

# Tim Leaton

Finding the sweet spot in film and television

**A**CTOR AND DIRECTOR BEN STILLER handed Tim Leaton a bowl of M&Ms and told him to pick out the green ones. Leaton, who was Stiller's assistant on the movie *Tropic Thunder*, at once began the sweet task.

But Stiller was only joking. And instead of quashing Leaton's desire to be in the movie industry, the director wrote him a recommendation letter that helped the budding film editor find success in Hollywood.

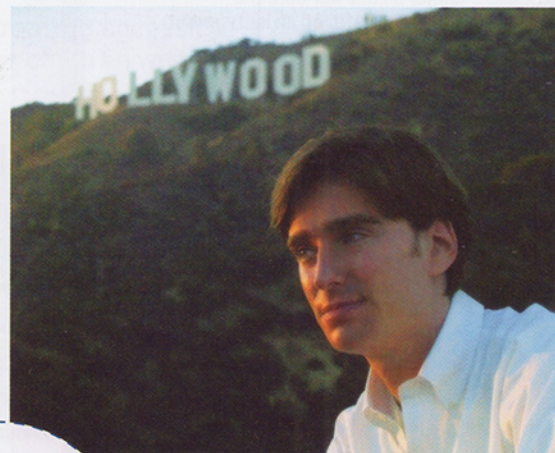
But how did Leaton get to sort candy for Stiller?

A year before graduating from Virginia Tech in 2007 with dual degrees in communication and business management, Leaton won a national competition that awarded him an internship at Walt Disney Pictures. After winning the Film Your Issue contest—for a short film he directed and edited in Uganda—and interning at Disney, Leaton stayed in Los Angeles to pursue a directorial career. Then, during a stint as a post-production assistant, he found something else he enjoyed: film editing. He set his sights on joining the Motion Picture Editors Guild.

This, he says, is where his education served him well, giving him self-assurance and a strong work ethic. "I don't think I would have had the guts, drive, or passion to pursue a career in Hollywood," he says, "if Virginia Tech hadn't given me the confidence to break into the very competitive entertainment industry."

Becoming a member of the Motion Picture Editors Guild can take years, but Leaton was fortunate. In 2009, he made it onto the guild's roster and in 2012, FremantleMedia hired him to work on a game show called "Total Blackout," which eventually led to "America's Got Talent" with the same company. Although Leaton's role is as a freelance editor, he has had a steady income since working with the show.

"I'm proud to work on a family show that features people from all walks of life and that all ages enjoy," he says. "I'm a small part of a show that offers wholesome



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entertainment to the U.S. and countless other countries throughout the world."

For the seven years he has been with the production, he has watched the show's ratings continue to climb. In 2014, he was there when Guinness World Records named "America's Got Talent" the world's most successful reality-TV format.

Yet when asked what his greatest accomplishments are, Leaton looks back at his time in Blacksburg.

"One thing I'm the proudest of," he says, "is being a Hokie." ■

Michelle Krusiec



## IN FRONT OF THE LENS

HOKIES OFTEN PLAY ROLES ON SCREEN AS WELL AS BEHIND THE SCENES.

Scores of College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences graduates serve as news anchors and correspondents, including political science major Brian Sullivan '93, news anchor at CNBC, and communication majors Peggy Fox '86, WUSA anchor in Washington, DC; Hoda Kotb '86, co-host of the "Today" show; Molly Line '99, Fox News correspondent; Jummy Olabanji '06, WNBC anchor in New York City; and Pierre Thomas '84, senior justice correspondent for ABC News.

College alumni appearing on screens large and small as actors include communication major Azita Ghanizada '98 and theatre arts majors Sara Erikson '01, Lauren Koslow '79, Michelle Krusiec '95, and Elizabeth Roberts '98.



# illumiNation

The background of the cover is a textured, light beige color. It features several abstract, stylized illustrations. At the top, a hand in a green sleeve is shown, with the fingers slightly curled. Below this, a black silhouette of a hand is filled with small, colorful binary code (0s and 1s) in shades of green, yellow, and orange. To the right, a green jacket with a buttoned cuff is visible. At the bottom, there are several black, irregular shapes that look like footprints or ink blots.

Virginia Tech College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

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