



FIRST EDITION · V1.5
FOR CREW, BY CREW
FREE TO READ · FREE TO SHARE

THE #SET LIFE HANDBOOK

A guidebook for crew —
on set, and in the life.

PROPERTY OF _____

DEPARTMENT _____

IF FOUND, HAND IT BACK.

READ BEFORE
HOUR FOURTEEN

THIS BOOK IS FREE. KEEP IT THAT WAY.

Copy it. Print it. Email it. Translate it. Put it on your production's onboarding drive. Hand it to the new person on day one.

The digital edition is free, forever, with nothing to fill in and nobody to ask. If you print copies, print them at cost. Nobody should be making money off this book — including us.

It is written for the 22-year-old PA on their third day and the 40-year operator who has forgotten more than the rest of us know. Both of you need the same seven things. One of you needs them explained; the other needs them remembered.

WHAT THIS IS NOT

This is not a contract, a legal document, or a substitute for your union, your rep, your steward, or a lawyer. It is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or produced by IATSE, ICG Local 600, or any studio, guild, or employer. Where it points to their published material, it points — it does not reproduce, and it does not speak for them.

Nothing here overrides your collective bargaining agreement, your local's rules, your production's safety protocols, or the instruction of a qualified safety professional standing in front of you.

Where this book and any of those disagree, **they win.**

CORRECTIONS

Some of what's in here is opinion and some of it is fact, and you deserve to know which is which. Where a fact is cited, the source is listed at the back. If something is wrong — especially a name, a date, or a phone number — say so and it gets fixed in the next edition.

media@rollonthis.pro · see the back cover.

BEFORE YOU READ ANOTHER PAGE

Put this number in your phone right now, under a name you'll recognize at 2 a.m.

ICG SAFETY HOTLINE (877) 424-4685

You do not have to be a Local 600 member to call it. If a hazard isn't their jurisdiction, they will point you to whose it is.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

THE ONES WHO DIDN'T GET TO GO HOME.

Every rule in this handbook was written in advance by
someone who paid for it.

MARK MILSOME

CAMERA OPERATOR · 54 · 18 NOVEMBER 2017

On a Saturday afternoon in November 2017, Mark Milsome rang home from Accra. He called his wife Andra and his eleven-year-old daughter Alice every evening at her bedtime, but there was a night shoot scheduled — the last day on location, in Achimota Forest, a Land Rover rolling onto its side. He rang to say he couldn't call at bedtime, but he'd speak to them in the morning.

The risk assessment written before the production reached Ghana specified that the two cameras filming the stunt should be **unmanned**.

On the night, the plan changed. Three positions, all manned. It was the biggest stunt of the shoot and they wanted to capture it properly.

The vehicle went for Mark instead of the ramp. He was killed. His colleague Paul Kemp was injured.

THE CORONER'S FINDING

West London Coroner's Court, 23 October 2020: shortly before the execution of the stunt, the risk of Mr Milsome being harmed or fatally injured **was not effectively recognized, assessed, communicated or managed**.

His credits included *Sherlock*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Quantum of Solace*. His family, friends and colleagues founded the Mark Milsome Foundation, which now runs a free health and safety course for crew and funds scholarships for young technicians. Robert De Niro, Judi Dench and three thousand working crew wore its T-shirt on the first anniversary of his death.

Remember this one when you are asked to put your body somewhere a remote head could go instead.
The human eye does not have to be behind the camera or the eyepiece.

HALYNA HUTCHINS

CINEMATOGRAPHER · 42 · 21 OCTOBER 2021

Killed on the set of *Rust* when a loaded firearm discharged a live round during a rehearsal. The chain of custody of that weapon had been broken and it was declared cold by someone totally unqualified to handle it or speak of it. Live ammunition — which has no reason to exist on any film set at all — was present and unaccounted for.

Not one of those was a new hazard. Every rule that would have stopped it was already written. The system built to keep crew alive did not fail because it was inadequate. It failed because it was not followed.

SARAH JONES

2ND ASSISTANT CAMERA · 27 · 20 FEBRUARY 2014

Killed on a live railroad trestle over the Altamaha River in Georgia, filming *Midnight Rider*. The production had twice been denied permission to be on those tracks. The crew was not told. There was no safety meeting, no medic, no railroad personnel present. When the freight train appeared they had about a minute to clear. Eight others were injured. Her parents founded Safety for Sarah. Their words: *never forget, never again*.

BRENT HERSHMAN

CAMERA ASSISTANT · 35 · MARCH 1997

Died driving home from a nineteen-hour day on *Pleasantville*, which followed four fifteen-hour days. He fell asleep at the wheel and struck a utility pole. He is the reason we argue about turnaround, and the reason Haskell Wexler made *Who Needs Sleep?* Nearly thirty years on, the argument is not won.

CONWAY WICKLIFFE

CAMERA / SFX TECHNICIAN · 41 · SEPTEMBER 2007

Father of two. Killed during a test run on *The Dark Knight* in Surrey, leaning out of a vehicle with a handheld camera when the car left the road and struck a tree. He was not strapped in.

JOHN BERNECKER

STUNT PERFORMER • 33 • 12 JULY 2017

Killed on *The Walking Dead* in Georgia, falling more than twenty feet onto concrete, missing the pad by inches.

JOI “SJ” HARRIS

STUNT PERFORMER • 14 AUGUST 2017

Professional motorcycle road racer. Killed on *Deadpool 2* in Vancouver.

HARRY O'CONNOR

STUNT PERFORMER • 2002

Killed on *XXX* in Prague, on a second take of a stunt he had already landed clean on the first.

JACK TYREE

STUNT PERFORMER • 37 • 1981

Killed on *The Sword and the Sorcerer*, missing the airbag by two feet after an eighty-foot fall.

BRANDON LEE

ACTOR • 28 • 31 MARCH 1993

Killed on *The Crow* by a firearm everyone believed was safe. Every live-fire protocol we have descends from that day — and we still had to learn it again in 2021.

VIC MORROW • MYCA DINH LE, 7 • RENEE SHIN-YI CHEN, 6

23 JULY 1982

Killed on *Twilight Zone: The Movie*. The Industry-Wide Labor-Management Safety Committee and every numbered Safety Bulletin you can download today exist because of that night.

AND FOR THE INJURED —

WHO ARE MORE NUMEROUS AND LESS REMEMBERED.

Joyce Gilliard, who nearly lost an arm on that trestle in Georgia and has spent the years since organizing for the rest of us. **Paul Kemp**, injured beside Mark Milsome. **Joel Souza**. The seven others hit by that train. Everyone carrying a back, a knee, a shoulder, an ear or a set of nerves that never came back right.

.....

THIS LIST IS INCOMPLETE. DELIBERATELY.

There is no complete registry of crew killed making motion pictures. No memorial wall. No industry count. Non-union deaths, overseas deaths, second-unit deaths and the ones who died on the drive home mostly go unrecorded.

The names on the preceding pages are the ones whose deaths changed a rule, started a foundation, or forced a hearing — which is a filter that says more about who gets attention than about who was lost.

So this page is left open on purpose.

WRITE THEIRS IN.

BEFORE YOU START

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Three parts. They are meant to be read in completely different ways, and the design tells you which is which.

I • THE SEVEN P.9

Read at home, on a plane, on a day off. Slowly. This is the why.

10 Safety is the only non-negotiable · **12** Be the calm, not the quiet · **14** Stay a student · **16** Solve, don't spiral · **18** Respect the gear, the space, the people · **20** A privilege, not a debt · **22** It's only art

II • THE FIELD GUIDE P.24

Read standing up — on the truck, in the van, before a stunt. This is what you actually say.

25 The Stop Work Script · **28** Numbers for your phone · **29** The drive home · **31** Money is a safety device · **32** When you screw up · **33** Harassment & bystanding · **34** The body · **35** Set etiquette · **36** On the clock

III • TOUGH DAY PROTOCOLS P.37

Read at hour fourteen, when it has gone sideways. This is how you get through the next hour.

38 The 90-second reset · **39** Hour fourteen · **40** The 3 a.m. company move · **41** The day you hate this job · **42** The job that didn't call back · **43** Why you got into this · **45** Bigger than a bad day · **46** The wrap beer · **47** Where to go

.....

If you only ever read one page of this book, make it **The Stop Work Script** on page 25.



THE SEVEN

These are the load-bearing walls.
Everything else is trim.

1

RULE ONE

SAFETY IS THE ONLY NON-NEGOTIABLE

Everything else in this book is a preference. This one isn't.

Every other value here bends under pressure and should. Schedules change. Tempers fray. You eat a note you disagree with, you carry a bag that isn't yours, you make the day. That is the job.

Safety does not bend. Not for the light. Not for the day. Not for the director you want to work with again.

You will be told — sometimes out loud, far more often with a look — that flagging a hazard makes you difficult. Whoever tells you that is asking you to bet your body on their schedule. It is not a fair trade and you are not obligated to take it.

THE FIELD TEST

Someone says *"we're fine, let's just get it."*

If your stomach drops when you hear that sentence, your stomach is correct. Trust it before you talk yourself out of it — because you will begin talking yourself out of it within about four seconds.

THE TRAP

Thinking safety is somebody else's department. There is a medic, and a safety rep, and a key, and a UPM — and not one of them is standing where you are standing, seeing what you can see.

On the day, the safety officer is whoever noticed.

.....

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF. LOOK AFTER EACH OTHER.

Drink water. That sounds far too small to sit beneath a rule this heavy. It isn't.

Dehydration is the front door to bad judgment, and bad judgment is the front door to everything else in this chapter. So is fourteen hours on your feet, so is skipping second meal, so is the fifth coffee standing in for the sleep you didn't get. **You are the safety equipment.** Maintain it the way you'd maintain a rig you were about to hang over someone's head.

And look sideways. The person next to you is worse at protecting themselves than you are at protecting them — that's just how it works, for all of us. Say the thing. *"You've been on that ladder a long time."* *"Have you eaten?"* *"Let me spot you."*

Rule One in four words:

NOBODY GETS HURT TODAY.

"There's always time to shoot it again, but never time to shoot it right in the first place."

SAID ON EVERY SET, FOREVER

Usually by whoever was about to be proven right.

If you're ever choosing between Rule One and any other rule in this book, there is no choice to be made.

2

RULE TWO

BE THE CALM, NOT THE QUIET

Not *positive*. **Regulated.**

I want to be careful here, because the version of this rule that circulates on sets — *always be positive, smile in the face of adversity* — is the most dangerous idea in our culture, and it wears a friendly face.

Nobody died because a crew member was rude. People died because someone didn't want to be the one who slowed the day down. Killed the vibe. Looked green. Seemed difficult. Made it weird.

**Enforced positivity is how a set goes quiet
right before it goes wrong.**

So: be the calm, not the quiet.

Calm is a gift you hand the people around you. A regulated 1st AC makes an entire department work better. A panicking one makes everybody slower and dumber — and bandwidth is the thing that catches the loose sandbag.

But calm is not compliance, and a smile is not consent. You can be the most pleasant person on the set and still say *no*. In fact you should be — because it makes the *no* land twice as hard. The people who get listened to when it matters are the ones who never cried wolf and never made it personal.

THE FIELD TEST

Your chest goes tight and your voice climbs. **Stop.** Put your hands on something solid.

Breathe out longer than you breathe in. Three rounds. Then speak.

(Full protocol on page 37.)

THE TRAP

Confusing *don't lose your shit* with *don't have feelings*. Have them. Have them on the walk to the truck, have them in the car, have them out loud to one trusted person at wrap.

Just don't spray them on a twenty-two-year-old PA who has been awake for sixteen hours and has approximately no power in this situation. That isn't venting. That's just running downhill.

SMILE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY — PROPERLY

There is a real version of this and it's worth keeping. It is not *pretend everything is fine*. It's this: when the day falls apart, somebody has to be the person who doesn't. Being that person is a genuine service and it is often the most valuable thing you contribute all day.

Be that person on purpose. Just never let being that person cost somebody their body.

3

RULE THREE

STAY A STUDENT

The masters are still students. That isn't a nice sentiment. It's a job description.

The moment you decide you have it figured out is the moment you become dangerous, because certainty is precisely what stops you from checking. The DP with forty years and eleven features is the one asking the gaffer what they think. The one who isn't asking is the one everybody has quietly learned to work around.

LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK

Most of what you need to know on any given day is being said out loud, within earshot, by somebody who has been on this show longer than you have. You will not hear it if you are composing your next sentence.

LEARN WHEN TO OFFER AN IDEA — AND WHEN TO HOLD IT

This is a real skill and it takes years. Rough guide: **a good idea offered at the wrong moment is a bad idea.**

If the AD is calling the roll, if the director is with the actor, if your key is mid-solve — hold it. Write it on your hand. Offer it in the van, at second meal, or tomorrow at crew call. It will still be a good idea then, and it will be heard instead of resented.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF MISTAKES

Everyone makes them. The people who claim otherwise are either lying or not working. Full protocol for the bad ones is on page 32.

BUT AVOID THE CLASSIC SMART PERSON'S MISTAKE

Thinking you're smarter than everyone else in the room.

You are, occasionally, on a narrow question. Fine. **You are never smarter than the room.** The room contains forty years of scar tissue you cannot see, and most of the rules you find stupid are scar tissue — somebody got hurt, and this is what got written down afterwards.

Before you route around a rule, find out which accident wrote it.

REMAIN HUMBLE

Not *small* — **humble**. There's a difference and it matters. Humble people take up exactly as much space as their job requires and no more. They are not quiet, deferential, or invisible. They are just not performing for an audience.

.....

Ask the question you think will make you look stupid. It's the same question four other people have and are too proud to ask — and one day it'll be the one that stops the day.

4

RULE FOUR

SOLVE, DON'T SPIRAL

Filmmaking is collaborative problem-solving. That isn't a metaphor — it's the literal content of the work. The art sits on top of a thousand small solved problems, and every one of them was solved by two or more people talking.

So when something breaks, the question is never *whose fault is this*. On the day, fault is a luxury item. The only question is: **what is the fastest safe path to the next shot?**

SAY IT ONCE, TO THE PERSON WHO CAN ACT ON IT

Then propose something. Even a bad proposal beats a naked complaint, because a bad proposal gives somebody something to correct.

COMPLAINT →

"The C-stand won't clear the doorway."

SOLVE →

"The C-stand won't clear the doorway. I can get it on a wall plate in five, or we lose the kicker."

Same information. Completely different person delivering it.

PRACTICE GOOD JUDGMENT

Which mostly means knowing the difference between a problem that needs to go up the chain *right now* and a problem you can quietly handle.

Both errors cost you. Escalating everything makes you exhausting and people stop listening — which is catastrophic on the day you actually need them to. Escalating nothing makes you a liability.

THE ROUGH SORT

- **Escalate now:** anything involving a body, a vehicle, height, water, fire, electricity, a firearm, or money the production doesn't know it's spending.
- **Handle it:** almost everything else, once.
- **Escalate later:** patterns. One bad call is a bad call. The same bad call three times is a conversation for your key at wrap.

THE TRAP

Solving so fast that you skip the safety question. Speed is a genuine virtue in this job right up until the moment it isn't, and the moment it isn't never announces itself.

Rule One outranks this one. Always. Without exception. Nobody gets hurt today.

A note for the ambitious: being the person who solves things is how you get hired again. Being the person who solves things *without checking* is how you get someone hurt and then never get hired again. The gap between those two people is about four seconds of thought.

5

RULE FIVE

RESPECT THE GEAR, THE SPACE, THE PEOPLE

Treat everyone's equipment as if it were your own. Better than your own, in fact — treat it as if it's rented, uninsured, and belongs to somebody who is counting on it to feed a family. A great deal of the time, that is exactly true.

This rule extends outward in rings.

THE GEAR

Don't touch what isn't yours. Don't move it, lean on it, sit on it, or set your coffee on it. If you must handle another department's kit, ask first and hand it off deliberately — two hands, eye contact, wait for the take.

A camera body is somebody's mortgage. A grip's dolly is their career.

THE SPACE

Locations are somebody's home, somebody's church, somebody's business, somebody's forest. Leave it cleaner than you found it. Kill the generator when you can. Pull the tape off the floor.

Our reputation in every town we shoot in is built entirely by crew behavior at wrap, when nobody is watching and everybody is tired.

THE PEOPLE

Every single person, at every level, gets kindness and respect as the **default** — not as a reward for seniority, or talent, or usefulness to you.

The PA holding traffic in the rain is doing a harder job than most of us today. The caterer feeds a hundred people out of a truck. The background actor has been sitting in a holding tent for nine hours with no information. The driver was here two hours before you and will leave two hours after.

Be a team player. The credit is collective. So is the blame. So — and this is the part people forget — is the danger.

THE TEST THAT NEVER FAILS

How you treat the person with the least power on the set, on the worst day, when you are exhausted and nobody senior is watching. That's it. That's the whole measurement, and everybody around you is quietly taking it.

LEARN NAMES IN THE FIRST THREE DAYS

All of them. Write them down on the back of your sides if you have to. It is the single highest-return investment available on any show and it costs nothing but attention.

A person whose name you know will tell you the thing they noticed. A person whose name you never learned will assume somebody else already mentioned it.

6

RULE SIX

THIS IS A PRIVILEGE — NOT A DEBT

Somebody is, right now, doing everything they can think of to get the job you are complaining about.

That isn't a scolding. It's a calibration tool.

On the eleventh hour of a fourteen-hour day in a parking lot in February, your nervous system will tell you that this is suffering. It is not suffering. It is a hard, well-paid, wildly unusual job that most people on earth will never get to touch — and you talked your way into it.

Notice it. Say it out loud sometimes. **You get paid to make pictures move.**



But hold the second half just as tightly, because you will need it:

Gratitude is not a debt.

“You’re lucky to be here” is also the oldest tool in the business for getting people to accept unsafe conditions, unpaid hours, and behavior nobody would tolerate in any other industry.

When somebody weaponizes your gratitude, that is a *them* problem being loaded onto you, and you are permitted to notice it happening. The feeling of luck you have about this job is real and it is yours. It is not collateral, and nobody gets to spend it on your behalf.

Grateful and unexploitable are entirely compatible. Practice being both at once. The best people in this industry all are.

TWO SENTENCES WORTH KEEPING

"I love this job."

"And I'm not doing that."

PRACTICE GRATITUDE, LITERALLY

Not as a mood. As a habit with a specific target. Once a day, on set, find one concrete thing and register it:

- The way somebody solved something in front of you.
- The light at magic hour that you got paid to stand in.
- The fact that this whole enormous machine exists to make something up.
- One person who made your day easier.

Then tell them. Out loud, by name, specifically. *"That was a great call on the flag."* Ten seconds. It is the cheapest and most powerful thing available to you on a film set, and almost nobody does it.

7

RULE SEVEN

IT'S ONLY ART

Say it out loud on the bad days.

The director is not curing anything. The shot is not saving anyone. **You are making pictures move.**

We are entertainers, not medical wizards. Nobody on this call sheet is performing surgery. When the tension in the room starts to feel like the tension in an operating theatre, somebody has lost the plot — and it is usually somebody who is not standing anywhere near the danger.

.....

But hold the other half of it, and hold it hard:

**It's only art —
and people have died making it.**

Mark Milsome, filming a car stunt at night in Ghana. Sarah Jones on a live trestle in Georgia. Brent Hershman, driving home. Halyna Hutchins, in a church in New Mexico. Conway Wickliffe, leaning out of a car window.

None of them were making anything worth their lives.

And every one of them was on a day where somebody decided the schedule mattered more than it did.

.....

SO “IT’S ONLY ART” IS NOT PERMISSION TO CARE LESS

It’s permission to **refuse**.

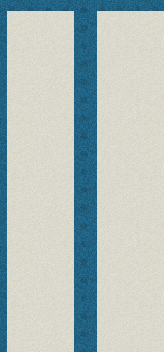
It is the sentence that makes the answer obvious when the pressure builds and everyone is looking at you and the light is going and the answer is supposed to be complicated. It isn’t complicated.

Nothing on the call sheet is worth your body, or anyone else’s. Not the light. Not the day. Not the shot. Not the film. Not the career.

Care enormously about the work.

Care more about the people making it.

When those two ever come into conflict — it’s only art.



THE FIELD GUIDE

Read this part standing up.
Scripts, numbers, checklists.

THE STOP WORK SCRIPT

Learn these words now, so you don't have to find them under pressure.
Under pressure, nobody finds them.

1 · SAY IT OUT LOUD, IMMEDIATELY, TO THE PERSON WHO CAN STOP IT

**"I need to stop for a second.
I'm not comfortable with this and I want to talk it through before we go."**

Say it flat. Not apologetic, not aggressive, not loud. **You are not asking permission. You are stating a condition.**

Do not soften it into a question. *"Are we sure about this?"* can be answered with *"yeah, we're good"* and the day rolls straight over you. A statement cannot.

2 · NAME THE SPECIFIC HAZARD, NOT THE FEELING

**"The pad's short of the mark by about a foot."
"I'll be inside the vehicle's path if it comes off the ramp."
"That rig isn't tied off and I'm working under it."**

Specific hazards get fixed. Vague unease gets managed.

3 · ASK THE FOUR QUESTIONS

- ☐ What is the plan if this goes wrong?
- ☐ Who is in charge of this specific hazard?
- ☐ Has everyone on set been informed?
- ☐ **Can we do it a way where nobody is physically near the hazard?**

That last question solves most of it.

A HUMAN EYE DOES NOT NEED TO BE BEHIND THE CAMERA OR THE EYEPIECE

Remote heads exist. Unmanned cameras exist. Mark Milsome's own risk assessment specified unmanned cameras — and on the night, three were manned instead.

If a shot can be done without a human body in a danger zone, this is not a compromise. This is the firm correct call.

4 · ESCALATE, IN ORDER

1 Your key

2 Department head

3 1st AD

4 UPM / Producer

5 **Union rep or on-set steward**

6 **ICG Safety Hotline (877) 424-4685**

7 OSHA / local authority

Don't skip steps out of anger. Don't stall out on a step either. **If two levels have brushed you off, go to the third.** That is not disloyalty; that is the ladder working as designed.

That number belongs on the front page of every call sheet. If it isn't on yours, that is worth asking about.

5 · WRITE IT DOWN BEFORE YOU SLEEP

Date. Time. Location. What you said. Who you said it to. What they said back. Photograph the condition if you can do so safely. Text a colleague so there is a timestamp that isn't yours.

Contemporaneous notes are the single most useful thing you can produce if this ever becomes a grievance, an insurance claim, or a hearing. Memory degrades. A note taken at 11:40pm does not.

6 · KNOW WHAT PROTECTS YOU

Federal law protects workers who refuse work they reasonably believe is imminently dangerous, and prohibits retaliation for raising safety complaints. The detail is genuinely complicated and fact-specific — which is exactly why Local 600 publishes a **Safety Bill of Rights** that answers, in plain language:

- Can I stop working if asked to do something unsafe?
- What should I say?
- What protects me if I do this?
- Can I be fired for it?
- What if I'm retaliated against?

Download it before you need it.

icg600.com/safety-bill-rights

I'm not a lawyer and neither is your key. If you're retaliated against, call your rep the same day — not the same week.

7 · DO IT AS A GROUP WHEN YOU CAN

Concerted action by multiple workers on a safety issue generally carries stronger legal protection than one person acting alone, and it is far harder to isolate a crew than an individual.

If your gut says stop, quietly ask the person next to you what they think. Nine times out of ten they were feeling it too and waiting for someone to go first. Be the one who goes first.

DO THIS NOW, NOT LATER

NUMBERS FOR YOUR PHONE

Save them under names you will recognize at 2 a.m. in the rain with one bar of signal.

CONTACT	NUMBER
ICG Local 600 Safety Hotline	(877) 424-4685
Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (US) — call or text	988
Samaritans (UK/IE)	116 123
Your local's business rep	
Your steward on this show	
Set medic (today's call sheet)	
Nearest hospital to location	
Production 24hr emergency line	
Someone who will come get you	

ALSO INSTALL

The ICG Safety App. Free, and the most useful thing on your phone at hour fifteen. It sends a hazard report straight to a Business Rep and opens a two-way chat — so you are not standing there on your own, deciding whether it's worth making a call.

Every report is handled confidentially, and members of other Locals are invited to file one too. **Install it now.** The moment you need it is the one moment you can't.

Take thirty seconds. Genuinely. Put the book down and do it. The rest of this chapter assumes you have.

THE DRIVE HOME

This is the part of the job most likely to kill you.

Brent Hershman died in 1997 after a nineteen-hour day that followed four fifteen-hour days. He fell asleep at the wheel and hit a utility pole. He was thirty-five.

Nearly thirty years later, a survey of UK crew by the Mark Milsome Foundation found that **working hours, sleep deprivation and driving tired remain the top health and safety concerns in the industry.** The same survey found 62% of crew believe current health and safety regulation needs improving, and 20% think it isn't adequate at all.

We have not fixed this. Until we do, you have to manage it yourself.

THE MATH NOBODY DOES OUT LOUD

A 14-hour day plus an hour each way of commute is a 16-hour absence. A 10-hour turnaround gives you six hours of horizontal time before you're back in the car — before food, before a shower, before saying a word to anyone you love. Do that four days running and you are, functionally, impaired.

Sustained wakefulness degrades reaction time comparably to alcohol intoxication. You would not let a colleague drive drunk. Treat this identically, including when the colleague is you.

THE RULE TO ACTUALLY KEEP

If you have to ask yourself whether you're safe to drive — you're not.

The question only occurs to an impaired brain. A rested one never wonders.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

- 1 Ask for a ride or a room.** Local 600 runs a Safety Rides & Rooms Initiative for exactly this. Productions carry safe-ride budgets far more often than crew realize, and the ask is dramatically less career-damaging than crew assume. *“I’ve been up nineteen hours, I need a ride”* is a normal sentence spoken by normal professionals. **Keep an overnight bag in your vehicle at all times — toothbrush, charger, clean socks — in case you end up staying over unexpectedly.** It turns “I’m not driving” from a crisis into a decision.
- 2 Sleep in your vehicle.** Doors locked, alarm set, seat back. This is not defeat — it is the cheapest safety equipment in existence. But a nap is not a cure for nineteen hours. **If you still feel it when the alarm goes, you don’t drive. You call someone.**
- 3 Split the drive.** Pair up with someone heading your direction and rotate. Two tired people are meaningfully safer than one.
- 4 Say the number, not the adjective.** Not *“I’m tired.”* Say *“I’ve been awake nineteen hours.”* Numbers move people. Adjectives get absorbed into the general fog of everyone being tired.

TURNAROUND

Know your agreement’s turnaround provision and know what a forced call costs the production. You are not being precious by tracking it.

A penalty is the only language a schedule understands. If you don’t count your hours, nobody counts them for you — and the schedule will keep taking exactly as much as it is allowed to take.

MONEY IS A SAFETY DEVICE

This belongs in a safety book and almost never appears in one.

You cannot say no to an unsafe day if you can't afford to lose the week.

Every piece of courage in this section is underwritten by your bank balance. That is ugly, and it is true, and pretending otherwise is how people end up on the trestle.

- **Know your rate exactly.** Overtime structure, turnaround penalty, meal penalties, box and kit rental. Not roughly — exactly. Ignorance here is not humility. It's just expensive.
- **Build the runway.** Three months of expenses in cash. In a feast-or-famine business this isn't financial planning; it's the thing that lets you walk off a bad set.
- **Track your days.** Health and pension hours don't count themselves. Every year, people fall short of qualifying by a handful of days they genuinely worked and never reported.
- **Report your job.** Unreported work is how rates get undercut for everybody coming up behind you.
- **Get the disability and workers' comp information before you're hurt.** Your local publishes it. Nobody reads it until they're flat on their back and it's a bad time to be learning.

The most radical thing a freelancer can do is be boring about money. A dull savings account is a political act. It is the difference between having principles and being able to afford them.

WHEN YOU SCREW UP

You will. Everyone named in the dedication of this book worked alongside people who screwed up and lived. **The screw-up isn't the test. The next ninety seconds are.**

- 1 Say it immediately.** The gap between the mistake and the disclosure is where careers actually die. A dropped mag disclosed instantly is a problem. The same mag disclosed at wrap is a character reference.
- 2 Say it to the right person. Once.** Your key or department head. Not the whole channel. Not the director. Not fourteen people in ascending panic.
- 3 Say it flat.** *"I dropped it. The lens is on the ground. Here's what I think we should do."* No adjectives. No self-flagellation — that's a performance, and it forces everyone else to manage your feelings in the middle of a crisis.
- 4 Propose the fix, then take the note.** Have a solution ready. Then shut up and do what your key says, even if you disagree.
- 5 Take it home once, then put it down.** Review it on the drive. What was the actual chain of events? What would you change? Then stop. Grinding a mistake for three weeks doesn't make you conscientious. It makes you slow the next time it matters.

WHEN SOMEBODY ELSE SCREWS UP

Don't pile on. Correcting someone else's mistake is their key's job, not yours. What you do is help fix it, and then never mention it again — not at lunch, not at wrap, not in three years.

That's how you earn the same treatment on your day. And you will have your day.

HARASSMENT, BULLYING, BYSTANDING

Safety is not only physical. A set where people are frightened to speak is a set where hazards go unmentioned. **That is the same problem wearing different clothes.**

IF IT'S HAPPENING TO YOU

You do not have to absorb it to be professional. Document it — date, time, words used, witnesses. Your local publishes its harassment and discrimination policies and its reporting channels; Local 600's are on the safety pages. Your rep will take the call, and taking the call is literally their job.

IF YOU SEE IT HAPPENING TO SOMEONE ELSE

This is the whole skill, and it's four options. You only need one.

DIRECT	Name it in the moment. <i>"That's not okay." / "Let's not."</i>
DISTRACT	Interrupt with something mundane. <i>"Hey, can you help me with this cart?"</i> Getting the target out of the situation is a complete win. It does not have to be a confrontation.
DELEGATE	Get the key, the AD, the steward, the rep.
DELAY	Check on them after. <i>"That was out of line. Are you okay? Do you want me to say something?"</i>

Behind the Scenes runs free bystander-intervention webinars built for entertainment workplaces. Take one, and the words will already be loaded when you need them.

The thing to internalize: the target is almost always the person least able to speak. If you have more standing in that room than they do — more years, more rank, more security — then spending some of it is the entire job.

THE BODY

Nobody warns you that this is an athletic career with no off-season, no trainer, and no one tracking your minutes.

- **Backs.** Lift with the legs — and far more importantly, *ask for the second person*. The most common cause of crew back injuries is one person moving a two-person object because asking felt slower.
- **Knees.** Kneepads. Yes, really. Your fifties are watching you right now.
- **Ears.** Hearing loss is cumulative and permanent. Carry plugs. Effects days, gunfire days, generator-adjacent days, tarmac days.
- **Eyes.** Brightness down. Every twenty minutes, look at something twenty feet away for twenty seconds. Long-lens operating and DIT work will cook your eyes across a decade.
- **Feet.** Real boots. Replace them before they're dead. You stand for a living.
- **Sun and cold.** Reapply. Layer. Exposure compounds the fatigue that causes the bad decisions in Part One.
- **Food and water.** Eat at second meal even when you're not hungry. Bottle with your name on it, filled at every reset. Hydration is a cognitive intervention, not a wellness gesture.

SUBSTANCES

The wrap beer is a tradition, and for a meaningful number of people in this industry it is also the top of a slide. Rates of substance problems in entertainment run well above the general population — on brutal hours, no routine, and a culture that treats endurance as identity.

If you're wondering about yourself, that wondering is data. Behind the Scenes funds counseling grants — money toward therapy, inpatient or outpatient — for people who do exactly this job.

SET ETIQUETTE THEY DON'T PUT IN WRITING

The stuff that decides whether you get called again. None of it appears in any contract.

- **Be early. Don't start early.** Early is on time. On time is late. But your day starts when the call sheet says it starts — coffee, breakfast, read the sides, walk the location. Don't push a cart or build anything until you're on the clock. (*See overleaf.*)
- **Radio discipline.** Short, clear, name first. “*Camera to Grip.*” Wait for the acknowledgment. Never editorialize on channel — the whole show hears you, including the people you're talking about.
- **Don't cross the eyeline.** Ever.
- **When someone calls “flying in” or “points” — repeat it.** Silence means nobody heard.
- **Don't sit in the actor's chair, the director's chair, or anybody's cart.**
- **Don't complain on the walkie, in the van, or at craft.** It travels, always, and faster than you think. Vent to one person, off set, once.
- **Have empathy — and know your limit.** Helping another department is how crews stay crews. Just know what it's costing you, and what you're taking on. (*See overleaf.*)
- **Never say “that's not my job.”** Say “*let me find the right person for that.*” Identical information. Opposite reputation.
- **Don't vanish.** Smoke, vape, call home, whatever you need — but tell someone where you're going and stay findable. The problem was never the cigarette. It's your key looking for you.
- **Say goodnight.** To your department, to the AD, to the PA on lockup. Two seconds. It is the difference between a crew and a group of contractors who happened to eat in the same parking lot.

“Take it easy, Mr. AD — this stuff is all done by hand.”

EVERY DEPARTMENT, TO EVERY AD, SINCE 1895

ON THE CLOCK, AND IN YOUR OWN LANE

BE EARLY. DON'T START EARLY.

Working before call is free labor, and productions get plenty of it from eager young crew. **If you're hurt doing it, expect the claim to be fought.** Being on the clock isn't the legal test — being at work doing work is — but you'd be making that argument injured, out of work, with no paperwork showing you were even there. Insurers dispute off-the-clock claims as a matter of course.

If there is work that has to happen to stay ahead of the day, let production know that you will need a 30-minute pre-call. That is what a pre-call is for, it puts you on the call sheet, and it is a normal ask.

HAVE EMPATHY — AND KNOW YOUR LIMIT.

Helping another department is how crews stay crews. Do it. But three things get spent when you do, and you should know all three.

What it takes out of you. You have a finite amount of body and attention in a day, and you need it for your own department at hour fourteen. Someone who burns it being useful elsewhere isn't sharper for it — they're just tired earlier, in the job they're responsible for.

And what it lets production take. Every hole you quietly cover for free teaches the schedule it doesn't need filling. A department that's always short doesn't need goodwill — it needs another body on the call sheet.

And what you're taking on. Coiling cable, grabbing an end of a case, holding a door — nobody's ever been hurt by that. But the moment you're doing another department's actual work, the risk moves onto you. If the case drops, if the gear is damaged, if someone gets hurt, you were the one with your hands on it and you weren't the person trained or assigned to be. **Wanting to help is good. Sometimes it isn't worth what you're standing to lose.**

Help freely — just don't let it become the reason nobody notices the gap. If you can see a heavy day coming, ask your key to ask production for the help *before* the day, not during it. **Read the script. Read the advance schedule.** Every problem is cheaper a week out than it is on the day.



TOUGH DAY PROTOCOLS

For hour fourteen.

Read whichever one applies.

THE 90-SECOND RESET

For when it's rising in your chest and you are about to say something you'll be apologizing for at wrap.

- 1 Step away.** Behind the truck, in the stairwell, anywhere out of eyeline. Ninety seconds is always available to you, and you are worth very little to the shot in your current condition anyway.
- 2 Breathe out longer than you breathe in.** In for four, out for eight. Three rounds. This isn't a mood thing — a longer exhale is the mechanical lever for your parasympathetic nervous system. It is the closest thing you have to an off switch.
- 3 Name five things you can see.** Out loud if you're alone. This drags you out of the loop in your head and back into the room your body is standing in.
- 4 Cold water** on the wrists and the back of the neck.
- 5 Ask one question:** *what is the actual next physical action?* Not the day. Not the show. Not the situation. The next single thing your hands have to do.
- 6 Go and do that one thing.**

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A day is nothing more than the next physical action you need to undertake, repeated until wrap. Break it down. Make it manageable.

HOUR FOURTEEN

You are not a bad person right now. You are a tired person. Those two feel absolutely identical from the inside, and they are not the same thing.

At hour fourteen your judgment is degraded, your empathy is degraded, and your risk assessment is degraded. Which means this is precisely the hour to trust your *safety* instinct more and your *emotional* instinct less.

- If your gut says **unsafe** — act on it. That signal survives fatigue.
- If your gut says **that person is an idiot and I should tell them** — do not act on it. That signal does not survive fatigue.

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

- Water. Salt.
- Sitting down for four minutes.
- One minute standing in the dark with no screen.
- One honest sentence to one colleague: “*I’m cooked.*” Say it. It gives everyone within earshot permission to be human too, and somebody needed that permission more than you did.

WHAT DOESN'T

- The fifth coffee.
- Doomscrolling at the cart.
- Rehearsing what you’d say if you weren’t a professional.

THE 3 A.M. COMPANY MOVE

Nothing is wrong. This is just the worst part.

Everyone is quiet. The gear is heavy. It's cold or it's raining or both. The next location is going to have some problem you can already feel coming. Somebody has said something short to somebody else. You have completely forgotten why you wanted this.

THREE THINGS

1. Nobody talks at 3 a.m.

The silence in the van is not tension. It's biology. Don't read anything into it and don't fill it.

2. Do one kind thing that costs you nothing.

Carry somebody else's case. Hold the door. Bring back two coffees instead of one. At 3 a.m. the cost of kindness is at its absolute highest — which is exactly why it counts for so much more than it does at 10 a.m.

3. Look up.

Genuinely. Stop and do it.

You are standing on a street at three in the morning with permission to be there, with a hundred other people, building something that will still exist long after every one of you is gone. Almost nobody on earth gets to see a city at this hour with this purpose.

Take ten seconds to actually see it. Remind yourself of the privilege of being able to do this for a living.

Then pick up the case and keep moving, because it's 3 a.m. and you still have three scenes to go.

THE DAY YOU HATE THIS JOB

It comes around three or four times a year and it feels total. Some notes from the other side of it:

- **Hating it on a Tuesday is not a verdict. It's a Tuesday.** You cannot evaluate a career from inside hour thirteen of a bad one. Make no decisions today.
- **Separate the job from the show.** Almost always, what you hate is *this production* — that one producer, this schedule, these politics — and not the craft. Those two feel identical when you're inside it. They are completely different problems with completely different solutions. **The production ends at wrap. The craft doesn't.**
- **Name the actual thing.** Is it the hours? The money? A specific person? Being unseen? Vague despair is unfixable. A specific complaint has a specific answer.
- **You are allowed to leave.** Not today, and not from inside the feeling — but this industry does an unusually good job of convincing people that walking away is failure. It isn't. Plenty of good people leave. Plenty come back. Both are fine.
- **Talk to someone who's been in it twenty years.** Every single one of them has had this exact day. **Many times.** And most will tell you about it if you ask. That one conversation is worth more than anything on this page.

THE JOB THAT DIDN'T CALL YOU BACK

The phone doesn't ring and you assume it's about you. It's almost never about you.

Bookings collapse for reasons you will never see: a producer's cousin, a budget change, a start date that moved, a list you weren't on because somebody forgot — not because somebody objected. Freelancing means living permanently inside an information vacuum, and human brains fill vacuums with self-criticism.

- **The between-jobs feeling is a nervous system problem, not a career problem.** Treat it accordingly: sleep, movement, other humans, something with your hands that isn't the phone.
- **Do the maintenance work now.** Clean your kit. Update the resume. Take a course. Call three people — not to ask for work, but to ask how they are. This is the actual job during the gaps.
- **Don't take the desperate booking.** The gig you accept out of fear is the one on the unsafe set with the producer who doesn't pay. Your runway exists precisely so you can decline it.
- **The industry is small and long.** The PA you were decent to in 2019 is somebody's key now. That is the entire networking strategy: be good to people, for twenty years, and let it compound.

WHY YOU GOT INTO THIS

You're allowed to have forgotten. Everyone does. So, in case you need it back:

You got into this because a film did something to you when you were young and you didn't have the vocabulary for it. Something in a dark room rearranged you very slightly, and you wanted — in some way you couldn't articulate to anyone, including yourself — to be part of the machine that did that.

And then you found out that the machine is a hundred people standing in a parking lot at three in the morning.

And that was somehow better.

Because it turned out the magic isn't magic. It's craft, and coffee, and a grip who knows exactly which flag, and a script supervisor who catches the thing nobody else caught, and forty people all deciding at once to solve the same problem together.

That is still what's happening.

On the worst day. On the show you hate. At hour fourteen. A group of people who are very good at unusual things are collectively making something out of nothing.

You are inside that. Most people watch it. You do it.

THINGS WORTH NOTICING ON PURPOSE

- The moment before “action” when a hundred people go silent at once.
- The first time you see dailies of something you lit, or focused, or built.
- Watching someone with thirty years' experience do the thing they're great at, from six feet away, for free.
- The crew you'd take a bad job for, just to work with them again.
- Wrap on a Friday.
- The first frame of your name in a credit roll.

That's the pay.

The money is a bonus for showing up.

WHEN IT'S BIGGER THAN A BAD DAY

Sometimes it isn't hour fourteen.

Sometimes it's been months. The tiredness doesn't lift on the hiatus. The thing you used to love feels flat. The drinking has quietly become load-bearing. Or you're having thoughts that frighten you.

This is common in this industry, and it is not a character flaw.

Rates of depression, anxiety, substance problems and suicide run measurably higher among entertainment industry workers than the general population — and not mysteriously. It's the specific mechanics of this life: irregular hours, no routine, chronic sleep debt, permanent job insecurity, months away from home, and a culture that treats endurance as an identity.

You do not have to be in crisis to be allowed to get help. Most people who go don't go because something broke. They go because the pressure got too heavy to keep carrying alone, which is a completely sufficient reason.

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Where to go — overleaf.

THE WRAP BEER

It's a tradition. For a meaningful number of people in this business it is also the top of a slide.

One beer and a nineteen-hour day is not one beer.

Nobody starts out with a problem. It starts as *function*. Two drinks so you can sleep after a fifteen-hour day. Something for the back. Something to come down after a run of nights. Something to feel like a person again in a hotel room in a town you don't know.

That's the trap, and it is specific to this job. Irregular hours, no routine, chronic sleep debt, real physical pain, permanent job insecurity, months away from home, and a culture that treats endurance as an identity. Rates of substance problems in entertainment run well above the general population, and not mysteriously.

THE HONEST TEST

It was never about how much. It's these:

Has it stopped being a choice on a Tuesday? Are you keeping the amount from someone? Has anyone who loves you raised it more than once? Do you need it to sleep, or to start?

If you're wondering about yourself, the wondering is the data. People without a problem don't audit themselves at 1 a.m.

AA — aa.org · NA — na.org · SMART Recovery — smartrecovery.org

Free and anonymous. Meetings in every town you'll ever shoot in, and online meetings running around the clock — which matters when you're on nights or on location. **SAMHSA — 1-800-662-HELP (4357).**

And if it's the person next to you: don't diagnose them, don't corner them at wrap, and don't tell the department. Ask once, privately, plainly — and tell them you'll go with them.

WHERE TO GO

HELP THAT WON'T COST YOU THE JOB

The reason people in this business don't ask is that they believe it follows them onto the next call sheet. None of these work that way.

SAMHSA NATIONAL HELPLINE — 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Mental health *and* substance use. Free, confidential, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, English and Spanish. Referrals to local treatment and support groups. Federal service — nothing to sell you, and they don't need your name. Or text your zip code to **435748**.

BEHIND THE SCENES — BEHINDTHESCENES.ORG/MENTALHEALTH

Our industry's own. Their **therapist finder** matches you with someone who already knows what a company move is, so you aren't spending half a first session explaining the job. They also fund **counseling grants** toward therapy, inpatient or outpatient treatment, and run free Mental Health First Aid so you can help a colleague.

YOUR UNION

Start with your rep. Most locals run a member assistance program, and most members don't know it exists. Ask what's covered before you need it, not after.

ENTERTAINMENT COMMUNITY FUND — ENTERTAINMENTCOMMUNITY.ORG

Social services, emergency financial assistance and health counseling for entertainment workers.

Right now. 988 — Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (US), call or text, 24/7. **116 123** — Samaritans (UK & Ireland).

If you're worried about someone else: ask directly, then **ask twice**. "*How are you actually doing?*" — and be quiet long enough to get the second answer, which is the real one. You don't need the solution. You need to be the person who noticed.

Nobody good at this job got there alone.
Nobody gets out of a hole alone either.

THE #SETLIFE HANDBOOK



- 1 Safety is the only non-negotiable.**
Everything else on set is negotiable. This isn't.
- 2 Be the calm, not the quiet. Positivity is not compliance.**
Quiet can be fear. Calm is a choice. A smile is not a yes.
- 3 Even the masters are still students. Listen first.**
The one who's been here longer already tried the obvious fix.
- 4 Every problem has a next physical action. Do that one.**
Not "the lighting's screwed" — "I'm moving the bounce."
- 5 Their gear is your gear. Their day is your day.**
Handle it like it feeds their family. If grip is behind, the day is behind.
- 6 This is a privilege. It is not a debt.**
You're lucky to be here. You don't owe them your health for it.
- 7 It's only art. Nothing here is worth a body.**
The work matters. It does not matter more than a spine.

**DRINK WATER. SAY GOODNIGHT.
GET HOME.**

ICG SAFETY HOTLINE (877) 424-4685

CRISIS LINE (US) 988 • SAMARITANS 116 123

behindthescenes.org/mentalhealth

✂ . ✂ . ✂

GO DEEPER

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

LOCAL 600 / ICG — ICG600.COM/LOCAL-600-SAFETY-PAGE

Safety Bill of Rights · 7 Steps to Practice Safe Sets · Safety Bulletins (Industry-Wide Labor-Management Safety Committee) · ICG Safety App · Safety Rides & Rooms Initiative · Harassment in the Workplace · Disability & Workers' Compensation Assistance · Safety Videos including *Establishing a Culture of On Set Safety* and *The Human Face of Unsafe Hours*.

THE MARK MILSOME FOUNDATION — MARKMILSOMEFOUNDATION.COM

Free online production health & safety course, developed with Media Safety and supported by the National Film and Television School. Scholarships for young UK technicians, in collaboration with the Guild of British Camera Technicians.

SAFETY FOR SARAH — SAFETYFORSARAH.COM/THE-FOUNDATION

Founded by Richard and Elizabeth Jones. “Never forget, never again.”

BEHIND THE SCENES — BEHINDTHESCENES.ORG/MENTALHEALTH

Therapist finder, counseling grants, Mental Health First Aid, bystander intervention, substance use resources.

TRAINING

IATSE Entertainment & Exhibition Industries Training Trust Fund · Contract Services Safety Pass Program.

WATCH

Who Needs Sleep? (2006) — Haskell Wexler's documentary on industry hours, made after the death of Brent Hershman.

Facts in this handbook are drawn from published reporting, coroners' findings, union publications and industry charities. Opinions are the author's and are labeled as such. Corrections are welcome and will be made.



ON THE SET OF THE EXORCIST III

Left to right: **Cary Fisher**, **Gerry Fisher BSC**, **George C. Scott**, **Ron Zarilla**, 1st AC, and **John Cambria**, 2nd AC.

Gerry photographed the film. Cary operated on it. Father and son, same crew, same call sheet.

Photograph by Myles Aronowitz.

Nobody in this picture is doing it alone.

That was always the point.

THIS HANDBOOK WAS MADE IN HONOR OF

GERRY FISHER, BSC

1926 – 2014 · MY GRANDFATHER

Clapper boy at Riverside Studios in 1946, after the Royal Navy. Then camera assistant. Then focus puller. Then camera operator on *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. Then, at forty-one, director of photography on Joseph Losey's *Accident* — the first of eight films together, among them *The Go-Between*. Sixty-two features. Two BAFTA nominations. The BSC Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.

He came up through every rung of this department, in order, and never skipped one.

CARY FISHER

1953 – 2026 · CINEMATOGRAPHER & CAMERA OPERATOR · MY FATHER

Began as a clapper loader — the same first rung his own father started on. Camera operator on *Blue Chips*, *Breakdown*, *Bean*, and *The Exorcist III* — which his father photographed. Second unit director of photography on *Ghost* and on *CSI: New York*. Director of photography on *Rebel Highway*.

He taught me the parts of this job that are not written down anywhere — which is most of it.

Three generations behind the same camera.

Everything in this book was handed down long before it was written down.

That is how this craft has always traveled — from a key to a best boy, from an operator to an assistant, at three in the morning, in a parking lot, for free. Put this in someone's hands and keep it moving.



WORK. BE SAFE. GO HOME.

If you see something, say something. If you say something
and nothing happens, say it louder, and say it to somebody
else.

ICG SAFETY HOTLINE (877) 424-4685
CRISIS LINE (US) 988 • SAMARITANS 116 123

DID WE MISS SOMETHING?

If there is something important that isn't in here — a hazard, a protocol, a hard-won lesson,
a correction — tell us and it goes into the next edition.

And if there is someone you want to pay tribute to, send us their name. Nobody should
be left off that page because we didn't know.

media@rollonthis.pro

With thanks to all the crew who helped support input on this document.

CREATED BY

MONTGOMERY FISHER, SOC

ROLL ON THIS PRODUCTIONS LLC

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