### MIDEAST ENVOY

*Local consultant helps Hollywood movies connect overseas*

*By Joel Russell*

*Monday, September 27, 2010*

Interest in the Middle East is helping Reza Aslan bring his expertise in all things Islam to Hollywood.

The Iranian-born Aslan, who has five college degrees – including two doctorates in religious studies – runs BoomGen Studios, a boutique film consultancy that helps moviemakers tell stories rooted in the cultures of the Middle East, as well as sell movie tickets to audiences in the region.

“I don’t have a job, I have a mission,” Aslan said. “The mission is to build bridges between European and North American culture and the greater Middle East.”

BoomGen’s latest credit was Disney’s action movie “Prince of Persia.” Aslan and his colleagues worked on the project from script development to marketing. Activists protested that Jake Gyllenhaal was too white to play the ethnic lead, but Aslan countered that the story takes place before a series of Turkish invasions darkened the local Persian populace.

“The Middle Eastern community, especially the Iranian community, really got behind this film,” he said. “They were still reeling from ‘300,’ which showed Persians as the bad guys.”

Reza called his company BoomGen because the Middle East is the world’s largest emerging consumer market and has a young demographic. The region currently has a GDP of \$2.7 trillion, but some forecasts range as high as \$30 trillion by 2050. Half the region’s population is under 25.

“The numbers speak for themselves: This is a massive market and it’s underserved,” he said. “But they have this sense of paranoia. They are wary because of the way they are presented in film – always the bad guy.”

*Read more: <http://labusinessjournal.com/news/2010/sep/27/mideast-envoy/>*



**CANUCK SOFT MONEY BIG DRAW AT  
CO-PRO CONFAB  
STRATEGIC PARTNERS EVENT TO FOCUS ON U.S,  
GERMAN PRODUCERS**

*By Etan Vlessing  
Sept 2, 2010, 11:20 AM ET*

TORONTO -- With Wall Street coin drying up, the search for soft money and international options is taking film and TV producers to Canada for co-production financing.

Jan Miller, director of Strategic Partners, the co-production conference aligned with the Atlantic Film Festival, said getting American and European indie producers to Halifax later this month has suddenly turned into an easy sale.

"The last couple years were difficult in pulling together the conference. But this year, we've had more submissions than ever before, and we're really not having to talk people into coming," she said ahead of Strategic Partners' upcoming 13th edition.

This year's focus is on American and German producers, financiers, sales agents, agencies, broadcasters and distributors chasing potential Canadian partners for their local tax credits and other taxpayer subsidies, and co-production and co-venture know-how.

"Internationally, everyone knows they have to think globally in terms of financing and audience, and Canada has been there for a long time," Miller said of Canada's international market reach and intelligence.

Examples: Halifax has two internationally-broadcast TV series currently shooting locally, the Stephen King TV adaptation "Haven" and the Jason Priestley-starrer "Call Me Fitz."

Killer Films' Christine Vachon will provide one of the keynote speeches in Halifax, and projects looking for production coin include Canadian producer Picture Plant's movie adaptation of Marian Engel's novel "Bear," **U.S.-based BoomGen Studios' "Redemption," about a young American journalist pursuing an Iranian agent and a government conspiracy in New York City**, and Belgium's Eyeworks Film & TV Drama's "End Game," a film about an autistic teenager who fights back at bullies with help from an online-gaming girlfriend.

The Strategic Partners conference is set to run from Sept. 16 to 19.

# Los Angeles Times

[http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/content\\_display/world/news/e3i3b3230c2cb215154ae5b072d803dcdff0](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/content_display/world/news/e3i3b3230c2cb215154ae5b072d803dcdff0)

## HERO COMPLEX HOLLYWOOD WHITEWASH? 'AIRBENDER' AND 'PRINCE OF PERSIA' ANGER FANS WITH ETHNIC CASTING

May 22, 2010 | 3:47 p.m.

This is a longer version of Chris Lee's cover story in this Sunday's Los Angeles Times Calendar section.

Since its release, the video game franchise Prince of Persia has become notable for the acrobatic grace of its dagger-wielding, balloon pants-wearing hero as well as for what the games didn't do: affront gamers of Middle Eastern and Muslim descent with stereotypical depictions of people from the region as terrorists or religious zealots.

Independent filmmaker and blogger Jehanzeb Dar, to name one such player, remembers his favorable first reaction to the swashbuckling action game, which is set amid the sands and ancient cities of Persia (as ancient Iran is known) and follows a hero with a magic sword caught between forces of good and evil.

"You could see clearly the protagonist had distinct Middle Eastern features and darker skin," said Dar, 26, who pens the blog Muslim Reverie from Langhorne, Pa. "People could develop some respect for that culture instead of seeing it vilified."



So when Disney studios announced plans for a live-action adaptation of "Prince," Dar held out hope it would be a "serious story that would dispel a lot of stereotypes and misconceptions." Then came the bad news regarding "Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time" (the movie which arrives in theaters on Friday). None of its principle cast members are of Iranian, Middle Eastern or Muslim descent.

And playing Dastan, the hero and titular heir to the Persian throne in the \$200-million tent-pole film, is none other than Hancock Park's own Swedish-Jewish-American prince, Jake Gyllenhaal.

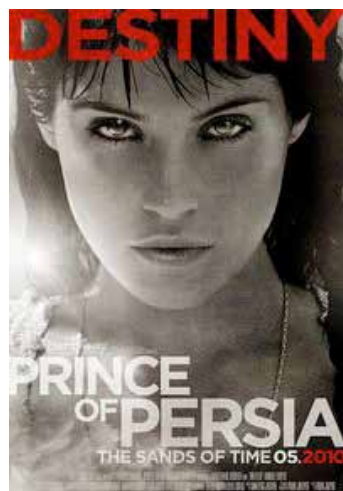
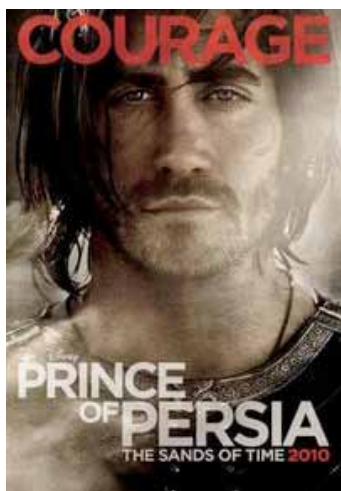
"My first reaction was, 'Really?!' " said Dar. "It's insulting that people of color — especially Middle Easterners or South Asians — are not allowed to portray ourselves in these roles. That's a big problem a lot of people in the community are having with this film."

Of course, Hollywood, has a rich history with this kind of thing. Think: John Wayne playing Genghis Khan in "The Conqueror," Peter Sellers' bumbling Indian character in "The Party" or even more notoriously, Mickey Rooney's buck-toothed Mr. Yunioshi character from "Breakfast at Tiffany's," the grandfather of all "Yellowface" stereotypes.

Although these portrayals took place decades ago, their legacy lives on. Even now, in the age of Obama — when the newly installed Miss USA Rima Fakih is Lebanese American, Will Smith is the biggest movie star in the world and Sonia Sotomayor became the first Latina to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court — movie industry decision-makers can still seem woefully behind the times when it comes to matters of race.

Consider the latest evidence. This summer, two of the season's biggest budgeted films have sparked controversy by





installing white actors in decidedly “ethnic” parts. And some early fan reactions have varied from indignation to righteous fury to organized revolt over a perceived “whitewashing” of multi-culti characters, a practice that has come to be known as “racebending.”

In addition to Gyllenhaal and British actress Gemma Arterton’s portrayal of Iranian characters in the swords-and-sandals action epic “Prince of Persia,” Paramount has come under attack for its live-action adaptation of the Nickelodeon animated series “Avatar: The Last Airbender.”

Directed by “Sixth Sense” auteur M. Night Shyamalan, “The Last Airbender” (as the movie is called to distinguish it from a certain James Cameron-directed 3-D blockbuster) has enraged some of the show’s aficionados by casting white

actors in three of four principle roles — characters that fans of the original property insist are Asian and Native American.

And with just weeks until the movie’s July 2 release — after a year-and-a-half-long letter-writing campaign to the film’s producers and a correspondence with Paramount President Adam Goodman to underscore the importance of casting Asian actors in designated Asian roles — members of the Media Action Network for Asian Americans and an organization called [www.racebending.com](http://www.racebending.com) are urging fans to boycott “Airbender.”

The movie’s detractors have spoken against the film at six college campuses, including MIT, New York University and UCLA, also setting up booths at events such as San Francisco’s WonderCon pop culture expo to publicize their discontent. At last count, the group’s Facebook group had 7,125 supporters and attracted petitioners against the movie’s casting in 55 countries. The stated goal: to prevent “Airbender” from blooming into a lucrative three-part franchise via negative word of mouth.

“It’s unfortunate that it’s come to this,” said Racebending.com spokesman Michael Le. “They’ve constructed a film that is contrary not only to what fans expected to see but is also contrary to what America expects to see in a film released in 2010 featuring Asian culture and Asian and Native American characters as heroes.



“We want to raise awareness of the discriminatory practices of Hollywood,” Le continued. “We want to tell people this is important. It really matters.”

Guy Aoki, head and co-founder of MANAA — a crusading organization that has skirmished with TV networks and movie studios for a decade for more positive representations of Asian Americans — put a finer point on the boycotters’ concerns. “If ‘The Last Airbender’ does really well, it sends the message in Hollywood that discriminating against Asian Americans works,” he said.

Although the studios behind both “Prince of Persia” and “Airbender” have taken costly steps to not seem insensitive toward — or out of touch with

— the minority constituencies represented in their respective films, no Disney or Paramount executives would comment for this article. Nor would the producers — “Prince of Persia’s” Jerry Bruckheimer or “Airbender’s” Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall. Directors Mike Newell and Shyamalan similarly declined.

Camille Alick, project manager for MOST — Muslims On Screen & Television, a resource center providing Hollywood productions with connections to Muslim actors and accurate information on Muslim populations — had not seen the films but remains sympathetic to the studios’ decisions, and contends that her experience in the field allows her insight into such casting choices.

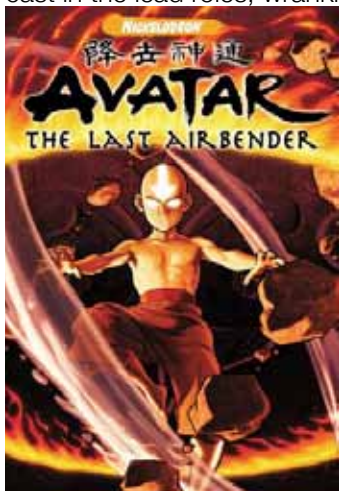
“The hope is to have an authentic depiction, but casting directors have huge jobs in front of them,” Alick said. “They’re trying to find the best person for the part. And when it’s a big budget movie, it’s going to come down to a business decision. If a major actor can carry a film, that plays a big part. It’s not malicious intent.”

Still, those among the anti-racebending camp feel that such rationalization provides a convenient excuse for keeping the prevailing system — a glass ceiling for actors of color in major movies — firmly in place.

“Hollywood can make anybody into a hero,” Aoki said. “And yet these people continue to use a conservative attitude. When are they ever going to put an Asian American as a star to disprove that thinking? For Paramount to assume people wouldn’t pay to see Asians as leads is presumptuous and insulting.”

For the uninitiated, the cartoon series “Avatar: The Last Airbender” was aimed at children but enjoyed broad crossover to all ages — earning a zealous Asian American following — during its 2005-08 TV run. Set in a Pan-Asian universe, identifiably Asian and Native American, anime-inspired characters battle one another using martial arts manipulation of the four elements. The series follows a 12-year-old named Aang (played by non-Asian actor Noah Ringer in the movie) and his band of youthful cohorts who must save the world by toppling the evil Fire Lord and ending war with the Fire Nation.

But when word leaked out last year that a casting call had gone out for the movie version requesting “Caucasians and other ethnicities,” “Airbender” fans freaked. Representatives for the Media Action Network for Asian Americans attempted to contact Paramount in an effort to influence casting decisions. The studio made no reply until after white actors had been cast in the lead roles, wrangling the members of MANAA.



On the “Airbender” set in Philadelphia, Shyamalan took issue with the accusation that “Airbender” was anything less than inclusionary to characters of color. “Ultimately, this movie, and then the three movies, will be the most culturally diverse tent-pole movies ever released, period,” he told the Los Angeles Times last summer. Nonetheless, many of the film’s detractors felt that Shyamalan, an Indian American, has betrayed his own.

“He can fill up the background with Asian characters but that doesn’t mean it’s a diverse film,” Aoki said.

Paramount provided a statement about “Airbender’s” casting choices. “The movie has 23 credited speaking roles — more than half of which feature Asian and Pan Asian actors of Korean, Japanese and Indian decent,” it reads. “The filmmaker’s interpretation reflects the myriad qualities that have made this series a global phenomenon. We believe fans of the original and new audiences alike will respond positively once they see it.”

(In an effort to short-circuit further criticism, the studio says it will screen a print of the film to Racebending.com boycotters once its last-minute conversion from 2-D to 3-D is complete.)

During “Prince of Persia’s” scripting process, Disney hired BoomGen Studios, a consultation and niche marketing firm



specializing in creative content about the Middle East, to help address issues of historical congruity and cultural contexts. Consultants advised the filmmakers to avoid specifically characterizing religion by setting “Prince” in a “mythological time” before the arrival of Islam. As well, the company worked to assure members of the Iranian American community that the film was the antithesis of a recent action-adventure movie felt to vilify the people of Persia.

“We said, ‘This is the anti-‘300,’ “ said BoomGen’s co-founder Reza Aslan.

Asked point blank by the Times of London, “Isn’t Gyllenhaal a bit pale to play a Persian?” Bruckheimer delivered this history lecture. “Persians were very light skinned,” he said. “The Turks kind of changed everything. But back in the 6th century, a lot of them were blond and blue-eyed.”

Aslan confirmed the veracity of Bruckheimer’s historical appraisal. “Iranians are Aryans,” Aslan asserted. “If we went back in time 1,700 years to the mythological era, all Iranians would look like Jake Gyllenhaal.”

Gyllenhaal maintains that “Prince of Persia” is simply a slice of old-fashioned Hollywood fantasy, a bit of cinema escapism that’s as light in spirit as the vintage serials. That heritage — along with the fact that it’s based on a video game — took precedence over any real-world context for his character.

“To me, it’s not something I gave a lot of thought because all of it such a fantasy,” Gyllenhaal said last month while attending San Francisco’s WonderCon. “It’s based on a video game, not something out of history. There’s nothing real about this. It’s just an adventure and it’s fun and it’s strange in a way to hold one part of it and say, ‘That’s not real or right.’

“Blogger Jehanzeb Dar and people he has communicated with in the Iranian-American community, meanwhile, see the issue differently. “A lot of people feel its offensive and insensitive,” Dar said. “It’s another example of Hollywood doing its racebending.”

Jack Shaheen, author of “Reel Bad Arabs” and a frequent commentator on Hollywood’s distortions of Muslim cultures and people, refused to condemn “Prince of Persia’s” depiction of ancient Iranians until seeing the film. But he critiqued the film industry’s conventional wisdom that mainstream audiences won’t shell out to see a non-white lead in a big-budget film.

“Hollywood is making a mistake,” Shaheen said. “As a society, we’re not seeing color like we used to. We’re more integrated than we used to be. The country is changing. But I don’t think Hollywood is at the forefront of that change.”

– Chris Lee

Read here: <http://herocomplex.latimes.com/2010/05/22/racebending/>





## BBC'S TALKING MOVIES INTERVIEWS BOOMGEN CEO, MAHYAD TOUSI, TO DISCUSS THEIR WORK ON DISNEY'S PRINCE OF PERSIA.

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**Jul 17, 2010 9:04am**

by [BBC Talking Movies](#)  
12:45

reports on Hollywood's less than glorious portrayal of Iranians over the decades - we start our evolution with Prince of Persia: the Sands of Time.

Watch here: <https://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=413738648236&oid=115246171845694&comments>



## RIZ KHAN - LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE

*This episode of the Riz Khan show aired on Thursday, July 31, 2008*

How did a bunch of Muslims living on the rural North American prairie become some of the most popular characters in Canada?

The comedy show Little Mosque on the Prairie is now syndicated in more than 60 countries and a deal has just been made to bring it to the US.

So what lessons can the residents of the fictional town of Mercy provide on how to avoid a “clash of civilisations”?

Riz Khan talks to two of the show’s stars - Sitara Hewitt, who plays Rayyan, and Manoj Sood, who plays Baber. We also speak to the programme’s executive producer, Mary Darling, and Iranian-American indie filmmaker, and CEO of BoomGe Studios, Mahyad

Watch here: <http://www.blinkx.com/watch-video/riz-khan-little-mosque-on-the-prairie-31-jul-08-part-2/0RnJgJ80Ysvhk8zfPQ2qcQ>

