

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN THE GIVER

Lois Lowry's 1993 novel is set in a society that has eradicated suffering through a system called Sameness. As children reach adulthood, each is assigned a fixed role for life in the Assignment Ceremony. Here, director Phillip Noyce and coscreenwriter Michael Mitnick explain how they adapted the scene for film. —LINDSEY BAHR



THE SCENE

In this sequence, the Chief Elder (Meryl Streep, right) informs Jonas (Brenton Thwaites, below) that he has been chosen to be the next Receiver of Memory—i.e., the sole keeper of humanity's recollections before Sameness was instituted.

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CONTINUED: (2)

CHIEF ELDER
Number 52, please step forward.

JONAS walks to the podium as though it were a guillotine.

CHIEF ELDER (CONT'D)
Jonas has not been assigned a Position. Jonas has been selected. He has been chosen to become our next Receiver of Memory.

An astonished GASP from the audience. MOTHER and FATHER exchange a stunned look. THE CHIEF ELDER gestures to a gallery where the Committee of Elders sits. JONAS follows her gesture to that BEARDED ELDER. The ELDER's face is unreadable; he seems unaffected by the announcement. On holographic screens: Only the words RECEIVER OF MEMORY rotating. The absence of any images of the Position in practice highlight its secrecy.

CHIEF ELDER (CONT'D)
We have not been hasty this time. We couldn't afford another failure. Jonas, for many, many years, we have watched you carefully. I ask—have you always felt that you were a bit different?

Before JONAS can answer, the CHIEF ELDER continues.

CHIEF ELDER (CONT'D)
Jonas possesses all four attributes: Intelligence, Integrity, Courage... And one more I can name but not describe: The Capacity to See Beyond. But I must warn you, your training involves pain. Pain far beyond anything we know. (Turning to the crowd.) Do we think Jonas is brave enough?

An IMMEDIATE pounding and applause from the audience.

CHIEF ELDER (CONT'D)
Jonas, you have been selected as our next Receiver of Memory.

THE COMMUNITY begins to chant as JONAS slowly walks forward. An ASSISTANT hands JONAS his CLEAR GLASS TRIANGLE.

THE COMMUNITY
Jonas. Jonas. JONAS. JONAS: JONAS!!

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED: (3)

CHIEF ELDER
(With an odd intensity.)
We thank you for your childhood.

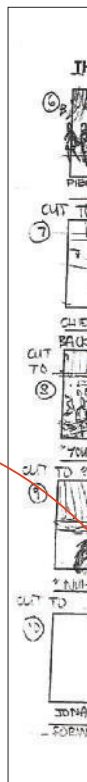
THE SCRIPT

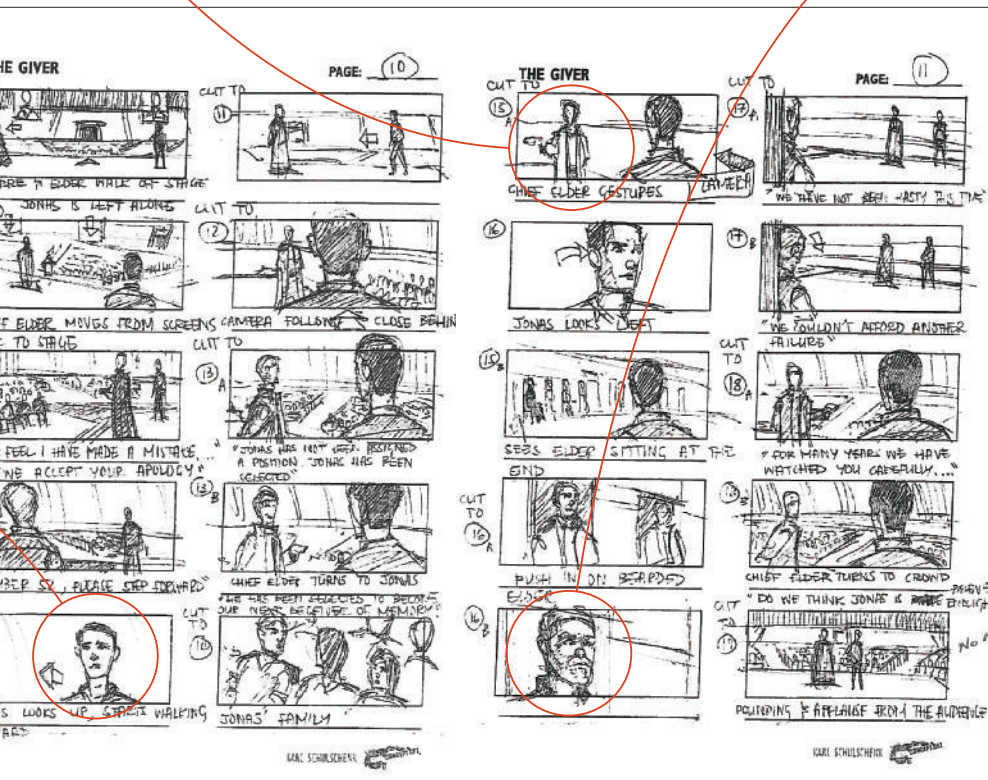
First-time screenwriter Michael Mitnick has been a fan of the novel, which he says inspired his career, since fifth grade. "Lois and I had a lot of conversations about the Assignment scene," he says. "You want to feel faithful to the book." Though he made significant changes to the overall story (the Chief Elder becomes a major antagonist, for instance), this scene did not require much revamping. Says Mitnick: "The way Lois [Lowry] wrote it, with lines like 'Thank you for your childhood,' is delightful. They take on a very ominous tone when delivered by Meryl Streep."



THE STORYBOARDS

Phillip Noyce (*Salt*) and VFX supervisor Robert Grasmere (*Patriot Games*) mapped out every shot with storyboard artist Karl Schulschen. They wanted the stadium to look as if it were filled with 10,000 people, but with only about 400 extras available to them, a large portion of the crowd had to be animated. "Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* influenced our sequence, from framing to editing and music," says Noyce. "I wanted the moviegoing audience to experience the same uneasiness and deep sense of dread one feels watching Riefenstahl's celebration of that 1935 Nazi rally in Nuremberg."





THE MOVIE

The Assignment Ceremony introduces the Giver (Jeff Bridges, above), who is the previous Receiver of Memory and the man tasked with training Jonas. “That was a moment we talked about a lot,” says Mitnick. “Jonas sitting among his friends and being absolutely terrified about what his future holds and looking over at the Elders and seeing one person staring back at him—a short but unsettling moment.” Noyce decided to place the Giver in a different spot: “In the book it says that he’s sitting in the center. I thought that he would be sitting on the side. It just felt right that he was a fulcrum but not a part of the main scenery. He has such a lonely job and existence.” As for the Chief Elder, Streep was not able to travel to the South African set for the whole shoot, so Noyce and his team decided to make her character appear as a hologram for some scenes. Actress Fiona Ramsay stood in for her on set, and Streep later filmed her part against a greenscreen. It marks a big change from the novel, but the author approves. “I love how the Chief Elder is able to interject herself into the families’ homes,” Lowry says. “She suddenly appears, and it’s so weirdly intrusive that I wish I’d put it in the book.”

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