UP THE RIVER: Allyn has been trying to make a film about James Brooke since discovering the 19th-century British explorer in the footnote of a novel. The effort finally brought him to the island of Borneo.

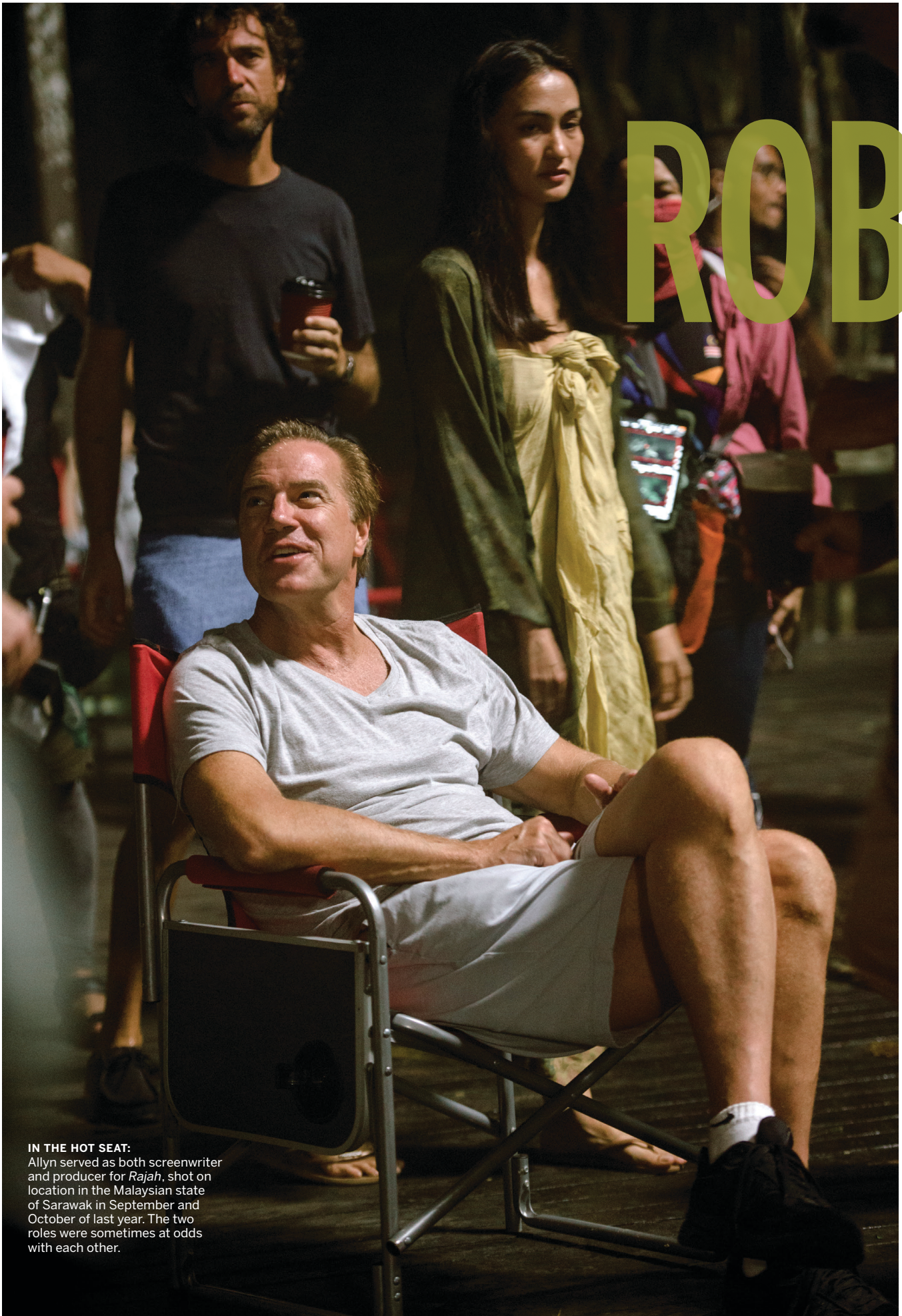
ROB ALLYN'S JOURNEY TO THE EDGE OF THE EARTH

PETER SIMEK

He helped George W. Bush become governor of Texas and led Vicente Fox's Mexican revolution. For the last decade, though, he has been a filmmaker, mostly trying to tell one story, taking on a cursed production that Hollywood has tried and failed to pull off for almost a century. Why is Allyn the right man for the job? Because he might be making a movie about himself.

By Peter Simek

ROB



IN THE HOT SEAT:
Allyn served as both screenwriter and producer for *Rajah*, shot on location in the Malaysian state of Sarawak in September and October of last year. The two roles were sometimes at odds with each other.

LOCATION PHOTOGRAPHY BY @JACHPHOTOGRAPHER

ALLYN

stands on a floating platform in the middle of a river in Sarawak, a Malaysian state on the island of Borneo. Draw a line from Vietnam to Australia. He's roughly at the midpoint, watching as a crew prepares a shot for the film *Rajah*. It is October 2019, and the movie, which was written and produced by Allyn, chronicles the exploits of a 19th-century British explorer. This morning, they are filming the explorer, played by Irish actor Jonathan Rhys Meyers, as he floats down the river on a barge, accompanied by tribesmen in dugout canoes.

There are problems with the scene. The paddlers can't keep their boats in sync with the camera, and the film's director, Michael Haussman, has trouble communicating with the extras in the dugouts. It is mercilessly hot, and the movie's three stars—Rhys Meyers, Dominic Monaghan of *Lord of the Rings* fame, and up-and-comer Otto Farrant—are wearing heavy navy blue or red Victorian military blazers, baking in the sun. With each failed take, everyone on the set grows more frustrated. Then disaster strikes.

A rubber stopper pops out of the hull of one of two boats that have been lashed together to create a floating platform for all the film's camera, sound, and lighting equipment. The boat starts to sink. A production assistant tries to bail out the water with his flip-flop. Allyn—a 60-year-old man wearing cargo shorts and mud-caked black sneakers—turns his attention from the movie scene to the real-life action with the assistant and the flip-flop.

How Rob Allyn ended up on a sinking boat in a Borneo jungle is a story of radical self-reinvention. Allyn is well-known in Dallas as the founder of Allyn & Company, a man who played an outsize role in shaping this city's political discourse for the greater part of three decades. His résumé includes stints as speechwriter for a Texas governor, columnist for *D Magazine*, millionaire entrepreneur, Dallas mayoral kingmaker, corporate spin doctor, Republican strategist, and toppler of regimes in a slew of developing countries around the globe. But about a decade ago, he decided he wanted to make a movie.

The movie Allyn wanted to make was a big, swashbuckling epic about an adventurer named James Brooke. One problem: people had been trying to make a movie about Brooke's life for nearly 100 years. Hollywood had come to think the story was cursed. Brooke was a restless youth who squandered his inheritance on an aimless maritime expedition only to wander into the jungles of Borneo, cheat death at the hands of headhunters, fend off pirates, and emerge from the ordeal as the island's king—the famous White Rajah of Sarawak. The story inspired Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King* and Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, and yet, for decades, every movie studio that had tried to adapt the story had failed. To put those attempts in perspective, the earliest known failed movie production cast Errol Flynn as James Brooke.

The story of the political consultant turned filmmaker trying to produce a possibly doomed project fascinated me, and when I heard that Allyn was in Borneo shooting his movie, I flew halfway around the world to see how on earth he planned to pull it off. Which is how I came to stand on the banks of a crocodile-infested river, watching a floating platform piled with expensive gear slowly slipping into the muck. Maybe Allyn's movie really was cursed.

But then he jumps into the hull to help the man with the flip-flop. He takes the sandal, twists it into shape, and crams it into the hole. The leak is sealed. The show, at least for now, will go on.

♦

ALLYN'S JOURNEY FROM RENOWNED DALLAS MEDIA CONSULTANT to Hollywood movie producer began around his 50th birthday. He was on vacation on Salt Spring Island, near Vancouver, when, one rainy day, he stumbled upon Brooke's story in a footnote of a George MacDonald Fraser novel. Allyn fixated on Brooke's life, and something in him said he had to make a movie. He had written a novel in the 1990s—*Front Runner*, a political intrigue set in Texas—but he had never written a screenplay. And so Allyn set out to break into filmmaking in much the same way he had broken into politics: he read books, relied on his innate guile, and made it up as he went along.

Allyn was born in California, studied government at Georgetown University, and fell into Texas politics after working as an aide for Dallas Congressman Jim Collins and a speechwriter for Gov. Bill Clements. After a brief stint at Frito-Lay, he started his own political consulting group in 1983, at age 24. Allyn likes to tell a story that when he and his wife, Monica, started Allyn & Company, he went to a bookstore and bought a copy of *Accounting for Dummies*. He also called his father to ask if he should keep his steady job and reliable paycheck or break out on his own. Allyn's father had worked at the same company his entire life, and Allyn expected he would tell him to stick with the job. To his surprise, his father said go for it.

In the 1980s, Dallas was booming, Reagan was president, and Allyn was a young political savant earning a reputation as a master Republican strategist. He worked for a slew of Texas Republicans: Phil Gramm's Senate campaign, Mac Thornberry's Congressional bid, David Dewhurst's run for Texas lieutenant governor, and George W. Bush's first gubernatorial campaign. His firm was hired by large corporations ranging from Coca-Cola to Cinemark, and, eventually, Allyn would be tapped to work on campaigns for Republicans around the country. But his influence was strongest at home, in Dallas. His firm worked for five consecutive winners of Dallas mayoral elections, and when the city leadership needed to sell a major civic initiative, they turned to Allyn. Allyn marketed the DART referendum, the American Airlines Center bond package, and the Trinity River Project.

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By the 1990s, Allyn, not yet 40, was one of the most high-profile political strategists in Texas. Then his career took an unexpected turn. In 1997, while on a trip to Mexico with the Dallas Assembly, he heard a speech by a relatively unknown business-

man from Guanajuato named Vicente Fox. Fox embodied much of what excited Allyn about politics in those days. He was a tall, formidable man with an inspiring backstory. Fox was self-made, a truck driver at Coca-Cola who worked his way up to become head of Coca-Cola for all of Latin America. When Allyn met Fox, the Mexican had left business for politics and philanthropy and spoke of using his experience to bring radical change to a country saddled with corruption. After Fox's speech, Allyn was so impressed that he handed him his business card. He didn't expect anything to come from the meeting, but the truth was, Allyn was bored.

"When he was younger—or even in his 30s and 40s—as much as he enjoyed his job, he would always be like, 'Ahhh, I don't want to be an old man PR guy,'" Monica says. She was used to his restlessness. When they traveled on vacation, her husband planned feverish itineraries over breakfast while couples at adjacent tables worried only about where they would eat lunch. On the flight home, Allyn would pull the in-flight magazine from its seat pocket and flip to the routes map, plotting their next adventure.

Fox called Allyn, and he invited the young consultant to his ranch in Guanajuato to ask for advice about running his presidential campaign. Allyn delivered a six-hour lecture on the history of political advertising. Before he'd finished, Fox leaned over to his advisor and whispered, "Hire him."

Working for Vicente Fox wasn't your typical consulting gig. To avoid the scandal that might embroil Fox's campaign if the Mexican press learned he had hired a prominent right-wing strategist from the United States, Allyn traveled from Dallas to Mexico using multiple pseudonyms. Phone conversations were conducted in code. Allyn was shuffled around the country in bulletproof cars, accompanied by security teams armed with automatic weapons, to meetings conducted in safe houses. The stakes couldn't have been higher. Mexico's presidency had been held by the same political party for 72 years. Fox wasn't simply running for the country's highest office, he was leading a political revolution.

Fox won in 2000, and Allyn essentially earned a meal ticket for life. His many rich friends in Dallas introduced him to aspiring politicians all over the world. Many of these people shared a few characteristics. They were wealthy businessmen frustrated with the messy political situations in their countries, and they believed that business-minded reform could fix endemic political corruption, entrenched military rule, and economic malaise. It was a vision of governance familiar to someone who had spent his career promoting the "Dallas Way," and Allyn soon found himself working in places like Haiti, the Bahamas, Japan, and Indonesia.

His campaigns in these environments did not come without controversy. Stories in the Indonesian press about Allyn's work sometimes kicked up conspiratorial clouds. He'd begun operations in that part of the world after Ray Washburne—co-owner of Highland Park Village and the Mi Cocina chain, husband to a Hunt, and former finance chair of the Republican National Committee—introduced him to billionaire Hashim Djojohadikusumo, whose younger brother, Prabowo Subianto, a former army general, was running for president. The press labeled Allyn a compatriot of George W. Bush and an agent of misinformation. For Allyn, the tangle of political and cultural sensitivities was part of the thrill of the job. Before he parachuted into a new role, he would read armfuls of books about the country's history, culture, and politics. He'd learn some of the local language, too.

Allyn delivered a six-hour lecture on the history of political advertising. Before he'd finished, Vicente Fox leaned over to his advisor and whispered, "Hire him."

Allyn's experience abroad changed his perspective on politics in the United States, and the invasion of Iraq eroded his faith in the direction of the Republican Party. "By the time I started working overseas, I was glad to be working overseas," he says. "The party had drifted. I think I would have become a liability to our firm."

In 2002, the Allyns sold their company to global communications firm FleishmanHillard, and, in 2007, Allyn co-authored a bestselling book with Fox, one year after the Mexican president left office. By the time he turned 50, Allyn was a self-made millionaire who had accomplished just about everything a political consultant could hope for in a successful career. And yet something nagged at him: what was next?

In the late 2000s, Djojohadikusumo asked Allyn to produce a documentary film about the region's malnutrition. The leap from message-driven political advertising to advocacy documentary filmmaking didn't feel too huge, but the project started to make Allyn think of new possibilities. He had heard a story from Indonesia's bloody war of independence about a band of young guerrilla fighters, each from different ethnic and political backgrounds, who had died in their struggle against the Dutch colonialist forces. To Allyn, the story sounded like an Indonesian version of *Band of Brothers*, and he approached Djojohadikusumo with a proposal. In addition to the documentary, what if he also made a feature film about the war that drove home a positive message about Indonesia's quest for democratic freedom? His patron bit.

Allyn worked on the screenplay for *Merah Putih* (*Red and White*) with his son Conor, who had recently graduated from Georgetown's school of government and was working in Allyn's Jakarta office. The father-and-son team swapped books about screenwriting, famous directors, and movie financing. The film's cast was Indonesian, but they brought in experienced Americans, Brits, and Australians to head the production departments. After they completed *Merah Putih*, Allyn, without an international sales agent, took the movie to film festivals himself and found distributors to buy the rights. Despite the obscure subject matter and uncommon target market, the film made money. The Allyns then turned their war story into a trilogy and produced two more films in Indonesia.

On a layover during a trip back to the United States, father and son sat in a cafe in Sydney. Allyn's work on the Indonesian elections was wrapping up. As he felt when he'd started Allyn & Company, joined the Fox campaign, and sold his company, he was at another crossroads. "I'm sure we could keep working on more elections," Allyn told his son. "I know people in South America.

"Or," Allyn continued, "we could try to work in the film business."

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I FIRST HEARD ABOUT *RAJAH* IN 2013, WHEN ALLYN CAME TO the Dallas International Film Festival to promote *Java Heat*, a movie he'd produced and co-written with Conor, who directed it. Shot in Indonesia and starring Mickey Rourke, *Java Heat* is a straight-to-DVD-style action flick with a moralizing theme that seemed to reflect the instincts of a man who had spent most of

CALL OF THE WILD:
(*clockwise from top left*) Allyn and the author in the Bornean jungle; Jonathan Rhys Meyers stars as the White Rajah; Otto Farrant and Rhys Meyers paddle down river during the difficult shoot; filming Brooke fending off pirates to become rajah.

his career in the propaganda business. But it also offered evidence that Allyn could lure Hollywood talent to his projects. By 2013, Allyn had already been thinking of making *Rajah* for about three years. I told him that if he ever secured funding, he should give me a call. A few years passed, and we lost touch. I wasn't surprised. *Rajah* sounded like the sort of midlife passion project that would end up in what Hollywood calls "development hell." Then, out of the blue, in late September 2019, I got a text: "We start shooting RAJAH Sept 24—end of Oct." A few weeks later, I was on a plane.

I touch down in Kuching, the capital city of Sarawak, a week before Allyn's 60th birthday. When we first meet on set, Allyn doesn't recognize me. It is a reminder of how much has changed since he began working on *Rajah*. In that time, Conor met his future wife, got married, had three children, and launched a career as a director. Allyn's younger son, Jake, started college, graduated, and became an actor and screenwriter in Hollywood. Allyn and Monica bought a house in Santa Barbara, and have since bought land across the street from Mark Cuban in Preston Hollow so they can build a house in the city they still consider home. They plan to return to Dallas full-time when *Rajah* is in the can.

Unsurprisingly, Allyn has found that shooting a film in Borneo is tremendously difficult. A few days in, Jonathan Rhys Meyers fell ill with dehydration and spent three days recovering in a hospital. The film's first days of shooting were also hampered by smog created by forest fires set by farmers clearing land for palm plantations. The key grip contracted dengue fever. Allyn also spent some time in the hospital recovering from dehydration, which affected his kidneys.

Then there are all the inconveniences, miscommunications, and logistical mishaps that spring up in the jungles of Borneo. They shot a scene of Brooke landing on the island, but the props crew missed the boat to the coastal site, and Rhys Meyers had to disembark on camera sans sword or pistol. When the production arrived at another important shooting location, at a remote inland spot called Fairy Cave, they found parks officials had closed the site for renovations. Allyn negotiated with the Malaysian tourist office to reopen the cave for the production. There were also unseasonable rains that swelled rivers and ruined locations; intense heat that turned routine shooting days into brutal tests of endurance; and Sarawak's ceaseless public holidays, which seem to fall on every Monday and Friday and slow the simplest tasks. When I ask Allyn how many of these problems are filmmaking problems and how many are Borneo problems, he says, "About 75 to 80 percent are Borneo problems."

On my first day with Allyn, we head to the lower slope of Gunung Santubong, a long, plump mountain with two bulbous peaks that resembles an odalisque in recline. Our pickup turns onto a muddy driveway and we reach a dead end where a handful of police officers

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in camouflage smoke cigarettes and mill around. A path into the jungle leads to the edge of a wide clearing. The forest floor is covered with leaves, vegetation, electrical wires, and rigging equipment. Huge lights and reflectors stand on tall metal posts under the canopy of trees, and film crew buzz around, pulling wire or setting up cameras or lighting rigging. Extras stand around half-naked in loincloths, holding spears and wearing necklaces of human skulls.

Allyn says that he has found that film productions are like political campaigns. They are both business startups that grow exponentially for a few months and then dissolve. With *Rajah*, he plays two roles that occasionally conflict with each other. On the one hand, he is the screenwriter. He wants to make sure that the many improvisational decisions made by the actors and filmmakers don't deviate from his story. On the other hand, Allyn is a producer. He wants the production to stay on time and under budget, even if that means changing the script on the fly. It makes for tricky office politics. In the production tent, Allyn is decisive, quick to agree to cut scenes, swap crew members, or reimagine how a location might work if it means staying under budget. But on set, Allyn listens closely to the actors and doesn't hesitate to alert Michael Haussman if they improvise dialogue that doesn't work. "I want to make sure they don't fuck with my script," he says with a smile, only half-joking.

For the most part, though, Allyn hangs back and watches the cast and crew with almost boyish enthusiasm. It is something that struck me when we first met in Dallas. Allyn, who is a commanding 6-foot-4, with broad shoulders and thinning brown hair that flops over his square forehead, is the cliché of neither an impenetrable PR handler nor a cutthroat movie producer. He is approachable, sincere, and gentle, like an avuncular father ready to lead a troupe of Boy Scouts on a camping trip. I find it difficult to believe that this is the same man who one Indonesian pollster described as a producer of mischief and a manipulator of media, or even the person who *Dallas Observer* columnist Jim Schutze once chastised for conjuring the solar-powered water taxis that epitomized the magical thinking around the failed Trinity River Project. When I ask Allyn about Schutze's criticism, he laughs and asks, "What's a solar-powered water taxi?"

As we move through the set, making our way toward the rear of a clearing where *Rajah*'s crew is shooting against an outcropping of granite boulders, Allyn introduces me to everyone we bump into: the Thai still photographer, the Malaysian script supervisor, the special effects guys from Bangkok. He remembers everyone's name and chats in bits of broken Malay, Indonesian, and even a little indigenous dialect he has picked up. He says he was emphatic about casting actors from the ethnic groups of the characters they portray, right down to Peter John, a Dayak activist and journalist who plays a tribal chief from whom John is a direct descendant.

We reach the shoot, and a production assistant hands Allyn a headset. He crouches behind a monitor to watch a few takes. The filmmakers have moved on to an important scene with Rhys Meyers and Samo Rafael, a handsome young Indonesian actor who is playing a Bruneian prince. In the scene, Brooke begins to realize that his journey has embroiled him in political intrigue he is only beginning to understand. "The British never understand that we are the kings," the prince whispers. "And you are the pawns."

Director Michael Haussman exhausts the permutations of angles from which they can shoot the two men. Afternoon turns into night. Crew members hand out bug spray and pass around trays of pink bean curd and puffed potato pastries. As the evening stretches on, Allyn begins to worry. Screen Actors Guild rules require a certain amount of downtime for actors each day. If they don't get Rhys Meyers back to the hotel soon, it may mean having to push back tomorrow's shooting schedule. Finally, they get their shot. Brooke stares out into the darkness. The director yells cut. Allyn sits back in his chair, takes off the headset, and exhales.

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EVERY NIGHT ALLYN EATS AT ZINC, A MEDiterranean restaurant run by a French expat. It's one of his routines that helps make life in this foreign city feel more like home. It's Friday night, and Kuching's waterfront bustles with street performers, food vendors, and families strolling beneath the glowing ribbed dome of the parliament building, which looms over the river like an enormous lemon juicer. It's another public holiday, Allyn tells me, the governor's birthday.

It has been a long day. They shot a scene up on the mountain where Rhys Meyers was forced to sit half-naked in a natural pool for hours. Allyn was worried he would get sick, and when they were done shooting, no one was happy with the footage. "Sometimes it feels like the world is not letting you make your movie," he says.

For Allyn, his days begin at 4 AM, when he wakes to respond to emails that come in overnight from Los Angeles. Conor, an executive producer on *Rajah*, helps handle that side of the production—talent contracts, travel logistics, legal issues. Allyn doesn't enjoy that aspect of filmmaking. "I used to say, I don't want to be running around being a political consultant when I'm an old man, when I'm 50," he says. "I really don't need to be running around dealing with what hotel room some actor is going to stay in anymore."

Allyn has found that making movies involves many of the details he didn't enjoy handling in politics: schmoozing, fundraising, reacting to unpredictable elements. And though he may not like this part of the production process, he has proven adept at it. It took him years to raise the funds for *Rajah*, and he did so only after a slow realization that traditional sources of Hollywood money wouldn't be available to him. Allyn pivoted and approached people with deep pockets in a world he better understood. Thirty percent of *Rajah*'s budget is funded through a rebate program set up by the government of Malaysia. He didn't finalize the last bit of funding until he was already in pre-production, but when it came through, Allyn had investors from Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur bidding for a piece of his movie.

I ask him what aspects of filmmaking he does enjoy. "Writing," he says. "You only have to rely on yourself."

We order wine and a charcuterie board, and Allyn begins to relax. He'd rather talk about books and movies than politics or his former career. He churns through novels at a ferocious clip, mentally indexing the ones that he believes might make good films. He gravitates toward adventure stories driven by moral purpose and argues, for example, that *The Mission*, the 1986 Roland Joffé movie starring Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons, is an underrated masterpiece. His favorite movie of all time is *Lawrence of Arabia*, and he suggests that one of the reasons he has been obsessed with James Brooke all these years is that the story offers him the opportunity to realize a boyhood dream of making a movie like David Lean's seminal film.

This brings me to a question I had long before arriving in Borneo. Why, when Allyn decided to try his hand at the movie trade, did he fixate on the story of the White Rajah? Why did he spend 10 years struggling to write it and then get it financed and produced? I could argue that this movie has dominated Allyn's life to such an extent that he didn't leave political consulting to make movies, he left to make *Rajah*.

On a surface level, it makes sense. There are parallels between the 19th-century adventurer and the former political strategist. Both were wandering idealists who entered foreign lands armed with ideas about how to fix the "uncivilized" corners of the world, and both ended up profoundly changed by the experience. When I ask Allyn why *Rajah*, he echoes some of these ideas. Brooke wasn't your typical colonialist explorer. When he became rajah of Sawarak, he resisted attempts to allow his lands to be subsumed as a colony of the British Crown. Allyn admires Brooke's empathy for the people he encountered in Borneo and the way in which he allowed his experience to alter the way he perceives the world. It is a process that Allyn himself underwent, beginning with his work in Mexico, and why he feels alienated from the political party he served for so many years. We live in "an era of xenophobia," he says, and he believes the movie's themes have a bearing on our current historical moment.

Then he jokes that Monica has another explanation. "My wife says it is because I am like Brooke. I have an impetuous need to keep going."

As dinner winds down, Allyn becomes contemplative. He admits that, from the outside, his quest to make his movie might reflect a certain amount of restlessness, and he wonders if, when *Rajah* is finally finished, he should slow down. "People live in the past, the present, or the future," he says. "I live in the future. I think it is time to live more in the present."

He tells me a story about an Allyn & Company Christmas party some years ago where they played a game in which everyone had to write down something he wished he could do or be. Someone wrote that she wished she could play the piano. Allyn wrote down that he wanted to be more like his father. "My father was a contented man," he says. "He played golf. I could never play golf."

Later, though, Allyn seems to contradict himself. He tells a story about Stanley Marcus. Toward the end of his life, Marcus was building a house in Chiapas. Allyn was a younger man at the time, and when Marcus told him excitedly about the project, Allyn couldn't understand why Marcus was pouring so much energy into building a house that he wouldn't live to enjoy. Now Allyn understands that wasn't the point. The point was that Marcus needed a project. Vicente Fox used to say something similar. "The day you retire," Fox told Allyn, "is the day you start to die."

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IN ALLYN'S *RAJAH* SCRIPT, JAMES BROOKE'S decisive moment comes on page 60. Brooke has helped the people of Sarawak fend off pirate raids, and he has built an alliance with the ruler of Brunei, who appoints him rajah. He has fallen in love with a Malay noblewoman, and they are living together in a palace he has constructed that contains the fruits of his explorations, exotic taxidermy and maps of uncharted lands. Then, from over the horizon, an English ship appears bearing a British naval captain and Brooke's estranged wife. The voyagers are expecting a celebration upon arrival, and they hope to declare the rajah's realm for the British Crown before whisking the fabled adventurer back to England. Brooke, however, knows that their arrival will only hasten his tragic end.

I could argue that this movie has dominated Allyn's life to such an extent that he didn't leave political consulting to make movies, he left to make *Rajah*.

"I can't come home with you, sir," Brooke tells the captain after he has disembarked. "Because, you see, I am home."

Every morning on the way to the shoot, Allyn calls his wife, who is currently living in Santa Barbara but finalizing the plans for their new Preston Hollow home. Overnight, Monica sends Allyn samples of design ideas. Allyn tells her he likes them but admits that "To say I'm building a house would be like saying Monica is making a movie in Borneo."

On my last day in Borneo, Allyn is once again inundated with mundane production demands. An official from the tourism office arrives with his wife and her friend in tow, and Allyn must show them around. They linger and hope to catch a glimpse of the stars, maybe snap a few selfies. Allyn grows antsy. He is missing much of the day's shooting, and he wants to get back to the hotel to greet a new batch of talent—British actors Ralph Ineson and Hannah New, as well as Hong Kong star Josie Ho—who is set to arrive that evening. Watching him, I think of something else that Allyn and Brooke share. Both men escaped to the far edges of the world, only to find themselves trapped by the responsibilities they sought to escape. For Brooke, it was ruling a realm. For Allyn, it is making his movie.

Allyn finally passes off the officials to an assistant, and we head back to town. As I leave the set, it is clear that, despite all the obstacles, Allyn will make his movie. But I can't help but wonder what happens after that. When I later speak with Monica, she says she believes that, after so many years running around the world, Allyn is finally ready to come home. They never really enjoyed being in Los Angeles, and even though their children and grandchildren now live in Los Angeles, Dallas is where their friends are and where they feel most at home. "When he started this project, he had no idea how hard it was going to be and how much it was going to take out of him," she says.

Conor is more skeptical. His dad tells him he wants to slow down, but then he will call about a book he has finished that he thinks would be perfect for the next film they could make together. "He is not good at being retired or semiretired," Conor says. "This is kind of a weird Rob Allyn version of semiretirement, working full time but pretending that you're not."

When I ask Allyn, he deflects. Part of the reason he got into filmmaking, he says, was to help his sons break into the business, and now that their careers are taking off, he can take a step back. But then he'll mention casually that he sent a series of novels to his agent to see if the rights are available. I can't help but feel that this conflict is the result of living in a kind of limbo. Now that *Rajah* is nearly over, Allyn is caught between two worlds and two conflicting senses of purpose. There is the vision of quiet contentment, his father's long golf games, the house coming out of the ground in Dallas. And then there is the do-not-go-gently resolve of Vicente Fox's work ethic, Stanley Marcus' house in Mexico, the next film idea that may bring Allyn and his boys to some new corner of the earth.

As I leave Borneo, it is as if Allyn stands like Brooke on a dock overlooking the Sarawak River. A ship appears on the horizon, and Rob Allyn must decide how he will script his next act. D

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