'AVIATOR' TEAM PILOTS WB KIDPIC

Helmer in ‘Hugo’ cockpit

By MICHAEL FLEMING and PAMELA MCLINTOCK

The heat generated by “The Departed” has put Martin Scorsese in high demand. Warner Bros. and Graham King’s Focus Entertainment Group—which produced “The Departed”—have acquired screen rights to the bestselling Brian Selznick children’s novel “The Invention of Hugo Cabret” as a potential directing vehicle for Scorsese.

Project reteams the creatives behind 2004’s “The Aviator”: screenwriter John Logan, Scorsese and producer King. Logan will immediately begin penning the script.

Published last month by Scholastic, “The Invention of Hugo Cabret” concerns a 12-year-old orphan who lives in the walls of a Paris train station in 1930 and a mystery involving the boy, his late father and a robot.

Scorsese recently inked a lucrative first-look deal with Paramount. Under the terms of the pact, Par has the right to own half of any project Scorsese directs or produces elsewhere.

“Hugo Cabret” joins several projects on Scorsese’s to-do list. While the director hasn’t declared his next film, projects on his front burner include “Silence,” the Warner-produced initial adaptation of the Shusaku Endo novel about two 17th century priests who witness the hardships of spreading Christianity in Japan. (Project predates the first-look deal with Par.)

A sequel to “The Departed” is also being mulled, based on an idea by scripter William Monahan.

Both Scorsese and King head into the weekend in contention for Oscars for “Departed.”

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Separately at WB, King is partnered with Depp on “Shantaram” for director Mira Nair.

Initial and Depp’s Infinitum Nihil are also developing a drama that will focus on Alexander Litvinenko, the ex-KGB spy who was fatally poisoned.