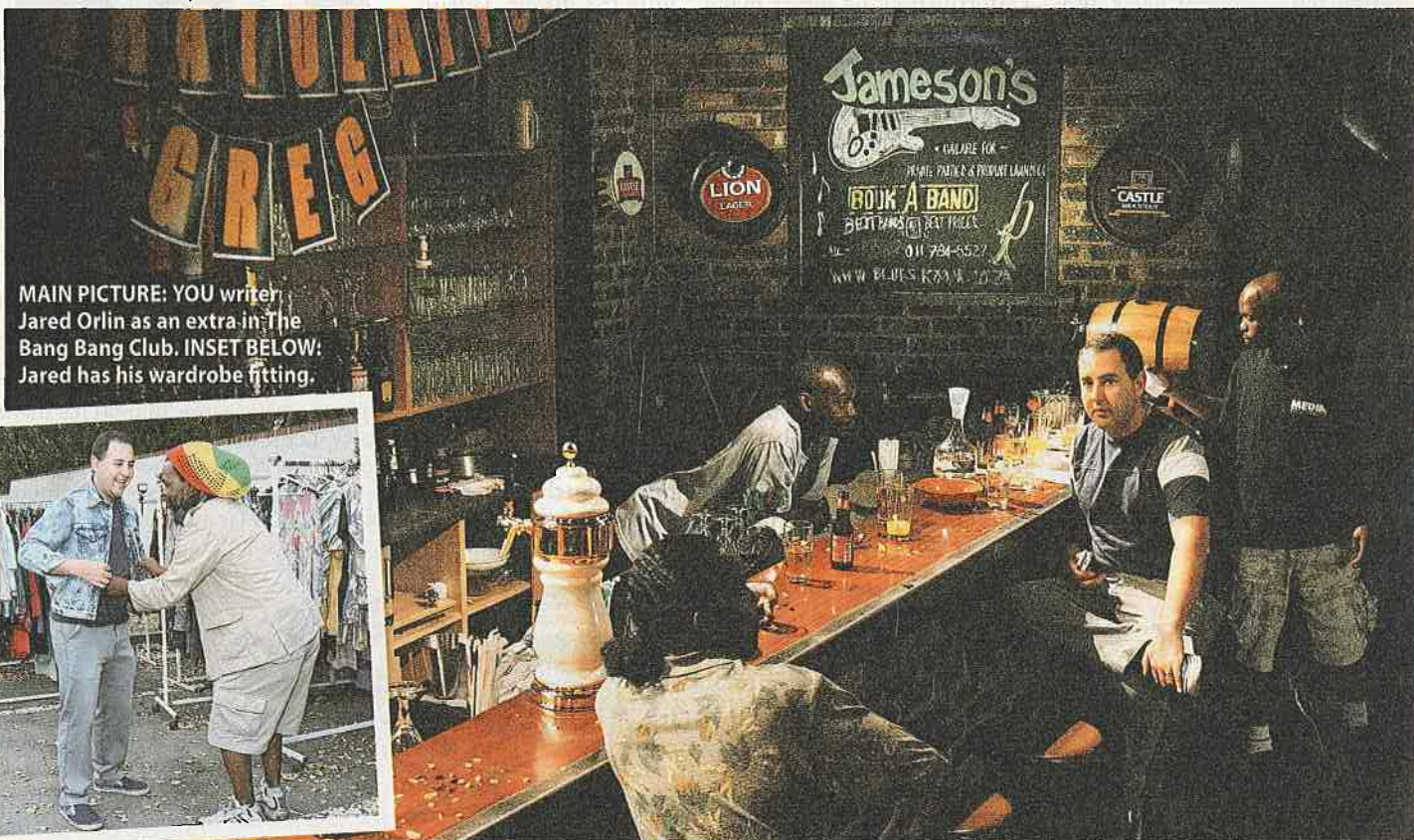


HOLLYWOOD, HERE I COME!

Two years ago a YOU writer became an extra on The Bang Bang Club film set – and experienced a few seconds' of big-screen fame



IT'S 6.30 am when I drive into the parking lot of the Holiday Inn in Sandton, Joburg. This is where I've been told to report for duty because today I'm working as an extra on the Hollywood movie *The Bang Bang Club*.

The film, set in Joburg, tells the story of four top SA news photographers who often risked their lives covering the violent final days of apartheid South Africa.

The movie boasts a stellar international cast – Ryan Phillippe, Taylor Kitsch and Malin Akerman – as well as local actors such as Frank Rautenbach, Neels van Jaarsveld and Nina Milner. I'm a nervous wreck. For one thing I've never been an extra before. What will they ask

me to do, I wonder, as I get out of my car dressed in grey denims, blue loafers and a T-shirt.

To make matters worse I'm late. Turns out the other extras were here an hour earlier and while they tuck into a breakfast that looks like a potential heart attack (surely actors would never touch such greasy eggs?). I speak to a tall man who peers down at me from one of the trailers. "Yes?" he asks, eyeing me suspiciously. "I'm an extra," I tell him, although that's not strictly true.

Most of the 50 or so extras I can see haven't been invited exclusively onto the set and they aren't there with a notepad and a photographer to capture every detail of the experience.

The man, who appears to be

in charge of wardrobe, quickly sizes me up and settles on an ugly golf shirt and a denim jacket. I'm grateful that at least I get to wear my own jeans and shoes. Who knows where those clothes have been, I think, glancing at the racks of outfits from the '90s, the decade in which the film is set.

The jacket is extra large and I'm drowning in it. Even rolling up the sleeves doesn't help and I feel ridiculous. Thankfully Wardrobe Guy agrees. "Lose the jacket and put your T-shirt back on," he tells me.

I'm now back in the clothes I'd arrived in (seems I dress like I'm stuck in the '90s) and am whisked over to the hair and make-up trailer for a bit of sprucing up. The once-over is

quick. Evidently I don't need much work (yay!) and I'm told to wait until they call me. Coffee is readily available and I gulp some down.

By 7.50 am, three cups of coffee later, I'm warm as toast but bored stiff. There's nothing to do except drink more coffee and wait to be called onto the set. I glance at the trailers around me. With the doors tightly shut and the blinds drawn it's not clear if star attractions Ryan Phillippe and Taylor Kitsch, who portray award-winning photographers Greg Marinovich and the late Kevin Carter respectively, are inside.

IT'S 8.15 am and I'm finally on set. We've moved across the road to Village Walk shopping centre

where popular hangout The Blues Room is being used for a couple of scenes.

The extras take their places before the actors arrive and wait around while the crew check the lighting and make sure the cameras are in the right place. I do a quick tally: there are about 35 people in the room and only nine of us will actually be in the shot – two barmen, a waitress, two barflies (I'm one of them), Taylor Kitsch, local actress Jessica Haines, who plays Kevin Carter's love interest Allie, and two extras who play her friends.

I'm sitting at the bar, so close to Taylor, best known for his role in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, I could reach out and touch him. But he doesn't look at me. He knows not to make eye contact with the extras.

We're also not allowed to take pictures so when Taylor sees our photographer, Mduduzi Ndzingi, shooting away he's understandably miffed. Politely yet firmly he asks him to stop taking photographs.

The Canadian-born hunk is dressed casually in jeans, a blue shirt open slightly at the neck and a black leather jacket. A cigarette dangles from his lips and he sips Appletiser. He looks nothing like the character he played in *X-Men*, the mysterious mutant Gambit.

He sidles up to the bar and jokingly asks for a beer he can actually drink. The director, Steven Silver, chuckles as he explains what the scene is about: a plastered Carter plucks up the courage to ask Allie out on a date.

We rehearse twice and then start shooting. When we're finished we shoot it again. And again. Then just when Steven is sure he has the shot a background noise ruins the take and we do it again.

Mostly I'm told to just sit there, sip my whisky (actually ginger ale) and move around enough to look natural but not too much to distract viewers from Taylor.

It sounds easy enough but it's quite hard really to pretend to



ABOVE: Jared's hair and make-up took only a few minutes – the cameras were more interested in the big Hollywood stars.

do nothing when you're actually doing something.

Later I'm told I'm no longer needed; the camera has changed angles and I'm not in shot any more. My Hollywood debut will probably amount to seeing the back of my head for all of three seconds.

They continue filming the same scene but from different angles until finally at 10.55 am the director is satisfied. I'm flabbergasted – almost three hours of filming for less than three minutes worth of footage. What's so glamorous about this?

THE next scene is a celebration organised for Greg Marinovich,

who co-wrote the book the movie is based on with Joao Silva, for winning the Pulitzer Prize. The entire cast, including the rest of the extras, are in attendance. I sit to the side of the bar with a few extras and the dialogue coach who tells me Taylor is doing a great job nailing the South African accent.

Ryan Phillippe, who plays Greg, arrives. He's shorter than I expected but still very handsome.

He's followed by Malin Akerman – she plays a photo editor at The Star newspaper – and local hunks Frank Rautenbach (the star of *Hansie* plays the part of late photographer Ken Oosterbroek) and Neels van

Jaarsveld (cast as photographer Joao Silva).

It's clear the actors have a great rapport and Taylor playfully tussles with Neels. I spot Frank and Malin chatting about their mutual love of music. He picks up a guitar (there are a few instruments on a nearby stage, apparently for a later scene) and starts strumming away. She hums along appreciatively.

Ryan isn't as sociable. He spends much of the time chatting closely with the director. The conversation looks serious but it's impossible to tell what they're talking about.

Later I eavesdrop on a chat between Neels and Ryan. They've hung out a lot, Neels told me earlier, so I'm expecting the new pals to be dishing Hollywood secrets – maybe even some juicy titbit about Ryan's ex-wife, Hollywood darling Reese Witherspoon. But I'm in for a surprise.

Instead they're talking about the craft of acting, getting into character and the upcoming scene. Oh, how dull.

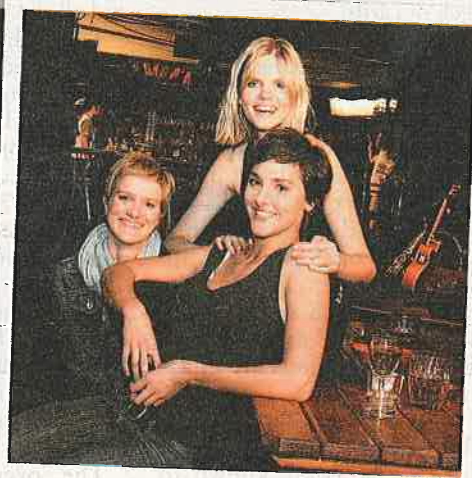
I have to admit I'm a little disappointed. So far today nothing has panned out as I'd anticipated.

I never thought I'd say it but this Hollywood thing is a bit of a bore – think I'll leave it to Ryan, Taylor and the gang and go back to my real job. □

■ **The Bang Bang Club opens in SA cinemas on 22 July.**



ABOVE: Jared meets SA-born director Steven Silver, who wrote the screenplay. **ABOVE**



RIGHT: Local actresses Jessica Haines (left), Nina Milner (behind) and Lika Berning appear in the film.