



Hell Revisited

By Nick Cunningham

Adam Jonas Horowitz is very confident that his Green Screen competition film *Nuclear Savage*, which world-premiered at IDFA, will sell widely across the world – but believes that a US sale may prove elusive.

The film is, he explains, “an ethnographic, historical journalistic exposé of how the US government used the Pacific islanders (specifically the Marshall Islands) for human radiation experiments for more than 30 years.” For many years, there was no proof to back up this allegation, he claims – until he uncovered it.

Nuclear Savage actually received funding from a division of PBS that supports Pacific Island stories. “But PBS has a lot of arms; it’s a huge bureaucracy and just because one little arm supports something, that doesn’t mean it will ever be shown. I sense there’s a good chance it will never be broadcast”, Horowitz stresses.

But Brussels-based sales agent Thierry Detaille doesn’t share the director’s scepticism. Horowitz’s previous film on the subject, *Home on the Range* (IDFA 1991) was screened as part of the PBS Independent Lens series, so Detaille is far from ruling out a PBS sale. “And we have strong

hopes too that POV would consider a 60-minute cut for 2012”, he stresses. “We are actually seeking a television partnership to re-version the film to one hour, with a ‘history revisited’ or investigative current affairs aspect in mind.” The film was made over a six-year period for approximately \$200,000 “with a lot of extra unpaid man hours”, Horowitz confirms. He first went to the islands as a Greenpeace activist in 1986. “The Americans detonated 67 nuclear bombs in the Marshall Islands, and the biggest one was bigger than 1,000 Hiroshimas”, he claims. “They contaminated a lot of islands and they had a programme to determine what would nuclear war be like and its effects on humans, so they had a captive audience – the islanders were the perfect test subjects.”

“It is our version of paradise, it’s like the Garden of Eden”, he continues. “But that’s the place where the Americans decided to test the most horrendous weapons in history. I think this dichotomy of paradise and hell is what always drew me to that place – it’s almost mythic. This beautiful paradise with hydrogen bombs is terrifying and horrible, but also fascinating. What these people have gone through to try and get some recognition from the American government is really heroic – it’s like David and Goliath.”