

### Murali THALLURI



Genre: **Drama, Action**  
Format: **35mm**  
Estimated Running Time: **110 min.**

Budget:  
**US\$2,750,000**  
**(HK\$21,300,000)**

Funds Secured:  
**US \$1,575,000**  
**(HK \$12,200,000)**

Producers:  
**Helen LEAKE**  
**Nick SELTH**  
**Murali THALLURI**

Writing Credits:  
**Murali THALLURI**  
**Nick SELTH**

Production Company:  
**Jewel Films Pty Ltd**

Partner Attached:  
**Machine Made LLC**  
**South Australian Film Corporation**

HAF Goals:  
**Funds, Co-producers, Sales agents**

Contact:  
**Jewel Films Pty Ltd**  
**(Helen LEAKE)**

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### INTRODUCTION

The feature film *Jewel* is to be shot in India and post-produced in Australia/Asia, and the producers are seeking Asian partners to complete production financing. Director Murali K. THALLURI's debut feature film 2:37 was selected for the 2006 Cannes Film Festival, where the film attracted critical acclaim and worldwide sales. The film became a festival favourite, and was chosen as the opening film for the 2006 Melbourne International Film Festival, followed by selection in Toronto, Tokyo and many other film festivals around the world. Murali also wrote and produced 2:37, and he has now written several feature projects including *Jewel*, a modern day adventure story set in the sprawling kaleidoscopic landscape of India.

### SYNOPSIS

A wealthy merchant visits a family in a small south Indian village, promising to give their son, Happy, an education and the chance to escape the poverty and hardships they endure. Little do they know that their child will be forced to work in a slave labor camp under the cruelest of masters. Repeatedly told that his parents are dead, Happy is forced to work under terrible conditions and is subjected to constant beatings.

While in the labour camp, the young boy forms a powerful friendship with an older boy named Kishore. A series of events drives the two boys to steal a rare jewel from their master and attempt an unlikely escape. Together, they journey across the kaleidoscopic landscape of India in a bid to reach Mumbai where they hope to meet their idol - a famous film star whom they innocently believe will rescue them from their lives of poverty and desperation. Meanwhile their master has discovered the theft and gives chase, determined to reclaim his valuable stone and exact revenge on the boys who stole it.

*Jewel* is an uplifting story of hope, courage and innocence, a modern day fable about two boys bound together by tragedy, and a journey that will change their lives forever.

### DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The goodness that I found in the people of India is something that I think is ever present in our lives, and only asks to be lived, so from this, we set out to write a screenplay that would capture both sides of the India that I saw. India is by no means a perfect country: corruption is rife, the hierarchical system provides little freedom for one to come up in life, and tradition has quite often impeded progress. But despite this I found the magic, wonder and hope of the people is a force that allows them to live while still maintaining their human dignity.

When I heard that there were over forty million child labourers in India today, I knew what my new film was going to be about. My co-writer and I realised from the outset that we had to approach the story without being sentimental, passing judgement or showing pity, and most importantly we had to see it

through the eyes of optimism. I wanted to express the playfulness inherent within children, I wanted it to be fun, and most of all to have wide appeal, similar to films such as *Life Is Beautiful*, and LEAN's *Oliver Twist*. We came to the conclusion that we needed to show India through the eyes of innocence, and from that our two protagonists, Happy and Kishore, were born.

The way I want to capture *Jewel* in a visual sense is reminiscent of the epic films of a bygone era, where the cinematography and design will fully exploit the unique, vast, and varying landscapes of India. This, coupled with a dramatic score and innovative sound design, will augment what is most important - the journey our two boys take across the life, color and character of India.

### DIRECTOR

Murali Krishna THALLURI is an Australian film writer/director born in Canberra to Indian parents. Without any formal cinema training, THALLURI raised \$1.1 million and shot his debut feature film 2:37. At age 21, THALLURI became the youngest director to have a feature film officially selected for the Cannes International Film Festival. He is developing various projects and aims to make *Jewel* his second feature. In addition to his writing skills, Murali is renowned for his work with actors, and is one of Australia's brightest new film talents. He is represented by Philip Raskind of the Endeavor Agency.

### PRODUCER

Helen LEAKE is one of Australia's leading film producers and her feature film credits include *Black and White* (2002) starring Robert CARLYLE and *Heaven's Burning* (1997) starring Russell CROWE and KUDOH Youki. Both films were festival hits, playing at twenty-six international film festivals, including Toronto, London, Karlovy Vary and Pusan. Helen recently completed a three-year term as CEO of the South Australian Film Corporation (2004-07). She is extremely experienced in raising overseas financing and funding co-productions.

Nick SELTH (Co-Writer, Co-Producer) began his close partnership with Murali K. THALLURI while completing his degree in Screen Production at Flinders University. He worked as a producer and writer on THALLURI's debut feature film 2:37 (nominated for best original screenplay at the 2006 AFI awards). Since that time, the pair have collaborated on three original screenplays, including *Jewel*.

Murali K. THALLURI completes the producing team (see director).

### PRODUCTION COMPANY

Jewel Films is a single-purpose company set up to make the feature film *Jewel*. The company directors are Helen LEAKE, Murali K. THALLURI and Nick SELTH.