THE FILMING OF CONAN THE BARBARIAN
In 1942, working with practically no money, director Jacques Tourneur and producer Val Lewton joined forces to create "Cat People," an intelligent and low-key horror classic. Forty years later, backed with a $15 million budget and aided by some of the best technicians working today, director Paul Schrader has breathed new life into the old cat.

"The Making of Cat People," our next cover story, will chronicle the twists, turns, triumphs and disasters involved in updating Tourneur's gem into a sensuous, yet terrifying tale, starring Malcolm McDowell and Nastassia Kinski. Our in-depth coverage features interviews with screenwriter Alan Ormsby, visual consultant Ferdinando Scarfiotti, makeup artists Tom and Ellis Burman, effects supervisor Al Whitlock, optical wiz Rob Blalack and nearly a dozen others!

And, of course, there's an interview with Schrader himself, the often-misunderstood writer-director of "Blue Collar," "Hard Core" and "American Gigolo."

It's the type of comprehensive article you'll find only in the colorful pages of CINEFANTASTIQUE. To get your copy weeks before it appears on the newsstand, simply fill out the coupon below. By subscribing, you'll save up to $14 over the single issue cost. What's more, you'll be sure to keep your "Sense of Wonder" purring.
Though our previous issue devoted to the filming of CONAN THE BARBARIAN (Volume 11 Number 3) was one of our most popular issues, we experienced a substantial backlash of criticism from readers who wanted to know why we were bothered to hype another Dino De Laurentiis fantasy film?

Author Paul Sammon, who spent ten days in Madrid covering the filming for our pages, has since embarked on a new career as publicity flack for the production, in the employ of distributor Universal Pictures, trumpeting the film's virtues to gatherings of fantasy and science fiction fans at conventions of any size in hamlets and towns across the country. The fans come to listen, but they are a skeptical bunch who tend to hiss at the name of Dino De Laurentiis. Someone always asks the inevitable question: "How can another fantasy film from this man possibly be any good?"

Since we've taken great pains in our pages in the past to expose the kind of trash with which Dino De Laurentiis pollutes our genre (KING KONG: 5:140, 5:4:20, and FLASH GORDON: 10:3:24), I'm not surprised that some of you might be confused by our relatively benign "wait and see" attitude toward CONAN. All I can tell you is what our writer Paul Sammon tells the doubting fans at conventions, individuals who would normally be salivating at the prospect of a major motion picture based on the work of fantasy author Robert E. Howard, if only it weren't being done by a schlockmeister like De Laurentiis. "Dino wasn't that involved in this production."

We can hope.

We contacted publicity representatives at the Dino De Laurentiis Corporation to ask Dino what his involvement with the movie was, but De Laurentiis declined to be interviewed.

All I know about CONAN is what I've read in CINEFANTASTIQUE, and I think it looks and sounds very promising. The preview trailer now circulating in movie theaters confirms that. It can be great.

Frederick S. Clarke

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Cover illustration by R. Casaro
By Tim Lucas

An abandoned nursery school, hunched on the corner of Bathurst and Adelaide Streets in Toronto, appears to have reopened for business in what appears to be a Catholic mission.

But that's not what the sign says at all. It reads, "Cathode Ray Mission," as in "cathode-ray tube." And beneath these words is a thorn-entangled Valentine heart, religiously bleeding, which conceals the true meaning of the place—a marque for David Cronenberg's latest project, VIDEODROME.

Parked behind the Mission's wrought-iron gates are a tribed Winnebagos, labeled "Dr. Cronenberg," "J. Woods," and "N. Brand." Fans of Neville Brand needn't excite themselves; the Winnebago is Debbie Harry's, the name is that of her character, and the sign is to give her some privacy from her fans.

"This is my first Winnebago picture," Cronenberg announces, mock-stoically. As his production deadline draws near, late in 1981, the King of Venereal Horror (as David Cronenberg christened him) often holes up inside his home-away-from-home to sort his thoughts, plan his shoot, rewrite and, sometimes, reconceptualize the white-paged scenes from his first draft.

"Admittedly it's a small field, venereal horror," Cronenberg jokes, "but at least I'm king of it."

The Mission itself is quite spacious and still decorated with paintings from its days as a nursery school. The auditorium has been converted by art director Carol Sett and crew into a harrowing sequence of 50 monitor-enstrined cubicles. Rick Baker's makeup room, its door sternly, but perhaps facetiously, labeled "No Admittance," has a Christmas tree above a series of strung stockings, each stuffed with a severed hand (Rick's own).

There are lounging quarters, a video room harboring taped footage from the film, two toilets and a makeshift kitchen provisioned to fuel both cast and crew through absurdly long workdays. The "Videodrome" chamber itself, a harsh-looking red torture arena, dominates the cellar.

When assistant director John Board boiers, "Okay, lock it up! Everybody quiet!" a call is scattered

Director David Cronenberg and cinematographer Mark Irwin during filming in Toronto's Constellation Hotel.
by walkie-talkie throughout the building, halting all activities. There will be no talking, no slurping of coffee and no flushing of toilets, because, hopefully, movie history is being made.

In the early hours of the morning on the day before Christmas, David Cronenberg completed principal photography on VIDEODROME. The $5.5 million feature, Cronenberg's sixth, was produced by Claude Heroux with Filmplan's Pierre David and Victor Solnicki, and stars James Woods, Debbie Harry, Sonja Smits and Les Carlson.

Originally scheduled for October release though Universal, financial considerations have urged Cronenberg and editor Ron Sanders to aim for an August premiere. Five days of postproduction shooting, devoted to filming special makeup effects devised by Rick Baker's F/X, Inc., are planned for March.

James Woods—recipient of Golden Globe and Academy Award nominations as Best Actor for THE ONION FIELD—plays Max Renn, owner of Civic TV, a small-time cable operation that illicitly pirates video signals from satellites for cost-free re-broadcast. One night, an employee accidentally nets what appears to be a grainy Brazilian telecast. "They pull in this show called 'Videodrome,'" Cronenberg explained. "It's a torture and murder show, featuring guys in hoods torturing and electrocuting various victims. Renn figures he can broadcast the show free, because how will Brazil learn what Toronto is doing? He tries to learn more about the show and discovers what he seen is real—Videodrome—and it's being done for a very private clientele. I invented a sophisticated video underground—at least I hope I invented it—that exists in each country, expressing whatever is suppressed by that country's political and personal taboos."

At first, Cronenberg was content merely to explore Renn's pursuit of the truth. "But my script suddenly went off into some very strange directions," he said. "There's a second and third level to the picture we can't yet discuss."

So, while the time wasn't ripe to reveal what VIDEODROME is, Cronenberg was quite willing to discuss what it is not an attack on the television industry. "I won't be surprised, but I'll be disappointed, if people read it that way," he said. "I think people who plug into the straightforward moral stance at the beginning of the film will find themselves utterly confused by the end of it. It's more subtle than that. People who have the simplistic outlook that says, 'TV is bad, it's rotting our minds,' won't understand."

"Once again," Cronenberg continued. "I'm interested in the incredible way people alter their environment without knowing the consequences; you might consider that either foolhardy or courageous. VIDEODROME is about more than TV; it's about sex and violence on TV. People may approach it as some moral parable, but it's not specifically an attack on TV, as was NETWORK. In public, Max Renn claims that televised sex and violence will help him survive in the cable business. But he's also personally fascinated with these things. So, the real question becomes: does democratic capitalism force him to 'do bad,' or is this an evil spawned by a private obsession?"

VIDEODROME's innovative shape and content constitute Cronenberg's most dramatic structural and creative advancement yet. "The first draft was totally wild," he said. "I could never shake the feeling it was wrong. The first draft would've been rated XXX and I'm bound, in the contract I've signed with Universal, to an R-rating. Still, the film will be very daring and tricky. Not only topically, but sexually and structurally, as well."

VIDEODROME is expected to be a departure from the type of explicit horror films—including THEY CAME FROM WITHIN, KABIB and THE BROOD—that tagged Cronenberg as the King of Venerable Horror. As a master of pushing his material as far as it will go, the question remains: how daring can VIDEODROME really be, when Universal is hoping for a massive commercial hit?

"One of the nice things about working on a low-budget," Cronenberg said, "is that, in a weird way, you have more freedom in terms of imagination and daring. Not technological daring, but just plain daring. In this film, there are some strange and unusual ways the information will be conveyed to the audience. None of this affects how much the film will cost. Money and creative imagination don't have to do with each other as some people think."

As the film's content is something of a departure for Cronenberg, so is the film's structure. "It's completely a first-person narrative," he said. "My other films begin in the first-person and end up scattering all around. In VIDEODROME, there are no cutaways to other points of view. This single perspective limits one as a storyteller, but it adds a certain potency."

The sado-erotic content and the film's first-person perspective are only two of the many creative challenges the project posed for Cronenberg and his crew. VIDEODROME encompasses everything from the director's private brand of "venera}

The stars of VIDEODROME: (l-r) Canadian Sonja Smits; Debbie Harry, lead singer of "Blondie"; and James Woods, nominated for an Oscar for THE ONION FIELD.
Sonja Smits and director Cronenberg.

horrors” to a satirical musical production number. Therefore, Cronenberg is reluctant to call the project as either “horror” or “science fiction.” Rather, he prefers Borges’ adjective “irreal” as more apt, as VIDEO DROME veers in and out of reality.

With the narrative structure built around the perspective of Max Reen, actor James Woods appears in virtually every scene. In fact, he had so little time for relaxation away from the set that, on one occasion, a professional masseuse was summoned to the set.

Woods can turn a scene into a beast-of-burdenship. When he’s not needed for a particular shot, he leaves to loop dialogue for a recently-completed picture. His mind is on his wife, a Los Angeles model. He has to be in New York City by Christmas Eve to let her into their apartment, and in the midst of the shoot, the Christmas deadline looks less and less likely with the fog on his character’s heightening anxieties.

Through it all, his rampant sense of humor keeps the crew alert in the wearing haze that thickens after midnight. I presented him with a copy of CQP that highlighted Cronenberg’s career. “To give you a sense of historical perspective on the film you’re making,” I told him. Big prepared speech. He remembers the next morning that he read the issue straight through in his hotel room. Then on the set, he jokingly challenges one of cinematographer Mark Irwin’s suggestions. “You don’t understand,” Woods chides. “According to the thematic unity of Cronenberg’s films…”

Wood’s screen persona of oddness, created desperation is perfect for Cronenberg’s paranoid scenario, and the two men have since evolved an almost brotherly rapport. Witty dialogues and practical jokes are freely exchanged between them.

“To be honest with you the first-person aspect never dawned on me until the second week of the shoot,” said Woods, while waiting between takes. “Now, I’m sitting here after working a 17-hour day yesterday, and we’re gonna have another one today, and I’ve done it every day of this movie. The shortest day I’ve had was 14 hours. I have never worked so fuckin’ hard in my entire life!”

“I thought it could become boring watching me slobbin’ around everywhere. But, I thought I might as well take the character from A to Z and back again. Sometimes the film’s mysteriously funny, then it’s horrific, and there’s some of the sexiest stuff I’ve ever seen in film. In one love scene, a phrase I’m inventing Debbie Harry’s ears, the light from the TV flickering like a crackling fire in front of us. The image on the TV, though, is a person being tormented. Then I saw it: it resembles it worked like gangbusters. That scene’s going to make cinematic history!”

Debbie Harry, best known as the poster queen vocalist of Blondie, is the most cautious cast member when it comes to the Press, perhaps because she’s the widest experience with them. Once her defenses are felled by a couple of halfway-intelligent questions, and she sees that we’re not going to pester her about her new hair color, her manner warms considerably.

The singer is acting her last scenes despite an artfully-concealed handicap of flu. She is extremely concerned at proving herself all over in this new medium and, unlike her fellow actors, carries her lines onto the set, studying them intensely between takes and sitting on the floor with her script. The care she takes and the performances that is developing impress her co-workers.

VIDEO DROME marks Harry’s following screen credit, this is her first appearance in UNION CITY and ROADIE. She plays Nicki Brand, a Toronto pop psychologist who meets Max Reen on a talk show and becomes, to his complete surprise, his lover.

Harry hadn’t been aware of Cronenberg’s work before he approached her with the part. “I haven’t seen SCANNERS, ” she said. “I wasn’t familiar with any of his earlier films. I did see THE BROOD. It was gory and kind of weird, but interesting. It reminded me of that painter, Bacon? He was a lot of stuff with conscious.”

The film’s producers, reeling from the amateurish performance by Stephen Lack in SCANNERS, were at first hesitant to hire the rock star. But Cronenberg was interested in bringing Lack from the outset, and she flew to Toronto and had a very successful audition. “David didn’t want to feel he had to use me because I had a large following,” said Harry. “So I flew up and tested. It was all very legitimate.”

“Performing has its pressures,” Cronenberg remarked about Harry’s debut, “but she told me filmmaking was a very different pressure. Her training as a singer and performer on stage hadn’t prepared her for her screen role. This isn’t the first time on a film set, but the energy she uses as a performer is definitely unusable on film. The constant repetition of dialogue, hitting your mark and finding the light, doing the same things with your hands for continuity, while her totally spontaneous, is simply not part of being a rock performer. Yet, she adapted remarkably fast. Jimmy Woodson made a joke about it, saying. Remember how she used to do that line and I took that line. Now she does it in two and I need it!”

Jimmy’s been very supportive of her. His great knowledge of film technology and acting was extremely helpful in making Debbie feel comfortable.

VIDEO DROME’s remaining cast members are native Canadian performers. Sonja Smits, a striking Toronto stage actress with two other, as-yet-unreleased, films behind her, plays Bianca O’Brien, the mysteriously cool daughter of Brian O’Brien (Jack Creley). Model and the late Marshal Louisa, the elder O’Brien is a media prophet obsessed with the metaphysics of television. Cronenberg was so pleased with Smits’ performance, he was planning to include an extra, in scenes she hadn’t originally envisoned her.

It may seem odd that Cronenberg would make such-on-the-spot changes, ever to his film. However, I was writing far too poorly so poorly on SCANNERS. But Cronenberg is convinced the increased flexibility is worth the risk. “It’s like blocking a scene,” he says. “As you come to know your actors, their potential and their ideas together, you’ve worked with them for six or seven weeks—it’s easy to do what you think the characters and the film. For example, I’ve added Smits to the last scene in the movie. She played Bianca so well, I thought ‘Gee, let me see him one more time’.”

SCANNERS, a lot of scenes were written this way, and that was the problem.”

Rick Baker and his FX team were first approached for VIDEO DROME last June. Noting the extensive use of special effects demanded by the latter Cronenberg’s script, Baker wanted to get the best possible jump on the film’s October starting date.

“They stalled and stalled until, finally, it was about two months before the shoot,” Baker said. “We had a lot of other offers for some big films and I told them we were either going to start work now, or we were doing something else. So we were given two months before production started. I’d wanted five and a half months. This job really was a test of what we could do without adequate time and money.

Baker admits actually did the majority of the work on this film.”

Baker continued. “I was a designer, supervisor. I did some original sketches and some real quick paintings and then, to save time, assigned different assistant to different projects. I’m used to working on this stuff myself, at least the fun stuff. The problems of time and money invested in these guys, and I want to keep them. The best way to do that is, to give them the fun things!”

For this project, Baker and his FX team (Steve Johnson, Doug Beswick, Shawn McEnroe, Bill Sturgeon, Kevin Brennan and Tom Hester) worked with Canadian effects men Frank Carrere and Tom Cotlier. In addition, the late Marshall Lennick and assistants Lee Wilson and Rob Mekler contributed not only the recording and projection of video-tape materials, but the development of custom equipment and creative matte effects.

Members of the effects team, on the average, received about three hours of sleep per night during the shoot.

“I think Rick’s had an interestingly difficult time,” Cronenberg remarked. “First, because he didn’t have as much lead time as he would’ve liked. He always has to be on the case—and second, because he’s doing some special effects, even by normal makeup standards. There are some things he’s never been asked to do before and that’s why it’s interesting and why it’s difficult.”

Prior to the signing of Baker, Dick Smith (who designed the pyrotechnic death duel in SCANNERS) was contacted to create film’s makeup effects. Smith, about to begin work on Tony Scott’s THE HUNGER, declined. However, he did become involved temporarily when a body cast of Debbie Harry, who wasn’t able to leave New York, was required by FX.

“I just did Rick a favor by casting the body,” said Smith. “It was like taking a life mask. She came and we cast her front torso from her chin to below her navel. Exactly how the cast was to be used, I don’t know. I think Rick had to make some kind of
David Cronenberg (left), assistant director John Board and cinematographer Mark Irwin discuss the film's concluding scenes on the Videodrome set, where various victims are tied, whipped, made love to and electrocuted at different points throughout the film. The set is filled with shallow water for all of its appearances on camera.

appliance to fit over her body. But it was hardly mechanical, nothing creative about it."

Baker asked Steve Johnson to fly to Smith's home to assist in the casting and fetch it back. Johnson recalled that Harry did not take well to the plastic casting. "We did the casting in Dick's house, in his basement, and she didn't know who he was, or who I was," he said. "We had to do it twice; we messed up the first time. Dick worked out a pretty good technique; there's a retardent that comes with the alginate now, so that it doesn't go on ice-cold, and cause goosepimples. Still, she didn't enjoy it. Not as much as she did.

On December 16th, 1981, David Cronenberg directed his first musical production number, in the Aries Scorpion Room at Toronto's Constellation Hotel. Choreographed by Kirsten Etherington, the number begins muddily with the six dancers dressed in bright, metallically-colored renaissance costumes, which are peeled away to reveal contemporary leotards as the music soars. Actually, the music has yet to be written and the dancing was phrased to zesty Bob Fosse fare to which composer Howard Shore will synchronize his composition later. The effect is tantalizingly tacky. And intentionally so.

A roomful of extras are seated at tables—supposedly the conventional salespeople of Spectacular Optical, an eyewear-designing company—are finally dismissed, after a 13-hour day, at 12:55 in the morning. The dancers are not so fortunate, and are kept working until 3:30. While cinematographer Mark Irwin and Cronenberg grapple with the conceptual challenge of musical comedy, the dancers chat, exercise and nap.

Filmmaking seems an incomprehensible art to one dancer in particular. After 12 hours of lifting a female partner and having her slide off his arm, the abrasive texture of her costume has rubbed it raw. He conceals and protects the sensitive area with a beige-colored bandage, which Irwin detects only after a full take. The dancer has to remove the wrap for the unprintable take, and suffer through the lift with only a skimpy costume to cover the burn. Close-up, it looks agonizing...

Everyone involved with the making of VIDEODROME is confident of its success and importance, equating its controversial subject matter with Stanley Kubrick's A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. And like that film, VIDEODROME has suffered in share of technical setbacks. There have been tragic occurrences of scratched negatives and other ruined footage. Cronenberg, without time or cash to reshoot this material, intends to "cut around" the problem in the editing room.

Some scenes are being reshot for other reasons than bad luck. Executive producer Victor Solnicki revealed that, regardless of VIDEODROME's strong sexual and violent content, "soft" versions of several scenes were filmed. "A TV version acts as an insurance policy on any picture costing more than $6 million," said Solnicki. "But the peculiar content doesn't concern us, commercially. Look at A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. It was picture without a niche, but it had a classy and menacing advertising campaign and did beautifully at the boxoffice. VIDEODROME has so many selling points, our publicity department has a wealth of materials on which to focus—it's a savagely satirical look at the media; it features outstanding actors, it's sexy, it has incredible special effects, and it has David himself. I feel David has great star potential. He'd be perfect for TV talk shows. When you compare this normal-looking man to his work, you have to fight an impulse to ask, 'What's a nice guy like you doing...?'

In fact, Cronenberg's increasing visibility as a filmmaker has led him into some interesting, if awkward, situations. "At one point, George Lucas asked if I'd be interested in directing the third STAR WARS movie," he said. "I told him I wasn't used to doing other people's material, but I'd be interested. They went off and looked at my pictures and nothing came of it. Later, I realized that films like STAR WARS must involve a lot of storyboarding, especially with all the specific visual work. I don't think I'd enjoy doing that very much; I don't even make shot lists."

The push to complete VIDEODROME by August has put all of Cronenberg's other projects on hold, and the director revealed that his long-rumored FRANKENSTEIN project no longer interests him. But VIDEODROME is another story.

"I'm very excited," he admitted. "There's black humor, character studies and some really beautiful, sensual stuff. It certainly feels like it's going to be, by far, my best film."
THE DARK CRYSTAL
Jim Henson brings the land of Froud to life with $25 million worth of fantasy wonder.

By Larry Winters

Making the rounds in theaters beginning this past December is a short, but impressive, teaser trailer of scenes from Jim Henson’s THE DARK CRYSTAL, the most complex and perhaps the most fantastical film ever made. Production sources estimate the film’s budget to be at least $25 million. Henson, creator of The Muppets, uses no live actors in the film. Virtually every scene has been made into a special effect to bring its cast of amazing non-human characters to life, based on designs by noted fantasy artist Brian Froud.

Though the preview trailer now circulating promises audiences they will see the images world of THE DARK CRYSTAL come to life on movie screens this summer, in January, Universal, the film’s U.S. and Canadian distributor, postponed the film’s longstanding May 28 premiere to consider more favorable dates. The film will probably see a Thanksgiving release in November. stiff competition from numerous other horror, fantasy and science fiction releases slated this summer was cited as the reason for the film’s delay, despite the considerable prestige of its Muppets connection, huge budget, participation of producer Gary Kurtz, whose credits on STAR WARS and THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK are prominently displayed in all advertising.

Co-directed by Henson and his Muppets associate Frank Oz, THE DARK CRYSTAL presents a primitive world devoid of technology and science where trees walk, mountains move, and nature is a living force of spirit and intelligence governed by magic. Henson conceived the story idea in 1977 to develop a new direction for his Muppet technology, and was immediately attracted to the work of English artist Brian Froud, published that year in a handsome coffee-table book by Peacock Press and Bantam Books called The Land of Froud. Henson hired the artist to design the film and its characters, and THE DARK CRYSTAL was born.

Four years of preproduction work followed, at a cost of more than $6 million, before production began in April of 1981. During the film’s lengthy preproduction period, Henson fleshed out his story working with screenwriter David Odell. From Froud’s designs, prototypes of characters, sets and costumes were constructed, and comic artist Mike Ploog was brought in to storyboard the action, providing a blueprint for filming. In 1979, after the tremendous financial success of Henson’s feature, Letter from Froud, the project was presented to financier Lord Lew Grade who agreed to bankroll filming through his I.T.C. Films International company. Grade’s movie empire has since collapsed, reeling from catastrophic losses on big-budget pictures, like RAISE THE TITANIC, that flopped at the box office.

Henson was approached during preproduction by producer Gary Kurtz, then working on THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, to provide the technology and expertise needed to film Yoda, the Gremlin-like Jedi master conceived by George Lucas. Henson used the assignment to underwrite research and development costs for techniques needed to film THE DARK CRYSTAL. Yoda served as a sort of dry run for the film. The character’s overwhelming popularity also provided a bonus, a promotional hook to win audience acceptance for Henson’s risky, unconventional project. Kurtz joined Henson as co-producer in 1980, shortly after the release of EMPIRE.

The Yoda convention is particularly important since, as one source close to the production puts it, “Muppetry is a word the filmmakers want to avoid.” Though Henson, Oz and regular Muppet crew performed the characters, non-Muppet voices have been added in the dubbing room. The performers, no more than three per creature, operate the characters from below stage by direct manipulation or by mechanical means, augmented by radio controlled effects triggered from a distance when needed.

Characters include Gelllings, two human-like elf creatures who serve as the film’s hero and heroine; Skekses (sounds like nexus), lizard-like villains who resemble Scrool, the Muppet character from Henson’s SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE segments; and Garthim, the beetle-like henchman of the Skekses. Not only are the names a hit off-putting for general audiences, not to mention the appearances, but some characters speak foreign languages which will not be subtitled.

Filming wrapped last September at EMI’s English Borehamwood studios. Final postproduction work has now been completed, including the addition of a symphonic score by Trevor Jones (EXCALIBUR), and trimming to a tight 94 minutes. A July release in England, via UIP, is being considered.
EATING RAOUl

What's for dinner?
It's the neighbors, m
Paul Bartel's quirky little black comedy.

By Jordan R. Fox

Whatever became of director Paul Bartel? In an age of blockbuster spectacles and high-budget spectacles, his talent for making quirky little films is not in great demand. But that's common in Hollywood, and although he garnered belated and well-deserved critical kudos (but nonexistent boxoffice results) with his feature debut in the early 70s—a marvelously kooky horror film, PRIVATE PARTS—and his subsequent features—DEATH RACE 2000 and CANNONBALL—were commercial successes, they did not make anyone stand up and notice him. In fact, all they did was type Bartel as a director of cat-stunt movies.

Then came a string of abortive projects that kept him busy without anything to show for it. United Artists pulled the plug on his next project, FRANKENCAR, at the last minute. He bowed out of UNDERGROUND Aces over concept differences with the filmmakers after a wearing development process. The film was made with another director and has been on the shelf for nearly two years. He was all set to direct a mystery by a British company when that, too, fell apart. So Bartel hasn't been in evidence behind the camera since 1976.

In fact, until his new film, EATING RAOUl, Bartel's major visibility has been as an actor. Working mostly in films made by his friends (HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD and PIRANHA for Joe Dante; HEARTBEATS for Allan Arkush), voicing computer characters (like THE BLUES BROTHERS) and as a member of the Filmex Selection Committee.

But even though he has been well-received as a comic actor, Bartel has returned to his first love: directing off-beat small-budget films. But Bartel disagrees with Hollywood's perception that his films project in extremely off-beat directions.

"I don't know about that. Am I kooky?" he asks turning to Joe Dante, who sublets a corner of his production office to his colleague from the New World days.

"Compared to what?" quips Dante.

EATING RAOUl (titled in production as THE BLANDS, named after its lead characters) is a black comedy highlighting the predicament of Paul and Mary. They are psychologically the quintessential Eisenhower-era couple, somehow stuck in the early '80s. Living in an apartment decorated in 1960s hinny—a bed, they are besieged on all sides-by the depraved, offensive world: the obnoxious, sniggering pop culture, the drab suburban sprawl, and dead-end, underpaying jobs. Their dream is to move away and open a small restaurant in the country.

By accident, the Blands discover a means of solving their most pressing problem: a non-de-plume of cruel Carla or Naughty Nancy in "underground" ads. Mary lures swingers to their doom, as husband Paul dispatches them. The scheme is a fabulously simple until the triple runs into a Chicano bunglar, who offers his silence—and a better means of corpse disposal—in exchange for a piece of the action.

EATING RAOUl was written by Bartel and collaborator Dick Blackburn two years ago at the Berlin Film Festival, while Bartel served on the critics jury. Knowing such a quirky and steep-scale project would be difficult to finance, Bartel shot and edited the film in sections, as money became available and to show new investors exactly what they were getting into. Completed after a total shooting schedule of 25 days, the film cost around $75,000.

Without blood and gore, though, with mice cameoed by Buck Henry and John Landis (who worked as a stuntman in DEATH RACE 2000), EATING RAOUl may have a tough time finding a viable niche in today's film marketplace. The incomplete rough-cut promises the delti humor and off-center, civilized nastiness we've come to expect from Bartel. In the film's major role, Bartel is as good an actor as an aspiring director now working; and it's a revelation to see his co-star, the underrated Mary Woronov, not portrayed as the typical horror matron, but as a light comedienne (she also appeared with Bartel in HEARTBEATS).

Release plans for EATING RAOUl are still pending. A careful program of test marketing is envisioned. "Given the peculiar nature of the story," said Bartel, "I feel the film's commerciality must be demonstrated for the distribution people."
**COMING**

**BLADE RUNNER**

Script rewrite stops feud between director Ridley Scott and novelist Philip K. Dick.

By Paul M. Sammon

Fifteen major genre films are in the starting gate for summer '82 release and the smart money is riding on Ridley Scott's BLADE RUNNER as a sure bet. With Harrison Ford in the lead, miniature work by ace special effects technician Douglas Trumbull, and a literate script, BLADE RUNNER has the talent, and money ($15 million) behind it to win against any competition.

Scott's first film since ALIEN stars Ford as Rick Deckard, a "Rep Detect Terminator," who tracks down a number of renegade 'replicants' (or androids) infiltrating a huge metropolis in the year 2020. Rutger Hauer (NIGHTHAWKS) portrays Batty, head replicant, and Sean Young (STRIPES) plays Ford's emigric lover. The Ladd Company—Michael Deeley production is now due for release June 18.

Scott's film is based on a late sixties novel by Phillip K. Dick, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? Dick was less than pleased with the original script by former actor Hampton Fancher. "There was very little resemblance between the screenplay and my novel," said Dick. "Worse, they had turned it into a poorly written, simple, and violent private eye fantasy centered on killing androids." Dick's novel had raised a complex philosophical issue, based on the author's research among Nari documents. Dick discovered a Gestapo officer who complained that, while he didn't mind working in a Jewish ghetto, the cries of the starving children kept him awake at night. "That line haunted me," said Dick. "So the core of Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? was that these artificial people were becoming more human while making them more soulless. Unfortunately, Fancher's various scripts had little, if any, of this.

When co-screenwriter David O. Peoples entered the film, however, producing a joint screenplay in late February of 1981, Dick suddenly found someone who understood his point of view. "Peoples added dimension to the story and characters and added a philosophical subtext that had been missing in the previous scripts," said Dick. "He was particularly pleased to find that he had transposed the heart of Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? back into BLADE RUNNER."

Peoples was also indirectly responsible for coming the term "replicant". The screenwriter's daughter, a chemistry major at UCLA, was familiar with a process in molecular biology called "replicating," and suggested the term. Scott insisted the word be used because it tied in better than "android" was too familiar. Even though script glitches were resolved, both Dick and Scott were wary the first time they met. In the press Dick had trashed the movie's script and Scott had let slip he never finished reading Dick's book because it was "too difficult." Their meeting resulted in a congenial truce.

Scott has a reputation for obsessive attention to detail (he had the cast of ALIEN wear futuristic underwear with the name of the ship stitched on it). "My primary visual jumping-off point on BLADE RUNNER was Nighthawks," a painting by Edward Hopper, said Scott. "It portrays a grim, dreary late night diner, a scene of utter hopelessness. I was constantly waving it under the noses of the production crew." (The painting also inspired the look of PENNIES FROM HEAVEN, where it is seen miraculously recreated.)

Artist Syd Mead's book of futuristic design, Sentinel, impressed Scott and he promptly hired Mead to consult on the overall look of the film. Mead designed various vehicles of the year 2029 and other artifacts like the Voight-Kampf indicator, a lie detector, based on retinal scanning, used to detect differences between artificial and genuine humans. He also created a number of citiescape portraying the overall environment of BLADE RUNNER's teeming metropolis.

Scott and Mead decided on a "retrofit" look for both BLADE RUNNER's cars and buildings. "In this particular future," said Scott, "it's nearly impossible to get any new parts for a car or find the funds to tear down an old building to erect a new one. So these objects are retrofitted, both the cars and buildings are simply fitted with new parts or facades over the existing ones, resulting in a cluttered, built-over look."

Retrofitting is most evident in BLADE RUNNER's buildings. Structures are hundreds of stories high, with the dregs of the city living below the 10th floors. And streets are now primarily used for access lanes between buildings. "Although we never mention BLADE RUNNER's city by name," Scott points out, "we do have a quick throwaway shot of the Chrysler Building, layerd off in the corner of the screen. I think that speaks for itself."

Though BLADE RUNNER is Scott's second science fiction film in a row, he's not worried about being typecast. "Not at all," he said. "In fact, I think I rather like being known as a genre director."

**STAR TREK II: PARAMOUNT TRIES TO PUT THE 'HYPE' IN HYPERSPACE**

STAR TREK II, subtitled "The Undiscovered Country," went before the cameras at Paramount on November 9 and principal photography wrapped in mid-January, with a June 1, 1982, release date already set. With a budget in the range of $10 million, the film is less than a quarter of the final cost for the first feature.

Two crewmembers from the TV series and the previous movie, Majel Barrett and Grace Lee Whitney, are missing from the cast this time. Ricardo Montalban appears as Khan, a character he created in 1967 episode of the series, "Space Seed." Paul Winfield plays Capt. Terrell, commander of an ill-fated exploratory mission, and Ice Eisenmann is, rumor has it, Captain Kirk's son.

Frequent publicity announcements that every single aspect of the production is secret have gone hand in hand with a flurry of glimpses behind the scenes and leaks of intriguing tidbits of information about the plot. The television newsachines ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT, which, like STAR TREK II, is produced by Paramount, ran three "exclusive looks behind the scenes" of the film, in which principals, executive producer Harve Bennett, and director Nicholas Meyer sat on the shadowy bridge set and discussed how they couldn't discuss the movie. Seldom does a week go by without the announcement that exciting things are happening on the set, but they can't be revealed because it is a closed set. Most movies are filmed on a closed set; few get such publicity mileage out of the fact.

Foment of rumors surrounding the film is that Spock would perish. Though the movie's publicist denies the rumor was deliberately leaked, it appeared early in the production, has resurfaced frequently, and has obtained the movie more publicity than its entire budget could have bought. Alarmed Trekkies rose to the bait with letters, phone calls, petitions and newspapers designed to save Spock, and their fervor provoked magazine and newspaper coverage, including the headline of the October 9 edition of the said Wall Street Journal. The threat of killing off a major series character was old when Dickens had Londoners lining up in the snow for the next installment of The Old Curiosity Shop in 1841. Little Nell eventually died and stayed dead. But let us not forget that the television episode on which STAR TREK II is based, involved suspended animation, not that STAR TREK III is already on the boards and Leonard Nimoy has said that he will be in it.

Kay Anderson
PARASITE
Get ready for Stan Winston's monsters and makeup effects in glorious 3-D!

By Bob Villard & Ted Newsom

Not all special effects are on the screen. There was a time when they were on your nose, in the form of a pair of funny glasses with blue and red lenses. Independent producers searching for new solutions to the problem of filling theaters, have hit upon an old solution: 3-D.

Of course, history is quick to remind us that this solution occurred to movie moguls before, with the advent of 3-D in 1953, and it was quickly dropped a year later. But facts like this don't deter intrepid individuals who see quick profits, especially since the surprise box-office success last year of COMIN' AT YA, a 3-D Italian import released by Filmways.

So producer Irvin Yablans (HALLOWEEN) and director Charles Band have joined forces to produce PARASITE, the first low-budget entry into 3-D.

Technically, PARASITE isn't the first. Actor producer Earl Owensby is rightfully touting his North Carolina production of ROTTWEILER (about a killer dog) as the first 3-D movie filmed in independent movies in 25 years. But PARASITE is the first monster movie to be filmed statewide since the Universal epic of the 1950s. Originally, the idea emerged as a 3-D Gorman-type quickie remake of William Castle's THE TINGLERS, the film is the brainchild of Alan J. Adler, Frank Levering and Michael Shooch, based on an idea of estate of an on-set gag session band between Band, Adler, and actor Bob Glaudini.

The plot involves a post-holocaust world run by an omnipotent corpora tion called Mask-a-Ray, owned by Band, designed by Glaudini, discovers that a synthetic life-form with (what else) a dark purpose has escaped the laboratories. The technician has another beauty growing inside of him and has to find and destroy the creature before the one inside devours him.

A chance meeting with 3-D specialist Randall Larson convinced Band that the process would give PARASITE an added dimension, so to speak. And another dimension was added when Band asked Stan Winston (HEAR BREPS, DEAD AND BURIED, THE WIZ) to do the makeup effects. The production soon expanded with Irvin Yablans supplying enthusiasm and more money.

Winston and his crew took two months to design the parasite itself, plus the various heads and torsos that it bores out of. Designed by Winston and sculpted by Jim Kigel, the "adult" version of the parasite (affectionately named Perry) was actually an elaborate hand puppet, operated by three people. The mechanics of the beastie were engineered by Lance Anderson, who incorporated bladders, rods and cable systems into the polyurethane monster to make it breathe, snarl, quiver, flick its tail, and effect a number of startling, life-like movements.

"I hate the word 'puppet,'" said Winston, "because it means so much. The state of the art of what I do, and what Dick Smith and the Burmans do, is a combination of live-action, make-up effects and puppetry. Organic movements are the best way to animate a being, rather than by servo motors."

"There's been a great deal of technical advancement in the creation of creatures," continued Winston, "but there's a point after which you might get a wonderful piece of equipment with servos, drive motors, radio controls, but on screen you end up with something that looks just like what it is a machine. The effects here are basically simplistic, but that's part of being creative, finding the simplest and most effective way of doing things."

When the monster was due to make an appearance, Winston would stir up a little of his special "formula"—a greenish slime—to coat "Perry" before each take.

Of course, the monster was only one part of Winston's responsibility. He also provided a clucking severed hand; the half-devoured, mumified remains of the parasite's first victim; the emergence of the baby parasite through the lead character's stomach; and, not one, but two incredible on-camera "head-bursting" segments.

Although 3-D has been around for some time, the new technologies are still in their infancy. The StereoVision 3-D system has Natural-Vision lenses which give very sharp images and create dynamic stereoeffects. You still have to wear a pair of polarized glasses to see the 3-D effect, but the headaches caused by lack of convergence are a thing of the past.

"We're all learning as we go along!" said first-time director Charles Band, producer of such low-budget quickies as END OF THE WORLD, LASERBLAST and THE DAY TIME ENDED. One of the first things the PARASITE team discovered was that hanging objects and tracking shots both heightened the 3-D effect. So expect to encounter a lot of hanging bra-a-brac in the film: ropes, chains, and a good deal of illogical, perhaps, but nonetheless sensational junk strung up all over the place.

The Natural-Vision 3-D lens is a far cry from the dual-camera behemoth of earlier days. The lens can even be mounted on a hand-held Arriflex. The Natural-Vision lens splits the scene into an above-and-below pair of images on a single frame. Cinematographer Mac Ahlberg (HELL NIGHT, THE SEDUCTION) worked with Band and Larsen to master the new process. Although there were problems.

"The lenses were unpredictable," said Ahlberg. "We had to experiment and test. I needed about twenty-five times as much light as in other films. It must have been like the amount of light they used in Hollywood in the '30s and before. The slow-motion shots were a particular problem, because you need even more light."

Another problem cropped up when it was discovered that the combination of the Arriflex BL camera with the StereoVision 3-D system made sound recording very difficult. The sound blimp (noise muffler) used for the StereoVision system created immuttable lens flares for cinematographer Ahlberg (made infinitely worse because there are two points of view in 3-D photography).

Because of the low-budget, it was impractical to spend a lot of time avoiding the flares with elaborate camera lighting setups, so the obvious solution was to ditch the blimp.

Unfortunately, that produced another problem: the camera's operating noise made it nearly impossible to capture useful sound on dailies. To combat this problem, four wirelessly linked microphones were used extensively on the speaking principals, and an inordinate amount of looping was required in postproduction.

And how does it look? Everyday Band, Yablans and company would gather in the projection room to watch the dailies. All of them wearing the polarized glasses looking like the Hollywood chapter of the Devo fan club. A scene with actress Gloria Grahame (the only name player in the film) comes on, showing the parasite escaping Grahame's head in a waltz of raw hamburger. Yablans turns to his director and mumbles appreciatively, "Charlie, you've hit a new low."

Makeup effects supervisor Stan Winston adds some green slime to the embryonic parasite which has just jumped out of the specimen cannister onto actor Tom Villard.


PHOTOS/BOB VILLARD
TRON
Disney keeps it as top-secret as the nuclear weapons research lab they used for filming.

By Glenn Lovell

In Walt Disney Production's next foray into "parental discretion advised" — the $12.5 million electronic science fiction fantasy TRON, due for release July 9th — the studio will notch a few tradition-breaking firsts. For one, Disney has agreed to finance a project developed by freelancers outside the influence of the studio. And extensive computer graphics effects, expected to "pioneer the combination of digital animation and live-action," will be turned out to two outside firms, Information International Inc. in Los Angeles, and Magi Inc. in New York.

But perhaps the studio's most extreme departure is the choice of one of TRON's shooting locations: the government's largest nuclear-weapons research installation, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in Livermore, California.

Until now, no film crew had ever received permission to film at the top-secret, mile-square research lab, but top brass at LLL liked TRON's pro-computer slant, and approved four days of location shooting for director-screenwriter Steven Lisberger and his 83-person crew. Every member of the production had to submit to rigid security measures, including finger-prints and identity photos, but LLL had special props that Lisberger felt were worth the trouble: Gray-I and Shiva, the world's most powerful computer and laser, respectively.

Then too, LLL's hermetic world of humming computer banks, attended by white-cloaked engineers, would lend credence to TRON's elaborate special effects finale: a chase through a sort of fourth-dimensional world inside a powerful computer.

Did it bother Lisberger to shoot inside the nuclear weapons lab, possibly promoting the work done there? "We thought about that," he admitted. "But you've got to take the good with the bad, right? Livermore is what it is. I think it's necessary that there's a Livermore. None of the actors objected to working here. Our number one concern was making a good, adventure-action film and they had great locations.

In addition to the computers and lasers, TRON features Jeff Bridges as a video-game ace who takes on his former boss, the malevolent executive of an electronics company (David Warner), who is bent on creating a super-powerful computer alter-ego. With an assist from a comedy Lite-bright musician (Cindy Morgan), Bridges programs his own alter-ego into Warner's secret computer world — "a universe of electricity and light which parallels the real world" — for what one Disney rep called "a mind-blowing finish."

The film is the brainchild of its director, 30-year-old Lisberger, making his live-action debut. Lisberger originally conceived the script as a conventionally-animated film, to follow his 90-minute Olympic parody ANIMALYPICS. Once the Disney studio became involved, however, the decision was made to reduce the animation to perhaps 20 percent of screen time.

According to associate producer-effects supervisor Harrison Ellenshaw, who painted the matte for STAR WARS and THE BLACK HOLE, Lisberger prepared for the complex shooting by extensively story-boarding the film, then videotaped the storyboards. But conceiving and conceptualizing the film's animated conclusion was much more difficult, and will involve perhaps as much as nine months of postproduction work.

"Some of the scenes won't exist anywhere except inside a computer," Lisberger explained. "Eventually, the computer will be directed to put these images on 70mm film. There are no models, no special art work — nothing. Just the image inside the computer."

TRON's computer graphics are under the supervision of Richard Taylor, who is affiliated with Information International Inc., a leading supplier of sophisticated computer animation for TV commercials and industrial uses. Taylor, who worked with Robert Abel on early effects designs for STAR TREK — TMP — described the TRON "look" as "something you've never seen before."

Landscapes, buildings and vehicles will be created by the computer, based on designs by Jean "Mœbius" Giraud, Syd Mead and Peter Lloyd. Programmers at Magi and Triple-I plot the artwork in three-dimensions, creating a database with information on size, shape, color, and density of the objects. By telling the computer the direction and intensity of a light source, and indicating the desired movements, a fully-shaded, three-dimensional world will be created. Taylor will be assisted by Larry Elin, head of Magi's computer graphics division, and by optical artist John Sheele.

Prior to breaking for a 7 p.m. lunch, director and crew assembled for a few minutes of amiable chatter. "This is my first Disney film," said Bridges, the 31-year-old star of KING KONG, STAY HUNGRY and the megabudget HEAVEN'S GATE. "It's sort of about creating computer profiles of yourself. You see them in the movie. They look like us."

Costar Boxleitner, best known for his continuing role in ABC's HOW THE WEST WAS WON, sensed that Bridges was about to drift into classified plot material and jumped in. "We're being censored," he explained. "They don't want us to give anything away."

"Hey, you're not supposed to say that," grinned Bridges.

What about the blonde newcomer, Cindy Morgan? What's her tie-in with Bridges and Boxleitner? "It's sort of a triangle thing," she giggled. "There's lots of romance here.

"But it's strictly PG stuff," Boxleitner added. "This isn't your normal sort of Disney film — I mean it isn't BAMBI — but it will be solid family entertainment."

What about TRON's pro-computer line: the programmer as hero? Does the studio feel comfortable about computers in our lives? "Yeah, they're great," Morgan said. "They've got us playing 'Space Invaders' and 'Battle Zone' every morning so we really know what we're doing when we play the computer games in the movie."

"I've got to tell you," Boxleitner said, "the rest of the bunch goes crazy every morning they bring out the computer games — especially Jeff. I don't like the computers myself. That's my personal feeling."

"You're not supposed to tell him that," chided Bridges, grinning.

Jeff Bridges, Cindy Morgan and Steven Lisberger (right) at Livermore Labs.

Is it Disney's plan to suck audiences into another 'Black Hole'? In scenes shot at the top-secret Lawrence Livermore Laboratory research center — ironically one of the only TRON settings cleared for press visits — stars Jeff Bridges and Cindy Morgan had to break into the main computer room. Director Steven Lisberger guided his actors through four "straight" takes, then had Bridges do a Pink Panther-type caricature of a tip-toe walk.

"That's our funny take," Lisberger explained over the drone of the computer nerve center. At least two other camera setups were tapped by Lisberger's "funny takes," leaving one observer to quip: "If it doesn't work as a serious thriller, they can call it a spoof."
CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON gets the big-budget remake treatment in color and 3-D at Universal. Jack Arnold, who directed the original film and its sequels in the mid-fifties, will direct John Landis, who brought the project to Arnold, will serve as executive producer. Rick Baker will provide the creature, the same classic design, and makeup effects. Technically, the sequel, the film will be written by Nigel Kneale, British screenwriter of the superb Quantum mass science fiction trilogy. Kneale invites two weeks in Hollywood with Arnold, Landis and producers Jon Davidson and Mike Finnell. "Part of the Amazon is polluted," said Arnold, "the test is being deforested and they're killing off the native Indian tribes. There's one spot where the Indians still live, where the water is unpolluted—the Black Lagoon. One of the Indian tribes is extinct and this time, brought back to America, Arnold did such a good job with the original film the question arises, why touch a classic? "I think it gives us an opportunity to make a serious, same producer Finnell. "It's also a very interesting, unusual opportunity to see what Jack can come up with from the same material almost thirty years later."

David Wilson

EXTRATERRESTRIAL is the under-wraps project of director Steven Spielberg that Universal has slated for a June 18 release this summer, referring to it only as "A New Film By Steven Spielberg." Shot under the smoke-screen of A Boy's Life, supposedly a "small, intimate, low-budget" story, the film is actually the fruition of the director's troubled NIGHT SKIES project (11/17). Spielberg produced and directed from a screenplay by Melissa Mathison, who wrote BLACK STALLION. The story, by Spielberg, is about kids who take an alien to school, and face all the fun and problems of growing up with their outer space pal. After briefly considering ET AND ME as a title, Universal has decided to downplay the comedy aspect and depend on hoped-for associations with CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND to pull in an audience. Spielberg had wanted to do "cute" alien kids for that film, one prototype dubbed "Casper the Ghost" (see below), but abandoned the concept due to makeup difficulties. Makeup for the new film is being handled by Carlo Rambaldi, whom Spielberg turned to after firing Rick Baker in a little-publicized budget dispute. One Hollywood wag has dubbed the film "MY FAVORITE MARTIAN" with makeup effects. Countered a Universal spokesman, "It's not a kid's film. It's an adult film about kids. Spielberg thinks it's his best film."

Spielberg's unused "Casper the Ghost" alien design for CLOSE ENCOUNTERS.

Effects already put in the can include a giant crystalline stop-motion motion-FIGURE SLIDED through the movies, an alien mountain fortress that takes off into space. The movie features soap opera star Ken Marshall, Lysette Anthony, Francesca Annis and former Hammer character actor Freddie Jones. Principal photography is due to start in February, with six months of filming, followed by another six months of post-production, for a summer '83 release by Columbia.

BOXOFFICE SURVEY: 1981 RECAP

An analysis of the 50 Top Grossing films as reported each week by Variety, reveals that horror, fantasy and science fiction films accounted for 42.9% of all film earnings last year.

Top-grossing genre films in the Variety totals are listed as right. For purposes of breakdown by genre title, genre is indicated as horror (h), fantasy (f) and science fiction (sf), followed by the number of weeks each title made it into the Top 50 listings. The dollar figures listed represent only a small, scientific sample of a film's total earnings (averaging one fourth of a film's actual rentals). Of the 452 titles that comprised the weekly lists, 148 or 32.7% were genre titles. Breakdown by genre is as follows: fantasy films, accounting for 8.8% of the total but a whopping 18.2% of the receipts; science fiction films, 7.1% of the total, but a huge 13.9% of the receipts; and horror films, 16.8% of the total but only 10.8% of the receipts.

In a breakdown by distributor of the top earning genre films (below), both Paramount and Warners Bros. come out the big winners. Paramount grabbed 21.7% of all genre business with 11 titles, paced by RAIDER'S OF THE LOST ARK, while Warner Bros took 20.1% also with eleven titles, led by SUPERMAN II. Perhaps most surprising is the showdown of mini-major Avco Embassy, in third place with a 10.9% share from nine films, boosted by the year-end success of TIME RUNNIN', BUT supported by a strong lineup throughout the year.

The ten distributors listed released 85 or 56.1% of all genre titles, but earned 91.6% of all genre rentals for the year. All the remaining films from smaller, independent distributors, account for only 8.4% of all earnings.

It's somewhat eye-opening to tabulate the boxoffice share of three films produced by Lucasfilms Ltd. RAIDER'S OF THE LOST ARK, STAR WARS and THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK took in 18.2% of all genre money earned last year.

GENRE FILM REVENUE BY DISTRIBUTOR

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<th>Distributor</th>
<th># of Films</th>
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<td>55</td>
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KRULL is director Peter Yates' big, big-budget fantasy, set on a world of twin sons the public says is "someplace beyond our universe." Formerly known as THE DRAGONS OF KRULL, the dragons got excised not only from the title, but from the script when DRAGONSAYER flopped last summer. Due to beginning filming in December, Yates instead decided to rewrite the screenplay by Stan Sherr, with full cast and crew standing by. While Yates closeted with writer Steve Tesich, who wrote his phenomenal but LAKING AWAY, visual effects supervisor Derek Meddins embarked on fifteen weeks of preproduction filming.
FORBIDDEN WORLD
Director Alan Holzman gets a crash course at Roger Corman’s school of fast filmmaking.

By Bob Villard

With an ad campaign proclaiming, “The slime ends where the blood begins,” FORBIDDEN WORLD (originally titled MUTANT) is the latest Roger Corman quickie to be produced at his New World Pictures Special Effects Studio in Venice, California. Set for release in April, the film was shot on a break-neck 20-day schedule for under $1 million, and it displays every penny of its budget right up on the screen.

Tim Curnen’s screenplay of a constantly evolving mutant on the prowl in a remote scientific outpost on the planet Zariba is from a story by New World publicist Jim Wynorski and R.J. Robertson. Both acknowledge ALIEN and THE THING as “inspirations.”

FORBIDDEN WORLD is the proving ground for first-time director Alan Holzman, another in a long line of Corman’s proteges (including Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich and Martin Scorsese). Holzman put together Corman’s theatrical trailers for the last couple of years, and like Roger Corman quickie to be promoted editor, asked for a chance to direct. Sets used in filming GALAXY OF TERROR were still standing and camera equipment was not due back from the rental outlet till the end of the week, so Corman agreed. “Show me what you can do in one day,” he said.

Frantically, Holzman convinced character actor Jesse Vint to don a mothballed uniform, came up with a make-shift script overnight, incorporating left-over footage of dog-fight effects from BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS and enthusiastically completed an incredible 94 set-ups in one day. With his trainer experience, Holzman then edited the footage into an action sequence which Corman adjudged so accomplished that he not only gave Holzman his chance to direct, he had the “test footage” written into FORBIDDEN WORLD’s script as the film’s opening.

Most of FORBIDDEN WORLD’s live-action filming was done right at the Venice Studio, which meant that as the camera was rolling on one set-up, another area of the stage was being struck, repainted and re-dressed. Hammering stopped only long enough for rehearsals and takes. Actors and technical crew had to be careful where they stepped and leaned during playback. In one instance, the sets still had wet paint, even as they were being filmed.

Administration offices, hallways and various lab areas were pressed into service. A corrugated metal stor-age shelter served as a not-so-soundproof stage; an entire wall of New World’s main building was dressed and painted to provide a massive only a few shots of Holzman’s station exterior, as a backdrop for one of the mutant’s killings; and a nearby vacant lot was converted into a sandy alien desert.

The sets for FORBIDDEN WORLD incorporate a lot of sound components in unusual ways. A standing joke during production, as volunteers went to pick up fast-food, was the effects men saying, “See if you can grab an extra handful of food trays!”

A few thousand trays from McDonald’s can look impressive when spray painted and strapped to walls, augmented by such “high-tech” bric-a-brac as PVC piping, sheets of plastic “packing bubbles,” cut and formed upholstery foam, and cannibalized radio and TV parts.

The New World credo of “Roger wants it real fast and real cheap!”—a homily everyone acknowledged—does cause its frustrations. Bathroom walls became the safest place to work out any personal or professional grudges, covered with an ever-growing list of “sequel” titles (when the film was still titled MUTANT), including THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE MUTANT; MUTANT ON THE BOUNTY; THE CAINE MUTANT; DIAL “M” FOR MUTANT and more than 100 others.

FORBIDDEN WORLD’s special effects are provided by a talented “in house” effects team supervised by Bill Conway and headed by Bob and Dennis Skotak. Effects newcomer Steve Neill (STAR TREK, THE ALCHEMIST) was given less than five weeks to come up with four major, fully operational embodiments of the evolving, rampaging life form.

Neill and his constantly growing staff (which came to include Michael F. Howser, Rick Laudarrini, Michael LaValley, Mark Shoostman, Anthony Showle and Gene Barsamian) found themselves saddled with some unworkable concepts from a previous production designer. Subsequently they agonized over several major changes “from upstairs” with no easing of deadlines.

Though Neill’s delivered fourth-stage design failed to operate properly, it was filmed anyway, over his objections. Since the “monster” proved so difficult to wrangle, it was decided to go heavy on the monster’s wrath. John Carl Buechler (who got his start cranking out “Monsters of the Week” for Filmation’s JASON OF STAR COMMAND), was tapped to whip up some “death scenes” for assorted crew members.

The design and execution of the carnage fell to Buechler and a hastily assembled staff, including Stephan Czerkas, Chris Biggs and Don Olvera (who also played, in his own home-made robot suit, SAM-101, the hero’s robot sidekick). The on-screen result is a series of escalating Mutant murders, the style of which Buechler sardonically describes as “punk rock horror.”

When the hectic shoot was wrapped, Holzman locked himself into the editing room and fashioned a quick first cut. It soon became apparent that, in his time-pressed decision to “Do it anyway” on some of the Mutant effects, Holzman had shorted himself on footage of his title-star. An urgent call went out to Buechler to come back and re-do some of the third-stage Mutant work, of which there was critically insufficient footage. Within a week, Buechler delivered a Mutant head which blinked, snarled and opened wide its ravenous jaws.

Then, it was back to the editing room for Holzman, the place where many New World pictures are eventually saved. That just may be the reason Corman promotes his directors from the ranks of trailer editors. Preliminary word from insiders who have seen Holzman’s final cut of FORBIDDEN WORLD is that despite the production’s hurried pace and budget limitations, the film races.
"This is the book that tells how we did it—written so entertainingly I felt I was back helping Capt. Nemo sail his 'Nautilus,' and giving Mary Poppins rooftops to fly over."

—Peter Ellenshaw, matte artist & effects pioneer

John Culhane's "Special Effects in The Movies" is one of the best and brightest books on special effects to be published in years! It's filled with fascinating technical information, hundreds of rare, behind-the-scenes photos and profiles on more than 20 of the industry's top effects artists—including Peter Ellenshaw, model-maker Greg Jein and stuntman Yakima Canutt, to name a few.

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By Paul R. Gagne

A thunderstorm is brewing and the wind is rising as the camera creeps down Maple Street, an average block in a "Leave-It-To-Beaver"-style neighborhood in the archetypal American town of Centerville.

As we approach our house in particular, we hear the sounds of conflict. Dad, it seems, has caught young Billy reading—gasp!—a comic book. And not just any comic book, but—horror!—"Creepshow," a collection of the kind of morally-vacuous tales that E.C. comics were noted for back in the '50s. "I never saw such rotten crap in my life!" Dad explodes. "Where do you get this shit? Who sells it to you?"

"I don't see how it's any worse than the books you keep in the top drawer of your bureau!" the kid retorts. "Those sex b..."

The sound of an authoritative slap silences the youngster, as Dad goes out into the rain to drop the "Creepshow" comic in the trash.

Suddenly, at an upstairs window, a flash of lightning reveals a skeletal spectre. It grins, beckoning our attention to the street, where the discarded comic book flaps open in the wind. As we approach for a closer look, the pages of the comic come to life.

In a bucolic section of country-side near Pittsburgh, in a setting just as serene as Maple Street, stands Penn Hall Academy, an old grammar school which makes a rather unassuming home for a feature film production.

But inside the gymnasium-turned-soundstage, big time scares are in the works, as director George Romero and novelist Stephen King collaborate to film CREEPSHOW, an $8 million anthology of horror tales currently in postproduction. Based on an original screenplay by King—his first ever to be produced—the film serves as an homage to the horror gems produced by E.C. comics a generation ago.

Five different horror shorts will be presented in the framework of the "Creepshow" comic book, as the pages continue to turn in the breeze, the different stories unfold. Of the five, three were written especially for the film, and two were adapted by King from stories of his which were previously published:

- In "Father's Day," an original story, Jon Lomberg disrupts the annual gathering of his well-to-do family by climbing out of the grave he has been buried in for the past seven years. Carrie Nye and Ed Harris co-star.

- Stephen King himself stars in "The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verrill," adapted from his short story "Worthand," which first appeared in Cavalier magazine. It's the tale of a loveable, but greedy redneck who dreams of quick cash when a meteor lands in his field. The meteor does cover Jordy in green, but it isn't money—it's a virulent space plant that soon sprouts over Jordy's land and person.

- "The Crate" stars Fritz Weaver and Hal Holbrook as professors who confront utter terror after a janitor discovers a 150-year-old shipping crate under the stairs of a lab building. Adapted from a story King published in Gallery magazine, the segment also stars Adrienne Barbeau as Holbrook's ravish-bitch of a wife.

- In "Something To Tide You Over," TV executive Leslie Nielsen takes revenge on his cheating wife (Gaylen Ross, who starred in DAWN OF THE DEAD) and her lover (Ted Danson) by burying them up to their necks in the sand below the tidal line of his beach estate. When the tide recedes, Nielsen can't find the two bodies—but they find him.

- E.G. Marshall is an utterly despicable multi-millionnaire in "They're Creeping Up On You," another original tale. Marshall is an executive used to getting things his way, but one night, during a power failure, he finds his apartment overrun by thousands of critters who won't do as he tells them.

"Originally, the idea for CREEPSHOW was to do a bunch of black-outs," explained Stephen King, restating in his location apartment overlooking the Monroeville shopping mall where DAWN OF THE DEAD was filmed. "There'd be eight or nine different segments. In some there would not be much motivation, or where you wouldn't need any. They would be situational, like some of the old "Lights Out" radio shows were situational. It would almost be the equivalent to a comedy skit, only this would be horror.

The comic book idea evolved out of the idea to do stories," King continued. "The E.C. comics were like that—everything was pared down to the bone, and they got it off in a big hurry. In Danse Macabre, King's informal look at horror in American media, he refers to the E.C. stories as "tales of the book," referring to an old campfire tale in which the plot serves as nothing more than a buildup to a big 'scare' scene. The segments in CREEPSHOW are similarly structured.

"They're pretty primitive, aren't they," said King, smiling.

Left (r-l): director George Romero, production designer Cletus Anderson, screenwriter Stephen King and producer Richard Rubenstein pose on the set of the "Jordy Verrill" segment, one of five horror tales presented in the framework of a "Creepshow" comic book (cover shown far left). CREEPSHOW is a loving tribute to William Gaines E.C. comics, and was written and designed to capture E.C.'s unique style of '50s horror. Facing Page: In addition to writing the script—his first to be produced—King is featured in his first major film role as Jordy Verrill, a dumb farmer. Here, King dumps a bucket of water on a meteor which has just landed in his fields. The overblown reaction is typical of the caricatured way King is playing the role.
There's a chance to do things in this movie with dialogue that nobody's really cared to do in a horror movie for a long time. It's a question of words, and the words should sound right.

Author: Stephen King
TALES THAT TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY

DURING THE DAYLIGHT HOURS, YOU WOULD NOT KNOW ME. NEITHER SEE, HEAR OR TELL ME EXIST. BUT AT NIGHT—AH!—
THE TALES I SHALL TELL YOU...

TALES THAT GRAB YOU...

TALES TO DAZZLE YOU...

AND TALES THAT WILL BRING YOU FACE TO FACE WITH YOUR Deepest FEARS AND NIGHTMARES!
The idea struck a positive response in George Romero and business partner and long-term associate Richard Rubinstein. The pair then sold the idea to the executives at United Film Distribution, which came up with the entire $8 million budget—by far the most money Romero had ever had to play with. Part of the reason UFD was willing to gamble so much on a horror film was that films of the sort have never been especially successful—was Romero’s enviable track record: DAWN OF THE DEAD, which UFD also distributed, grossed more than $50 million, making it one of the most successful independent films of all time.

The $8 million budget allowed Romero the relative luxury of a 17-week shooting schedule and the ability to hire “name” stars. But his deal with UFD gave him what he considers the ultimate luxury for a filmmaker: not having to rely on a Hollywood studio looking over his shoulders, with reigns on the creativity as well as the money.

“We don’t want to have responsibility without the freedom to go with it,” explained Rubinstein, who also produced three previous Romero films: MARTIN, DAWN OF THE DEAD and KNIGHTRIDERS. “We are in this business, not just about business, but about creativity and business-wise. We don’t mind winding up with egg on our faces, so long as we had the chance to control our own destiny. UFD allows us to do what we need to do without having them poke their noses in because it’s their money. I think that’s a gifted vision in today’s world of balance sheets. We’ve basically been left to solve our own problems, and I think that makes for better pictures.”

Total creative control isn’t a guarantee of success. But Romero and Rubinstein found out with KNIGHTRIDERS, an off-beat film about modern-day motorcycle journeymen. The film was pulled from release by UFD after the rough cut was disappointing, though it’s expected to be re-released shortly with a different advertising campaign.

Although KNIGHTRIDERS failed to change Romero’s momentum—or even to a mainstream success, it’s hoped that the commercial nature of CREEPSHOW will do just that. Convincing the “industry” that there are viable productions of national importance to Romero, Rubinstein and King, who frankly admit they’ll probably need the cooperation of a major studio to film King’s epic novel, The Stand, for which Romero owns the rights.

But THE STAND is still a long way off, and in the Penn Hall Academy, attention this day was focused on the interior of the farmhouse for the “Jordy Verrill” segment, a marvelously filthy set created by production designer Cletus Anderson, who

leads the design program at Pittsburgh’s Carnegie-Mellon Institute. The set was cluttered with tacky furniture, sleazy magazines,odd and ends gathered from local junk shops and a collection of used TV dinner trays. In addition, everything was covered with a layer of dirt and grime, guaranteeing the set’s status as a hazard to health and logistics. A sign posted outside the door implored people to enter only if necessary: “A potential continuity nightmare exists here!”

Romero’s mostly non-union crew was unusually relaxed and supportive. Many, including cameraman Michael Gornick and makeup artist Tom Savini, are alumni of DAWN OF THE DEAD and KNIGHTRIDERS. The general feeling was of a big, happy family, in which Romero is the favorite uncle. With his lucky scarf tucked into his belt—it’s the same scarf he’s seen wearing as the TV director in DAWN OF THE DEAD—his direction was friendly and easygoing.

“We had a couple of people who quit on us because they thought it was too relaxed,” Romero said, and a glance at the grasp crew makes it easy to understand how that’s possible. On this particular day, all the men had shown up wearing dresses and skirts, part of a running gag in which the grasp group alike on certain days.

Even more interesting than the look of Romero’s crew is the identity of Romero’s leading man for the segment being shot, and the strange green growth that’s been applied to him. Yes, that’s Stephen King behind the bushy green beard, a bit of inspired casting by George Romero.

“I’ve been telling people that if I had written it for myself, I would have put at least one sex scene in there,” King laughed after the day’s filming, traces of cosmetic adhesive and green material still visible on his acutely-redrodden face. “Or maybe not a sex scene, but at least a vision of Jordy sitting there with some painted woman who would look like something out of one of his magazines—a real ’50s-style whore!”

King, whose previous film work consists solely of a short cameo in KNIGHTRIDERS, acknowledges that his casting adds to the creative risk he’s taking with CREEPSHOW.

“Whatever the performance is, I may be in for a hard time critically, because people don’t want you to be able to do two things well, or they’re very doubtful if you can. The feeling is that I’ve got this role because of who I am, and in this case, that’s completely true!”

But according to Richard Rubinstein, King would never have been cast if he couldn’t fulfill the demands of the role. “I think all of us were confident that Steve would be competent,” Rubinstein said. “None of us are going to put out professional reputations on the line to indulge a friendship. And Steve turned out to be much more than competent; he gave the role a life of its own.”

However, the author is still a bit modest about his first major role. “You just try and please yourself,” King said of the role. “I guess that’s the only thing you can do. And, of course, to try and please George. He’s been great to work for.”

And, what does the director have to say? “King’s really doing a great job,” Romero said proudly. “He’s not at all intimidated by the people around him, he really cuts loose. He’s taking real chances with it and doing it very broadly, which I think is very brave. It’s perfect for what the character has to be. And although I’ve never really worked with Steve as an actor, I have a feeling it’s a pretty conscious performance, and that he could be a lot more subtle.”

The pair have responded well to working together—Romero, the writer, learning from King; and King, the actor, learning from Romero. In one scene, Jordy wonders what to do about the furry green blisters sprouting from his fingers. As he puts his fingers to his mouth, he realizes his mistake. “I was just yanking my hand away,” King said. “George was trying to put across to me what he wanted.”

Rather than simply yanking his fingers from his mouth in shock, Romero explained to King that his character is like the coyote in the Roadrunner cartoons—running in mid-air until he realizes that he’s gone out the edge of the cliff, and then plummeting down. “When I knew that,” King said, “I thought, ’Ger, I could do this five more times, and maybe a couple of them would beal good’!”

For King, who has aspirations of directing his own films one day, the directorial comment was enlightening. “A hel director should be like a good editor or anybody else,” King said. “They’re not telling you the only way it can be done, they’re trying to tell you something in a useful, unassertive way. That’s what interests me.”

As King has learned to adapt to his new role as an actor, Romero has also found himself in a unique position: filming someone else’s material. “It was really a joy to watch George and Steve interact,” said Richard Rubinstein. “Because it was the first time George has had an outside writer on a picture, and after a week or two, when they were past the point of shyness, they could talk straight out.”

Romero, a talented writer in his own right, worked from King’s first draft screenplay, and subsequent changes have been relatively few. “George is a director who cares about words,” King said. “There’s a chance to do things in this movie with dialogue that nobody’s really cared to do in a horror movie for a long time. It seemed to me that Robert Wise’s THE HAUNTING was a movie that cared about words. I’ll never forget Russ Tamblyn saying at the end: ‘It should be burned to the ground and the ground seeded with salt.’ They used Shirley Jackson’s words [the film was based on her novel, The Haunting of Hill House], and it worked. It doesn’t always work when they do that, but a lot of the time it does.”

“In CREEPSHOW,” King continued, “there are things that Wilma [Adrienne Barbeau in ‘The Crate’] says that are carefully calculated. When Aunt Sylvia [Carrie Nye in ‘Father’s Day’] says, ’How can such a beautiful woman be such an utter tart?’ it’s a question of words, and the words should sound right. But I don’t
I want it all to be words. Some of the worst horror movies are the ones that talk you to death. It's doubtful that CREEPSHOW will talk anyone to death, and it's clear that Romero is just as concerned about King's words as the author is, if not more so. "When Steve isn't around," Romero said, "I have much more of a tendency to think that his dialogue is locked up because it isn't mine. On all the stuff that I've written, I don't insist that any actor say every line the way I wrote it. I've been sticking closely to Steve's stuff whenever he's not around to ask, but you have to be flexible enough to make changes."

While King is the first to admit his stories are primitive in style and execution, they retain the essential element that elevates his fiction above many lesser writers: characters that a reader (or audience) can identify with. "I think horror or fantasy works best when the audience identifies with the people who are in jeopardy," Robert Stein said. "They have empathy for the characters, and they're scared themselves. And having good actors, in what I would consider to be somewhat frivolous material, really adds a left hook to the impact."

Casting such personable actors as Hal Holbrook, Adrienne Barbeau, Fritz Weaver, Leslie Nielsen and Jonathan G. Marshall not only adds to the potential box office, but has allowed Romero to cut back on lengthy character development that might slow down the film's brisk pace. "This is the first time I've ever worked with a 'name' cast," Romero said, "and I felt a little intimidated at first. One of the things I've liked in the zombie films is that you don't know any of the people and you don't have any preconception of them at all—it's part of the unpredictability. But CREEPSHOW's characters are so archetypal that it's wonderful to have people who bring a certain persona.

One actor audiences won't recognize plays the little boy who reads the forbidden comic book in the film's introduction. Stephen King's nine-year-old son, Joe, was cast in the part after Romero noticed Joe's striking resemblance to the child pictured in the film's promotional poster (shown page 10). "Joe read for the part, and George thought he'd be great," King said. "I was a little bit nervous about it, because I didn't want to be a stage father, pushing my kid into the limelight saving 'Act! Act!' But it's gonna work. He tried very, very hard."

Joe's father won't be able to lend any pre-established "persona" to his role either; his characterization will be aided by one of the film's most unusual makeup concepts: a strange green plant that sprouts over everything he touches, including his own body. The early stages of the plant's growth, and the film's other unusual makeup effects, are all the work of Tom Savini, whose gore effects for DAWN OF THE DEAD and FRIDAY THE 13TH established him as an expert in creating realistic on-screen carnage.

However, Savini is more than just a makeup artist—he often handles a film's stunts as well as makeup, and has extensive acting experience, including a leading role in Romero's KNIGHT RIDERS. Savini was set to make his directorial debut on NIGHT OF THE BUNNY MOON, a $1.5 million murder mystery from William Friedkin, when he got the call from Romero about CREEPSHOW.

"That was the hardest decision I've ever had to make in my life," said Savini of the career choice. "I was having anxiety attacks about making the right decisions. William Friedkin couldn't wait for CREEPSHOW to be finished, and I wanted to be loyal to George. That was that." But Savini has had no regrets, as he's had a field day creating the wide variety of effects needed for the film. "My name has always been associated with 'splatter,'" Savini said with a touch of disappointment in his voice. Many people—even a few on the CREEPSHOW crew—have confused the man with his work, assuming that someone who develops ways to slice, dice, chop and decapitate people must be pretty sick. While Savini was running a tape with footage of his effects, makeup artist Bonnie Prior wandered in. After watching a closeup of fingers being chopped off with a pair of shears, she fled Savini's workshop.

"Oh, Tom! You're sick!" she yelled from outside.

Savini managed a shrug. "See?"

A look around Savini's workshop gets a certain pleasure from seeing and devising ingenious new ways to shock people, but even he admits that the gore effects he helped popularize a few years ago have run out of hand lately. "It's unfortunate, and a little sad," Savini said, "that we've desensitized the whole thing so much that people are going and getting pleasure just out of murder and death. But it's all over—the monsters are coming back! And I'm lucky enough to be in a film where there are monsters to create."

A look around Savini's workshop confirms this: although the film has a fair complement of conventional gore effects, Savini has created some good, old-fashioned monsters. Hanging on a plastic skeleton was the mask for the father's corpse in "Father's Day," wonderfully reminiscent of the walking corpses that stalked the E.C. comics. Elsewhere, an assistant was working on an articulated, plastic skeleton for the film's opening shots that was to be used with remote-controlled eyes and arms and from a real human skull.

Among the most impressive items is the Creature from the Crate, a delightfully hideous, feral-looking mass of hair and eyes which has been fitted with mechanisms for snorting, staring, salivating and puffing its cheeks. "Hully," as the creature was lovingly dubbed by the crew, is Savini's piece de resistence. "I never knew I could do this stuff," he marvelled. "I never knew I could actually create an articulated head like this!"

In comparison, Savini's tasks for "Jordy Verrill" were fairly simple—creating green foam latex blisters for King's hands and lips, as well as the first stage of hairy, plant-like growth on his hands. Savini also created appliques for a shock effect in which the veins in Jordy's hands and cheeks seem to pop under the pressure of a disgusting green ooze.

Several other effects for "Jordy Verrill" created by Savini will not be seen in the film, including a latex "skin" for King's hands. The intention was to pull green hair into and under the skin, which was glued into place on King's own hand. By reverse printing the film, the illusion that the hair was growing out of his hand would be achieved. "That just didn't work," Savini said.

A latex skin was also created to cover King's tongue ("He laughed through the whole casting session," Savini noted), but it shuttered King's speech so badly that the scenes in which it was used were shot using a simple mixture of green gelatin and shredded wheat to give the impression that the space plant was growing inside his mouth and nose.

The bulk of the work involved in turning King into a six-foot wasp was in the hands of the makeup costume department, headed by Barbara Anderson, wife of CREEPSHOW's production designer Cletus Ander-
son. For the early scenes in the segment, patches of yak and horse hair were dyed green and glued directly onto King's face and hands. 'He was wonderfully good natured about the whole thing,' Anderson remarked. 'It's nice, because if he complained we could always say, 'It's your fault Steve, you wrote it.'

For the final phase of Jordy's transformation, Anderson designed an elaborate head-to-toe 'plant' suit (which looks remarkably similar to a walking talking pot plant), worn by Savini's assistant Darryl Ferrucci.

For the shot in which Jordy—sitting in his heat-up living room chair, guzzling a bottle of ripple—first glimpses Savini's green blaster appliances, bright red lights were used to flood the scene. It was part of the decision by Romero and cinematographer Michael Gornick to recreate the type of saturated colors found in the E. C. comics—a startling departure from conventional movie lighting. 'I wanted to really try to visualize what these comic books were,' explained Romero.

In "Something to tide You Over," for example, strong blue-green lights were used for scenes involving the return of the drowning lovers. "It alluded to a watery existence, which was why George liked the color," explained lighting assistant Alan Brenneck. For "The Crate," the creature's ferocious attacks were lit with a harsh, contrasty red light, which strengthened the tension, while diminishing the impact of the gore. "If blood is lit with red, you know that it's there, but it doesn't stand out as brilliantly," Brenneck explained.

But perhaps the most outlandish lighting effect is found in several of the film's segments: abstract, back-lit patterns meant to imitate the jagged lines often drawn around comic characters to indicate violence or intense emotions. "I was a little worried at first about how audiences might react," Romero admitted, "but only from the standpoint that I don't have a lot of faith in audiences anymore. It seems that if something doesn't stick into immediate recognition, nobody wants to bother to try to figure it out or understand it. But ever since I saw the script, I've wanted to do this type of lighting.

"If we had another two months and another $7 million," Romero continued, "I'd really love to go all the way with it. But there's plenty. It could be a total visual style, but that would require so many effects and opticals that almost every frame would have to be treated somehow.

Even without the constant use of elaborate comic book-type visuals, Romero was pressed to complete the principal photography on time, given the built-in problems of filming five different stories, plus the film's opening and closing segments. "It's been rough," Romero admitted. "The stories have different personalities, and bouncing in and out of them has been difficult because we've tried to give each of them a different visualization. The toughest thing, aside from having to make those shifts, has been functional. We only have three or four weeks for each story, and we have to get it within that time frame. That's caught us with our pants down a couple of times, but we've survived it.

But even as principal photography wrapped at the Penn Hall Academy, work continued elsewhere at a frantic pace. Four different editors—Romero, Michael Spolan, Pat Bulka and Paul Hirsch (STAR WARS)—will piece the stories together. To link the stories, Rick Catizone is furnishing cel animation of the pages of the comic book turning, with inserts of typical '50s-style advertisements preceding the opening "splash pages" for each story, which, in turn, are being drawn by Jack Kamen. The Pittsburgh-based Catizone is also contributing cel animation cuts for the film's opening and closing segments.

Optical effects and matte paintings are being handled by David Garber, who supervised the effects for BATTLESTAR GALACTICA and BUCK ROGERS. Garber will create the meteor that streaks across the sky for "Jordy Verrill," as well as elaborate "frames" for several flashback and fantasy sequences.

Romero plans to score the film with library music in the style of '50s horror films. "I happen to love library music," Romero confided. "It's real, hardcore, bullshit movie music, man! To me, it triggers all kinds of great emotions and wonderful nostalgia. It's part of the whole experience for me; the film cries out for it!"

While the King Romero collaboration sounds like dynamite, many genre fans may be a little skeptical after such promising, but inevitably disappointing combinations as King and Tobe Hooper (SALEM'S LOT) and, more specifically, King and Stanley Kubrick (THE SHINING).

"Well," King responded, "none of them has been King! In a way, I've been safe through all of this. But if CREEPSHOW is a bad movie and people don't like it, then I can't very well duck it, can I? I'm tied to it for a hundred ways."

"If the fans don't dig it, it's on us," Romero agreed. "We can't really claim that there's another force in it. The deal didn't get fucked up. Nothing happened to it. This is it!"
It's hard to think of anyone but John Milius having a better time putting CONAN THE BARBARIAN on the screen. The writer of APOCALYPSE NOW and the writer-director of such romantic fantasies as DILLINGER, THE WIND AND THE LION and BIG WEDNESDAY, he belongs in the same fraternal order of filmmakers as Sam Fuller, Don Siegel, and Robert Aldrich. These directors make movies about the brotherhood of men facing the hardships of life together, a subject best typified by Conrad, Melville and Kipling.

But Milius is a shy beast, with a flair for the outrageous that's sadly taken the focus off his very real talents for dialogue, narrative and composition. In person Milius is, by turns, friendly and suspicious, relaxed and shy, articulate and taciturn; in short, a complex man. But critics have irresistibly rushed to the bait of his spurious bursts of outlandishness. "When Pauline Kael and I got together," Milius said, "we were getting along pretty well. Then she asked what my next project was. I told her, CONAN THE BARBARIAN. She looked as if she'd just swallowed some bad Mexican food."

Milius makes movies about what he likes. And Conan's mixture of action, intellect and fun perfectly reflect the concerns of Milius' boyhood. But Milius has granted so few interviews that little is known of him, outside of his professional work.

I understand you don't like interviews.

I usually don't like whatever I say in them.

That's common.

Whenever you talk about yourself you're always going to be in a hole. And I don't like to talk about myself. I like to talk about other things, a story, for example. But me? There's just not that much there.

You once told me that, at one time, your philosophy of life was similar to CONAN's: being dumb and strong. Could you expand on that?

I was referring to a time in my life when I didn't know about anything. I was coming out of the Colorado mountains, where, as a teenager, I'd gone to be alone. I never got as strong as the characters in CONAN. I got dumb, but I didn't get strong.

The press put you in the dumb and strong category.

Well, they never really did that. I wish they had. They'd put me into evil. I'm the Hermann Goering of my generation. Arrogant, aggressive and barbaric. That's what they've always tagged me. As a matter of fact, Andrew Sarris, in The Village Voice, once wrote I was a gifted barbarian. I liked that one.

Do you still like it?

I suppose so. Not really.

People have not recognized your facility for writing, for staging action, for handling actors. Particularly the press.

They pigeonhole me. If you shoot guns, which I occasionally do, they think you're shooting people. Which is fine. I'd like to shoot people as much as any psychopath. I have an absolute hatred for the human race. But I think most people do, and they don't admit it. I live with my hatred. I'm in control of it. If I'm going to shoot at someone, I'm going to hit him. It's not going to be an accident.

The point is, whether I've shot someone or not is irrelevant. It's like the movie business. It's so much ado about nothing. You work incredibly hard to make a movie; on any movie people slave over it, and then they all play for one week in some little unknown town in Kentucky. To the people who live in the town, that film is just a change of names on the marquee. They're not any more aware of it than that. Television is much more important to them.

You soon realize you're not doing brain surgery. You're not saving anybody's life. It's just a movie.

Was there anything in your childhood that specifically led you into a film like CONAN? Literature? Westerns? Pulp? Science Fiction? Horror?

Not really. I used to read World War II history. I liked certain comics like Men in War. I liked the Blackhawk too. My father wanted me to read Moby Dick when I was a little kid. That was a large-scale undertaking. I finally did read it as a teenager in Colorado. I was deeply affected by that book. I don't know of any work of literature or any movie that quite touched me as that book did.

I still love Melville, Kerouac and Conrad. Whatever skills I have as a writer I obtained through reading. I certainly didn't get them from being taught grammar. I also have the knack of imitating the styles of other authors; when I was in high school I could write in fluent Melville.

What made you decide to become a screenwriter?

I always knew I'd be a writer, but, on the other hand, I didn't care what I did with my life. I never expected to live past 25. So I was all set to go off and become a war correspondent. My greatest dream was to enter West Point and I knew I couldn't do that.

Why not?

Asthma. They won't take you with it. They don't want you flying a Phantom jet, get an asthma attack, and crash. That was another of my childhood dreams, becom-

Interview by Paul M. Sammon
ing a fighter pilot. What is more a symbol of total life than a kamakazi pilot flying through the clouds, through the flak, through extraordinary resistance before crashing his airplane into the deck of an aircraft carrier?

When did you decide to become a film director?

It was inevitable.

Can you describe what type of director you are?

I don't like to waste any time. I may not be the best director in the world, but with practice I could be the fastest.

How did you meet Ron Cobb, your production designer?

Ron was a fairly well-known cartoonist for the L.A. Free Press and I arranged a meeting with him. I gave him the script to THE WIND AND THE LION and commissioned a painting from him. When I got back, he had done a piece called “Man on Lizard Crossing Over.” It's a study of a samurai riding a great lizard across a volcanic plain, and now it's considered Cobb's major work.

In fact, I quit my career as a painter right after seeing a painting of Ron's. I was going to the Choinard Art Institute and was pretty good, but my work was in the Cobb school of art,” so to speak. When I saw his work, I knew I could never be as good as he was. I still draw, it's a handy tool when you're a director. I draw things out very carefully for second unit shots.

With your drawing ability it's funny that there are so few storyboards for CONAN.

You don't need storyboards if you already know how to draw. I always had a good sense of composition and movement as a painter. That part of the movie-making process isn't hard for me.

How much of CONAN's final look was done in collaboration with Ron Cobb?

The visual look of the movie—the sets, the costumes, the swords, everything—is all Ron's. I insisted Ron design everything because there's a certain wonderful look that's particularly his. Our collaboration was more than visual. For instance, I'd come up with an idea, and Ron and I would try the idea consistent with the various cultures we invented for the Hyborian Age. Ron has had a greater impact on this movie than Frazetta. Even though we were inspired by Frazetta, CONAN has a Cobbian look.

Cobb grows strong in the film pushing a millstone called the Wheel of Pain. Did you come up with that concept?

The Wheel of Pain comes from an exercise device that's a real killer. It has two handles and a central shaft running through a wheel on it. You roll out on it, arms outstretched, for your stomach. I've called that exercise wheel the wheel of pain ever since I got one. You bow down to the wheel of pain, the god of hurt and suffering. Ronald Reagan does 30 of them every morning. It's the only exercise he does. So Reagan is a believer in the Wheel of Pain. I believe the Wheel of Pain will set you free. Why shouldn't Conan have one? Look what it did for him.

I understand you also designed the sword Sandahl Bergman as Valeria uses throughout the film.

Valeria uses a tulwar. The tulwar is actually an East Indian cutlass. But her's is definitely Oriental; it has more of a Japanese or Chinese style.

Were the swords expensive?

Pretty expensive. The weapons in CONAN are done in much greater detail than they usually are in movies. Look at the swords they used in EXCALIBUR, and then look at the swords in CONAN. There's no comparison.

The atmosphere of CONAN occasionally suggests the dark ages.

But CONAN doesn't look like other Sword and Sorcery products that are set in a dark ages England or France. Our may be set in the dark ages, too, but CONAN is a dark ages Eastern Europe.

People like the fact Robert E. Howard created the Hyborian Age to set his stories in, and that he even went to the pains of writing a long essay laying out the era. But you could have set the Conan stories in the Europe of 400 to 700 A.D. Howard knew that too.

Your historical interests are peppered throughout the script.

It's not hard to put your interests in a film. For instance, I'm greatly interested in things Japanese, so whenever I can employ certain Oriental ideas or objects I tend to do so. But with CONAN we were into creative culture, an echoing of history.

Cobb said both of you assumed that a character named Conan actually existed. Then you'd just recount his history.

I even wanted to put a footnote in the script to that effect. The first draft included a note that historians have since questioned whether Conan, in his youth, was actually at this incredible battle which I ended the first draft with; a battle which I subsequently whittled down to the fight in the mounds. Anyway, this footnote concluded by stating that recent diggings in Russia had unearthed evidence that the young Conan was indeed there.

What about the fantasy in your script? There were rumors circulat-
'In STAR WARS, the rebels are all unqualifedly good; the Empire is bad. Why? If I were in STAR WARS, I'd want to be working for Darth Vader; I'd much rather be on his side.'

I love that! I used to quote it all the time. That was written by Bertrand de Born, who was a knight and a troubadour. It's a suitable quote for CONAN. It's so sick, it's wonderful. My screenplay was based on the spirit of Howard, not on any one source. Although I took a few incidents from other stories. I tried constantly to work little pieces of the stories in whenever possible.

What were your conclusions on Howard as a writer? The guy had some great images and visions. He was a pulp writer, but an interesting pulp writer. I enjoyed his historical knowledge, too. He drew from every imaginable culture for his-stories. Howard seemed a highly suspect civilization as I am. You know, people ask me how I could be interested in pagan, Teutonic cultures, and tell them I cannot help myself—voices sing to me.

I tell them there might be something we can learn from them. They invariably tell me that ridiculous, that we now live in civilized times and should stay there. The only thing civilization has done is increase the body count. The wars we fight now are infinitely more horrendous and bloody than anything the Picts dreamed up.

Why did you slant your script towards an origin story? To produce a complex and definitive Conan, a finished human being who, over the course of the film, we see mature from a little boy to a complete man.

In a Film Comment interview you gave some years back, you said Warren Beatty came into your office and criticized your writing by saying "you come too quickly and you come too often," referring to the way you fill your scripts with many little crescendos and incidents. CONAN is teeming with incident. Do you think that might cause the audience problems?

I don't know. CONAN is a very linear story. The film begins with a quest and he continues straight on with the quest. He never diversifies. Everything ties in.

What about the Riddle of Steel? That, to me, is the spine of the story, yet it's only brought up at the start and clomax.

No, I don't think that's a problem. The way that scene is composed will play a big part in the way audiences comprehend it. They should be wondering about the Riddle all through the movie.

Thulsa Doom is a particularly interesting villain, wouldn't you say? You seemed to enjoy creating a complex bad guy.

He tells the truth. He never tells a lie.

Yet you let Conan behead him. Why?

Because he's wrong. He's the villain. But the villain is not as easy as all that. The villain is sometimes more than just the other side of the coin, which is the way they're depicted. I dislike that good and evil are taken for granted in certain kinds of pop movies. In STAR WARS, the rebels are unqualifiedly good, and the Force is better; the Empire is the bad guy. Why? Because the history books tell us that empires are bad, and that the rebels are the freedom fighters. But what are they rebelling against? We don't know anything. We assume everything.

The Empire is evil because it issues black armor.

That's right. We assume the rebels are the good guys, that they're righteous, humanitarian and slightly to the left. Whereas if I were in STAR WARS, I'd definitely want to be working for Darth Vader; I'd much rather be on his side.

One of Thulsa Doom's problems is that he's static. He's comfortable with his power, happy with his control. And it kills him.

That's a good point. When Doom is undone it's almost as though he has to do it. He's similar to Kurz in APOCALYPSE NOW. He realizes, just a bit, that he's fulfilling his own destiny. That another force must replace him.
"Working for Dino De Laurentiis was like being in the foreign legion. His methods were... unsound. Dino's just like bad weather; he'll pass, but meanwhile you contend with it."

During the moment when Doom pleads with Conan, he asks "Why are you doing this? I've taught you everything—I'm the one who made you this way!"

Doom says, "I am the spring from which you came. When I am gone, you will never have been." That is direct from New Guinea folk religion and all pagan religions have that statement. There is always a figure, whether it be Woton or the sea or the winds on the airplane god, who finally says to man, "If you take me, you will never have been. I am the well-spring from which you come." Doom merely reflects this.

Doom's control of his Cult of Set reminded me of Charlie Manson and his Family.

Doom's similis to Manson. The Cult of Set is based on the cult of hashish assassins, the Hashishan. The two most frightening and interesting fanatics I studied were the assassins of the Hashishan and the cult of Thuggee, the stranglers of Bombay.

The Cult of Set boils down to cults in general; these groups go on forever. There were vicious cults in the 17th century, vicious cults in the 12th century and there are vicious, weird cults today. That implies group acceptance. I tried to portray the Cult of Set's members as unable to see anything particularly wrong with their cult.

Personified in the scene where Doom calls his young female followers to leap to his death.

And at one point Dooms says to Conan, "You came in and killed my snake. Why would you do that?" Later Doom sees the Orgy Chamber pillar has been knocked down and asks, "What manner of monsters would do this?" And he's absolutely right. As far as he's concerned, the Mansons have just raided him. He doesn't understand why. At the beginning of CONAN, Doom was just looking for steel and happened to kill a lot of people. So what? In Conan's world everybody kills a lot of people.

There's nothing unusual about Doom, even today. The Shah of Iran was on television, before he died, being interviewed by Barbara Walters and she said, "They say you personally ordered the torture and killing of a thousand people." He responded, "They cannot count. Perhaps several hundred, but..."

One of the things I enjoy about the script is that you've invested a lot of yourself into it. Yet the sense of being alone seems to be a common method in your work.

Frankly, I have no methods at all. If you want to deal with yourself, if you want to deal with things, if you want to chase after those things you're told to, you have to deal with loneliness.

There's a line I once wrote concerning the path to greatness. I gave it to Teddy Roosevelt in THE WIND AND THE LION. He said that if you invest in anything, it doesn't necessarily mean you'll be great, but if you do invest you're bound to stop off the road. Alone. If you just go down the road with everyone else, all you're doing is putting off the day when you will, indeed, have to stop off the road. Alone.

Were you nervous casting unknowns for the leads in CONAN? God, it scared me to death. These people seemed better in the roles than anyone else, but there was always that doubt, I cast people who seemed to be the characters in the script. And, frankly, I had no idea how I was going to pull off the transformation.

Why did you cast Sandahl Bergman as Valeria?

I looked at a lot of girls, but I was interested in a dancer. So I talked to Bob Fosse and he recommended Sandahl. When Sandahl walked in I thought, "That's her. Here's my Valeria."

Here in Hollywood you can call up a lot of sexy, sensual women who move well, but she's the only woman who looks right holding a sword. They used to say Bogart looked right holding a gun, you know. Well, Sandahl looks right holding a sword. She's powerful looking. Her body is not just sexy; it is capable of strong movements. You believe she could cut somebody's head off. You can believe she could cut Arnold in half.

Some people are going to compare the HERCULES films to CONAN, do you think that's fair? Oh, sure. But some of those movies I really liked. I thought HERCULES UNCHAINED was good. And there was a nice moment in the first HERCULES where he wanted to be mortal. Steve Reeves has to journey to a temple to ask the gods if they'll grant him his wish because he wants to be able to love. I enjoyed that, and other moments, in those films. I'm not worried about any comparisons between CONAN and anything else. He has his own identity.

The special effects of CONAN are unusual because, unlike STAR WARS and others, they were shot in-camera and not optically added later. With Industrial Light and Magic's facilities and people like Jim Danforth and Ray Harryhausen around, why didn't you use effects like dimensional animation in the film? I don't know what any of those things are... It's building a 15 inch, articulated rubber puppet rather than a 36-foot hydraulic snake.

I don't think of any of those things as work. If you make something full-size and it looks realistic, CONAN's not one of those movies where you have a lot of special effects. It's the story that matters. I was advised by Ron Cobb and other people that floor effects were the best way to go. I was just following orders.

Were you satisfied with the performance of Allder's fighting snake?

Oh, it's movements were alright. Perhaps I had it do over again I would do something other than a snake.

Why a giant snake, then?

Thulsa Doom is the snake god. Set is the cult of the snake.

CONAN's cinematography is credited to Duke Callaghan, but the first few weeks of shooting were done by Gil Taylor. What happened then?

He was terminated with extreme prejudice. His methods were... unsound.

CONAN's climax put me in mind of APOCALYPSE NOW.

There's definitely a similarity. This time I had the chance to do the ending of APOCALYPSE NOW the way I wanted it. Although, I loved that film. It's one of my favorites. I can't believe I had anything to do with it. It's a very surreal movie—let me say I am Colonel Kurtz. The Brando character...

I thought of APOCALYPSE NOW's surrealism in the sequence when Sheen and the rest of the boat crew go under the tail of the half-drowned plane.

That was one of the most beautiful passages I ever wrote. They were going under the tail section of a B-52 that had crashed in the river and it was like a gateway. The river widened at that point, strangely colored waterfowl abounded, and suddenly an incredible sense of peace came over them. At one end of this widening the river narrowed and it looked like a dark hole back into the jungle; the chief let go of the wheel and the boat drifted aim-
Millius was in his element directing gory violence (right), at a pit fight spraying blood from a pressurized can or beheading Conan’s father (inset).

...lessly toward this hole. Each man wanted to cry out, “Stop! I want to stay here.” But no one would lift a finger. The boat simply drifted forward, slowly. Then they were swallowed up, and there was darkness again.

I understand you and Francis Ford Coppola are quite close.

Francis is like a brother, so we fight and bicker a great deal, but he’s a great influence on me. I learned everything from him.

What’s your relationship with Spielberg, or Lucas?

Spielberg’s a good friend. I don’t see George as much as I used to. He lives in San Francisco, and is involved in his own thing.

Your films remind me of Spielberg’s. BIG WEDNESDAY, for instance is pleasurable.

I really took a beating on that project. I was attacked like a war criminal. You’d have thought I made some terrible film on cannibal children, instead of surfers.

I remember reading a critic taking to task for spending $8 million on a personal statement. Would you say the studio screwed up BIG WEDNESDAY, in terms of distribution and advertising?

No, I don’t. I would say that no one wanted to see it. A studio can only screw up a movie in the way they send it around. Ultimately, it’s up to the movie to find a large audience. THE WIND AND THE LION could’ve found a large audience if it had been released at a different time. Nevertheless, it eventually found a large audience.

Then why do you think BIG WEDNESDAY was a financial failure?

Not that many people were interested in surfing.

But’s it a timeless story, much like CONAN. The surfing is important, but tangential to the spirit of the film. BIG WEDNESDAY was about rites of passage, loyalty and friendship, as is CONAN.

That stuff is not as popular as modern society as The Sex Pistols. Or rage. I admit I was totally indulgent in making BIG WEDNESDAY. That’s what you’re supposed to do. You’re supposed to make films about the things you love.

A lot of people make movies about things they don’t particularly like. The filmmakers I’ve always admired—Ford, Kurosawa—always made films about what they did like. In Ford’s films he always includes an Irish sergeant because he likes the Irish sergeant; he digs that character. It may be rather corny, Victor McLaglen asking John Wayne when he’s going to retire so he can retire at the same time, but it works, because a human relationship is there. Ford likes people like that. He probably had someone like McLaglen around on his set.

Ford is the consummate filmmaker, and with Ford technique is not important. His technique is simple. He tells the story and gets his own personality and views into the film.

What was it like working for Dino De Laurentiis?

It was like the foreign legion. We’re good German soldiers, but we have a French officer. His methods are . . . unsound. Dino’s just like bad weather, he’ll pass, but meanwhile you contend with it.

Do you have the right of final cut on CONAN or does De Laurentiis?

I have two previews of my cuts. You’ve spent almost a year in postproduction. What were you doing during this time?

Crawling along the edge of a straight razor—and surviving. I like to put the film together. I enjoy that more than anything else.

How does it feel to be back in the States after seven months overseas? I understand you were cut off and isolated for half of the filming.

It was horrible in Spain. Cold, windy, bad weather, not to mention the mosquitoes. I love being back.

What about the possibility of sequels?

Arnold’s signed to a five-picture deal. As for myself, I think I’ll hire out as a military advisor. Right now I don’t plan to ever direct again. I want to go off and sleep under a tree, until the next assignment.
Filming

In 1932, the top box office stars were Garbo, Barrymore and March; GRAND HOTEL won the Oscar for best picture of the year. But it was also the year a rural Texan writer named Robert E. Howard began the adventures of Conan the Barbarian in a pulp magazine most Americans had never heard of: Weird Tales. Nearly 50 years later, Conan is finally a top star, backed by millions of dollars, a prestigious American writer/director and a famous Austrian bodybuilder. But there's a sad irony at the heart of CONAN THE BARBARIAN—his creator never saw the Gimmerian reach the screen.

Robert E. Howard was something of a walking fiction himself. The only son of a physician, Howard was born in 1906 in Peaster, Texas, but his family drifted through various Texas towns until finally settling in Cross Plains, a stop sign in the middle of nowhere.

Vocationally, Howard also drifted. After graduating from nearby Brownwood High and attending a few courses at Brownwood College (during which he was prone to recurrent bouts of sleepwalking), the brown-haired, blue-eyed author-to-be holed up in a tailor shop and worked as a public stenographer before drifting into writing as a profession. Howard was the target of continual bullying until a self-enforced routine of exercise filled out his six-foot-tall, 200-pound frame. Needless to say, the bullying stopped.

Through it all Howard retained a liking for boxing, history and

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER (left), a former bodybuilder and Mr. Universe champion, as Conan. Right: Conan as the aged King of Aquilonia, narrating the film's opening. The footage was originally to be a preview trailer in December 1980.
Know, O 'Prince; that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the rise of the sons of Aryas, there was an age undreamed of... Hither came I, Conan, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, to tread jeweled thrones of the earth beneath my feet. But now my eyes are dim. Sit on the ground with me, for you are but the leavings of my age. Let me tell you of the days of high adventure:

Article by Paul M. Sammon
From Pulps to Paperbacks

Artist Frank Frazetta defined Robert E. Howard’s barbarian in visual terms that fired the imagination.

In the mid-1960s, Robert E. Howard’s Conan series became a mass-market publishing phenomenon. The Cimmerian went paperback in 1966 with the release of Conan the Adventurer (edited by L. Sprague de Camp). This first in a series of Lancer paperbacks, later reissued by both Ace and Berkley Books, introduced Conan to a far wider audience than he’d ever enjoyed before. A new generation of readers were joyfully swept away by Howard’s vigorous prose.

Instrumental in the book’s success were the covers painted by Frank Frazetta, for the Lancer editions. Frazetta’s Conan illustrations became a profitable industry by themselves. Blown up into poster-sized wall hangings and collected in a number of high-quality soft-cover art books, Frazetta’s paintings of bulging, yet graceful, mountains of man-muscle and women of a highly developed animal sensuality became synonymous with Conan.

“Frank Frazetta is the high priest of CONAN,” said the film’s director, John Milius. “We were aware of this all the time we were shooting the film. He certainly was an influence on me. Frazetta’s Conan illustrations were more important to me than the books were.”

Arnold Schwarzenegger had been cast as Conan primarily on the basis that he looked like the living incarnation of one of Frazetta’s paperback illustrations. At one point in the film, Schwarzenegger as Conan bursts into Thulsa Doom’s Orgy Chamber, sword swinging, and

Left: The Frazetta cover that ushered in the modern age of Conan. To assess Frazetta’s impact, see how Conan was depicted by earlier artists, below: Norman Saunders (left) for Conan’s first, unsuccessful, paperback in 1950; Ed Emsh (middle) and Wallace Wood (right) for two Gnome Press hardcovers in the mid-fifties.

Frazetta

Howard

bests two of the villain’s muscular henchman. The action, as written and staged by Milius, is like a Frazetta painting come to life.

“I had a semi-nude girl chained to the pillar of the Orgy Chamber, with a leopard nearby,” said Milius. “That’s about as Frazetta as you can get.” Ron Cobb, Milius’ production designer, was aware of the same Frazetta reference, a painting called “Egyptian Queen,” though he changed it considerably and added his own distinctive touch.

Cobb followed Frazetta’s inspiration in designing the film reluctantly and only at Milius’ command. “I didn’t want to go that way at all,” he said. “Later I realized that Milius was absolutely right. We must bow to Frazetta continuously. It seemed to me that the picture needed a fresh viewpoint, because Frazetta has become a cliche. But Milius saw Frazetta as the archetypal image of Conan, and he was right.”

Cobb cites Frazetta’s influence on the look of CONAN mostly in the costuming, and in the ambition of some of the sets. “There’s a kind of northern European bleakness to some of the sets and an Arabian feel to some of the cities, as symbols of decadent civilizations, which is very Frazetta.”

In 1977, early in the film’s preproduction phase under the aegis of producer Ed Pressman, Frazetta was sought to act in an official capacity on the film as “visual consultant.” Though Frazetta’s name on the film would have been of inestimable publicity value, the producers failed to come to terms with the artist, and he backed out of the project. Frazetta, obviously interested in motion pictures as an avenue for his work, has since teamed up with filmmaker Ralph Bakshi on a Sword and Sorcery project called FIRE AND ICE.

“Frazetta’s role in their success has been grossly overrated. Sure, his covers helped sales, but the books became a hit because Howard was a damn fine writer.”

CONAN THE ADVENTURER

CONAN the BARBARIAN

CONAN the CONQUEROR

CONAN

THE RETURN OF CONAN

BOOKS FROM THE COLLECTION OF ROBERT WEINBERG
and blew out his brains. It took Howard eight hours to die. He was only 30 years old. The coroner's report passed away without regaining consciousness. Not long after, Cross Plains held its double funeral.

With Howard's death, Conan declined, then languished. An English hardcover collection of Howard's Breckenridge Elkins tales was published in the late 1930's (A Gentleman From Bear Creek) and various Howard stories continued to be reprinted in the genre magazines. But to new fans and purists, Conan was dead.

Until 1946. That year saw the appearance of Howard's second, Skull Face and Others. This time Arkham House collection, edited by August Derleth, triggered a seminal Howardian event; in 1951 a fellow Texan named Glenn Lord became fascinated with Howard after reading the book.

Lord is now known, along with noted science fiction fantasy author L. Sprague de Camp, as one of the primary keepers of the Howard flame. Lord compiled the first volume of Howard's verse (Always Comes Evening, published by Arkham House in 1957) and produced one of the best Howardian The Howard Collector. Lord was also made literary agent for the Howard heirs in 1963 (at the time Howard's estate was over the years has managed to collect every word Howard ever wrote.

Another crucial year for Conan was 1950, when an independent publisher known as Gnome Press issued the first hardback Conan series. Under de Camp's editorship, Gnome released such titles as King Conan and Conan The Barbarian. The series considerably broadened the Cimmerian's audience, well beyond the pulp book fans of the 1930's. The books were collected again in the early 1970's, and the series continued to be reprinted in the 1980's and 1990's.

During Summer's visit, Pressman attended a rough screening of PUMPING IRON, a body building documentary starring five-time Mr. Universe and seven-time Mr. Olympic winner Arnold Schwarzenegger. Enraptured by the muscular Austrian, Pressman realized that Conan was a cinematic property that suited the bodybuilder perfectly.

Said the producer on the film, Pressman and literary agent Henry Morrison began to separate the film rights from the book publishing rights, ultimately clearing the way for the movie. The legal entanglements and the extricating frustrating battle to settle all the little problems took two years, from 1975-1977.

**Cast**

Conan: Arnold Schwarzenegger
Thulsa Doom: James Earl Jones
Valeria: Sandahl Bergman
Rexar: Ben Davidson
The Wolf Witch: Cassandra Gaviola
Subotai: Gerry Lopez
The Wizard: Mako
Princess Yasmin: Valerie Quinnesen
The Master: William Smith
King Osric: Max Von Sydow
Pictish Warrior: Franco Columbu
Osric's Elite Sergeant: Gary Herman
Conan's Mother: Nadiuska Thorgurim
Sven Ole Thorsen
Red Hair: Luise Barboho
Young Conan: Jorge Sanz
Japanese General: Akito Mitamura
Sword Master: Kiyoshi Yamazaki
Woman Pit Fighter: Sarado
Axe Man at the Wheel: Bruno Larsen
Black Salt: Tom Brochaker
Hugo Vendor: Ron Cobb
Girl at Pillar: Cathy Valerie
Sacrificial Girl: Leslie Foldvary
Dancer, Tavern No. 1.: Marvia Mapuhi
Dancer, Tavern No. 1.: Masha Saint Clare
Yaro: Aldo Sambrali
Snake Priestess at Pool: Celia Millis
Male Servant: Jesus Abete
Lizard-on-a-Stick Vendor: John Mimus
Earthquake Cave Girl: Andrea Guion
Hog Witch: Anita Colby
Love Yurt Servant: Betsy Lin
Dancer, Tavern No. 2.: Pamela Sutton
Cimmerian Village Chief: Frank Brena
Turanian Officer: Erik Holmey
Beast with Three Eyes: J.L. Chinchilla

**Credits**

Also with the help of Summer and attorney Arthur Lieberman, Pressman managed to unite all the various Conan participants under one corporate roof. Conan Properties Inc. was formed in 1977. Three directors were chosen for the newly founded corporation—Lord, de Camp and Dr. John H. Troll, a patent specialist.

During the negotiations Pressman and Summer proceeded with the script. Summer enlisted the aid of Marvel Comics editor Roy Thomas, because of his intimate knowledge of Conan, to help write the script, and John Buscema was hired to do some preproduction drawings. Ironically, this scenario was specifically put together with director John Milius in mind. “Even then I was aware that John had one of the most wonderful sensibilities for romance and high adventure of any Hollywood director,” said Summer. Summer and Thomas had to write a completely original screenplay because serious legal impediments still barred the use of Howard’s material.

Pressman also moved to secure his star. Meeting Schwarzenegger at a healthy-food restaurant on the Sunset Strip in 1977, Pressman eventually persuaded the retired bodybuilder that he could play the famous Cimmerian. “People are coming up to me all the time pretending they're producers,” Schwarzenegger later commented, “and at first I didn’t take Ed too seriously. But he gradually convinced me that I was right for the role and, more importantly, that he could get the movie off the ground.”

Pressman’s film now seemed a definite “maybe,” as firm a prospect as any other motion picture during its critical formative phases. A tentative budget was set at $2.5 million. But in 1977, when the rights were cleared, Paramount offered to front the money for a new screenplay if it were written by a name screenwriter. Oliver Stone, who had just won an Oscar for his script of MIDNIGHT EXPRESS, (he is also the writer director of two genre films, SEIZURE and THE HAND) was hired to write it.

Based on Howard’s “Black Colossus,” and “A Witch Shall Be Born,” Stone produced the first viable CONAN scenario. With its bizarre fantasy touches (such as a mechanical death chariot for Thulsa Doom) and heavy emphasis on enormous battle scenes, Stone’s screenplay reflected the violent esotiricism of Howard’s Hyborian Age. Yet, there were crucial departures from the Conan canon. For instance, Stone’s script suggested Conan’s world actually lay in our own post-holocaust future (in one scene Conan chances upon a buried one-sheet advertising a motion picture).

Pressman also briefly hired artist and film designer Ron Cobb to contribute his own vision of the project. (For an interview with Cobb, see page 65). But his efforts, however, began appearing. Doubts were raised as to the feasibility of Stone’s screenplay. The budget was estimated at a whopping $40 million and the search for a director was rekindling. John Frankenheimer, Alan Parker and Ralph Bakshi were brought up and then dropped. Even Stone was considered. Finally, Ridley Scott was set to direct Conan when, in the usual Hollywood fashion, all the plans changed. John Milius agreed to direct the film although he was involved on another project and although he had initially turned the film down because he was working on his surfing opus, BIG WEDNESDAY (for an interview with Milius, see page 22).

A writer director noted for his keen sense of action and poetic romanticism, Milius had previously directed DELINQUENT, THE WIND AND THE LION and the aforementioned BIG WEDNESDAY. His script for APOCALYPSE NOW provided the framework for Francis Coppola’s controversial epic. Besides his talents in writing and directing (and despite his penchant for building an outrageous self-image), Milius brought to CONAN a life-long love and knowledge of history, swordplay and military tactics, interests similar to Robert E. Howard. More importantly, Milius had an affinity for the material. “Howard and I have the same view of civilization,” said Milius, “a skeptical one.”

But Milius did not simply slip into the director’s seat. He had begun preproduction on a Dino De Laurentiis film called HALFWAY TO THE SKY (a mountain film also involving ex-Pressman CONAN associate Ron Cobb). The film wasn’t coming together, and Milius was becoming more interested in CONAN. After reading Stone’s script, and after a number of meetings with Pressman and De Laurentiis, CONAN suddenly, and irrevocably, crystallized. “Ron Cobb was hugging me to do it,” said Milius. “I asked for a copy of Stone’s script. It didn’t look like he was going to direct the film and I thought, ‘Jesus! I have to do it!’”

Milius would write and direct the film, Cobb would design, and Buz Feitshans and Raffaella De Laurentiis (Dino’s daughter) would be the film’s line producers. Dino De Laurentiis would use his talents to arrange distribution. The picture’s credits would further read that CONAN THE BARBARIAN was “A Dino De Laurentiis Presentation of an Edward R. Pressman Production.” Summer would receive an Associate Producer credit.

By 1979, 47 years after the first Conan story, the initial Conan film was well underway. From a $2.5 million quickie the prestige of Milius and power of De Laurentiis had raised the budget to a $17.5 million film ($30 million if you tack on the $12 million advertising budget).

Milius’ first version of his script (begun in late ’78 and taking him a total of nine months to write) broke new ground for Conan fans. Stone’s script started with Conan’s origin. Milius expanded these brief scenes in the beginning of the film into a full-fledged origin story depicting the growth of Conan from a young boy to a man. This is something neither Howard, de Camp, nor any of the writers had ever fully attempted.

Conan, according to Milius, JAMES EARL JONES plays Thulsa Doom (right). Conan’s arch nemesis, actually the character borrowed from Howard’s King Kull series. He is seen here presiding over the destruction of Conan’s Cimmerian village, INLET. As spiritual leader of the Cult of Set, Doom exerts his fellow snake worshippers astride his mountain fortress.
Physical Training—Samurai Style

A martial arts expert trained CONAN's cast to perform their own stunts and swordplay.

Tutelage of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sandahl Bergman and Gerry Lopez by sword master Kiyoshi Yamazaki emphasized three basic areas to prepare for filming: karate/kendo techniques, sword practice and individual training. In the first category basic karate and kendo (a discipline involving long bamboo swords dubbed shina) was taught. For the sword training, Yamazaki drilled his pupils in iaido exercises (the art of drawing the Samurai's katana), while also rehearsing them through a series of katas (practiced movements against a single or multiple foe). The last part of the cast's training allowed Yamazaki to concentrate on their individual problems and needs.

As the initial training progressed," said Yamazaki, "I went from teaching Arnold, Gerry, and Sandahl the same basic moves to individual techniques which evolved from their own personalities. Arnold is a big, strong man, and he built up a dangerous power style. Gerry Lopez came out of the training looking like an assassin, quick and crafty. And Sandahl, since she is a dancer, gradually grew into a cool, beautiful, sharp technique. Very classical."

Kiyoshi Yamazaki (left) drills Sandahl Bergman and Arnold Schwarzenegger in the use of the Samurai katana.
spent his boyhood in the peaceful seclusion of a frigid Cimmerian village. But the peace was shattered by the attack of vicious Vanir Raiders, led by sorcerer Thulsa Doom (actually the nemesis of King Kull, from another Howard series). Doom and the Vanir-born village, kill Conan's parents, steal the Master's sword (which Conan's father, a weaponsmith supreme, had bequeathed to his son), and carry off the young boy into a life of slavery.

Chained to the Wheel of Pain, a massive wheeled grinding apparatus, young Conan spends years of exhausting labor plotting his revenge. Conceptually, the Wheel of Pain is a cleen Millius device, answering a question which puzzled Howard's fans for decades—namely, how did Conan ever get to be so goddamn strong? After a subsequent career as a gladiator, Conan escapes his servitude and embarks on a colorful, adventure-filled path that culminates in vengeance—and a new philosophical awareness.

Millius' script, through all three drafts, remained true to the vigorous, violent and exhilarating spirit of Howard's literature. The writer-director also took pains to pepper his screenplay with references from well-known Conan tales, ranging from a major episode in "A Witch Shall Be Born" (the crucifixion), to subtle throwaway lines like "I was born on a battlefield," something all true believers already knew.

With Millius' scenario secure, Ron Cobb's work in designing the film began in earnest. First working out of Millius' A-Team production offices in late 1979, the CONAN preproduction staff soon moved into De Laurentiis headquarters in Beverly Hills in early 1980. Along with Cobb and Millius came artist William Stout (recently represented by his avto-mime treatise on the making of the trade paperback, "The Dinosaurs"). Stout had been hired by Millius at Cobb's recommendation after Cobb had met Stout at the Los Angeles Book Fair in 1979. Stout worked for a year and a half as Cobb's production assistant designing a number of preliminary sketches for CONAN.

In this early stage of CONAN's genesis Millius worked at keeping his troops happy. Cobb, who had settled in at De Laurentiis, Millius presented them with heavy Marine knives as welcoming gifts. Using a large piece of plywood, Cobb drew a life-size cartoon of a manaced prisoner, and the CONAN staffers idled away their spare moments by tossing their knives at the drawing. The wood was soon in tatters and a sizeable hole was systematically chipped away in the wall behind the box. The bulk of designing and coordinating the overall look of CONAN's cinematic world fell on Ron Cobb's shoulders. "Our basic attitude in designing CONAN was to undo history," Cobb said. "We wanted the film to have a realistic, historical look, but at the same time we were always trying to invent our own fantasy history. We also said, 'OK, this is how Japanese or Celtic or Nordic—our chief design influences—looked in the year 1000. Let's take them back two thousand years and try to imagine how these designs appeared then.' In a sense, we were devolving history."

Using the work he had done earlier for producer Edward R. Pressman as a springboard, Cobb produced hundreds of sketches and drawings for the Millius version, dominated by a number of beautiful paintings representing key story points and sets. This process continued while Cobb was on location with the unit in Spain and, in the final analysis, it is Cobb's own unique vision which dominates and unifies the film.

CONAN's weaponry is particularly important in Cobb's design, especially the Master's sword and the Atlantean sword (which Conan finds in the skeletal hands of an ancient warrior). These instruments are crucial to CONAN's storyline, as a blade and weaponry buff, Millius had demanded that the swords be constructed as realistically as possible. In fact, real words were constructed by propmaker and model builder Tim Huchthausen, instead of fake weapons (see sidebar, page 39).

Millius insistence on weapon authenticity went so far as screening a number of films featuring sword fighting for his technical crew. Millius even brought his technicians to the Nu-Art Theatre in Santa Monica to watch a program of Kurosawa and samurai films.

"We were sitting around watching THE VIKINGS," Huchthausen recalled, "and there's a scene where a castle is being stormed and down at the gate someone is waving a sword whose blade is flopping back and forth, going shomp! shomp!, just like it's made of rubber. John jumped up and yelled, 'Now there, there! That's what I don't want!'"

Both the Master's and Atlantean swords were hand ground out of special 40C stainless steel carbon steel. The blades were then heat-treated. None of the film's weapons were given an edge, however. "These are for the movies," Huchthausen stated, "not real. If we'd put a real edge on them people would have been killed."

Unfortunately, by squaring the edges to blunt the swords, they became slightly off balance. They were blade-heavy. "We just couldn't take enough steel off of them," Huchthausen explained. "Had they been sharpened to a razor's edge they would have been balanced. But by every other criteria these were real weapons, actual working swords."

The final step in completing the Master's sword called for impressing Cobb's stylized script onto the blade, a motto which reads: "Suffer No Guilt Yee Who Wield This In The Name Of Crom."

The resulting prototype was approximately 70 long with a weight of nine pounds—truly a stunning weapon. Copies were later struck of the prototype, in Spain, as stand-ins. Several copies of the Atlantean Sword were struck in the United States, copies of which eventually were given to De Laurentiis, Millius and Fretham among others.

"Every design on every major sword in the film had a function and a history," said Huchthausen. "On the Atlantean weapon, in particular, the sword tells a story. There are waves, gargoyles, a ship and a death's head on the hilt, symbolizing the Atlanteans' flight from their country."

The cost for both prototypes of the Master's and Atlantean swords was high—about $10,000 apiece—but as Huchthausen pointed out. "For any copies after that all you have to do is use the mold and pay foundry and blade grinding costs."

Cheaper by far were the weapons of Conan's comrades, Valeria's tulwar (an Indian saber) and Subotai's climbing knives. Originally based on the design of a Chinese dance sword, Valeria's tulwar features a
bear symbol on its pommel (sculpted by Ralph Massey). Since Sandkal Bergman, who played Valeria, would have an easier time wielding a weapon constructed of a lighter metal, the scimitar’s blade was cut from a 1/2-aluminum sheet which was then ground to fit the hilt.

As for Subotai’s climbing knives (which might not appear in the final print), their design sprang from the 20th century. “Gerry Lopez (who plays Subotai) has his own company called Lightning Bolt,” said Huchthausen. “We designed Subotai’s knives as lightning bolts with handles on them. Gerry could jam the jagged knife into a wall’s crevices and pull himself up. Ron Cobb designed the handle which was a monkey’s paw holding a nut; symbolizing a thief, since that’s what Subotai is. We cast the knives all in aluminum, and wrapped them in leather. Actually they were quite functional; you could really use them as climbing knives” (see photo, page 39).

With prototypes of the Master’s and Atlantean swords completed, the weapons were shipped to Madrid, where fiberglass, aluminum and steel copies were made of them. The film company, however, nearly lost their prized props; a clerical error led Spanish customs to temporarily impound the swords as dangerous weapons. Which, of course, they were.

While the swords of CONAN were under preparation in the United States, simultaneously a

CONAN TRIUMPHANT at the Battle of the Mounds (right) reclaims his father’s sword, which has broken during a powerful showdown (below) with Thula Doom’s henchman Rexor, played by Ben Davidson. Doom stole the sword and murdered Conan’s father at the film’s beginning.
search for the film’s key roles was also underway. While Arnold Schwarzenegger was cast from the beginning, various other names and stars were considered and, for various reasons, discarded. Raquel Welch as Valeria, Persis Khambatta as the Princess, Sean Connery as Thulsa Doom, John Huston as the wizard of the mounds, even Sylvester Stallone, who was reportedly under consideration for a stand-by Conan, Milius finally settled on a cast of relative unknowns.

Sandahl Bergman, a dancer who had appeared on various TV variety shows and on Broadway, was signed to play Valeria, Queen of Thieves. Milius modeled her after Beulah a character in Howard’s short story “Queen of the Black Coast” (although Valeria is the name of a leading character in Howard’s “Red Nails”). Getty Lopez, champion surfer and friend of the director was cast as Subotai the Mongol. Lopez’s sole previous screen credit had been playing himself in Milius’ BIG WEDNESDAY. Accomplished film and theatre actor James Earl Jones, the voice of Darth Vader, would appear in the pivotal role of Thulsa Doom. Jones was forced to jet back and forth between Spain and Broadway while acting in the film, due to his starring role in “A Lesson To Aloe.”

For the part of King Oxcir, longtime De Laurentis star Max Von Sydow (HURRICANE, THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR, FLASH GORDON) was signed. The role, of the Master, Conan’s father, went to William Smith, an actor who has played countless villains in low-budget films during his long career. The part is his first solid role in a big budget epic. Valerie Quennessen, a neophyte French actress previously seen in FRENCH POSTCARDS and LIKE A TURTLE ON ITS BACK was the choice for the Princess of Shadizar. Finally, two important “ heavies” were cast. Ben Davidson, a 6-foot eight-inch, 280-pound former Oakland Raider was to play Rexor, prime henchman of Thulsa Doom (and the character which Milius most closely identifies with in the film), while Danish karate champion and bodybuilder Sven Ole Thorsen was picked to portray the deadly hammer-wielding Thorgrim.

Milius’ insistence on realism went beyond real, instead of rubber, swords. His three leads—Schwarzenegger, Bergman and Lopez—were all world-class athletes, superb physical specimens who had been cast as much for their physical prowess as their thespian abilities. Accordingly, Milius wanted CONAN’S swordplay to be genuine. Furthermore, the principals would do most of their own stuntwork, an unthinkable procedure for most productions whose entire existence rests on the well-being of its cast.

But most productions hadn’t CONAN’s cast. Convinced that his young athletic stars could handle the risk, Milius hired Terry Leonard, one of the most respected stuntmen in the industry. Leonard would be CONAN’S stunt coordinator and second unit director (it was Leonard who performed the hand over hand slide under the Nazi truck in RAIDERS OF THE
LOY芽 distilled by Pancic De Marchis, who directed John Millius' secretary, falls for Conan in a different way, beheaded in one stroke by the barbarian, who shows good form in his follow through (left). During filming, Schwarzenegger and Sardohe pose with her head (inset), fabricated by Carlo De Marchis.

The spring and summer of 1980 would run four miles, then go right to the ocean and swim a mile, and then work out with weights for an hour. Also I did a series of stretching exercises, every day. This way I knew that I got my body into some strange positions during filming nothing would pop. Also it was done, then I practice with Yama- zaki and everybody else. I was in pretty good shape by the time we got to Spain.

Besides the obvious physical benefits, Sandahl Bergman claimed that the threesome were rewarded with less tangible results. "The martial arts instruction we received became very spiritual after awhile," she said. "The concentration, the mental discipline, and technique; the tightness, the cleanliness, the form of your work. John was always telling us that if the technique and the will were there, then the cut would be there."

Yamazaki followed the production to Spain for the first three months of filming. Among other activities, he instructed Naduska (the Polish emigre who plays Conan's mother) in basic sword techniques, assisted Terry Leonard in coordinating some of the film's numerous fights and even managed to appear briefly in a cameo role as the Japanese sword master who teaches young Conan the finer points of weapons play.

With the bulk of CONAN's pre-production chores out of the way, the company began making the logistical moves needed for the principal photography to begin. CONAN was originally scheduled to shoot on Yugoslavian locations, so Ron Cobb left for that country in mid-March of 1980. It soon became obvious, however, that Yugoslavia had been a major error. The company pulled out and blamed the move on the death of Marshall Tito, which had left the country in a state of political flux, but more practical reasons also contributed to the departure. For example, extras were difficult to locate and even simple matters as a long-distance telephone call could be infuriating difficult to attain. Yugoslavian production facilities and technicians seemed alarmingly ill-equipped to deal with a production of CONAN's size. A rumor floated around that the Yugoslavian technicals suggested mixing the sets into real buildings (prohibitively expensive) since they had little working knowledge of fiberglass and polystyrenes, two crucial elements in stage construction.

Millius, it soon became apparent that Yugoslavia was out. In May, Cobb temporarily relocated in Rome while they looked for a country suitable for an already-delayed production. Finally, Spain was decided upon and Cobb flew to Madrid to begin setting up the film's art department.

Spain had been chosen for its excellent production facilities, varied landscapes and highly experienced film crews, who had worked on some of the largest epics ever released (KING OF KINGS, EL CID), as well as a steady flow of lesser known products. Two other factors seemed to dictate the choice. Millius has already shot THE WIND AND THE LION in Spain, in Almeria, and was familiar with the country; it is also much cheaper to shoot a film in Spain.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1980 the various CONAN departments were set up in a navé (Spanish for warehouse), a building which was only 20 miles outside of Madrid and large enough to house a full dozen sets. By this time the various departmental heads had been selected and were settling in. Nick Allder, who had worked on everything from '60s Hammer films to Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's television puppet shows before co-winning an Oscar for M.I.E.N.'s special effects and contributing to THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and DRAGON SLAYER, was named CONAN's director of special effects. Allder's crew would include such genre veterans as Rolf, Roger Shook and Ron Hone (Hone designed the little-known radio controlled Yodas used for certain key shots in THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK).

Carlo De Marchis, a long time pupil of Carlo Rambaldi, was tagged as the film's Director of Special Makeup Effects. De Marchis would employ such men as Colin Arthur (who has worked on many of Hammer's leading edge films and is one of them responsible for the Dawn of Man ape makeups for 2001), and Peter Voycey, who sculpted the masks used during Thulsa Doom's transformation into a
The Riddle of Steel: Conan's Swords

For propman Tim Hutchthausen, the riddle was learning how to make one.

Conan learns the Riddle of Steel as a boy, when his father takes him to the mountaintop and bequeaths him the Master’s sword (left). The wisdom of the riddle states that one thing a man can trust—not man, not woman, not beast—is steel. And the magnificence of the weapon he feels in his hand tells him that this is true. For propmaster Tim Hutchthausen, hired by production designer Ron Cobb to fashion the swords and weaponry needed to film CONAN, the riddle of steel was how to fashion it into a sword. “I’d never had any prior experience with sword-making,” said Hutchthausen. “Like everything else in my business, every day was a new experience. But I approached making the swords the same way Hillary approached Everest, because it was a challenge and because it was there.”

The two major swords needed for CONAN were the Master’s sword, and the Atlantean Sword (right), which Conan finds in a crypt, gripped by the skeletal hands of an ancient warrior. Hutchthausen began with work he knew well—sculpting—in order to transfer Cobb’s designs into three dimensions for a prototype of the Master’s Sword.

Like most everything else seen in CONAN, the swords first sprang to life on the sketch pad of Ron Cobb, later to be transferred to detailed plans by draftsman for artisans like Hutchthausen to work from. “Cobb was very specific on what he wanted for the props,” said Hutchthausen. “I liked the way he worked from the very beginning. Precision is one of his strongest points. He was capable of providing not only good, detailed drawing, but good, detailed ideas on the direction he wanted to take the work.

The hilt (handle) and pommel (knob on the end of the hilt) for the prototype of the Master’s sword was first sculpted by Hutchthausen in clay and wax, reproducing faithfully the intricate detailing Cobb had incorporated into those parts of the weapon. A rubber mold is made from these sculptures. Using a technique known as the “lost wax system,” a series of wax and plaster molds are made from the rubber mold and eventually encased in a silica shell called an “investment,” from which the hilt and pommel are cast in molten bronze. Investments and castings were made at the Sun Foundry in Los Angeles. The characteristic color of the hilt and pommel (on the Atlantean sword as well) is the result of natural bronze oxidation.

The next step called for the blade to be manufactured for the prototype, hand ground by Burbank-based master blade-maker Jodie Samson, who had done some of the initial sculpting of the elk’s head featured so prominently on the handle of the Master’s sword. Onto Samson’s blade, Cobb’s stylized runic script was impressed by Daniels Engraving in Glendale using electricity and a process known as EDM. An electrode carved into the shape of the engraving is lowered onto the steel, and cooled by flowing oil. An electric charge cuts out the design in a series of pulsating hits to whatever depth desired. The size limitation of the electrode required the blade to be inscribed in three contiguous sections. With the inscription finished, the 34” blade was then joined to the hilt and pommel for the prototype to be complete.

Hutchthausen repeated the process for the Atlantean sword, which was sculpted in part by Ralph Massey. During twelve months work on CONAN in 1978-80, Hutchthausen also fashioned Valeria’s tulwar, an Indian sabre, and Subotai’s climbing knives. Before the CONAN company moved to Spain, leaving Hutchthausen behind, he also sculpted, molded and built the prototype snake staff, standard used by Thuista Doom, and a miniature of the Wheel of Pain, made in two days on a 4’ by 4’ base as well as a number of warrior shields and other paraphernalia.

Hutchthausen had helped construct hovercars for BLADERUNNER, had made a miniature submersible vehicle, the Calisean for television’s THE MAN FROM ATLANTIS, and built the miniature Ferris Wheel in 1941 (where he first met Ron Cobb at Millius and Spielberg’s A-Team Productions). Now he knows how to build a sword.

THE MASTERS SWORD (left) is the weapon forged by Conan’s father at the film’s beginning, prominently figuring an elk’s head, and Ron Cobb’s stylized script “Suffer No Guilt Yee Who Wield This In The Name Of Crom.” The pommel and hilt (knob and handle) were cast in 2000°F molten bronze at Sun Foundry in L. A. (below).

THE ATLANTEAN SWORD (right) features twin gargoyles, and a smoking volcano, sinking in waves on the hilt, with a death’s head pommel. The hilt and pommels are cast in bronze using silica molds (left) called ‘investments.’ Hutchthausen’s sword (below) fits one of the Atlantean hilt to its custom hand-ground blade of stainless steel.
Jose Antonio Sanchez was the film's makeup chief and the director of cinematography was Gil Taylor (STAR WARS and FLASH GORDON) until January 1981, when Milius replaced him with Duke Callaghan (JEREMY JOHNSON).

With the CONAN organization in full operating order, Milius and Schwarzenegger flew to England's Shepperton Studios in mid-October of 1980 to begin filming. In the first scene Schwarzenegger is seated on a throne as the 60-year-old King of Aquilonia. He recites an abbreviated version of Howard's "The Nemedian Chronicles" (another homage to source material) and invites the audience to join him as he weaves a flashback to the days of his youth.

The barbarian-as-king sequence was originally intended as a trailer or preview, to be tacked on to all release prints of De Laurentiis' FLASH GORDON. Yet, due to unforeseen difficulties (it wasn't ready), the footage now opens the movie.

Schwarzenegger's Austrian accent is considerably lighter in CONAN than in other pictures. A vocal and dialect coach was hired to prepare him for the role; although enough Eastern European touches remain in Schwarzenegger's voice to lend an extra air of exoticism to his Cimmerian character.

Milius and most of his cast arrived in Spain in December of 1980; director and actors had already begun rehearsing their parts at De Laurentiis' Beverly Hills offices in September, and would continue to rehearse in

CASSANDRA GAVIOLA (inset right), an American high-fashion model in her film debut, plays The Wolf Witch in makeup by Jose Antonio Sanchez. Conan stumbles on her lair (right), constructed amid the strange geography of Cuenca, Spain. Conan frees Subolai from her power (inset bottom), filmed as they leave the valley.
PIT FIGHTING (above) develops Conan into the martial arts champion of the Hyborian world, shown by Millius in a stirring montage of scenes. Ron Cobb’s design sketch (inset) depicts Conan’s first triumph when, as a young man, he is thrown into the pit to face an enemy without training or explanation. Conan catches on fast.

Spain throughout December. Yama-zaki also accelerated their training schedule with Schwarzenegger, Bergman and Lopez working out two to three hours a day, six days a week.

The CONAN filming schedule was to cover nearly five months, from early January to late May. It was decided to break the shoot into two rough sections; until mid-March filming would take place in and around Madrid. Interiors would be lensed at the departmental headquarter’s uae, another smaller warehouse, and inside an aircraft hanger at Torrejon, Spain’s largest military base. Exteriors would be shot in a number of locales ranging from a short hop to a long drive outside Madrid. After mid-March the company would depart the Spanish capital and move south to the coastal regions of Almeria. There the final bulk of the film’s sequences and exteriors would be filmed.

The first scene shot on Spanish soil almost ended the picture. Schwarzenegger emerges from the Giant’s Cave brandishing his newly-found Atlantean sword (see photo, page 28), only to confront a pack of hungry wolves (actually trained dogs). The scene suddenly became too realistic when one of the larger dogs jumped his cue. Trained to attack the bear-skin the actor was wearing, the pseudo-wolf broke from his pack and bit Schwarzenegger square in the chest, carrying both of them over the lip of a ten-foot cliff. Schwarzenegger landed on his back in a brief patch with the frantic animal scrabbling at his torso. But like his fictional counterpart, Schwarzenegger was tough to stop. Despite massive bruises, a very sore lower back and a number of cuts, Schwarzenegger insisted he was fine and that shooting continue.

That accident, according to Schwarzenegger, set the tone for the entire production. Schwarzenegger and Bergman later agreed that the early CONAN accidents impressed them with the degree of danger inherent in their roles. Their training had not been simply play-acting; Millius intended to stage a rough shoot.

By the time CONAN wrapped in May, Schwarzenegger had not only fallen off a cliff, but was nearly decapitated when the head of a war-ax broke and grazed his neck, almost run through during one of the film’s two dozen swordfights,
Stunt Work Was Swordplay

It wasn’t child’s play; it was danger for the actors called upon to do their own stunts.

Stunt coordinator Terry Leonard choreographed CONAN’s sword battles as one would choreograph a classic fist fight. The timing and camera angles suggest a devastating blow when, in reality, the weapon is passing far from the actors’ bodies. These tricks, coupled with the actors’ feigned reactions, transform near-misses into spinning, multiple kills. All the swordplay had Leonard on edge. “When I see actors doing their own stunts, I get really nervous,” he said. “I know the chances people are taking by doing it in the first place. It was difficult to route these sword fights; people just aren’t used to having a three-foot extension on their hands. It’s like wearing size-9 shoes all your life and then suddenly putting size-14 on and running down some stairs. You’re bound to end up on your nose.”

Leonard was pleasantly surprised that the cast’s expertise took some of the pressure. “The cast took to the art of stunt work very well,” he said. “The intensive martial arts training they received from Kiyoshi Yamazaki before they even stepped on the set was an enormous plus on their part.”

“But there was always the adrenaline to deal with,” Leonard adds. “Whenever anyone in front of a camera hears the word ‘Action!’ they inevitably get this immediate rush. And when you start hacking around with swords all that energy in you, boy, things can go wrong.”

Right: Stunt coordinator Terry Leonard blocks out a kill for Arnold Schwarzenegger. Below: Leonard and Sandahl Bergman routine a fight that resulted in her injured finger during filming. Below Right: The ax broke during this stunt shot, nearly decapitating Schwarzenegger.
Sacrifice in the Snake Chamber

THE CULT OF SET feeds Thulsie Doom's Giant Serpent. A cult member (Leslie Foldvary) willingly jumps into the Snake Chamber (right) just for the honor of becoming lunch, while other cult members look on (inset top). The huge reptile guards Doom's precious gem, The Eye of the Serpent (inset bottom), which Conan tries to steal.
later the actress swayed slowly before toppling over to the left and into the waiting arms of yet another member of the crew. The result is a simple, but convincing, illusion which Milius obtained in only five takes.

The shield, actors and false head were then cleared away for the second part of the illusion. A few wheelbarrows full of real snow, scraped from the last melting patches which lay about the location, were piled on top of the marble shavings which were standing in for the real thing (Madrid was suffering from the driest winter in 20 years). Carlo De Marchis’ cable controlled head, modeled after Nadia, was then brought out. Sculpted by De Marchis’ department, supplied with an inner framework and mechanism by Giuseppe Tortora, the false head could open and close both eyelids and mouth, roll its eyes, and extend or retract an extremely realistic tongue.

The head was placed on the mound of snow, and cameras were arranged for a tight close-up; the head’s controlling cables were hidden beneath the snow and run out to a simple wooden board on which a number of manual switches controlled its operation. After spotting the surrounding surfaces with blood, Milius ran through a number of takes involving various combinations of the head’s death spasms. During these scenes of graphic violence, Milius, sporting a Cherrie-cat grin, was obviously enjoying himself.

Young Conan is led away to a life of servitude beginning on the Wheel of Pain, an enormous grinding stone fueled by slave power. Cobb designed this set to be built over a pit; the hole itself had to be first jackhammered out of the bedrock by the construction crew. The entire structure was then braced with ironwork. The set was fully functional for grinding wheat.

“Terror it won’t be apparent to the audience,” said Cobb, “but the Wheel of Pain actually was a working mill. It had an operative chain and pulley mechanism and even an access tunnel under the pit, into which soldiers could feed hoppers and bag the finished flour. The grinding stones themselves were enormous and certainly could have crushed grain, if the stones weren’t actually made of hollow fiberglass and not heavy enough for the job.”

Composed of lashed-together logs and metal fittings, and adorned with strange animal carvings, the Wheel of Pain was mounted on ball bearings that so reduced friction Schwartenegger could push the mechanism all by himself. The groaning, creaking sounds of the wheel in operation were not dubbed in, but rather a natural by-product of its construction. However, in a burst of engineering zeal, the Wheel had been over-designed; a slight breeze could send the spokes spinning like a top. Cobb and a few other technicians had outside the frame and (unknown to Milius) pushed against Schwartenegger to preserve the illusion of the Wheel having weight and resistance.

The gladiatorial pit-fights, the next stage in Conan’s career, were filmed at a number of different locations. Six pits were constructed. The various and savage hand-to-hand combats were co-choreographed by Milius and Terry Leonard. One dark-haired female gladiator, whom Conan beholds, is actually Milius personal secretary, Satalo (her false head was cast by Jose Antonio Sanchez out of dental plaster in 40 minutes).

Milius plucked the concept of pitfighting right out of American history and adapted it to Howard’s Hyborian world. “It only goes as far back as Jim Bowie,” said Milius, “when he was a youngman in Natchez, Tennessee. These trappers and other pioneers would get drunk and want to fight. So they’d dig a pit and throw two men in there with Bowie knives. The winner was the one who could crawl out alive. Then he got to bury the other guy.”

Conan is graduated from the pits and taught a long series of physical, mental and spiritual disciplines, finally becoming an invaluable aid to generals who ply him with lines like, “What is best in life?” To which Conan replies, “To crush your enemies.”

The preceding exchange takes place in the War Yurt, within which Conan is chained to a rotating, circular platform (sort of a barbaric lazy susan), and used as a Cimmerian filing system for military men eager to hear his advice. The various yurts which appear throughout the film are yet another Milius touch of authenticity. These circular portable hut-like houses were used by the nomads of Mongolia.

The War-Yurt scenes and some other segments of CONAN filmed during the first few weeks were forced to be reshot because an improper, inferior film stock had been used. The War-Yurt scenes were reshot some time later in a small, shed-like stage at the base of Agua Dulce, the Almerian peak which served as the Mountain of Power. Bergman and Schwartenegger’s passionate coupling in a “Love-Yurt” was also filmed in Almeria—on a set erected inside a

Subotai (Gerry Lopez) prepares for the battle of the Mounds by donning traditional Hykanian battle garb, one of 3000 costumes made for the film.
How To Film A Giant Fighting Snake

Effects supervisor Nick Alder tries to do it De Laurentiis-style by building a 36-foot mechanical model.

When Conan, the thief, stops to admire Thulsa Doom's Eye of the Serpent, a fantastic gem he has just lifted from the sorcerer's Snake Chamber, he is unaware that the chamber's resident, a giant fighting snake, has arisen from its slumber and now looms up behind him. Subotai, Conan's accomplice, has already escaped down the tunnel at the base of the Chamber, into the Grunder Pit, a sort of garbage dump where the Giant Snake deposits uneaten meals. Conan turns to face the monster alone, sword in hand.

CONAN's giant serpent measured 36 feet long and a foot-and-a-half in diameter, with a two-foot-wide, two-and-a-half foot long head. The snake was first realized in a number of carefully detailed studies by production designer Ron Cobb. These sketches were then sent to Nick Alder in London.

"Peter Voysey sculpted the entire length of the snake in one piece, laid straight out, all 36 feet of it," Alder said. "Then we made a series of molds, about 50 pieces in all. At this point I began to put the mechanics together in my shop in England. My thoughts on engineering the snake ran like this: 'Look at a real skeleton. Look at the musculature attached to that skeleton, and see how it all works.' I decided on duraluminum [an alloy used in aircraft construction] for the skeleton and for the musculature I decided on a system of steel cables that resulted in a very accurate copy of a real snake.

Built in ten weeks ("straight from the drawing board," Alder points out), the giant serpent's construction costs came to $20,000. Alder was anxious to build the first believable giant snake and took extra care with its design. Run by hydraulics, the serpent's skeleton was joined to a control platform beneath the snake's body, eliminating outer wiring.

The snake chamber set was too small for the serpent to be laid out in a single piece. Two separate 18-foot sections of the snake, each with their own internal mechanisms, were designed and built. The forward half was equipped with a counterbalanced hydraulic ram that was strong enough to move 3½ to 9 tons. The script called for the snake to actually light Schwarzenegger, and pick him up off the floor.

"The snake was so powerful it could easily have lifted five of me off the ground," Schwarzenegger said. "One shot called for it to slam me against a wall; if Nick had made the slightest mistake while operating the snake, I would have been smeared against the wall."

The serpent's head was also carefully constructed. Its top and bottom jaw linkages are able to open the mouth into a variety of expressions. Opening the jaws automatically causes the fangs to drop down. Tubing running through the head and teeth allowed the operators to either pump blood out of concealed wounds or for the fangs to drip saliva (actually KY jelly). Carlo De Marchis supplied the reptile's skin, a soft, pliable, lightweight, vulcanized foam rubber which was sectionally applied on the creature's body over a complex supporting web of bungee cords.

The snake chamber set had been equipped with a false bottom and tracks were fastened onto hydraulic belts secreted under the snake's belly enabling it to move forward or writhe from side to side. Special articulated body sections were built that could twist and coil around Schwarzenegger during the battle. The coils were operated separately from the giant snake which careful camera angling conceals.

To cut off the creature's head, after Conan pins the snake's head against the wall, the cameras were stopped and the mechanical snake head was replaced by a second head connected to a body section and hosing for blood. The cameras were started and Schwarzenegger cut through the rubber body section, resulting in a wonderfully gory Howard tribute.

The fighting snake (as the mechanical creature was dubbed on stage) was actually only one of three full-length serpents used in the film. The other two included the detachable-head model used for the beheading and an inert, 300-pound rubber model braced by a nylon skeleton, which was posed for stationary shots of the serpent coiled around the altar holding the precious Eye of the Serpent.
half-completed, underground parking lot.

Conan escapes from slavery courtesy of a Nick Alder floor-effects earthquake. The fleeing Cimmerian stumbles onto a damp, dark cavern guarded by a gigantic mummy of a long dead Atlantean warrior. A strange beautiful weapon, the Atlantean sword, rests on its knees.

At this point Milius' screenplay stays on more familiar ground veering away from the director's original concepts of Conan's origins. Ironically, the incident, based on "The Thing in the Crypt," was not written by Howard but one of the de Camp Carter pastiches. Milius stated he had little use for Milius left out the fantasy elements of the de Camp Carter story changing the Thing to a lifeless hich. In the original story the young Conan finds himself fighting for his life against an aggressively vigorous corpse.

Eight and half feet tall, carefully built bone by bone by Giorgio Postiglione, the Giant was carefully supervised during its construction by Ron Cobb and shot in January of 1981. Despite the usually harmonious Cobb-Milius working relationship, the production designer was unhappy with a certain aspect of Milius' handling of this scene. "I originally posed the Giant to resemble my preproduction painting," Cobb explained, "knees together, dignified, solemn. At the last minute John reposited the Giant so that it's slumped back on the throne with its legs flung wide apart and I think it looks silly."

With his newly acquired Atlantean steel, Conan dispatches the wolves waiting outside the crypt and runs headlong into their spiritual ally—the charac ter Milius sees as reminiscent of Howard's lead in the story "The Frost Giant's Daughter."

The Wolf Witch exteriors were filmed in Cuenca, an area noted for its strange and arresting rock formations. Portrayed by American model Cassandra Gaviola, the Wolf Witch is the first supernatural element in the film. This encounter lays to rest the persistent rumors that Milius had cut all supernatural elements from the film. The Wolf Witch scene, in fact, become Milius' homage to Masaki Kobayashi's 1961 Japanese fantasy film KWAIDAN, based on a number of short stories by American writer Lafcadio Hearn. Cobb's Wolf Witch sequence is reminiscent of KWAIDAN's "Woman of the Snows" episode.

The Wolf Witch scene required Conan to throw the Witch into her fireplace where she explodes into a fireball. To accomplish this effect, Nick Alder pulled a small cannister, filled with compressed gas and strung on a fine wire, into the fireplace. The billowing flames blowing out the cylinder's end disguised the cannister as it wobbled out into the night. The fireball was also one of the few effects which would later receive postproduction effects by Peter Kuran's Visual Concepts Engineering company, animated effects including lens flares designed by Katherine Kean. "We enhanced a shot of the fireball reeding away from the camera by adding simple animated pyrotechnics," said Kuran. "We extended out the flames to give the impression there was still something of a body in there. The original pyrotechnics for that shot didn't give you that illusion."

Following the Witch's demise, Conan frees her half-frozen captive, Subotai, a mongol and a thief. Striking up a quick friendship, the pair soon embark on a long series of travels throughout the Hyborian world, from border to border and bazaar to bazaar. A variety of actual locations doubled for these stopovers. The endless plains over which Conan and Subotai ran were really flats just outside Madrid, while the Zamoran bazaar they visit was a heavily redressed version of Alcaba, a famous Moorish Christian fortress near Almeria. While visiting this bazaar an unlucky pick pocket lost his hand to Conan, and promptly loses it.

Colin Arthur, who once was the Studio Head of Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, describes how to make the pick pocket's severed hand twitch. "To get an artificial hand to close after it's been chopped off is quite easy. You simply put a piston and spring with a bleed screw on the end of it into the prop, and the screw slowly releases the energy out of the spring. That's a very common technical way.

The amount of violence affected everyone. There were times I thought CONAN might be the most violent movie ever made."

said Ron Cobb. "I simply lost track of the stabbings and beatings, slit throats and barrels of blood we ran through during the shoot. You just never knew when you were going to round a corner and find a headless mechanical torso twitching its arms at you. Of course, everyone expected an R rating from the start, but it'll still be interesting to see what Milius takes out to tone down the explicitness."

A large standing set in the Almerian desert called the El Condo Fort (named for the Lee Van Cleef film that was built for the city of Shadizar). It is here Conan and Subotai first encounter Valeria, and cross paths with a giant snake and the city's Princess. These required considerable alteration, both within and without, but Milius dislikes using extensive postproduction optical effects to enhance sets.

"John Milius, Nick Alder and I were constantly striving to cut down on or avoid optical effects," said Ron Cobb. "John always said that he wanted to see the work in the dailies, and not six months later in a lab back in the States. We tried to avoid matte paintings, too, because they're generally artificial and I didn't have the time to paint them, although one matte, by Jim Danforth, might be in the picture."

"So to avoid matte paintings," Cobb continued, "we relied on Emil Ruiz, the head of our miniature department, to come up with an old trick. We simply blended models against actual backgrounds. Emilio constructed the miniatures, plotted the camera angles and was really responsible for making it work.

For instance, we had Conan and Subotai running towards Shadizar and it looks like an actual city. But in reality only half the city was genuine, the rest was a foreground miniature. It's actually quite simple to fool a camera by exploiting its monocular vision and carefully plotting its focal depth."

The miniature portions of Shadizar, being three dimensional, were naturally lit by the same lightsources as the standing set, making a seamless illusion. Extra moving back and forth at a distance, fires lit a great distance away from the set so their smoke seemed to emanate from the model, were some of the tricks with depth of field that replaced the traditional matte

THE PRINCESS OF SHADIZAR is played by Valerie Quennessens (right), a French actress recently considered for Natasha Kinski's role in CAT PEOPLE.

Max Von Sydow plays King Osric, her father (inset), who is killed by Thulsa Doom's famed sword when he refuses to give his daughter's hand in marriage.

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Trick perspective was also used for Shadizar’s Tower of Serpents; Ruiz constructed a number of different towers—60, 40, and 20 centimeters high—to be used both on the El Condor locations and the miniature city of Shadizar. A 12 foot Tower of Serpents also appears in the background when Conan and Subotai climb over a garden wall.

El Condor was the setting of the film’s funniest off-camera incident: during a formal procession down an El Condor street, two elephants suddenly copulated in the middle of the avenue and continued to merrily bang away for the cameras before an astonished Milius had the presence of mind to call “Cut!”

Cobb and Milius both appear in the El Condor Street scenes. Cobb makes a cameo appearance as a sleazy Black Lotus dealer, and Milius as a purveyor of a Hyborian fast food franchise—lizard on the stick. Milius has made a cameo appearance in each of his films, except DILLINGER. He plays a gun salesman in THE WIND AND THE LION and a drug dealer in BIG WEDNESDAY. The Lizard-on-a-Stick concept originated with William Stout. “I figured even in Conan’s day there must have been an Hyborian equivalent to our own fast food stands,” Stout said. “I came up with the Lizard-On-A-Stick idea and drew it up. John roared with laughter upon seeing it. Instead of golden arches, I’d put golden tusks on each side of the

CONAN THE THIEF stops to admire his loot (right), unaware of what looms up behind him. Though Conan thrusts his powerful Atlantean sword through the snake’s head (inset right), he still gets all wrapped up. Effects supervisor Nick Alder and assistant Colin Arthur (inset below) adjust the fangs of the 36-foot mechanical model.
Thulsa Doom's Giant Serpent
NEANDERTHALS pose with Arnold Schwarzenegger (above) during filming in Almeria, Spain. Makeup artist Jose Antonio Sanchez made simple rubber masks (inset) for a scene where their faces are glimpsed dimly in a cave as Conan faces the Mountain of Power.

As Doom's elite guard, they cover their looks with leather face masks.

“To suggest that they were dec vending a 200 foot shaft,” Cobb explained, “we had a large mirror manufactured and placed at the bottom of the Torrejon Tower at a 45 degree angle. This mirror reflected a smaller, forced perspective tube, which was horizontally joined to the base of the Tower, up towards the camera at the top of the Tower. The camera, looking down the Tower’s throat, picked up the reflection of this secondary tapered section and gave the impression of enormous depth. Frankly, I was worried that if one of the actors had slipped and fallen down on that mirror from that height... I don’t want to think about it!”

Conan and Subotai end up in the Grunge Pit, a sopping well of decomposing bodies (the name was coined by Buzz Feitshans). An underground channel takes them into the midst of a human sacrifice involving a fabulous gem called The Eye of the Serpent and a 360 foot long snake.

In the snake ritual chamber—one of CONAN’s most beautifully textured and detailed sets—Ben Davidson, as Thulsa Doom’s henchman Rerox, conducts the sacrifice forcing a half-blackened young woman into the giant serpent’s lair. But Conan is there to help her and his battle with the snake is the film’s fantasy highlight (see sidebar, page 46).

The Eye of the Serpent was actually a purple paperweight, a prop that Ron Cobb considered a major disappointment. “It was a disaster,” said Cobb. “Originally I drew it exactly how I wanted the jewel to look. I consulted with Milius on this and we both decided how we wanted it. We were very detailed about it.”

“I then gave the designs to Nick Aller, but technique failed to produce anything that looked good. They were terri- ble. We were getting close to shoot- ing and Milius didn’t like them either. I thought I could rely on the wonderful technology, fantastic plastics and all that, but—nothing. So I launched an emergency trip all over Madrid, trying to find some- thing. We went all over the place, jewelers, chandelier makers, every- where.”

“Finally, I said, ‘Christ, what about paperweights?’ Rafaela de Laurentiis promptly found this paperweight shop, I don’t know how. She bought this ghastly pur- ple thing and Milius decided to use it. We changed it into an egg shaped thing, drilled a hole in it and added fiber optics. It grows on you, I suppose. But basically I mis- calculated the kind of work you can get from the effects department. It should have been a very important prop...”

Peter Kurian’s VFX company was called in to provide postpro- duction animated effects around the jewel, enhancing the gem’s lustre with a deep hypnotic glow.

After stealing the gem, the trio fight their way to the top of the tower (involving ropes, pulleys, and an impromptu hanging) and leap into space intercut with Emilo Ruiz’s miniature garden and pool which increases the perception of height. Their pockets stuffed with loot, the three companions drink and carouse their fortunes away in a marvelously barbaric tavern (set in the attic of a 17th century monas- tery) before being abruptly sum- moned by a wave of King Osric, a set built in Torrejon.

Osric tells Conan, Valeria and Subotai that his daughter has been kidnapped by Thulsa Doom and offers a handsome reward if they will return the woman. The trail leads them to prehistoric burial mounds and Doom’s own forbidding stronghold—the Mountain of Power.

The mounds were completely man-made, their construction supervised by art director Ben- jamin Fernandez. The mounds are the burial site of ancient warriors and kings, guarded by silent skeletal sentries. While pausing here on his journey to Doom’s mountain stronghold, Conan first meets a half-mad wizard, played by Mako.

Conan infiltrates an enormous group of pilgrims of the Cult of Set (the film’s largest crowd scene, with 1500 extras recruited for what was called the Procession of the Faithful). He then stalks his mortal
The Tree of Woe, to which Conan gets nailed by Thulsa Doom's henchman, is a prop that manages to roll the best of Robert E. Howard, Frank Frazetta, John Millius and Ron Cobb all into one set. The exterior, designed by Cobb and assistant art director Pierluigi Basile, consisted of plaster molded over a wood and steel reinforced skeleton, with branches composed of wire and styrofoam. The inside of the Tree was designed by effects supervisor Nick Allder and assistant Peter Voysey to house electrical equipment and an operator for the scene's mechanical vulture. The hapless bird picks on the wrong carcass and gets bitten through the neck by a dying Conan. The entire assembly was mounted on a turntable to follow the sun, and was filmed in three days in March 1981 near the coastal sand dunes of Almeria, nearly the same spot where the train derailment of LAWRENCE OF ARABIA was shot.

Schwarzenegger sat comfortably on the tree astride a bicycle seat concealed underneath his loincloth (see photo bottom right). The nails in his feet and hands were makeup appliances attached to arcs of red wire bent around his wrists and ankles which were anchored to pegs on the Tree. For the mechanical bird, Allder and his crew removed the wings from a dead vulture and supported them with internal metal braces, operated by a series of tiny cams and pistons. A false body, feet and head were then constructed over which genuine feathers were applied.

"The Tree was never properly utilized," said Ron Cobb. "Millius decided to use certain tight angles for those scenes [top right], and the technicians were reduced to operating the bird just out of camera range behind the Tree."

Actually, some real vultures used for the scene proved to be the biggest problem. "They kept running away!" laughed Cobb. "We had four live birds tethered to the Tree's limbs, but they kept untying themselves, hopping off and trying to escape."

Left: Subtai eyes the dead bird. Below: A grip rigs a silhouette to film the bird's shadow as if circles.

A pesky vulture finds Conan in an extremely bad mood, courtesy of mechanical effects by Nick Allder.
Thulsa Doom’s Orgy Chamber
enemy, Thulsa Doom, on the steps of the Temple of Set. The Temple on the Mountain of Power was the most massive single set constructed for the film, requiring tons of concrete and various woods, lacquers and tiling to complete. It was also the most expensive set with a price tag of $350,000 (see sidebar, page 54).

The Procession scenes also featured the largest single collection of serpents in the film, with over forty reptiles squirming on various portions of the building. All of CONAN’s snakes were under the close supervision of Dr. Tiva, a Madrid-based herpetologist who stayed with the production throughout its long shoot, caring for the numerous serpents appearing in the picture.

But Conan’s disguise is penetrated. Conan is captured by Doom’s guards and taken to the Fountain Plaza (a set erected in a quarry about one mile away from The Mountain of Power set), where he receives a savage beating at the hands of Rerox and Thorgrim. Crushing his hands and feet, kicking him until he’s bloody, Thorgrim and Rerox finish the job by tossing the maimed, but still defiant Cimmerian into the fountain’s icy waters.

Yet for all the scene’s gore, Milisus was still dissatisfied. As he was to do countless times throughout the production, the director halted filming while he personally sprayed Schwarzenegger with more studio blood. In fact, Milisus’ passion for “More blood!” would become something of a running joke. From Nadiuska’s death scene to the pit fight to the final battle of the mounds, Milisus could be seen standing next to an old-style fire
**Thulsa Doom’s Temple of Set**

**CONAN’s most costly set was a remarkable feat of construction, engineering and logistics undertaken in a remote part of Spain.**

The Mountain of Power is Thulsa Doom’s stronghold fortress hollowed out of an inaccessible mountain peak. The Temple of Set squats just below the mountaintop, serving as the doorway to the beehive interior of Doom’s empire, and doubles as a shrine for the Cult of Set. Doom’s fanatic followers who worship the Serpent God.

"On this kind of structure you usually have to resort to a matte painting," said production designer Ron Cobb. "We didn’t do that on CONAN. We built it. The Temple was the largest exterior construction made for the film, and could be photographed from any angle. Our cast and extras could walk in and around it just like a real building."

The Temple was 50 meters long, 22 meters high and had 120 steps on its stairway to heaven. Cobb considered locations for the set’s construction in Canada and Yugoslavia before settling on a mountain near Almeria in Spain called **Agua Dulce** (Sweet Water).

**Agua Dulce** is a very prominent peak, and building the Temple proved to be a major engineering project. Fortunately, a crude natural access road led to the base of the mountain, and doubles in the film as the path tread by Doom’s Procession of the Faithful. A funicular, or small railway, was built by the construction crew from the access road to run alongside the construction site, taking men and material up and down the mountain’s rather steep slope. "This wasn’t a DeMille extravaganzas," laughed Cobb. "We couldn’t have workmen climbing up and down Agua Dulce all day with gigantic loads on their backs."

Since the Temple set had to support the weight of thousands of extras, the steps and foundation were made of concrete. "There’s a special form of concrete that comes out looking like dirty white marble," said Cobb. "We painted it in the marble grain." Decorative sections were prefabricated in Madrid out of plaster and shipped by truck to the construction site where they were carried up the mountain on the company’s winch-powered funicular and fitted over a reinforced substructure, and painted. Each piece was numbered and coded for easy accurate assembly.

The Temple itself was made of wood and wood finishes so that Conan could burn it down at the end of the picture. Effects man Nick Alder torches it with gasoline. "We got a little panicky when the Spanish fireman couldn’t put the fire out," said Cobb. "We needed the bottom part of the set for later shots! Nick ran up and ripped aside some panels to show them key points where they should train their hoses."

Cobb’s Temple design is a mixture of variations on Oriental, Moslem and Greek architecture, carrying forth strongly the serpentine motif that symbolizes Thulsa Doom and his Cult of Set. There are snake bannisters, snake sculptures, and mosaic inlays of snakes throughout. The Temple itself somewhat resembles an ornamental Japanese gate, with its carved decorations, brass fittings, and abundance of wood and blue tile. Cobb’s personal favorite among his many designs for CONAN, the art director was rumored to have cried when it came time to burn the Temple down.

Filming Thulsa Doom’s Procession of the Faithful, as members of the Cult of Set make their pilgrimage to the Temple, a shrine to their Serpent God.
extinguisher energetically pumping out the gelatin-based blood on every corpse and victim in sight. Milius' directions to his actors could also be amusingly terse. While rehearsing Conan's beating, Milius turned to Ben Davidson (Rexor), pointed to the bloody Schwarnegger, and said, "Terminate with extreme prejudice."

The Fountain Plaza scenes also had Ron Cobb performing second unit direction as he would sporadically throughout the shoot. Terry Leonard really had his hands full picking up a lot of the specialized action shots Milius simply didn't have time for," Cobb said, and "I sort of inherited some scenes Terry didn't have time for. At the Fountain Plaza, for example, I directed the scene where Conan coaxes one young follower of Set to stab himself to death. I also filmed the effects sequence where Thulsa Doom turns into a snake."

Cobb enjoyed his directorial chores "tremendously," but not all of them were particularly pleasant. "For one quick shot all I wanted was a close-up of Conan's horse's hooves thundering by and kicking up some black sand," said Cobb. "Arnold was off somewhere being filmed for a more important scene, so we put his stand-in on the horse and set up the shot. But we quickly discovered that this man wasn't much of a rider; not only did he never hit his marks, but he almost ran over me a few times. The equipment also got trampled. But we finally got the shot."

On Doom's orders Conan is crucified to the Tree of Woe, a complex steel-striped prop covered with wood and plaster and built on a rotating platform. Battered and bruised, nearly dying from his wounds, the Cimmerian nevertheless still has the strength to bite through the neck of a hapless vulture. "That crucifixion scene is probably the archetypal Conan image," said director John Milius.

Conan aficionados will recognize this scene originating from Howard's short story "A Witch Shall Be Born." The mechanics behind the film's vulture, however, are definitely the product of 80s technology. The vultures that roost in the Tree of Woe's branches are genuine, but the bird bitten by Schwarzenegger was a cable-controlled puppet (see sidebar, page 51).

The release print may not retain this scene's punchline: as Conan looks down on Subotai, even the barbarian is horrified to see the Mongol calmly plucking the carcass of the dead bird. "You're not going to eat that thing!" Conan asks.

"I'm hungry," comes the reply from Subotai.

"Eat it behind me," the barbarian says, "so I don't have to watch." Conan is brought back to the mounds, where the wizard carefully

fully paints the near-dead barbarian's body with arcane symbols. These runes protect Conan from the spirits which have been summoned to give him new life, for without the symbols' protection these ghosts could just as easily turn on the Cimmerian and kill him. This sequence is another homage to KWAI DAN. In fact, the segments of this Japanese fantasy film an identical situation is presented. Unfortunately, its protagonist forgets to cover two parts of his anatomy with the runes, and after the spirits vanish he is promptly dubbed "Horchi the Earless."

A storm heralds the spirits' arrival and the necessary wind was to be provided by a huge wind machine, although the wind was blowing hard enough that night to make the machine unnecessary. The scene also required the ghosts to appear to be levitating above Conan and come to be known as the levitation scene. The sequence employed extensive postproduction animation effects generated by Peter Kurian's Visual Concepts Engineering (VCE) company (see sidebar, page 63).

VCE was not the first choice for CONAN's animated effects; the job was first offered to Kurian's one-time employer, George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic (ILM). "Since they primarily do their effects work in an 8-perforation VistaVision format, and since CONAN had been shot in 4-perf, we were contacted next," said Kurian.

ILM, however, did provide some effects for the film, a short piece of work for the IvaHat ix, Iona's ghost sequence. The 8-perf/4-perf problem did not become a great hindrance. "We can handle other formats," said ILM's Visual Effects Supervisor Richard Edlund, "but

we prefer to work in VistaVision because of the quality jump we can get."

ILM's main contribution to CONAN was the boiling clouds seen during the arrival of the levitation spirits. Beginning with stock footage of clouds shot in time-lapse photography, ILM supplied a transition scene where the sky darkens into a deep, angry red. This transition was achieved in ILM's optical department by shifting color separations within the film stock. "Essentially," said Edlund, "we did a high-class posterization process whereby you can extract different values from assigned colors."

The 8-perf problem was solved by Edlund supplying a duplicate negative of the clouds shot in 8-perforation VistaVision, for some of the other shots that the CONAN location crew had done anamorphically, Edlund made reduction interpositives of the clouds which were then composited by Barry Nolan of Van Der Veer Optical.

The spirits return Conan his strength and, a bit subdued, he rejoins Valeria and Subotai in guerilla raid on Doom's Mountain of Power. Swathed in surreal camouflage designs, their objective is the

kidnapped Princess. "Milius originally wanted Arnold and the others painted over their entire bodies in a green and brown pattern," Cobb said. "But he changed his mind when he saw the results. It looked too modern. Instead, he devised an angular, "Kiss"-like design done with red and black paint. It was very tigerish and primeval. Very scary."

It was also uncomfortable. "Our upper bodies were naked all day long," Schwarzenegger said (one of the few such moments in the film that Schwarzenegger's torso was uncovered; from the very beginning, Milius and Cobb had decided to keep Schwarzenegger clothed most of the time, repudiating the bare-chested, muscle-flexing cliches of the HERCULES sub-genre."

"And the warehouse where we shot these scenes was very cold," he continued. "My eyes were painted and I had a wig on, a fall that attached to the ends of my real hair, so I couldn't move around the way I normally do. I couldn't lie down in the trailer, because the paint would have gotten all over the bed. And I couldn't wash the paint off my hands at lunchtime because the continuity would have
CONAN also used a great number of false bodies—over 200 of them—to act as corpses and crowd-scene stand-ins. Constructed under the supervision of Colin Arthur from a complex foam rubber formula, the figures were baked in life-size molds after being strengthened with thin wire skeletons. The molds were painted with three finishing coats of latex, one pinkish-red coat sandwiched between two clear coatings. The final products were enhanced by transparent, life-like flesh tones.

"CONAN was a real violent film," said stunt coordinator Terry Leonard. "No two ways about it. What also makes it unique is that 95% of the time, Arnold, Sandahl and Gerry were doing their own stunts (see sidebar, page 43). Except in a few cases, we didn't use doubles. Besides, where would you find someone who could double for a body like Arnold's?"

A number of trick swords were devised by Nick Allder when actual physical contact between weapon and body was required. Two basic swords were manufactured which could drench themselves in blood. Both were capable of telescoping in on themselves to suggest the blades had passed through a body.

The first blood sword design had a hollow core planted in the blade through which artificial blood could be pumped by tubing running into the weapon's pommel from an off-camera gore supply. The second, more portable blood sword was completely self-contained; a small CO2 pressure pot was inserted into the sword's handle along with a charge of blood. When the sword's handle was compressed, the CO2 would force the blood up through the core of the blade and out of its tip, resulting in a nasty-looking gash.

Both varieties of blood sword were manufactured out of fiberglass, into which carbon strands had been impregnated for added strength. Compressed under great forces in on-location molds, the carbon fiber swords were cast whole. Each sword took about an hour to manufacture from start to finish. Carbon had been decided upon because it lent the swords the necessary tensile strength needed to hold up against the punishment exerted on them by CONAN's cast.

"There were big guns on this picture," said Allder, "and they didn't pull their punches. We had begun with some aluminum swords, but they kept breaking, so we went to the carbon fiber process. They still managed to break the carbon swords, though, but as fast as they broke them we kept turning them out."

One of the greatest special effects in the film is Thulsa Doom's on-screen transformation into a giant snake. Ron Cobb handled the second unit work on this effect.

"We had two different sets of
Thulsa Doom’s private chamber for this shot,” said Cobb. “A full size set for which Nick Allder provided a mechanical snake about six feet long, and a 1/3 size miniature set of the same chamber provided by Emilo Ruiz on which we released a live reticulate python.

“We built a miniature set to get our real snake to look the same size as the mechanical one,” Cobb continued. “The set was eight to nine feet across, including a background. There was a pie-shaped section of the floor in front of the camera plus a whole miniature costume and miniature cushion. The scale on Doom’s miniature costume, the one the live snake came out of, would have made Thulsa Doom about two feet tall.

“Ruiz also included decorative brass fittings off a lamp, which were similar enough to stand in for the candle sticks on the real set. They weren’t exact, but it was close.

WILLIAM STOUT was a production illustrator under Ron Cobb and did this promotional painting (inset) during preproduction in 1980. At the Mounds, which face Thulsa Doom’s Mountain of Power, Conan chains up the rescued Princess of Shadizar as bait and waits for Doom’s army to emerge from his stronghold and try to take her back.
Valeria (Sandahl Bergman) returns from the dead at the battle of the Mounds.

Postproduction Optical Effects

Peter Kuran's Visual Concepts Engineering provides the finishing touches for key sequences.

When location and on-set photography doesn't quite come off as expected, Peter Kuran's Visual Concepts Engineering effects company is often called in to "enhance" the scene. On CONAN THE BARBARIAN, Kuran's operation was handed a number of sequences like Valeria's return from the dead.

During the climatic battle of the Mounds, a ghostly Valeria appears to protect Conan from a deadly stroke of Reror's blade, in a moment cribbed from Robert E. Howard's story "Queen of the Black Coast." For the scene, Sandahl Bergman wore an ethereal skin-tight costume (left), dubbed her "disco suit" because of the many tiny mirrors inserted into the fabric by costume designer John Bloomfield. Bloomfield had taken a full body mold of Bergman during the first weeks of shooting for the suit's construction. When the live action photography was deemed not dazzling enough, Kuran was asked to add animated flares and sparkling yellowish-gold glows (above).

Kuran was also handed the last scene in the picture, a long shot of Conan and the Princess of Shadizar, as they walk away toward a distant valley (below), in order to add a shaft of light and moving clouds in the background. Kuran turned the assignment over to matte artist Jim Danforth, better known for his forays into the field of stop-motion animation.

Kuran's major work for CONAN involved animating spirits summoned to give Conan new life after he has been crucified by Thulsa Doom (see sidebar, page 63). This, and the other optical work required, was a major factor in delaying the film's release. "Most filmmakers I've worked for deal so much in live action that they have problems understanding effects work," said Kuran. "In live action you shoot for two weeks and end up with thousands of feet of film. I'll work for weeks and weeks and bring a client 30 feet of film and they just don't understand what takes so long."

Jim Danforth's matte painting in progress (below, top) for CONAN's final shot, as the barbarian and Princess of Shadizar walk toward a distant valley (bottom).
enough. One thing bothered me: we took the same pattern off the full-size pillows and put them on the miniature. This meant that the pattern suddenly was much larger. I was worried about that. But we couldn't duplicate this intricate pattern on the miniature cushions. We had to use the same thing. It looked all roommates to me. But when we saw the dailies, I could not tell if it was real or the miniature set. We'd have to sit and wait for the snake to appear before we could tell. I was so pleased with that. Emilio just had to see what you had to go. He knew exactly what was needed.

The plot begins with James Earl Jones seated on a throne with the Princess beside him (see photo, page 58). His head was fixed to a head brace to keep him rigid as no movement could be allowed for the subsequent optical dissolve that would be a part of the metamorphosis. Yellow contacts were then placed in Jones' eyes to suggest the first stage of the transformation. After these scenes were filmed, the second unit placed a foam-rubber life mask of Jones (made by Peter Voysey) over a featuresless hollow head. A small hand puppet of a snake's head, proportionally designed to the same size as the face, was then manually pushed through an opening in the back of the head and up against the mask. It looked like Thulsa Doom's bone structure is altering into a snake.

Voysey also sculpted three other heads depicting various stages of Doom's reptilian metamorphosis. These were then sequentially filmed in a series of lap-dissolves to complete the transformation. A small, mechanical snake's tongue, darting in and out of the life mask, added the final touch.

Ron Cobb shot the scenes of Doom's costume sinking in on itself and the snake oozing out. De Marchis made a set of foam-rubber shoulders that rested on a framework he devised. Doom's clothing could be hung over this. Cobb and his crew used newspapers and anything they could find to fill out the torso, especially around the knees.

This body framework was connected to a pivot point which was connected to a camera dolly with a foot pedal on it. When an operator pressed the foot pedal the framework would collapse. The pedal controlled the rate at which the structure disassembled. Cobb also had the shoulders panted hinged so they could be pulled inward by two cables.

The mechanical snake was attached to a hidden track which was cranked by another crew member. In fact, it took a entire crew of people to operate this effect. One man would do the right and left movements of the neck of the snake, another the up and down motions of the body, another person could make the head rotate. Yet another crew member would start cranking the mechanical snake through the costume and at the same time hit the foot pedal to crumple Thulsa Doom's body. Another person would pull wires so the shoulders would move.

Cobb personally operated the mechanism for the snake's tongue. A series of electromagnets pulled on the fragile black rubber tongue; it could whip it out and whip it back in. Cobb also did an insert of Thulsa Doom's hands drawing up into his sleeves. One of the crew members dressed up like Thulsa Doom and they stitched the sleeves together so as the man drew his arms up the sleeves would remain stationary.

"The mechanical snake comes out of Doom's costume on the real set," said Cobb, "with the Princess in the foreground. It goes over her head but she doesn't look at it. She's in reverie. As it passes, it dives down and nearly extends to its full length. There is a cutaway to some action happening downstairs. When we come back, we are on the miniature set for the first time. You can tell because the Princess isn't in the shot. Now the real snake is used coming the rest of the way out of the costume, flowing around behind the pillow, making its way across the floor and into the snake hole."

The crew used a number of devices to get the snake to crawl into a specific hole. "We first ran the snake over its course a number of times with hot lights and little smokes surrounding it," said Cobb, "to keep it on track. The snake avoided the smoke and we'd prod it along until it fed itself into the tunnel. After a number of times it knew right where the tunnel was the moment we released it."

DOOM'S METAMORPHOSIS into a giant snake utilized Nick Alder's mechanical model (right), made to sitther out of James Earl Jones' costume. To escape Conan, the serpent slides down a hole (inset), seen to the left of the drug stotted Princess of Shadizar (Valerie Quennessen). A live snake and miniature set were also utilized.

But the smoke and repetition definitely weren't the only reason the snake learned to head for the tunnel. Dr. Tiva [the snake trainer] had put a female snake in the back of the tunnel, so the smell drifted out. He added up newspapers dipped in female snake urine and hid them under the turf and rugs on the miniature set, making a pathway from the costume to the tunnel.

"When we turned the cameras on," said Cobb, "the snake did live or six takes, and one of them was just wonderful. He came out of the costume, looked around, crawled across the room, hesitated for a moment, and then just surged right down that tunnel."

The last shot, over the Princess' shoulder, of the snake's tail slithering down the hole was done using a full-sized, inert, rubber version of the real thing. This way Cobb was able to put the Princess in the shot with at least a portion of the snake disappearing.

Meanwhile, a terrific battle is fought in the Orgy Chamber and the central pillar is knocked down by repeated blows from Thorgrim's hammer. To achieve this effect, the pillar was weakened on one side and braced by a steel platform placed above the camera.

To film much of CONAN'S strenuous action, effects man Nick Alder developed the "mini-jib," an automatic, electronic camera mounted on an extremely lightweight crane device. A further refinement of the Halo crane Alder invented for DRAGONSLAYER, the device was used in a number of scenes where laying ordinary camera tracks would have been next to impossible. Driven by servo motors, the mini-jib breaks down into four foot sections and features an electric interface which allows an operator to control the camera and crane from as far as sixty feet away.

After escaping from the Mountain of Power, Conan and his cohorts must still battle Doom's Neanderthal allies (wearing Joe Sanchez makeup) before they can carry the Princess to safety. The Princess, however, is an unwilling prize. Doom's dark seductions have converted her to his cause. Frustrated at their escape, Doom resorts to sorcery and transforms a snake into a deadly arrow which he fires deep into Valeria's side (the arrow, was held in place by a simple socket concealed on Bergman's belt). The
transformation itself utilized a special prop devised by effects man Nick Allder. James Earl Jones pulls a live snake from around his neck. Cut. Then he runs his hand along Allder’s prop, a limp, pliable rubber snake with an interior mechanism to make it become rigid. Another fully rigid prop was used as the arrow notched at the end so it could be fired.

Dying in her lover’s arms, Valeria whispers “Keep me warm.” Conan obeys, building a funeral pyre for her.

Peter Kuran originally optically enhanced the pyre scene, but his work was turned down in favor of the original flames. “We did some tests of adding flames to Valeria’s pyre, but they decided to stick with their original footage,” Kuran said. “They had come up with a pretty spectacular explosion and fire.”

His first love dead, Conan chains the Princess to an altar stone overlooking the mounds, live bait for the hordes of Thulsa Doom. Arousing battle ensues, reminiscent of THE SEVEN SAMURAI, with Conan and Subotai taking on a whole cavalry charge of 25 mounted riders among the huge Stonehenge-like ruins.

Although John had, of course, already written such details as the pump-stick pits and the final showdown with Rexot into his script,” Cobb said, “he really made up the specific action of this battle as he was filming it, cutting the sequence in his head as he shot it. Some of the stunts were pretty harrowing, but John was in seventh heaven. He loved coordinating this kind of thing.”

During the week long shoot one harrowing stunt almost resulted in a death. “One of the stuntmen was hanging upside down over the rear of his horse,” Cobb said. “He supposedly been struck down by an ax. All of a sudden, the horse he was riding ran straight for this big Mitchell camera, veered at the last minute, and swung this man right into it with terrific force! It was really a terrible blow; the impact knocked the camera over and nearly broke it. And blood, real blood, was splattered over everything. I was sure the man was dead. But he calmly picked himself off the ground and got right back up again. It’s become something of a cliche to say this, but these stuntmen really are remarkable.”

The battle scene’s frenzied climax involved Sven Ole’s Death Machine, a complicated booby trap of weights and mechanisms which finally impales the dreaded Thorgrim. The actor was hit with a collapsible rubber spike, bursting open blood bags, then Milus cuts to another shot where the jutting tip of a prop spike (which had been strapped beneath the actor’s costume) was visible. Cobb had another trick at second unit photography when he filmed close-ups of the Death Machine’s mechanisms at work.

After the battle, a ghostly Valeria returns to protect her lover from a deadly stroke of Rexot’s blade (another bit cribbed from “Queen of the Black Coast”). Bergman’s ethereal skin-tight costume for this scene—dubbed her “disco suit,” because of the many tiny mirrors inserted into the fabric—was taken from a full body mold which CONAN costume designer John Bloomfield had made during the first weeks of shooting. VCE added animated flares and sparking

**PARTNERS IN CRIME.** Conan and Subotai, stoned on Black Lotus, rest on a hill overlooking the city of Shadizar (below), a detailed miniature set and cyclorama crafted by Emilio Ruiz. The scene, in which the duo decide to climb the Tower of Set to steal the fabled gem “The Eye of the Serpent,” has been dropped in editing.
THE BEAST WITH THREE EYES
(above), played by J. L. Chinchilla in makeup by Jose Antonio Sanchez and Carlo De Marchis, encountered at the Tower's summit, has now been cut out of the picture. Subotai climbs the full scale Tower (left), constructed horizontally in an abandoned hanger at Torrejon, Spain's military airbase.

yellowish-gold glows to this sequence (see sidebar, page 58).

Surviving the attack, Conan leaves the Princess and a wounded Subotai in the care of the wizard. He makes his way back to the Mountain of Power to confront a defeated and terrified Thulsa Doom. In full view of his followers (about 300 extras), Conan beholds the evil sorcerer. The beheading was simple using a false torso and head that was released from the body by a simple ring-pull device (see photos, page 62).

His revenge complete, Conan torches the Temple of Set—the set, which took months to build, was razed in a single night—and finds the Princess waiting for him at the base of the Mountain. Saddened, wiser and ready to face new adventures, the two set off across a verdant valley bathed in the rays of the rising sun. Roll credits: The End.

But Milos didn't intend the script to end there. An epilogue was written in which Conan returns the Princess, now Queen because Doom had her father assassinated, to Shadizar and then rides off into the horizon.

A BLUE SKY — EXT. SKY AND MEADOWS
Filled with rich, fluffy clouds and thousands of seagulls.

TILT DOWN to a verdant land of green, lush sprouts. A horse thunders over; the horseman gallops off through the flowered meadows. It is Conan.

A ROAD
Conan rides silhouetted against the beautiful fields of spring toward a lone figure running in the distance.

SUBOTAI
He stops and looks back as Conan thunders up. They look at each other, not knowing what to say. Conan dismounts. They kick the dirt and scratch awhile.

CONAN
They told me you had gone.

SUBOTAI
You had business with the queen. She offer to make you king?

(Conan looks up embarrassed.)

CONAN
I'll be king someday—

(Subotai looks around. Peasants are busy with the planting; everywhere it is green.)

SUBOTAI
Springtime—things are new and fresh.

CONAN
Yes, the flowers and mud and the sound of birds.

(He looks at Subotai.)

Where do you go?

SUBOTAI
North and East—and you?

CONAN
South and West. (They laugh and embrace, slapping each other's shoulders.)

SUBOTAI
We will meet again at the gates of hell.

(Conan swings into the saddle.)

CONAN
Until that day, my friend—

(They separate, each to a different horizon. A vast world lies open to each.)

CONAN
(Voices over)
Thus, I went West, where the merchants were fat and the ports crammed with women, wine and plunder.

Ah, but that is another story...

FADE OUT

THE END

The original ending, that somewhat resembles the climax of SEVEN SAMURAI, illuminates the strong, but transitory, bond of masculine friendship, a theme which continues to be a cornerstone of Milos' work. Although it was intended to be included in the film, it was never shot in Spain. Milos thought he could pick up the sequence when the company returned to the United States, but for whatever reason the lyrical finale was never filmed.

With principal photography completed in May, the CONAN team fragmented and went their separate ways, some to new projects, some to well-deserted rest. Ron Cobb and his wife Robin Love spent a few weeks relaxing in Europe; Milos, however, returned to California and began the post-production process. Editing, dubbing and sound effects schedules were planned and replanned. Basil Poledouris, who had scored Milos' BIG WEDNESDAY and Randal Kleiser's THE BLUE LAGOON,
was hired to provide CONAN's music.

Then suddenly, Peter Kuran had a matte painting on his hands. "After I'd been hired to do CONAN's animation effects," Kuran said, "I was handed a scene of Conan and the Princess walking away in a long shot down a valley, the last shot in the film." They told me they wanted a matte to be put over this. So I immediately told them Jim Danforth [generally considered one of the finest dimensional animators and matte artists in the industry] could handle the job a lot better than I could. They agreed. I called Jim, and he said yes. He was really excited to be working on CONAN again.

"But then something funny happened," continued Kuran. "Danforth blew up this shot, projected it into a much larger image, sat back and looked at it. After studying it awhile, he suddenly sat up and said, 'You know, I think this already is a matte painting.'

"It was true. Danforth had been hired to do an augmentation of a matte Emilio Ruiz had painted in Madrid (unlike American matte painters, who usually paint on glass, Ruiz rendered his work on hardboard or sheet-metal). "Although I had very little communication with the Conan people on this part of the production," said Danforth, "I don't think they dis-liked Ruiz' matte. I can only speculate, but I think they wanted to add to what they already had.

"But I couldn't do it," Danforth continued. "They wanted a shaft of light coming down and illuminating the landscape, plus some moving clouds, and that was pretty hard to do when I had no control over what was already in the shot. I think it was the limitation of Ruiz' system on the location that precluded them from moving the clouds or putting in these shafts of light."

Danforth had to completely redo the painted elements of the shot. He retained the live-action by masking off the unwanted matte; he then replaced the painted area with a valley of his own design, adding the desired light rays spilling over the landscape. Utilizing his own system to move the clouds, Danforth combined various sheets of painted glass with split screen work (see sidebar, page 58).

Danforth found himself in the unique position of working both on the very start and very end of CONAN giving him an interesting perspective on the film. "I was mildly amused that some of the things they'd said they didn't want in the film have crept into it," he said. "Things like harem girl costumes and sort of a bible-movie look. But really, that's the way films go. For instance, the work I'm doing now on CONAN may not be used anymore than the Ruiz mate. You never know. You just have to wait for the final cut."

Waiting for the final cut has become the chief occupation of Conani fans. The film was scheduled for a Christmas '81 release date, then pushed back to February, then April, before its new opening date of May 21, 1982 was announced. The extra time was needed to complete the film's finishing touches.

John Milius flew to Rome to oversee the score being recorded by CONAN's composer, Basil Poledouris. Poledouris had been laying tracks with a full orchestra since late November, 1981. CONAN's writer and director was allegedly pleased with Poledouris efforts. When viewing the music for the raid on the Cimmerian village, Milius reportedly enthused, "Prokofiev would be proud."

With the score completed, the final CONAN chore lay in assembling the overall soundtrack. During this process Gerry Lopez lost his voice. The champion surfer's lines were redubbed by Japanese actor Sab Shimono. Lopez was the only CONAN character to have his dialogue redubbed by another actor. Rumors that Schwarzeneg- ger's voice would be dubbed proved groundless, as was speculation that the Lopez dubbing would add a comic touch to the role.

"Although Milius liked Lopez's original style and delivery," said a source close to the production, "Gerry had a hard time maintaining a consistent quality to his voice. So Shimono imitated Gerry's delivery but with a more polished style."

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of CONAN's postproduction was the dropping of numerous bits of business during the cutting stage (scenes that still may be reinstated in the final release print). Gone is the night scene featuring Emilio Ruiz' miniature city of Shadizar as are all segments with The Beast with Three Heads. Other scenes that met the ax were the pickpocket having his arm chopped off, the Cobb-directed sequence of a cult follower stabbing himself to death on Doom's orders and, most crucially, the close-up of Carlo De Marchis' cable controlled Naisissika head (the most controversial shot in the film), although the remainder of the beheading of Conan's mother has been left intact. The trimming served to tighten CONAN's narrative.

The film's first preview has been tentatively set for late February or early March. However, the location of this initial Cimmerian screening has not yet been finalized.

After suffering through numerous hall-heated attempts in the early Sixties (the HERCULES, MACHISTE, and URSUS series), after years of subsisting on odd oddities (TOM AND THE BUCKINGHAM'S SWORD, and after witnessing a promising new revival of the form (EXCALIBUR, DRAGONSLAYER) the potential for an adult and intelligent interpretation of the Sword and Sorcery genre seems to have arrived.

Milius and Cobb have taken a set of adolescent fantasies intended for the most unsophisticated readership of the Depression, retained the attractive, immutable concepts of mobility and infused the best of Howard's material with fresh concepts and top-dollar film techniques.

But CONAN's real potential lies in the chance for audiences tormented by the simple virtues of an American cinema without self-conscious, self-indulgent auteurism. CONAN can make us into the awed, wondering children Robert E. Howard once deftly catered to. Now, after weathering pulp, comic books, and indifference, the only question is whether CONAN THE BARBARIAN can break Dino De Laurentiis' dismal track record of genre flops.
Demon Ghosts Animated by Kuran’s VCE

Spirits of the dead are summoned to give Conan new life, in the film’s most elaborate optical effects sequence.

Peter Kuran’s Visual Concepts Engineering (VCE) effects company specializes in postproduction rotoscoped animation, special effects that are hand drawn and matched frame by frame to live action footage. Since CONAN’s director, John Milius, has an avowed distaste for postproduction optical effects work, it’s more than a little surprising to find Kuran involved on the film, especially with a major sequence like Conan’s levitation by demon ghosts.

Though Milius feigns ignorance when it comes to special effects, his staff was well aware of the work that Kuran had done. “In talking over the levitation sequence,” said Kuran, “and the work they wanted me to do on their germ, The Eye of the Serpent, both the ghosts from RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK and my amulet glints for DRAGONSAYER were brought up. So we were thinking along those lines when we did our first tests of the levitation spirits.”

For the original series of tests, VCE technicians peeled off film emulsion into thin, veli-like strips, and immersed them into a viscous, heavier than water solution, filming the movements desired. Laughed Kuran, “When the CONAN people looked at the tests they said, ‘This is too much like RAIDERS!’” So we scrapped the tank tests and went for straight animation.

VCE’s Len Morganti drew the basic design concepts for the levitating demon ghosts (shown below). “So far, the spirits Milius has liked are very muscular renderings of warriors,” said Kuran. Morganti is also drawing the finished cel animation for the sequence (inset right), and is being assisted by Susan Turner and Katherine Kean.

Equipped with an Oxberry animation stand, a contact printer, and a staff of five, Visual Concepts Engineering is located next door to RGB Optical in Hollywood, which provides the required two-headed optical printer and camera needed to composite the effects work with the live action.

To make the added animation seem more natural, effects supervisor Peter Kuran believes in creating photographic imperfections during the work. In practice this translates into adding subtle touches to VCE’s animation, like lens flares and glints that occasionally occur during live action photography. “After we’ve done the pencil sketches that define the basic animation,” said Kuran, “then we add the imperfections. For CONAN, we seem to be doing a lot of jewell glints.”

Since a high quality animation camera is designed to prevent such imperfections, Kuran fits his Oxberry with a variety of rented lenses to get the best effect for each specific shot. “Then we usually extend these flares with additional artwork,” he said. “adding bright blue lines across the screen and filling in the point of contact flash.”

VCE began working on CONAN THE BARBARIAN in October of 1981, and was still rushing to finish their work for the film’s first preview in February. “Time is always a hard factor in this business,” said Kuran. “Everyone asks for your services today and your work tomorrow. The only person I’ve ever worked for who doesn’t have this attitude is George Lucas. He understands how effects work.”
Ron Cobb on filming CONAN THE BARBARIAN

Ron Cobb’s bearded and burly physical presence is similar to the portrait he once drew of an affable buffalo. But behind his humor is the keen intelligence and trenchant wit that enabled him to become one of the few artistic survivors of the frantic, burn-out Sixties. After a short Army stint in pre-Americanized Vietnam, Cobb became internationally known as the LA Free Press’ satirical social cartoonist, a platform which enabled him to build a broad professional status with numerous posters, paintings and illustrations. Ultimately, Cobb branched into film design. His architectural expertise, command of light and color and talent for inventive engineering were, in hindsight, obvious credentials for the motion picture industry.

Cobb was canny (or lucky) enough to associate with films that metamorphosed into celluloid gold; he designed DARK STAR’s spaceship on a napkin in an all-night diner, contributed to the alien cantina sequence in STAR WARS, invented the interior of the Mothership in CE3K: THE SPECIAL EDITION and provided major support to ALIEN.

It was Cobb’s extensive design work for ALIEN that first made film viewers sit up and take notice of him. “We were all disappointed,” said Cobb of his reaction to the film. “We were aware of how much better it could have been. I’ve seen made my peace with it. I enjoy it. It works.” Cobb designed most of the exterior and interiors of the film’s spaceship, The Nostromo, and worked closely with original writer, Dan O’Bannon.

“ALIEN had an intensity, a nastiness, that comes from O’Bannon,” said Cobb. “It’s undeniably an outrageous original in a lot of ways, contrary to all the things Dan drew on and the movies he paralleled. On certain points, the film lost its way. O’Bannon started out with almost non-existent characters because he was constructing everything around this horrible chest-busting sequence. Questions of motivation were never resolved. The actors got tired of waiting, and devised a lot of their own dialogue.”

Cobb has a penchant for talking frankly about his work. Of his Mothership designs for Spielberg’s CE3K retreat, Cobb quipped, “One English reviewer said the final effect was like an ant lost in a toaster”. Besides scaling down Cobb’s designs, Spielberg encountered production difficulties. “Steve couldn’t get Dreyfuss to rehoot footage,” said Cobb. “Dreyfuss was supposed to begin to levitate, and the E.T.’s come and grab him by the arm. I had to fit my design around footage of Dreyfuss coming out a funny doorway and looking up, looking here and there. That was it. Most of these scenes were shot before Steven had accepted the design for the interior of the ship.”

Prior to being selected as production designer for CONAN THE BARBARIAN by John Milis, Cobb worked briefly on RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, designing the film’s flying wing and assisting in the design of the Peruvian temple looted by Indiana Jones.

Of course, Cobb’s entire career rests on the answer to one question.

Why do you draw?

I like to draw. And it seems important to invent something that doesn’t exist. That, to me, is the real value of drawing; that’s also why I have little art training, because I have no patience with drawing something I can see. It seems a repetition, and a waste of time.

Did the lack of training interfere with your work?

Well, I’d always painted and drawn, but was very timid about my lack of training, timid about a career in art. I had a secure, middle class, boring family and felt trapped in a routine world. I suffered from a lack of stimulus. Nothing seemed to be exciting out there, except glimpses of fantastic speculation, like the strange covers on Weird Tales. I found those enormously appealing. They’d haunt me. I was particularly attracted to science fiction; it seemed an exciting horizon, a new world.

Strangely enough, I never became a fan. I didn’t collect Bradbury stories or stuff like that. I just felt frustrated that I wasn’t doing what they were doing. If they could do it, why couldn’t I?”

Did you think that you’d end up working in films?

I’ve never thought much about where I’d be going or what sort of career I was supposed to have. One thing has clearly led to another. I’ve always enjoyed the exercise of imagination and design. More than anything else, I like design. I like to take something out of the air, put it together and make it really work. I have many areas of interest. Film is where these things all come together.

Were you familiar with Conan before you began working on the film project?

I was reasonably familiar with Conan without having read the stories. I saw the Frazetta illustrations of Conan and read the comics, but never seriously pursued any of Howard’s novels or novelettes. But John’s script is not an exact Howard transcription or a Howard echo.

Did you ever like the Conan character?

Interview by Paul M. Sammon
Still, the major reason for the rewrite on Stone's script was that John didn't want to direct a film he didn't write.

Would you say that Milius' CONAN script has more sword and less sorcery?

Yes, John was interested in turning CONAN into a romantic fantasy with a rather simple and intense argument for the rugged individualist as opposed to a sophisticated civilization. Out of respect for the tradition, CONAN has its share of the supernatural, but I don't think John is interested in the fantasy.

How do you feel towards the film's supernatural elements?

The inexplicable, the magic, should have been some distinctly misunderstood knowledge of the real world, a misplaced science that no one understands. To me science is another myth anyhow.

From the beginning, wasn't it yours and Milius intention to furnish a structure for CONAN that was steeped in reality?

The storyline should have been kept very historical. We saw CONAN as sort of a prehistory thousands of years in the past. I found it much more intriguing to visualize CONAN based on an imaginary history, which it already was. Howard even drew maps of the Hyborian world. We decided to make a picture as though there actually was an Hyborian world. Howard didn't just imagine it. It was real. This is the true story of a character named Conan. Howard sometimes intuitively got his life right, and often times he was wrong. We're going to tell the real story. This is just another period of history that we know little about.

That's where Kurosawa comes into CONAN; everyone is kind of ragged and believable, as are the sets. The sets are not totally fantastic. They're believable too. We found we could play with the history but at the same time keep it more historical.

How many years ago was CONAN's story supposed to have taken place?

This is a fantasy history. So we have some slew way, as much as Howard did. Howard borrowed things from every imaginable period, from the Middle Ages to Ancient Rome, mixed them all up, altered them, and gave them different names. We found ourselves doing the same thing, with a slight flavoring for the Viking cultures. Viking and Mongol cultures from our own history are in the film, and the Cimmerians have the look of the Northern German barbarians around the time of the Roman Empire.

It was fun to come up with new cultures without having to borrow too much from old ones. Of course, we borrowed a lot. Besides those I've mentioned, we touched on the Romans, the Greeks, even the Victorian Art Nouveau movement. But whenever possible, I blended and merged these influences. The only style of architecture which might be called original surrounds the Cult of Set. The Temple of Set on the Mountain of Power was probably the least derivative structure in CONAN.

'Did Milius consciously try for the Mongolian influence you mentioned?'

'He wanted certain cultures, such as the Hyborians, to look exactly like early Mongols. We didn't do anything too outrageous here, except to make them a little more extreme, or flaunt their flavor. Yet, I tried to come up with a look that tickles you; you don't know exactly where it comes from. There were a few points that are like that: Thulsa Doom's armor, and some things at the beginning and end of the picture. That's what sustained me. Economic realities were always undercutting my expectations. For instance, we had to rent Persian and Mongol props and costumes for some of the crowd scenes.

Was Roy Thomas, who edited the CONAN comics for many years, helpful with the project?

Roy was around a lot in the early days, in Los Angeles, as a technical advisor. He knew the whole Hyborian history. Milius would ask for a character, or a town, or a mountain pass, and Roy could draw them off the map and work things out.

It sounds like Thomas had a key function at the beginning.

He just helped embellish things. Many months would go by when Thomas wasn't there. He'd come in every two or three months, sit around for awhile and talk about CONAN.

What did Bill Stout contribute to the design of CONAN?

Bill had a lot of input in the beginning. We worked closely together. A lot of the tapes in the film, for instance, are his. I would find designs and Bill would reproduce them. He also did a number of preproduction paintings, some early storyboards and a lot of the early costume concepts.

Cobb poses with an unpainted foam dummy, mass produced for the crowd scenes set at The Mountain of Power.

Cobb's design for The Wheel of Pain, a large millstone pushed by slave power to which Conan is sentenced as a boy.
Filming foreground miniatures (above) at the El Condor fort in the Almerian desert. Miniature mock-ups which blend with the fort’s real battlements are seen at left. A camera crew directed by miniature supervisor Emilio Ruiz films a model cliff face with huts designed to blend seamlessly with the real cliff, tents and live actors at background right. The hut miniatures are prefabricated in Ruiz’s workshop (inset), with the large miniature exterior of Osric’s castle visible at left.

Many of these are still in the picture. Bill had another commitment—The Dinosaurs book—and he had to leave the production.

What were your CONAN design methods like? For instance, I understand you did preproduction sketches on graph paper?

Yes. I sketched plan and elevation views of objects on graph paper, in scale and with great detail, until I was satisfied with the design. I could visualize and control things better this way. Unlike many art directors, I like to control the construction of every set. I start from the practical standpoint of the construction space allotted and design what looks best.

Did you simply pass your designs to your production crew after you smoothed them out?

I designed the sets on draft paper by erasing and changing and shifting all these elements around. Each sketch was changed many times. Then I gave them to a draftsman who simply trace them, refine the rough spots and fill in the repetitive patterns.

Who were the draftsman who did this?

Different people. One was Benjamin Fernandez, my Spanish art director. The actual construction drawings were done by a number of other people. Actually, I had two art directors working with me—the other was Pierluigi Basile—and a great team of technical artists and draftsmen.

Pierluigi was the one person who had some experience. He advised me, guided me in the procedure, told me what was and wasn’t possible. He knew how things worked, and how long things take to build. I couldn’t have done it without Basile.

I also relied on him to continue a lot of the design feelings. He designed both of the temples, in detail. Earlier, I did one very detailed drawing, but the location didn’t lend itself to my design. I relied on Pierluigi to take the spirit of my original tavern drawing and improve and change it.

Franco Antonelli was another marvelous craftsman and designer, especially in leather. Franco utilized a lot of leather in costumes, which became vast revisions on my versions.

I had a nice rapport with Aldo Puccini, the construction manager, too. That was helpful because Aldo was responsible for the 50 to 200 laborers involved with building the sets. We had sculptors and painters from England and Italy—as well as every available film craftsman in Spain—working on CONAN at one time or another.

With the various artists involved in this project, were you able to retain your own vision?

I felt responsible to maintain a consistent vision on the film and this involves many difficult-to-define tasks. Basically, it’s just coordinating all the other creative efforts and making sure it harmonizes and interlocks. I had to be everywhere at once.

I also had a head start, as I was on this picture for a long time. Therefore I was able to do a lot of preliminary designing and a lot of drawing. I had some input on the initial costume design as well. As the production began to pick up speed I had to work on more of the major aspects, namely the sets, to make sure they were correctly controlled. We had to rely on choosing the right people to fit in the design process. Then I just supervised.

How much of the initial costume design did you do for CONAN?

I more or less decided, with John, how Conan should look, how the elite guards looked, how the followers of Set looked. Enter John Bloomfield, our main costume designer. We really liked his work and the way he carried out the designs and embellished them. The great bulk of the costumes were wholly designed by Bloomfield. Where there were large numbers of costumes in certain scenes—the warriors, all the peo-
ple watching the pit fights—Bloomfield was very skilled and worked hard to maintain the look we wanted.

I understand CONAN utilized over 3000 costumes.

It was an incredible job. Bloomfield handled it beautifully. He executed some of my initial costume designs very faithfully. Or he considerably improved them.

Did you know that the chain mail Antonelli used on certain costumes is actually used by English workers in slaughterhouses?

Yes. That’s an appropriate touch, don’t you think? I would never know where to go to look for things like that. You rely on people who go to the damnest places to get the most amazing things.

Didn’t you once inadvertently come up with a design Robert E. Howard mentioned in a story?

Actually, my Cult of Set symbol was almost identical to Howard’s description, a double snake. A lot of those coincidences took place. My intention was to be as original as I could, inventing everything from the ground up. And I’d just made up the Set symbol out of thin air. Then I stumbled across my exact design done by a artist who had his drawing on Howard’s description.

It was impossible for me to design everything. I would have liked to have that control, though. That’s the way I’m used to working, when I’m painting or drawing a political cartoon. I’ve always had the luxury of total control. On CONAN, I had to learn to work creatively with other people. This was the first time I was a production designer. On ALIEN I was just an illustrator. Director Ridley Scott had most of the ideas, I occasionally jumped in. I did a lot of designing on that picture without ever being able to follow through.

On CONAN, I had the authoritative position to design the entire film, but not a lot of experience. I wasn’t even in the position to choose the people, because I had no prior experience along this line. Happily, it turned out that the CONAN staff was well chosen and I was pleased with that. I learned a great deal from them.

Your design sense permeates the film, beginning from the map in the first shots, to Conan on the throne, to the opening in the Cimmerian village. Was this conscious or did you depend on instinct?

A fair amount of the history shown in the film is obscured; it’s a mystery, even to me. In many cases I tried to evoke mystery and purpose without having to really spell things out. I don’t think it’s necessary.

On the other hand, I am a nut about style and culture and symbols. I like to be consistent in certain things. At the Cimmerian village, for example, you can see signs of the very stylized elk which is prominently featured on the Master’s sword. I also tried to work out a symbol for Crom [the god of the Cimmerians], two interlocking triangles, but I had to change my first design because it was almost identical to the sign of Ming from FLASH GORDON. The symbol is still on the sword. We now have a simpler symbol for Crom.

I like the motto engraved on the Master’s sword.

Milus felt that the inscription on the Master’s sword should be in English. I didn’t like the idea. It was very difficult to do in English; it just didn’t look right to me. So we compromised, and I tried to do a strange language which actually is English if you turn the sword in a certain direction. It reads, “Suffer No Guilt Yee Who Wield This Name Of Crom.” But from any other angle, or if you are not looking for it, the script reads like some strange language.

You did a drawing for Pressman of Cimmerian mobile carts that convert into huts. It was heavily publicized and reprinted everywhere, but why wasn’t it included in the film?

The mobile cart wasn’t in the script. It was just an interpretation. I thought it would be nice to portray the Cimmerian’s nomadic existence with these funny little square huts while, in the background, you see one of them being tipped over to be converted into a cart. I just wanted to throw it in, but it became purely a budgetary concern; we couldn’t afford to build the village that way. We needed the money elsewhere.

The crest of Thulsa Doom changes throughout the film. Was that your own design?

Yes, the first symbol, which you see on the standard during the raid on Conan’s village, is the earliest version. There was also a stylized,
Japanese version which we did as a rubber stamp, but it isn't in the picture. The basic design was two snake heads arising from the same body which is shaped into an arc. Above the arc was the sun, and below it an upturned crescent of the moon, like prongs.

So, there's the moon below and the sun above, with a body of a snake through the middle. The more advanced version of the crescent is the one you see in marble above Thulsa Doom's Orgy Chamber. Because it was three dimensional, I was able to extend the prongs of the moon up over the front surface. You can see the moon much better. It's gotten so stylized now, you can't recognize it. It's just a lot of strange loops with circles in the middle.

_Didn't Thulsa and Rexor's helmets also carry the snake motif?_ Yes, but Rexor's was fittingly cruder.

_Your design of the Giant's Cave for the Thing in the Crypt used Atlantean motifs._

Those scenes are the only direct Atlantean references in the film. The design of the sword, crypt and armor of the gigantic skeleton was my version of an Atlantean culture. I had a lot of fun inventing those design motifs; the reed boats, the volcano, the wave patterns. I tried to invent, embellish and repeat a feel until it rang true. You can see a symbol above the giant's head that incorporates those elements. The crypt is from a post-Atlantean era after the loss of the continent. I incorporated the symbol of the sinking of Atlantis as dramatically as possible with the volcano nestled in a sea of waves arcing away from it and the reed boat is the symbol of their salvation.

Shadizar was one of CONAN's major locations. I understand the fictitious city had quite a design history.

Actually, we used a couple of prime locations to suggest the various cities Conan and Subotai wander through. One was the Alcabaz, the ancient Christian Moorish castle which served as a mountain city bazaar in the film. It had a lot of natural stone walls with Arabic decorations we had to cover.

Shadizar was actually a huge old standing set called El Condor, to which we made so many alterations it truly became ours. We inherited a mishmash of walls and turrets and stairways that was first turned into a Zamoran city, the market Conan and Subotai visit early in the film. Then the same set served as Shadizar.

_Didn't your vision of Shadizar change?_ An early version of Shadizar was completely out in the open, a kind of tent city. In the original version of the script all the action was going to be in Shadizar and we were planning on shooting the film in
Yugoslavia. Since none of the established architecture was suitable, it was more effective to build our own city from the ground up rather than be restricted by the modern buildings. Everything was too modern anyhow, even the oldest mountaintop cities in Italy, Spain and southern France.

I was dead set against using available old parts of towns and dressing them up to look like an ancient world. I felt building our own set could be practical and it would give me an opportunity to invent architectural styles, even though they were going to be highly derivative.

I therefore designed a whole series of buildings, carefully planning them so we wouldn’t waste a dime. I think I came up with a fairly practical solution. It wasn’t a very expensive set. But, still, it was too expensive to build a whole city and Mihus and I decided to cut up the sequence into a montage. We chopped our first Shadizar into tiny pieces of many cities. When we settled in Spain, it was insisted that I find existing locations and dress them. Without large scale construction we would have a lot of money to do excessive dressing and/or some construction changes.

*El Condor, or Shadizar, is also where you had your first hit part as a black lotus dealer. What was it like?*

No big deal. Fun, really. I even had a page and a half of dialogue, telling Conan and Subotai that I had some dynamite black lotus just off the ship from Kush.

There were so many things you saw on a day-to-day basis on the CONAN set. Men carrying around hideously mangled corpses, women mopping up blood between takes, even weirder things. I’ve a long history of watching movies and appreciating them, but working in films is still very new to me. I was constantly riveted by the bizarre sights that are nothing in the boring, everyday life of an extra.

*Weren’t you responsible for the Beast with Three Eyes?*

I designed that for the scene in the Tower; why not have a guy with an eye on the back of his head waiting for them at the top of the tower? Subotai comes up behind him, the eye opens, and this freak turns around. John liked it and put it into the script. Also, I thought it would be more interesting to place this eye asymmetrically.

*Is that the reason it’s almost under the Beast’s eye?*

Yes, at first we wanted a secondary, rudimentary face on the back of the head. We tried that for a while but the sculpture wasn’t good enough. We ended up with just a simple eye.

*Who was responsible for the makeup?*

Jose Antonio Sanchez. The eye was supplied by Carlo De Marchis. Originally the eye was rigged just to open. John came on the set and said he wanted the eye to move. I don’t know what Carlodid, but in a matter of an hour that eye was moving.

*What was your reaction to Nick Aller’s giant mechanical snake?*

The main thing I worried about was the awfully slow movements of the snake. We didn’t want to under-crank and speed up the action in the film, because that always looks transparently phony. We’ll see how it looks in the final print.

*In one shot a drop of sweat rolls off Conan and into the snake’s eye. The snake blinks. How was that done?*

Nick Aller made a hollowed-out foam snake head and put a glass eye in. The eye was made to open by thrusting the closed end of a test tube into the head behind the eye. A rubber membrane, used to represent the pupil, hid this glass nub. The bead of sweat was just a drop of glycerine. The final effect looked pretty good in the dailies.

*The tavern scenes are quite Howard-like. Where were they shot?*

That was staged in an old monastery in the town of Talamanca. It’s a famous center for wine-making; the monks used to own the whole valley. Now the place is famous for the films and television shows that are made there. The monastery is a grand old building with strange stables and rooms.

So many films had been made there that the place had been built, rebuilt, modified, and repainted a hundred times. You couldn’t see what was real structure. You constantly came upon walls that, after you looked at it and pounded on it, turned out to be plywood. There were also five thousand coats of paint on the walls, layer after layer of different colors.

We were shown the attic. It was a wonderful, low room supported by these ancient beams going off in all directions. I immediately thought, “That’s the tavern.” For the main, large tavern you see in the film, we added a big fire pit in the center, a stone chimney, roasted pigs and a lot of furniture. I was quite pleased.
It was incredibly exciting to see my designs transform from a painting to a real construction—an environment you could stand in. Everytime I saw a set completed and lit, I was amazed.

with the result.

One set that didn't make it into the picture was an amphitheatre at Thulsa Doom's Mountain of Power. What happened to that concept?

The budget couldn't support another elaborate set. Actually there was a wonderful natural cavern in Yugoslavia I was considering, but when we moved to Spain it was cut out. We placed the scene on the Temple of Set's steps.

When Conan, Subotai and Valeria penetrate the Mountain of Power and raid the orgy chamber, I liked the detail of the fungus garden. What was that constructed of?

Just foam rubber and metal. The desire was to suggest that Thulsa Doom had reared a formal fungus garden deep in the mountain. They're obviously phallic, too, which makes a nice introduction to the orgy chamber. I just wanted to do something with that area, fill it in.

It was rumored you cried when the Temple was burnt down.

No! No, no, no. I'd much rather have seen it burnt to the ground than let around to rot in the weather. I couldn't think of anything sadder than that. Besides, it made one heck of a blaze; it looked like some monstrous torch, burning on a hillside.

Were the mounds and the Stonehenge-like ruins dotting them designed by you?

Yes, but those type of paleolithic ruins can be found in many places around the world, not only England.

How much area was covered by those mounds?

Quite a lot. For months we piled up truckloads of sea sand and other things until we had one nine meter high mound, one eight meter high mound and one mound six meters high. There were originally going to be 10 mounds, but we had to reduce the number for budgetary reasons. My Spanish art director, Benjamin Fernandez, directed the construction on a rather flat, saltmarshy area near the Mediterranean, in Almerimar.

Who designed the skeletal riders guarding the mounds?

I drew them as kind of dehydrated horses and riders. Giorgio Postiglione then made—with his sculptors and set dressers—castings and sections of all the pieces. They assembled all the horses, and the skeletons were the same skeletons we used elsewhere; in the crypt, the grunge pit, all these places. They were just redressed and mounted on the horses.

Recycled skeletons?

A skeleton's a skeleton. We used them again and again. I was never happy with them, though. I thought they could have been a bit better looking.

You put two years of your life into CONAN. Was it worth it?

Jesus, my beard turned white during the picture. There were problems and horrors, terrible moments when you suddenly saw something had been built incorrectly and you had to correct it at the last minute. In some ways it was a tense production and yet it had its humorous moments as well. Milius would act comically eccentric. He would stay in his trailer and build model airplanes. He would constantly say that this was the most important thing he was doing on this picture. That was funny. It threw everyone.

But Milius was good to me. I can't complain about my relationship with him. It was hard to get his attention, hard to get him any place you wanted him, but he always had the utmost confidence in me.

What was your impression of Milius the director?

Speed and decisiveness. He was incredible to watch on the set. Two or three takes was his average, and he was always pushing to get in between 15 to 20 set-ups a day. He was impatient to get on with the job.

He wasn't always communicative. He kept his vision of CONAN to himself. But on the set he was precise. John seemed particularly concerned with the storyline, with the characters, and keeping the action moving. Stunts were something he really loved. He and stunt coordinator Terry Leonard had an excellent relationship. I think the action scenes are the main reason John makes movies.

What gave you the greatest satisfaction while working on CONAN?

It was extremely stimulating and incredibly exciting to have an idea go beyond the point of painting to an actual construction, to an environment you could stand in. That was an amazing experience for me. Everytime I saw a set completed and lit, it was an incredible feeling. To see that every millimeter, every angle, every color was some decision you've made, was wonderful.

I also enjoyed the problem-solving: the efficient use of space, the precise anticipation of where the cameras could be placed, or the kind of shots you'd get. CONAN was not only an aesthetic problem to me, it was very much a practical engineering project, too. I enjoyed that aspect of it as much as the aesthetics.

Will you be involved with any sequels?

Not again. I'd be more hindered by preconceptions than I was the first time. I think audiences are hungry for three dimensional, believable characters and storylines. In those respects, CONAN is just too limited.

In the last issue we ran on CONAN [11:3:22] I quoted you as saying you were glad the die-hard fans weren't making the film.

Oh boy, yeah. They would have made a lukewarm, predictable, orthodox film. They'd faithfully recreate the stories over and over and over. Fan mentality, to a large extent, has a great love of orthodoxy, everything has to be the way the author meant it to be. There is a hatred of creativity and a tremendous admiration for stability and that's very unchallenging. Howard kept his stories consistent, but they also had a vitality that a fan wouldn't particularly appreciate. Fans only appreciate that the vitality had been created; they'd want to relive it and replay it like a record. But to reinvigorate Conan with new vitality, with new creativity, would, I imagine, disturb them. Milius emulates Howard while confusing him with a whole new direction.

Cobb's cameo as an Hyborian drug dealer, selling Conan some Black Lotus.
I
n Hollywood, you can find any number of women script supervisors, production assistants and wardrobe aides behind the cameras. But key technical positions are almost always filled by men. The field of makeup effects is typical: outside of Ve Neill, it's hard to name any prominent women.

But in Canada, where tax loopholes spawned a plethora of locally-produced features, a critical shortage of qualified personnel has advanced the position of women in every area, and makeup is no exception.

For the Franco-Canadian production of QUEST FOR FIRE [12:1:10], 32-year-old Michele Burke was given the unique opportunity to show what she could do. Her 30-member makeup crew on what may prove to be one of the year's most unusual and provocative films.

"Once I thought I'd have to climb slowly up the ladder, which I handled all the makeup chores and choreographed herself. 'I became fascinated at the changes you can create through makeup,' she recalled. 'I dropped everything else when I realized that makeup was makeup that I wanted to pursue.'"

Burke worked for Revlon and other companies as a makeup artist and a demonstrator, and also did the makeup in high-fashion magazines and layouts. "This basic training still stands by me today," she said.

While Burke was growing as a makeup artist, Canada was growing as a film producer. With a hot spot in situation, and production requirements outstripping the supply of capable technical support in many areas, newcomers found encouragement to apply. When Burke was 19, women became makeup artists, they still tended to avoid makeup effects.

But not Burke. "I wasn't aware of any hallucinations," she explained. "I just assumed that to work in film, I'd have to know this stuff."

Burke practiced wounds and the like on her own. In addition, she sought out those whom she could learn from, including Dick Smith, who visited Canada to work on SCANNERS. Another was Stephan Dupuis, whom Smith has called the top makeup artist in Canada. After working, without pay, as an assistant on two films, Burke joined Dupuis in a makeup partnership.

Simply because such work was, and is, so prevalent in Canadian films, blood and gore effects proved to be Burke's entree into the makeup effects fraternity. "I don't think I'm a kid or squeamish," said Burke. "I've always been interested in what things looked like under the surface, and how they work."

BEAUTY AMONG THE BEASTS
WHO IS MICHELE BURKE?
And Why Are So Many People About To Discover The Answer
PROFILE BY JORDAN R. FOX

TERROR TRAIN was Burke's first solo assignment. Not quite the horror show 20th Century-Fox promoted it as, her chief responsibility was convincing stage blood around.

Principal makeup effects included wounds whipped up from her standard arsenal of latex, cotton, wax and blood paste; a sword through the head (done like the old arrow gag); a spike (retractable) piercing a cheek; and the ghoulish prank which serves as the film's revenge catalyst: the luring of a horny med student into bed with a partly dissected corpse.

Rather than being a full-body dummy, the cadaver torso was real, borrowed from a medical institution. False arms were made by Burke, and rigged to the torso with monofilament lines, which could be pulled from under the bed to make the student's "date" flop back and fall apart. "In my inexperience," Burke explained, "I sometimes wound up doing things in an unusual way."

Her next assignment was VISIT ING HOURS, a psycho-on-the-loose film starring William Shatner. Makeup effects were limited to a severely burned face—an appliance sculpted and painted to give the look of charred, bubbled skin—and a wound for psychopath Michael Ironside's arm, injured when he smashes down on a beer bottle.

Next came Burke's biggest challenge, both as an artist and administrator: the troubled production of QUEST FOR FIRE, an adventure film set 80,000 years in the past. She began work in October, 1980, part of a Canadian unit brought over to Scotland to work with a makeup crew based at England's Shepperton Studios. Burke's sole responsibility was applying the elaborate prosthetic makeup designed by Chris Tucker for the Ulams (El-Kadi [Gaw], one of the three Ulams warriors on the literal quest for fire.

When shooting began, the makeup department at Shepperton planned to go along with the makeup effects needed. But early in the production, they failed to come up with prosthetics for a tribe of cannibals (the Kazmms) that could withstand close camera work. Since even more exacting makeup tasks lay ahead, director Jean-Jacques Annaud began looking around for an alternative. While discussions in Kenya and Scotland, Annaud was impressed with Burke's dedication and talent, and in a surprise move, turned to her to organize a brand new makeup crew.

"When Jean-Jacques asked me if it could be done, I told him that, frankly, I didn't think so," Burke recalled. "But I told him that I'd be willing to give it a try, because we were all they had. I suppose it was my naivete that made me believe it was possible. Someone more experienced would have sat down and calculated that there was no way to do something this big, given the available time and expertise."

Regardless of the odds against her, Burke returned to Canada to set up a lab and hire her own people. Burke said that would be needed. She secured the involvement of Stephan Dupuis and John Caglione, artists with solid grounding in sculpture, the manufacture and application of foam latex appliances. The rest, an assortment of straight makeup artists, had to be given a crash-course in effects makeup, with lessons continuing through production.

"It was quite the ordeal the first few days," Burke recalled, "showing them how to hide edges, and things we would consider quite normal. The first week was very depressing, because Annaud wasn't satisfied with many of the makeup, and would send them back. The poor guys would say, 'I can't do it! I've never done this!' At times some of them were ready to walk off the set. It fell to Burke to coach, cajole and rally her crew.

Chris Tucker's molds covered most needs for the primary Ulams—El-Kadi (Gaw), Everett Mc Gill (Naol), and Ron Perlman (Amoukar)—but 29 sets of molds for English extras, since replaced in Canadians when the production moved, were useless. Burke's crew made new molds for the Canadian Ulams, with Ray Costigan and a Montreal dentist providing the teeth.

Even with a 30-person crew, creating individual appliances for the Ulams and the 50 other costumed roles was a monumental task. Most of the Ulams would ultimately have their own customized mouth, nose and forehead pieces.

Working with Bob Pritchett, Michele Burke developed an extremely realistic fur suit for the Neandertal-like Wagedou tribe, featuring natural-looking body hair and a detailed mask. Nearly 20 complete suits were needed, requiring the talents of seamstresses throughout Montreal.
But with team members already spread thin, Burke tried a daring interim solution. “For the initial fittings,” she said, “we ended up making small, medium and large pieces—rather like a shoe shop. When we got an actor we’d pull out our stock pieces and find one to fit.” Where these did not provide an effective result, custom casts were made.

Burke’s lab also fought to meet the seemingly-impossible deadlines. A huge curing oven had been imported from the United States and was operated around the clock. At best, it kept one day ahead of the production schedule. “Some days,” said Burke, “they’d be running to the set with the latex pieces still hot.”

An initial problem developed when it was discovered no continuity photos of the principal characters had been taken during shooting in Scotland and Kenya. Since Burke had applied El-Kadi’s makeup herself, she had no problem duplicating the earlier work. But other actors were giving Burke and her crew headaches. “For McGill and Perlman, we didn’t even know what makeup foundations they had used,” said Burke. “We did a screen test, but the color wasn’t right. Then it seemed like the wig wasn’t the same. Finally, we hit on the right color, and it worked out very well. But it wasn’t easy to have to start like that.”

Perhaps Burke’s biggest challenge on QUEST FOR FIRE was creating the Wagabou tribe—a group of savage Neanderthals that attack the Ulams and snuff out their fire at the film’s beginning. Director Annanu did not want the actors to appear to be wearing a suit; he wanted it to appear that hair was growing naturally from their bodies, even under the closest scrutiny. Burke helped develop a suit with hand-hooked hair that could be mass-produced. The work was sub-contracted to women all over Montreal, and a small crew worked overtime improving the quality control—particularly in areas of color, texture, thickness and the matching of heads to bodies.

The suits, which cost about $10,000 each, required constant attention to maintain a natural look. Besides the hair problem, teeth fell from dentures and the miserable weather weakened glue joints. Burke was on her feet eight hours a day. “I made a point of standing right by the camera every day,” said Burke. “You had to watch each character constantly, because if it took was one more minute in the rain, or a cuf from another actor, and something could loosen and fall off. I spent much of my time telling artists what to rush in and fix.”

While the Wagabou feet were well-crafted gloves with individual toes and latex soles, the “glove” approach did not work as well for their hands. Base makeup was used instead, with hair stuck on over it. Since the Wagabou, like other inhabitants of pre-hist ory, were a pretty dirty lot, extramud defiantly applied covered any deficiencies.

Even with a large crew, making up all the actors for the large battle scenes took many hours. Burke and her crew would start applying makeup at 4 a.m. and continue until about noon. Such a schedule might have meant delays, but Annanu took the unusual step of shooting the close-ups and inserts first, saving the master shot for last.

Burke, Caglione and Dupuis also created several gore effects for the film, used with discretion by Annanu. After a near-fatal encounter with a bear, one side of Gaw’s face is clawed, his arm and shoulder scooped out, with a length of bone showing underneath. The torn skin was foam latex, the “bone” was cotton, latex and wax. Miticulous painting and shading, plus elevation of the surrounding “tissue,” created the hollowed-out illusion.

There was also a limb-severing (edited out of the final print), and a Kzam who has his face smashed and skull split open. One effect—the bellies of pregnant Ulam women being burst open by marauding Wagabous—was successfully tested, but never shot. “That,” said Burke, “was rather too much.”

The unusual demands of the script brought together an unusual assortment of talented workers in Burke’s Montreal studio, and she is quick to heap praise on the 34-member crew. “Everyone collaborated one way or another on these things,” she said.

As QUEST FOR FIRE nears completion, the Canadian film boom shows no signs of slowing. Despeaux and other serious people in the industry believe Burke is working again, on BLOODROOT, doing scalp murders with “people falling down stairs with their throats slit, goggling blood… sounds nice, eh?”

It may be back to slice and chop for now, but she makes it clear that her goal is not to become the female Tom Savini. “I like science fiction and creating unusual characters,” Burke said. “I’d love to do more ambitious films like QUEST FOR FIRE.”

**Michele Burke makes some last-minute adjustments on Nameer El-Kadi’s makeup during photography in Kenya. Chris Tucker designed the intricate prosthetics.**

Posing in Kenya with an unidentified Iwaka Warrior, Michele Burke models an unusual green t-shirt, a gift from David Smith (makeup artist Dick Smith’s son), who met Burke while working on Toronto on SCANNERS.
By Michael Kaplan

The place smelled of moisture, of rotted leaves left under slimy rocks. Mists swirled easily above the surface of the swamp as strange sounds echoed in the distance. Moss hung from the gnarled cypress trees like green cobwebs, while clouds of insects darted back and forth furiously in search of a target.

And in the small, natural clearing, the massive green form of Swamp Thing and the scaly bulk of the Arcane Monster battled for all they were worth, knee-deep in the murky swamp waters.

Close by, the second-unit crew, led by producer Michael Uslan, was hard at work capturing the climactic battle scene for director Wes Craven. Over budget and behind schedule, Craven and Uslan were looking forward to completing the difficult sequence and moving on.

Makeup artist William Munns and his small crew watched helplessly as the acidic swamp water corroded the

Left: A life-size clay sculpture of Swamp Thing, completed during preproduction by William Munns. The phallic "root" was deemed too obvious by director Wes Craven and removed. Below: Munns at work on the sculpture.
rubber and bleached the colors of the head-to-toe foam latex costumes. Munns had been given only six weeks to prepare the complex makeups required in the script, and was barely able to complete the suits before they were needed on the set; no time had been available for testing them on location.

When shooting had begun in the South Carolina swamps last spring, Munns was horrified to discover that even simple movements would stretch and tear the fragile costumes. Keeping the suits in one piece had become a daily nightmare. When the suits were in the water, Munns' three-person crew would stand on guard, ready to undo whatever damage the swamp had done.

But neither Munns, nor the actors inside his latex costumes, were fully prepared for the strenuous fight sequence. Dick Durock (Swamp Thing) and Ben Bates (Arcane) had to battle the swamp and their own soggy costumes as much as each other, and the combination was taking its toll. Suddenly Bates crumpled to his knees and signaled for help, overcome by the heat that had built up inside his costume. Struggling for air, his cable-activated mask and foam-latex suit were literally torn from his body in the rescue effort.

Bates was out of action, but Craven still wanted to complete the fight sequence that day. "There was no one on the set who had any experience working in a suit," said Munns, a burly, bearded 32-year-old working on his first major production. "It's dangerous, especially in water where an actor can drown inside his mask before anyone realizes it.

"There was one young man," Munns continued, "a local person, who was hanging around the stunt people, and they were talking about using him. I had nightmares about having another guy just drop in the swamp. When you put someone in a suit that has never worn one before, they usually want to show off and overexerts himself, paying no attention to his rising body temperature or that his breathing is a little more difficult in a mask like that. An inexperienced person can come pretty close to killing himself. I felt the only way we would get done that day was if I got in the suit myself and finished the scene."

Reluctantly, Munns donned a duplicate Arcane suit and slipped into the swamp. His big moment in front of the cameras: Arcane's death at the hands of Swamp Thing, complete with liquid urethane "guts" bubbling out from the middle of his foam latex chest.

"Somehow, it seemed appropriate."

When Berni Wrightson first drew the Swamp Thing character for D.C.'s "House of Secrets" comic in 1970, his goal was to create a monster with the soul of a man. When William Munns was hired to recreate Swamp Thing as the title character for Avo Embassy's $5 million spring release [11:30], he discovered just how tough it could be to give a man the look of a monster.

"Something of a neophyte in the field of makeup effects when he was first hired (see box, page 77), Munns was called on to provide top-quality makeup effects at a bargain-basement price. He was hindered by a painfully short preparation period, poor planning on the part of his producers and inhospitable location conditions. And that's not to mention the trauma of his impromptu death scene."

To say William Munns paid his dues on SWAMP THING may be something of an understatement.

"The mere fact that we finished the film was a major accomplishment," he said. "It was a complex task, often confusing or frustrating, with frequent unexpected twists."

One of the more unexpected aspects of the project was that Munns was contacted in the first place. Unlike most of his previous jobs, he doesn't know who to thank—or blame—for recommending him to producers Mike Uslan and Ben Melnick.

"They had contacted Dick Smith first, but he was committed to GHOST STORY and was, of course, unavailable," Munns explained. "Mike [Uslan] then told me that they got the book, Making a Monster (which features profiles of 25 noted makeup artists), and went down the list contacting everyone who wasn't dead. It's possible that some of them might have passed along my name. By the time I got around to asking about it, they had forgotten."

Working from an early draft of the Dick Durock relaxes inside his head-to-toe foam latex Swamp Thing suit.
How Did Bill Munns Create Swamp Thing?

A step-by-step guide to making a monster.

1. In his original proposal to director Wes Craven and producers Mike Uslan and Ben Melniker, Munns sculpted this full-size head (made of sig rubber and filled with polyfoam) based on the drawings in the "Swamp Thing" comic book. Munns wanted to build a fully mechanical head—including remote-controlled eyes—to be operated by sophisticated servo controls. The idea was vetoed by the producers as untried, and by Craven because he didn't think it would be expressive enough, forcing Munns into a more conventional route.

2. Michele Triscari, Marcia Semones and Esther Mercado (l-r), take a full-body plaster cast of Bob Minor, originally selected to play Swamp Thing. Molds of his head and hands were taken separately. When the dried plaster is removed, it forms a "negative" impression of Minor's body, from which "positives" can be made. Munns sculpted the body of Swamp Thing in clay over a fiberglass positive (shown on page 74). Munns began to prepare his bid. Presumably, other makeup artists around the country were doing the same, competing for the prize assignment. Shortly before submitting his proposal, Munns went to a shop that dealt in used comic books and purchased a copy of the first issue of "Swamp Thing." Munns was captivated by the powerful drawings of Bernie Wrightson.

"As soon as I saw the pictures of Swamp Thing, I knew exactly what they were looking for," Munns said. "I had a feeling that it was potentially a classic character, and it had to be created as faithfully as possible. The pictures in the original comic books were abundant enough and detailed enough—especially a full-page shot of the head that ran in the first issue [shown in 11:4:16]—that I felt I could work perfectly from that."

On the day after Christmas, Munns met with Wes Craven to discuss the project. Munns explained that he wanted to duplicate in rubber and plastic what Wrightson had drawn with a pen, even though the comic character was never designed to fit on a normal human frame. "The profiles of Swamp Thing when he's walking, and when he's relaxed, show his head in front of his body, not on top of it," Munns explained. "But it's a physical impossibility to do that with a real actor.

"To remain faithful to the artwork, Munns wanted to take a muscular actor and build up his shoulders with foam padding an additional four to six inches. He then proposed building an oversized mechanical head, to be positioned in front and on top of the actor's own head, to create the proper profile. "The real actor wearing the suit would look out through little eyes in areas around the throat, and his nose would actually be the Adam's apple," Munns said. "That's where we started off."

Munns sculpted a life-size head based on his idea. Since the entire face would be a mask—operated by a complex servo-motor system—Munns didn't have to worry about fitting a human face inside the flat physiognomy. He also sculpted a foot-tall version of the creature, showing body details.

At the same time Munns was working to remain faithful to Wrightson's Swamp Thing concept, he looked to his own inspiration to create the film's second costumed character, the Arcane Monster. Arcane is the story's villain, played without special makeup—except for most of the film by French actor Louis Jourdan. But towards the end of the film, Jourdan dons the same experimental plant growth formula that has turned scientist Alec Holland into Swamp Thing, precipitating a dramatic transformation of his own.

Craven's original script described the Arcane Monster as similar to a werewolf that had been featured in an episode of the Swamp Thing comic. With THE HOWLING and AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON both in production at the time, Munns convinced Craven that it might be a better idea to think up something a little more original. Munns sculpted a full-size head and a foot-tall figure, combining a reptilian body with a head of a bizarre boar, and sent them along to New York with his the sculptures of Swamp Thing and his bid of $80,000 to handle the film's makeup effects.

A month later, Munns was selected to do the film. That's when his problems started. "They were still very leery of the mechanical head, largely because I couldn't show them one that I, or anyone else, had done that was fully operable," Munns said. "We wanted something that could walk from a long shot to a close-up, which would have prohibited the use of cables. I felt that servo-motor control would be better. But it seemed the more they thought about it, the more they built up a resistance to it. It was vetoed by the producers as untried, and by the director as not potentially expressive enough. They kept on asking, 'Can't you do it on an actor's face?'

Munns could, of course, but only by sacrificing Swamp Thing's unique profile, which no one wanted to do. It was agreed to keep the oversized head and shoulders for medium and long shots, using a muscular stuntman wearing a simple pull-over mask. To allow the creature to display a full
3 Swamp Thing's foam latex feet, rarely seen in the film because the creature is almost always knee-deep in the murky swamp water. Munns took an alginate mold of real feet and poured in melted clay to capture the tiny details in the toes. The rest was sculpted conventionally to match the costume. The feet were designed to fit over the shoes of the actor.

range of emotions in close-ups, another actor—Munns wanted one with large eyes and a flat nose to keep as close as possible to the look of the comic book—would have his shoulders padded and wear conventional appliance makeup on his face.

By mid-February, the dual-Swamp-Thing approach had been agreed upon. The major problem remaining was the calendar: the film was locked into a late April starting date in anticipation of the threatened director's strike, set for June. Even if Munns had been able to start work immediately, he still wouldn't have had the full two weeks of preproduction time he had originally requested. But the producers had not yet secured the film's financing, and Munns had to sit idle for more than a month until the money started flowing. He was left with only six weeks to create the suits and other special makeup effects required by the script, including the transformation of Louis Jordan into the Swamp Monster, and of Nicholas Worth into a three-foot creature dubbed the "drowned rat."

"Whenever prep time is drastically reduced, the end result is more time to test and refine the suits or test-rig the effects," Munns explained. "Some of the latex pieces were literally taken out of the oven and put into the suitscases headed for the location while still warm."

Working frantically to make up for lost time, Munns and his 10-member crew went to work. He took a full-body mold of Bob Minor, a muscular, six-foot-two-inch stunt man and began sculpting the full-scale figure of Swamp Thing in clay, using as a starting point the original head design he had submitted to the producers months before. With the sculpture nearly done—and only three weeks remaining before the finished costume would be needed on set—Munns was stunned to discover that Minor had been replaced on the film by six-foot-five-inch Dick Durack, whose relatively slender physique was hardly suited for the muscular Swamp Thing.

"With no time to start over," Munns sighed, "and no way to pad Durack to resemble Bob Minor's form, we had only one possible recourse, aside from quitting altogether. We broke down the body sculpture into twelve sections, cast

![Bill Munns: The Slow Climb Up The Ladder](image)

His career includes a number of awful, low-budget quickies, but there are a few bright exceptions.

Prior to his work on SWAMP THING, few people had heard much—if anything—about Bill Munns, despite the fact that he had been active in makeup since the late 1960s. Munns taught for several years, which didn't do much for his name recognition, and what few films he worked on were generally low-budget affairs that didn't do much for his career, either.

In sharp contrast to makeup artists like Rob Bottin and Rick Baker—both of whom landed major assignments while in their early 20s—Munns has worked his way up gradually, one slow step at a time. "I've long since come to terms with that." Munns said: "Bottin might get a lot of job offers, but if he takes on a big job like THE THING, it keeps him busy for a year and leaves a lot of work for other people."

Munns attended theater classes at Los Angeles Valley College. In 1969, he took an advanced makeup course taught by Mike Westmore, who steered him towards a job as a makeup artist on the Universal Studio Tour. "You would take a housewife and make her look like Marilyn Monroe," Munns explained. "But it brought me in contact with a lot of people in the studio."

Munns hung around the other makeup artists on the lot, watching and learning. In 1970, he ventured out on his own, landing a number of freelance assignments, including BLACKENSTEIN (top right).

In 1971, Munns began teaching at the Elegance School of Professional Makeup and was soon promoted to its Executive Director. During his tenure, Munns dabbled in animal training with Gentle Jungle, an outfit that supplies trained creatures to film companies. A recommendation from its owner led to Munns' assignment on SAVAGE HARVEST, and his decision to again try his hand as a freelance makeup artist.

For SAVAGE HARVEST (sub-titled LIONS 6, PEOPLE 1), Munns created gelatin- and meat-filled bodies to be mauled by real lions, and dummy lions to maul real actors. For close-ups, he wore what was known as the "Bert Lahr" suit (below left), which included paws and a mane.

The assistant director of SAVAGE HARVEST recommended Munns for his next assignment, postproduction makeup effects (uncredit) on DEAD AND BURIED. Munns, who was called in after the producers failed to come to terms with Stan Winston [see 11:1-6], created a collapsible mechanical head, but little of his footage was used.

Another recommendation from Gentle Jungle led to the job of creating the title character of THE BOOGENS (shown below). The script called for an all-purpose monster featuring claws, tentacles, fangs and a menacing set of teeth, and Munns went through several designs before the producers were satisfied. "They had, quite understandably, never seen a Boogens before, and didn't have the slightest idea of what they should look like," Munns explained.

"The tentacles had mechanics to coil around an actor's neck or leg. The claw-arms were movable and some had hard cores for breaking through doors. Several of the bodies were set up with mechanics, while others were soft-stuffed to be thrown or dropped on actors."

Souvenir photos from William Munns' career: BLACKENSTEIN, 1970 (top); SAVAGE HARVEST, 1981 (left—Munns can be seen beneath his lion suit); and THE BOOGENS, 1981 (below).
Berni Wrightson: The Original Designer

He breathed life into Swamp Thing a decade ago, but now he's watching idly from the sidelines.

Bill Munns is the first to acknowledge that Swamp Thing's foam latex costume is not an original design. Munns gave full credit to the stylized drawings of Berni Wrightson featured in the original D.C. comic book, powerful illustrations which served as veritable blueprints for Swamp Thing's face and body.

That Wrightson's influence was deemed so important is not surprising—producer Michael Uslan once taught a college course on comic books, and was himself a writer and editor for D.C. Comics. Uslan worked closely on the SWAMP THING adaptation with the original author, Len Wein (now an editor with D.C.), and with Joe Orlando, the editor who teamed Wrightson and Wein and now a top-level executive at D.C.

But one person Uslan did not contact was Wrightson himself, who gave up drawing Swamp Thing after just ten issues and "retired" from comic books a few years later. Wrightson first learned of the movie after most of it had been shot, a fact that has left him a bit upset.

"The film was done without my consent, or my permission or my knowledge," said Wrightson, currently working on a comic book tie-in for CREEPSHOW. "No one told me anything about it. I would have expected something—at least a letter or a postcard."

Uslan said that there was no room for Wrightson in the $2.5 million budget because the film was already "fully crewed." Uslan did, however, encourage Avco-Embassy to contact Wrightson about the film's ad art, but Wrightson had to turn down the assignment because of schedule conflicts.

Wrightson was only 22 years old when he and Len Wein collaborated on the original comic, one of the first attempts to portray a rational, thinking man trapped in the body of a monster. "We wanted something with enough humanity left," said Wrightson of the creature's appearance. "We wanted to make it grotesque and monstrous, but we didn't want it to be a turn-off."

Although initial response to the bi-monthly comic book was strong, even loyal readers complained the comic quickly grew stale. "I found myself getting tired of it after a while," Wrightson admitted. "After about eight issues, I started to feel the limitations of the character. It was turning into 'Guest Monster of the Month.'"

Although "Swamp Thing" ceased publication shortly after Wrightson left it, the movie version has generated enough excitement to convince D.C. execs to revive the comic, under the aegis of Len Wein. "I ran into the artist drawing it and he showed me a few pages," Wrightson said. "It looked pretty good. I suppose I feel close to the character, but not to the extent that I'd ever want to do it again."

Though disappointed he had nothing to do with the screen debut of his most memorable character, Wrightson is still looking forward to seeing the film. "It should be interesting," he said. "At the very least, it'll be good for a few laughs."

Munns warned Graven that using Wise in appliance makeup would require a major redesign of the face, moving it far from the comic book look originally planned for. But Wise was committed to the role, and Munns reluctantly reworked the head, fitting the actor's nose inside. "I did a sculpture of a Swamp Thing-type face on Ray Wise's face mask," Munns said. "They seemed to feel that it was satisfactory."

Other changes from Munns' original design were more, shall we say, sensitive in nature. "There was the curious matter of Swamp Thing's genitalia," said Munns. "From the start, Wes Craven wanted to avoid the sexless, neutered style of body suit so commonly done. We agreed that Swamp Thing had to have as much 'reality' as possible. Wes felt that negative molds, threw out the dupe positives and merely slush cast the foam latex 3/4 thick in the negatives. They thought the latex was then form-fitted around Durock to produce the slimmer suit seen in the film."

In other words, Munns was forced to wing it.

The late change put Munns in an unusual position for a make-up artist: if he had balked, the film might not have been able to proceed on schedule. That asked me, was technically, if it could be done," Munns recalled. "I told them, 'Yes, it can be done, it won't be easy, but it's possible. They went right ahead and figured, 'Okay, fine.' At that point, I was hesitant to put my foot down and say, 'You can't do this,' or 'You can't do that,' because I knew that if they didn't start up in three weeks the film just wouldn't go."

Switching the men inside the suit was more than just an inconvenience for Munns—it altered the very look and nature of the creature. "When the script was re-written, everything began changing," Munns explained. "Because he was tall enough, they wanted to eliminate the oversized head. And then Wes Craven cast Ray Wise to play Alex Holland, and Ray had stipulated that if he got the part, he wanted to play Swamp Thing in the close-ups. They sent him over to take a mold of his face. As soon as he left, I got on the phone and called the production offices in New York and told them that he had the worst possible nose in the world to try to hide under a Swamp Thing mask."

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MONSTER

5. Doug White prepares several of the more than 100 molds needed to make the suits for Swamp Thing and the Arcane Monster. Normally, latex pieces are created in a two-part mold: the inside is a “positive” of the actor’s body, and the outside is a “negative” of a clay makeup design. But since the stunt men for the film were signed so late, a process called “slushing” was employed. White merely poured liquid foam latex into open “negative” molds of the clay sculpture (shown on page 74, it was based on Bob Minor’s body) to a thickness of about 1/4”. Munns had to mend, chop and glue, literally forming a new suit around Durock’s body.

It was originally a man, there should be some remnants of his manhood remaining. So in my original sculpture of Swamp Thing, I included a short, thick root amid all the other fleshy parts of the torso. But when all concerned met to view the sculpture, the consensus was that it was simply too conspicuous.

“The offending root was removed.” Munns continued, “and it was reluctantly agreed that if there was ever to be a Son of Swamp Thing, he’d have to be adopted.”

Creating the Arcane Monster was not going much better for Munns than his frustrating work on the title character. To meet his schedule, Munns had begun sculpting the body for the creature before any actor was even considered for the part. Since Bob Minor was six feet-two (Dick Durock had yet to arrive on the scene), Munns sculpted the Arcane Monster on a 6’2” body form left over from his work on an earlier job.

“Two weeks later,” Munns recalled, “Ben Bates, a six-foot-five-inch giant of a stunt man, was sent to me for fitting. Naturally, nothing was even close to proper size. We found we needed eight more inches around the chest, and he needed his body piece to be four inches longer from shoulder to groin. Things like that. It took four full sets of pieces to make two full suits, and my material and labor budget took a horrible beating.”

Munns had begged the producers not to send him anyone who hadn’t already been signed for the film. So he was somewhat shocked when Bates casually mentioned he hadn’t signed a contract and was considering taking on another assignment. “His physique was so unusual—with a very high waist and legs that looked like sequoia trees—that if we fitted the suit to him in one piece, it would be impossible to find anyone to fit into the suit.” In anticipation of such a disaster, the suit was broken down into several pieces which could be easily, individually altered if the need arose. Naturally, Bates stayed with the production until his fateful day in the swamp.

Munns, of course, wasn’t alone in his struggle to meet the shooting deadline. His 10-person crew—including three graduates of the Los Angeles makeup school where Munns taught during the ’70s—worked nearly non-stop for days at a time. Doug White was responsible for the more than 25 gallons of foam latex needed for the hundred or so molds used to create the suits. Dave Miller and Steve LaPorte helped with the sculpting, including the creatures’ hands. Bob Bliss, Marcs Semones, Michelle Triscari and Gloria Gatter were involved in various lab chores, including punching the hair tufts for the Arcane Monster’s face and chest and sewing the costumes together.

Before the Swamp Thing costume

6. Munns actually made suits for two Swamp Things. Dick Durock (shown having his face mask painted by Ken Horn) and Ray Wise, who plays Dr. Alec Holland, Swamp Thing’s alter-ego (inset). Wise, who was to play the creature only in close-ups, hugs his suit, which extended to his waist. The face was a separate appliance, glued to Wise’s face. But Wes Craven didn’t think the two Swamp Thing’s looked alike, and used Durock almost exclusively.
Deborah Schankle (kneeling), Ken Horn and Esther Mercado fit Dick Durock into his full-body costume, a daily three-hour ritual. Horn concentrates on the creature's face, while the others secure and blend the edges on the other six pieces of the suit. Note the two extra masks at lower right, one already used and one still unpainted. Durock needed a new "face" roughly every three days.

Esther Mercado uses a commercial, urethane-based carpet adhesive to glue down the edges of the Swamp Thing suit. Munns figured—correctly—that if it was strong enough to keep carpets glued even after they're washed, it would be strong enough to survive the South Carolina swamps. To test it, Munns suited up Durock and had him float around in a California reservoir.

The "moss" that covers Swamp Thing's body is actually the same material used for brushes and similar details in model raider set-up. Besides its decorative quality, it helped hide the seams in the suit.

was shipped to the location, Munns spent a day testing it, suiting up Dick Durock to see how he and the costume would stand up to water. The tests went fine. But when it came time to perform on camera, things never went quite so well. For example, Munns on many was figuring out why the suits were falling apart.

"Whenever Dick moved a certain way and stretched part of the suit, the rubber would literally break apart," said Munns, who found that the problem was the swamp's acidic water. "When Durock would bend his legs, the knee would start to open up. If he would bring his arms forward, the back of the shoulders would crack. Ken Horn, Esther Mercado and Deborah Schankle [Munns location assistants] were always standing around with a needle and monofilament thread and between every take they'd bring him over and sew up whatever had split open."

Munns said that other problems with the suit were caused by poor planning, which forced Bates and Durock to suit up and sit around all day without working. "The wear and tear caused by these wasted hours and days was tremendous," he said. "Swamp Thing would sometimes spend hours thrashing around in the swamps doing master shots and then we would be told to get him ready for a close-up. By this time, the face appliance was so soggy and filthy that no glue would stick to it and no makeup would clean it up."

Durock, of course, was never meant to do the closeups. But that was all changed when Craven first saw Ray Wise in his Swamp Thing makeup. "They decided the resemblance wasn't close enough," said Munns, who was commuting between the location and his California shop where he was still working on the Arcane Monster. "I tried to explain that any differences they might see were because they had the two of them side by side, outside of the dramatic context. I thought they were close enough so you would not know the difference. But all the arguments seemed to be in vain."

Weeks later, Craven decided to try the appliance makeup again to reshoot a lengthy dialogue sequence between Swamp Thing and Adrienne Barbeau, but Munns didn't know which version would be used for the final film.

Suddenly—with that one possible exception—Dick Durock became the one and only Swamp Thing, and his makeup, originally designed only for long shots, became the focus of intense scrutiny. Instead of using just two or three face masks for the five and a half weeks of scheduled shooting as had been planned, Durock was given a new face every three days. Unlike Wise's makeup, which was glued directly to his face, Durock's mask was attached to the back of the suit. While not as subtle as a facial appliance, Munns felt the mask was suitable. "Any time it was relatively snug to his own face, it transmitted facial movements very well," he explained.

Durock was even called upon to play most of the creature's dialogue scenes—presumably Ray Wise will dub in his own voice later—which were being constantly augmented as shooting continued. "In the first draft I read, there were no more than four lines of dialogue, with maybe two or three words each," Munns recaided. "A lot of the writing was actually done when Wes was on the location. There were constant changes going on—changes in concept as well as dialogue."

Munns worked with Craven on perhaps the most basic problem of all: making the suits look lifelike, instead of like soggy, foam latex costumes. Human and animal skin is elastic, able to stretch and contract to fit an infinite variety of positions. Foam latex is fairly rigid, and tends to buckle and fold in odd places, more like clothing than anything organic. "Any suit that isn't totally affixed to the body like real skin has a totally different sense of stretch and flex," Munns explained. "I think that's a problem that every person who has ever done suits has had to deal with. If you want something with almost no buckling, you have to have something which can be stretched in every direction so it has the potential for contracting instead of folding. You'd
The final product: director Wes Craven confers with stuntman Dick Durock. Durock suited up on a daily basis for more than six weeks, enduring punishing physical conditions. The suit was porous, and among the other problems, tended to keep Durock afloat when he needed to submerge.

have to make the suit smaller than the person, and you'd have to make the material so light and so elastic that it would have to be like pantomime. But you'd have a suit so fragile all a person need do is breathe on it the wrong way to damage it.

The suit sometimes looks like it's loose. Munns added, "But you'd be surprised how difficult it was to get Durock in and out of it. It took two or three people pushing, pulling and shoving just to get it on and off. If we had made it any tighter, I doubt we could have gotten him into it."

Audiences who have seen early previews of SWAMP THING are somewhat mixed in their opinions of the makeup work. Munns admits that there is a number of things that could have benefited from more time and more money, but he is satisfied—and feels his producers were satisfied, too—with his performance. "I know there were some points where they were worried things weren't working out right," said Munns. "There was also some disappointment that it was this long it took to suit up the characters. Other than that, I think they were very pleased. I haven't heard anything to the contrary."

You can always come back afterwards and think you could have done it better," he continued. "But I think that everything worked well and was very appropriate for the kind of picture we were doing."

With some makeup artists getting almost as much media attention as movie stars, Munns is aware that a major assignment like SWAMP THING could have a dramatic impact on his career. "There's no question about it," he said, taking a break from his current chores on BEASTMASTER, an upcoming low-budget fantasy film. "Whenever you are literally creating the star of the movie, and the character comes to life only through the medium of makeup, it automatically becomes a high visibility assignment. That's what was consoling me all the time I was struggling on the film. It's inevitable that SWAMP THING will bring me a certain amount of attention that no other makeup artist I've worked on has."

But is William Munns really ready for fame, fortune and recognition to descend upon him?

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it," he laughed. "Hopefully."
**GHOST STORY**

A Universal release. 125 min. To color. 108 mins.

Rick Hawthorne: Fred Astaire
John Jaffers: Melanie Douglas
Edward Wanderley: Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.
Sears James: John Houseman
Don: David Wanderley: Craig Wasson
Alma Mobley: Eva Galli: Alice Krige

There is a rule, put forth to me once by a friend, that those people who have read the book hate the film, while those who haven't read the book find much to like in it. However, GHOST STORY is an exception. I haven't had the chance to read the book, but I can't find much to like in the movie. It is pitifully weak work in a sub-genre that can be intensely resonant; it is THE HAUNTING what Mogen David Blackberry Wine is to a fine Cabernet Sauvignon.

There are so many levels on which the film operates (andumbles) with such unblushing transparency, that reviewing it becomes a test of self-control. The fault clearly rests with John Irvin, who directs this supernatural material unsympathetically and insensitively.

The story is warped by its haphazard arrangement into the shape of a mystery. An accidental drowning in the 1920s of a girl, believed dead, haunts the four men responsible into the present and into their old age. From beginning to end, a bevy of halfhearted water motifs act as clues, pointing toward the drowning, which is presented in the penultimate motif, confusing the story's premise with its own climax. Not that the drowning sequence is all that captivating, but Irvin twice interrupts the flow of the film with lengthy, exposi- tory flashbacks, which primarily serve to displace audience concentration.

As a result, GHOST STORY is suspenseless and never frightening. Structurally, it is a slop of rearrangements, stray-ins and allusions where there should have been incisive detail (moon, running water) not in emotions. If it was ever his intention to intertwine the guilt felt by the four aging members of the Chowder Society with their fears of approaching death, it isn't evident in the finished work. What business has Irvin (who admits that he is "not a believer in cosmic evil") directing material for which his intellect has no affinity?

Irvin patrols the guilty feelings of the Chowder Society, the murderers of the mysterious Eva Galli, but he does not bring them into sharp focus. More interesting effects, strange elements from every visual mention of Water, Moon and Hair, but they seldom communicate it. The peripheral use of the wandering tub in Don's Wanderley's penthouse apartment, prior to his death, is creepy because it is so meaningless at that stage in the film. As he falls out the window to his death (tame blue-screen work from which Wasson's hobbily genitalia are meant to distract you), he lands conveniently—for Irvin's intentions—beside a swimming pool.

Ultimately, the motifs improve slightly with practice. When Don Wanderley bathes with Alma and playfully yanks her ankles to dunk her, she stays submerged, her auburn hair forming a floating little island atop the soap-er water—and then she darts up, screaming, which ends the scene. But it makes no remark that isn't already redundant (it's the floating head that sticks in the memory, and the scream is indicative of Irvin's Law: If you work yourself into an intellectual corner, you can always scream your way out.) There are other instances but, taken as a whole, Irvin's water motifs amount to creative arrogance. They demand a second viewing just to make simplification.

Screenwriter Cohen can share the tap with Irvin for reducing four great elder statesmen of the theater into feable, quibbling caricatures. There is a Stan Laurel like Fred Astaire: a nobly debilitated Melvin Douglas, a still dashing Douglas Fairbanks Jr., who dashes out of the film after five minutes; and John Houseman as a windbag filled with cognac, hells and damnations.

For its double role as the two Wanderley sons, Craig Wasson brings nothing to it that, say, Mac Davis couldn't have brought. The film's only absolute plus—and it is a notable one—is Alice Krige, a newcomer of unflinching Marlowian forcefulness whose Eva Galli/Alma Mobley is a mixture of spiritual thirst and sexual starvation. She conjures up mystery at times when it seems nothing is hidden, and infuses her splochily-written character with disproportionate, overwhelming verve. She has the courage to hurl fire off a clammy screen, and it is pleasant to think her someday coping with great material.

The "frisson" Irvin promised (12:15:59 for GHOST STORY's final curtain never quite materializes. Two other endings—both of which fetched the CARRIE whimmy—were experimentally pre-screened for audiences much luckier than mine. In the release prints, the old roadster containing Eva's body is dragged from the lake, her decomposed figure tummles out onto the snow, and the flesh peels from her bones. The film then moves to a puzzling, meaningless landscape view, and fizzles out altogether.

So, even I, a stranger to Peter Straub's novel, am awash with disappointment. I left the theater feeling rather at sea. Though I cannot fathom how Mr. Straub and his audience of readers must feel, they ought to be flushed with pride that GHOST STORY was, at least, translated into a splatter film of a somewhat different order.

John Houseman (left), Fred Astaire and Craig Wasson go exploring in the Old Dark House, listening for things that go bump in the night. Scary stuff, eh kiddies?

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**Director John Irvin turns fine wine into tap water**

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**Alice Krige was properly inviting as the sensuous ghost, Eva Galli, but the rest of the film offered few chills.**

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Tim Lucas
Change-o effects cannot mask this derivative horror stink-o

THE BEAST WITHIN


One night, a savage animal attacks a young woman and rapes her. The woman gives birth to a boy. As he approaches puberty, the boy begins to exhibit tense, inexplicable behavior; at night, he escapes from his bedroom and sattises his craving for blood and flesh. Doctors are baffled, but feel he will grow out of it. He doesn’t. He falls in love, but finds he is unable to curb his carnal urges. Finally, he transforms into a seething menace and is blown away by a merciful shotgun blast from his grief-stricken father.

That, roughly speaking, was the plot of CURE OF THE WEREWOLF (1961). It is also, roughly speaking, the plot of THE BEAST WITHIN, the latest bête noire from producer Harvey Bernhard (the producer of the OMEN trilogy) and Australian director Philippe Moa. The film demonstrates Moa’s ability to handle medium-draw actors and scare his audience with harrowing flashbacks and high-tech man-into-monster metamorphoses—now more of a staple than a novelty—but the sheer potential for terror and a muddled plot make the whole seem more like amateur night at the horror house.

THE BEAST WITHIN plays like an encyclopedia of earlier horror films, and throws in such crowd-pleasing cliches as demonic possession, bar: nouvelle gore effects, and transformations rooted in what the filmmakers laughingly call “Indian lore.” There is no werewolf in the film, but there might as well have been, and the end result is an overblown cross between THE EXORCIST and AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON.

Newcomer Paul Clemens plays the bastard son of the swamp-rape suggested at the outset; when the moon rises (as it does profana style, behind the opening credits), Clemens (now bald, his eyes rings blacken, terminal gingivitis sets in, and he proceeds to rip the gizzard out of his first victim with his teeth. Such niceties merely preamble the more graphic effects, none of it is done with any real style or atmosphere.

Fortunately, the final transformation scene is such a hulu, it’s almost worth the price of admission. Jumping on the handwagon of on-camera bladder effects and change-o mechanisms, special makeup artist Tom Burman manages to outdo anything seen before. Part of its effectiveness is attributable to the amorphous license given to Burman. No wolfman this, the beast’s tongue twirls hideously, venom and saliva dribble out, and the thing does seem to completely change shape while writhing in bed.

But part of the credit must go to director Moa, who extends the limits of this traumatic episode beyond the expected payoff. For the final rape scenes, rather than have the beast attack and beat his chest, Moa shows it reclining in the humus of the swampland, reveling in the glutinous afterglow of its sexual assault. It is a disturbing conveyance of loathsome animalism.

Philippe Moa has made a trendy horror film, but the gallows humor and contrived quiescence seems more derivative of the late William Castle than any of Mora’s contemporaries: as Clemens attempts to make love to his girlfriend in the woods, his dog digs up a severed hand and drops it in her face; when dozens of graves are systematically exhumed by the police, they discover at the camera, shades of HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL; “If this here’s Emily,” says the sheriff, “then who’s that buried in Emily Oldenburg’s coffin?”—a send-up of a line in PSYCHO; and even the denouement untravels like that of Castle’s MACABRE, with sniveling Don Gordon revealing the “secret of the Curwin’s”—the ghoulish guide, a shot at William Prince’s bad-guy hysterics in the MACABRE graveyard.

To top it off, the lush violin strains of Les Baxter’s score evoke a certain deep cue, a nice touch for a film that tries to be like other horror films, but just makes you miss the originals all the more.

Paul Mandell

A one-joke film, this silly send-up is dumb enough for cable-TV

SATURDAY THE 14TH


John..... Richard Benjamin
Mary..... Paula Prentiss
Van Holing..... Severn Runion
Waldemar..... Jeffery Tambor
Debbie..... Kari Michelson
Billy..... Kevin Brown
Yolanda..... Nancy Lee Andrews
Deane, the Deliverer Boy..... Craig Lough
Cousin Bhonda..... Robert Collins
Cousin Phil..... Thomas Newman
Ace Lucille..... Rosemary De Camp

Michael Miller comes the rescue of Karl Michaelson. Any resemblance between this monster and the Creature from the Black Lagoon is purely intentional.

powers of evil world domination. When the family retires for the night, the minions of evil search for the book. One of the creatures, a fastidious gremion complete with apron, ridies up behind its sloppy cohorts. Benjamin, not one to easily grasp a situation, is oblivious to the weird happenings, preferring to believe that the odd things that are happening are all a nightmare.

For instance, finding a pair of eyes floating in his coffee, Benjamin nonchalantly remarks, “Take this coffee, I can’t stand the sight of it.” This gives a good idea of the general level of humor in Howard R. Cohen’s script, which he directed himself.

Dad does become a little suspicious when he finds that his wife, whose neck is broken by Count Dracula early in the film, has spread a layer of dirt on her side of their bed, but basically the house’s intruders—everything from extraterrestials to a low-budget Creature from the Black Lagoon—are somewhat taken for granted.

Filmed on a tight $5 million budget, largely at an historic oldmanor tucked away in an obscure corner of downtown Los Angeles, SATURDAY THE 14TH is basically a one-joke film. It’s silly rather than funny, and probably an ideal movie for cable-TV, the new final resting place for low-grade filler like this.

Dan Scappinotti
The snake was boring—they should try rabbits

VENOM
A London kidnapping plot, put together by some larcenous servants (Susan George, Oliver Reed), fizzes into a hostage situation in VENOM. Adding to the fun for four detective Nikol Williamson is the fact that the kidnapper, a young ascetic lad whose bedroom is full of plants and toadstools, has accidentally given the wrong snake to a local animal dealer. The snake gets loose and holes up somewhere in the family's fashionable three-story townhouse.

VENOM's deadly—and hopefully well-led—black mamba snake.

In Alain Tanner's fantasy, you will finally believe a man can fly

LIGHT YEARS AWAY
(LES ANNEES LUMIERE)

Yoshika: Trevor Howard
Jonas: Mick Ford
Peasant: Brigitte Stengers
Notary: Henri Vourdogues
Dancer: Odile Schmitt
Thomas: Joe Pilkington

Swiss director Alain Tanner made his mark in the '70s with a series of warm, bittersweet tales of men and women coping with the many compromises of daily life, including the commercial success, JONAH WHO WILL BE 25 IN THE YEAR 2000.

LIGHT YEARS AWAY, Tanner's first full-blown fantasy, takes up the same themes in a film set in the year 2000, with the story of a man who claims he can fly. Yoshika, who seems a crazy enough old man as played by Trevor Howard, hires a disillusioned 25-year-old dishwasher, Jonas (Mick Ford), from Dublin to the stark Irish countryside with promises to make him “free like a bird.”

Yoshika, we find out, has spent his life studying birds and aerodynamics, and plans one day to fly away after passing on his accumulated knowledge. Before revealing this wild plan to Jonas, however, Yoshika sets him on a series of perplexing tasks so Jonas can “understand himself before he can understand life.”

Jonas’ tasks are sheer drudgery. He straightens a mountain of wrecked cars and cleans them to shining perfection, only to be told to “mess them up again,” which he does in a rage of fume and temper. Yoshika promises Jonas that the drudgery will show him how “to enter things from the center, instead of the outside.”

Jonas’ tasks are interspersed with additional talk of this kind, Yoshika’s distillation of ‘60s hope and mysticism. At times he sounds like Yosam the Empire Strikes Back, with touches of Zen and talk of transcendence. We discover eventually that Yoshika, an old man in 2000, was a hippy in the mystic, hopeful ’60s. Yoshika infuriates the ever-less patient Jonas again and again, until one day, bloodied from a bard attack, he has Jonas bury him in the ground, with only his head showing, for three days and nights. Emerging whole after that, he decides to tell his pupil everything.

He displays the wings he’s spent 40 years designing, and tells Jonas it’s almost time for him to leave. Finally, Yoshika kills all his birds and drenches himself in their blood, telling Jonas, “I’m bathing in their souls . . . you’ll understand later.”

Tanner’s fine, funny, subtle con- kunstler, who plays George’s “German Underworld Fugitive” lover.

Without its top-heavy cast, VENOM most closely resembles one of those happy-times poverty pieces that William and its uniqueness owe it so much fun with, selling fright insurance in the theater lobby, say, or perhaps letting a few garter snakes loose in the auditorium at the appropriate moment. As it is, however, VENOM has neither a sense of fun nor a fang in its mouth.

David Bartholomew
Thanks to Universal, this winning love story got lost at the boxoffice

HEARTBEEPS

Val..........................Andy Kaufman
Aqua..................Bernadette Peters
Charls..................Randy Quaid
Max......................Kenneth McMillan
Sam....................Melanie Macdon
Calvin...............Christopher Guest

Directo Allan Arkush on location.

Killing a robot isn’t called murder, but what do you call it when you kill a movie about robots? HEARTBEEPS. John Hill’s whimsical look at robots in love has died a quick death at the boxoffice, partly due to the poisonous attitude of some studio executives; it was poorly promoted, relate to a skinny 29 minutes after studio previews and suicidally released during the peak of the holiday crash.

A pits, too, because even with its flaws, HEARTBEEPS has much to recommend it. John Williams’ catchy pop score, stylistic production design by John Corso, several clever robotic creations and some of the most perfectly realized makeup designs (by Stan Winston) ever to grace a given film. One wonders why audiences would bypass its pleasures for some of the other far less-distinguished Christmas fare it competed against.

The story opens in the yellow, purple and orange confines of the General Motors Robot Repair Facility, in the vaguely futuristic California, where we meet two automata: ValCom 1785 (Andy Kaufman, in a surprisingly touching performance), a lumber commodities specialist; and AquaCom 99015 (Bernadette Peters, a fetching complement), a housewife used for “good side parties and other social functions.” While awaiting repairs, the two get acquainted, setting off curious sensations in each other’s “pleasure centers,” which is something apparently akin to a mechanical orgasm.

Though every inch of their bare skin is covered by Stan Winston’s ingenuous gelatin appliances, both Kaufman and Peters create expressive, sympathetic characters. Val and Aqua’s initial scenes together beautifully capture the winsome storybook qualities of Hill’s concept. The two are posed on the warehouse shelf like figurines from a Swiss clock, watching with wonder as a sunset and rainbow unfurl before them through the windows (the majestic matte work of Albert Whitlock, assisted by his son Mark, and Sid Dutton).

The two robots escape from the repair facility to explore the nearby, joined by a Borscht-Belt comedian named Catskill, a robot with comedian Jack Carter’s voice and Henny Youngman’s jokes. From the salvage yard, they track the “brow” and promptly wreck, they build a spare parts carrier—a “baby” of sorts—whom they christen Phil. ("Look," coos Aqua to Val, "It has your wiring.")

A fully-articulated, radio-controlled creation by Jamie Shoult and Robbie Blackab and their respective staffs, Phil is a second cousin to R2D2 (but infinitely more sophisticated, because he is completely mechanical) and just as ingratiating: his head bobs up and down when he giggles, his radar dish ears quiver when he is frightened, and his synthesized voice (courtesy of guitarist Jerry Garcia) sings out a mellow charge as he ready to snip open a fence with his built-in wire cutters. Unfortunately, Phil’s role amounts to little more than a cameo, the uniqueness of his state-of-the-art design—his right arm, for instance, houses a variety of utensils, like the Swiss army knife it resembles—is never fully exploited.

The remainder of the film follows the roving “family” of robots through a series of rather uninspired adventures—a run-in with a bear, a hardware store robbery and a party where they pose as servants—followed by a maniacal police robot Chrimbeber.

Built by the Universal effects department, Chrimbeber is the least successful element of HEARTBEEPS: not in terms of design—it has an impressive arsenal of weapons that was made in a car executive’s mouth—water—but in execution. His too-frequent appearances, trumpeted by the blaring tones of actor Ron Gans’ voice, upsets the otherwise delicate balance of the proceedings. The joke is supposed to be that he’s suffering from an overreaction malfunction, but it isn’t as funny as it is noisy and overbearing.

While made Arkush’s first film (ROCK & ROLL HIGH SCHOOL) so good, was his energetic approach to even the most puerile of gags. In one memorable scene, a dim-witted cop makes a better airplane out of a note he was supposed to deliver and it magically sailed about the school grounds until it reached its destination. For all of Arkush’s efforts, there isn’t a moment of such with inventiveness in all of HEARTBEEPS. He seems overwhelmed by the responsibilities of his first major film and treats the material with such cautionary reticence that his direction has the peculiar distinction of appearing simultaneously fuzzy and stagnant.

He demonstrates skill in his handling of the growing emotional interaction between Val and Aqua, but elsewhere his lack of seasoned judgement as a director is evident.

The negligible ad campaign allotted HEARTBEEPS was delivered in the kind of hushed tones that made it clear somebody lost faith in this pleasing but unspectacular family outing. Cut off from studio support, HEARTBEEPS was left to die a quick and almost unnoticed death.

Universal’s heart of stone helped kill HEARTBEEPS’ hopes

One of the largest casualties of a dismal Yuletide season was Universal’s HEARTBEEPS, which, after 10 days, had turned in a “disastrous” revenue of barely $1 million—on a $9 million (some say as high as $15 million) investment.

Previews held before the film opened generated little interest, resulting in major recutting. Under the tutelage of Academy Award-winning editor Verna Fields, Tina Hirsch excised at least 10 minutes of footage—without the consent of director Allan Arkush.

While some scenes were trimmed to quicken the film’s pace, footage featuring Chrimbeber was added, including a prologue and epilogue, "Preview audiences showed a distinct liking for Chrimbeber," Fields explained.

An industry observer saw the audience preview another way. "They sneered at the picture with FOR YOUR EYES ONLY, which isn’t exactly the type of audience HEARTBEEPS was for. They rejected and abhorred except when Chrimbeber came on—his scenes, after all, were the only action in the film. Naturally, the studio took that to mean they had to make it more of an action film—which goes completely against the grain of what Hill and Arkush were trying to do."

Despite protests from studio executives to the contrary, lack of promotion all but insured the film’s poor performance. "The publicity was astounding bad," said makeup artist Stan Winston. "No one knew it was out. No one ever knew it’s been out!"

Gordon Armstrong, head of advertising and publicity for the studio, said everything possible had been done to promote the film. "But when you have a product that previous test marketing indicates the public is not going to respond to," Armstrong explained, "you don’t throw away good money on it. A film has to have something going for it to catch on and in this particular case, the film just didn’t excite anybody." —KC

Kyle B. Counts
**REVIEWS**

**Horror on TV—where’s Rod Serling when we really need him?**

**DARKROOM**


The horror genre has fared badly on network TV of late, and ABC’s cancellation of DARKROOM does nothing to dispel the axiom that horror and prime time do not mix. A victim of network “creative” interference since its inception, the Universal series was also scheduled opposite CBS’ DALLAS—the toughest possible competition—and so mindlessly tampered with that its cancellation, after two seasons, was literally a mercy killing.

The lamentable fact, however, is that DARKROOM, from its second week onward, was never more than a mediocre anthology series. The two stories in its first episode, “Closed Circuit” (written by Alan Brennert and directed by Rick Roseenthal) and “Stay Tuned, We’ll Be Right Back” (written by Simon Monter and directed by Paul Lynch), were clearly written and competently executed. Neither seemed to be straining under the budgetary or narrative restrictions of network TV. But DARKROOM progressed so steadily into the opposite fashion of most series, as each week steadily became more confused and uncomfortable with the show’s premise.

DARKROOM’s clearest difficulty was that it attempted to do something new, yet yielded to the by-laws of the same antiquated format used by Rod Serling on THE NIGHT GALLERY. DARKROOM was to be a narrative in miniature hosted by a gimmickary framing device, repeated weekly—would get the viewers to tune in (networks insist viewers like recurring characters, which is why so few anthology series are canceled) and that the fresh ploddings would keep them from changing the channel. To prevent the audience from seeming too corny, Universal spent considerable sum to acquire James Coburn, a debonair actor not allied with the horror genre, as host.

“Maybe the reason a weekly anthology series hasn’t gone well is that we haven’t had a Hitchcock or a Rod Serling to do one in a long time,” Coburn suggested a few days before the series premiered. It was an observation that proved right. Coburn apparently did the best he could, introducing each segment from the eerily lit confines of—what else—a photographer’s darkroom. But the Coburn bits were just gimmick, never well enough written to stand on their own, and downright embarrassing when they followed one of the series’ few provocative playlets.

Much emphasis has been placed on the difficulty DARKROOM’s producers and writers had with the ABC standards and practices office. The series was cynically dismissed by many genre buffs even before its premiere. “They can’t do horror on TV.” True, horror has not worked in prime time since the networks, under pressure from a Senate commission on violence, backed away from the big-screen mayhem. For instance, the TV adapters of SALEM’S LOT watched in horror as CBS lowered its soundtrack volume and electronically darkened its scarier scenes. But most of the DARKROOM scripts were bad to start with, and it is absurd to assume that the inclusion of violence would have improved them. A check of the plotlines to several DARKROOM segments reveals an abundance of camp; a teenager’s curiosity prompts a confrontation between a severed head and an unscrupulous man steals his family’s fortune and celebrates by drinking a bottle of rare wine—which is poisoned; an Egyptian curse reduces a science to pants; and a voodoo kills a lady’s man when a dog chews up a doll modeled in his image. Most of these stories included plenty of hokey double-entendre dialogue, but not if Andrew Prine as the dimuitive scientist—was blatantly contrived as slapstick comedy, destroying any claim the series had at attempting black humor.

DARKROOM’s proudest hour, its creators felt, was an ambitious episode starring Ronny Cox as a Vietnam veteran-turned-farmer, whose son’s arsenal of pyrotechnics expands until it reaches, in miniature, a massacre in which his father participated. Unnecessarily, this segment lacked the subtlety that characterized the earliest episodes; the dialogue overstated the message, and the most memorable qualities were the injury special effects.

Cox’s solid performance, however, was his only consideration—DARKROOM seemed to sink along the surface of character development, going for superficial impact instead. When the series began drawing ratings as well as three stories each week, the speed with which which each had to be told made the characters literally impossibly terrible.

On the other hand, an adaptation of Cornell Woolrich’s “Guillotine,” starring Pati D’Auberville as a woman trying to spare her accused lover (France Bernard) from execution, developed at a leisurely pace, yet was merely boring. Perhaps appropriately, “Guillotine,” the series’ very worst playlet, was also the last to air. DARKROOM boasted a stock company in its writer-cum-actor (Eugene Roche, Brian Dennehy, Michael Constantine and Esther Rolle among them) reputedly eager to guest star in a series that did not have a continuing cast. Directed by Rick Rosenthal (HALLOWEEN II) and Curtis Harrington (WHAT’S THE MATTER WITH HELEN?), and the series’ story consultant, Jeffery Bloom, wrote BLOOD BEACH. But despite the input of these genre hands, and writers like Robert Bloch and Harlan Ellison (whose adaptation of his story, KILLING SYSTEM, was best in the series), the program suffered from a disparity of styles: viewers never knew whether to anticipate horror, camp, science fiction or straight suspense, and what ultimately lacked confidence.

In the program’s defense, it may be worth suggesting that an atmosphere of tension—both in terms of ratings and story content—hardly the temper—set to create an ambitious TV series. But one fitting irony, in view of the abuse DARKROOM suffered at the hands of ABC, is that its epitaph remains its first: “Closed Circuit,” which depicts network executives as ruthless, self-serving and obsessively mercenary. Sometimes life does imitate art.

*Bill Kelley*

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**Did ABC’s censors help turn out the lights on DARKROOM?**

Fischer, a veteran television producer, was reportedly planning to resign when ABC killed the show in January. “My own feeling is you can’t do horror on television,” Fischer said. “Even Rod Serling said that in a season of 26 episodes, if he got six or seven good ones, he was satisfied.”

Why can’t horror work on the small screen? Fischer points to the network’s Standards and Practices office, which scrutinizes scripts and scenes programming before approving them for broadcast. “Simple, little things like a sunburn, you can’t see in any movie, were out,” Fischer said. “I’m not talking about dismemberment or anything extreme, just the impact when a man is shot. They also have a thing about fires. In the Ronny Cox episode, Seige, the barn burns up and they got the firemen in and they sent an edict saying Nobody will die in a fire.” So Ronny had to be seen to be clearly dead when the barn exploded in flames. It’s really absurd sometimes.

Relations between Fischer and ABC executives weren’t helped much by the series’ opening segment, in which Robert Webber fell victim to a network plot to duplicate its most popular stars to ensure they never would lose them. In contrast, ABC was apparently satisfied when the episode remained its first: “Closed Circuit,” which depicted network executives as ruthless, self-serving and obsessively mercenary. Sometimes life does imitate art. *Bill Kelley*
Dawn of the Mummy


A group of American photographers and models on a shoot in Egypt, stumble upon some grave robbers who have just uncovered an ancient tomb. The photographers appropriate the site for their assignment, while the grave robbers plunder the tomb for gold. This makes the mummys unhappy, so he comes to life and to claim the descendants of his resting place. Inexplicably, several dozen zombies who claw their way to the surface from under the desert sand, also rise and prove to be the flesh-eating variety. In keeping with modern practice, there are endless scenes of eye-gouging, teeth biting, disembowelment and spurting blood. It's just what we've come to expect from low-budget horror films: atonious action, dumbdialogue and(Dialogue Cut). **F**

Evilease


Carrh Goes to West Point—sort of. Nearly Clint Howard, the butt of cruelty from his Military Academy peers, uses a computer to join forces with the Devil for a revenge spree. Slow, derivative, and morally reprehensible, this represents—hopefully—the last gasp of the unconvincing school of movie-making. **F**

Glen or Glenda


The pubic's camp interest in Wood's work led Paramount to re-release this re-release from a full page, pretentious ad in the New York Times. Wood's transvestite fantasy has been inexplicably lengthened with six minutes of new, unneeded footage—a MGM solely seduction (pretty rare for the early '50s), orchestrated around slapstick humor and hilarioustraction shots of Lugosi. This title card, despite the advertising, reads ITED TWO LIVES. It isimpossible to judge or even to appreciate a movie on its laughable symbolism and technical incompetence; experience it for yourself. **F**

Goliath Awaits

With: Christopher Lee, Mark Harmon, Robert Forster, Emma Samuels

The potential for interesting science fiction—like the opportunity to describe the subject to someone who has never seen it—is squandered on this tired old melodrama. Frank Groom over-embarks as a science writer in a kind of Anthony Newley caricature as the main villain. Christopher Lee exhibits none of the menace and sinister charm he normally projects. Ploddingly directed by Kevin Connor, this four-hour TV-movie was excruciatingly drawn out, with endless murky under-water sequences of obvious miniatures, inserts of meaningless spaces, and repetitive shots of the rescued swimming in and out of boats. **F**

The Hunchback of Notre Dame

With: Anthony Hopkins, Derek Jacobi, Christopher Lee, Christopher Lloyd

A transcendent performance by Hopkins (radiating through the slapdash makeup, exaggerated scar marks, and sinister charm he normally projects). Ploddingly directed by Kevin Connor, this four-hour TV-movie was excruciatingly drawn out, with endless murky underwater sequences of obvious miniatures, inserts of meaningless spaces, and repetitive shots of the rescued swimming in and out of boats. **F**

The title character isn't used much until the last half hour, where instead of acting like a cretin, he suddenly becomes articu- late. The TV-ending allows Hopkins to play the role to the hilt. **F**

Splendid adaption! Hopkins' Quasimodo is a creature of fierce pride and dignity, and Lesley-Anne Down's Esmeralda is the best and most beautiful yet seen. **F**

Myl Dinner with Andre

With: Andre Gregory, Wallace Shawn

Early in the day's finest magic show, two old friends meet for dinner and catch-up with one another on their lives—so more no less. Yet without special effects, splashy cinematography or even conventional action, the film soars with imagination, fantasy and perception. Cunninly funny, terrifying, visionary and impenetrably moving, films may not come any more fantastical than this... **F**

Neighbours

With: John Belushi, Dan Ackroyd, Cathy Moriarty, Janet Julian, Wallace Shawn

Neither as repulsively sadistic nor nightmarishly complex-in-situ- ation as Thomas Berget's brilliant book, but then the film admirably makes much of its unprecedented portrayal for the novel in the opening couple. Belushi is as forcefully Ackroyd is uneven in performance. Larry Gelbert's script uses Berget's dialogue verbatim about 85% of the time, veering away from the original only to make situations more wryly outrageous or heavy handed. Best aspects of the film, overall, are Moriarty's sly slick Ramona and Bill Conti's expressively histori- cal score. Far better than it's been made out to be. **F**

Quest for Fire

With: Everett McGill, Rae Dawn Chong, Ron Perlman

Against all odds, film succeeds, rather well in most every department, not just technically, but textually: a fine balancing of documented credibility and serious tone, together with adventure story dynamics, humor, low key "romance," and an intrinsic sense of wonder. Unusual and not geared to mass commercial tastes, but recommended just the same. **F**

An original, grim and unpleas- ant film whose semi-documentar y style works against it, deglam- orizing the cavenian myth with a vengeance. **F**

Violent and episodic. Makeup and performances are believable, but why do all cave people have such good teeth? Desmond Mor- ris' idea of body language weneuros to be shuffling and huddled. Would do better with comedic music, rented WHEN THINGS WERE ROTTEN. **F**

Rollover

With: Janet Field, Kris Kristofferson, Home Economics

Set in the near future, in the guise of a murder mystery, detailing the events which precipitate a world economic collapse. Kris and Jane survive to pick up the pieces. **F**

Niel's apocalyptic denouement would have made a better, more interesting starting point. **F**

A Stranger is Watching

With: Rip Torn, Kate Mulgrew, James Naughton

An almost tabbed patchy be- cause the film is one story-stand- ing and the familiar psych p- genre approach, this tepid trash is a remarkable example of the major- ity director Sean Cunningham gained via the box-office popularity of FRIDAY THE 13TH, film is more the usual, and it demonstrates how hard some kidappers have to work for their money. Torn's presence in the film is never live by HEARTLAND's along. The MGM lion must be embar- rassed. **F**
I don’t think that many snake stories have been successful. Most people are repulsed by them. People really don’t want to sit through a whole picture about a snake.”

Meet William Fruei. He’s the director of DEATH BITE, a low-budget Canadian film that deals with—surprise, surprise—a monster that looks suspiciously like a giant snake.

“Our picture isn’t about a snake,” Fruei insisted. “It’s about a serpent, which I think is different.”

Why is Fruei so insistent that his film not be classified as a slappy snake story? Because no less than five other films featuring menacing vipers—including CONAN’S 36-foot mechanical wonder—are due to hit theaters this year, and Fruei is hoping his won’t be lost in the shuffle.

He needn’t worry. Regardless of what you call it, the beast in DEATH BITE is sure to attract its share of attention when released later this year. And the havoc that the snake-serpent wreaks—courtesy of makeup down Dick Smith—will be equally difficult to overlook.

Loosely based on Death Bite, a novel by Michael Maryk and Brent Monahan, the film tells the story of a 20-foot-long serpent, a demon-god of a strange New Guinea tribe, which is captured and brought to America by millionaire Scott Miller (Oliver Reed) and psychic researcher Dr. Tom Brasilian (Peter Fonda). Naturally, the serpent escapes, and being a vengeful sort, goes out in search of those who have done him wrong. Ultimately, the serpent and Reed go at it mano a mano, as it were.

In the original novel, published in 1979, the beast was a real snake, a deadly taipan that was imported for his unlimited supply of venom. But by the time production began to get under way, early in 1981, it was clear to the film’s owners, the Cineequity Corp., that it might be a little late to jump on the snake bandwagon.

“There were about five pictures coming out of Hollywood that were snake-oriented,” explained co-producer John Newton. “We didn’t want to compete with Hollywood; we knew we couldn’t do it. But we also realized we didn’t have to be restrained by a live animal. We said, why not push it to the limit? Why not go to a monster? And we did.”

By May, 1981, when Fruei was signed to direct, DEATH BITE had already gone through two script drafts and more than a year of preproduction. In the three months that remained before shooting began, the script would be revised another four times, with a final draft completed by Don Enright just days before the start of photography. With each new script, the snake grew bigger, his attacks increased in ferocity, and more and more supernatural elements found their way into the plot.

Back in 1980, when the idea was to use live snakes for most of the action, Bob Zappalorti had been contacted to provide the necessary reptiles and handle the wrangling chores. Zappalorti, in turn, called in Raymond Mendez to create hand puppets for close-ups of the snake attacks. When the concept changed from snake to serpent, and from menace to monster, Zappalorti bowed out, leaving Mendez and his assistant Neal Martz to come up with something.

Mendez, a 34-year-old scientist, photographer and sculptor, is an alumnus of New York’s American Museum of Natural History, where his work included preparing the incredibly realistic displays and dioramas that the museum is so famous for. Mendez had been storing a pair of huge pythons in his studio and tinkering with puppet snakes for about a year when the film’s concept began to change. “They no longer wanted a 22-foot model of a real snake,” Mendez said. “They now wanted something more mythical, something more monstrous. They wanted a big head, almost two feet in size. They wanted it to be 18 inches across at the middle. They wanted a biggie.”

“It stopped entering what I thought were the realms of a good puppet,” Mendez added. “It got too big and too difficult to handle, especially for the kind of scenes they wanted—striking, biting, and so on. To have the proper extension and flexibility, I felt it needed to be a robot. A hand puppet couldn’t give us all the rotations and up-and-down movements, but when the neck is supposed to bend, no matter how good you are, you’re stuck with a human and which just can’t move the way a snake would.”

The decision to depend on a mechanical contraption as the “star” of your film might scare some directors, but not Fruei. “I had seen the snakes they were planning on using,” he said, “and they were very limited. A snake gets tired out in three or four minutes, so you can’t expect much of a performance, never mind getting the snake to do what you want him to do. It looked like a monumental logistical job trying to deal with a real snake. Also it was a limited approach, and thought we should take it beyond that.”

Mendez and Martz were asked to come up with a look for the monster, and sculpted two large serpent heads, with different features on each side of each clay head. A meeting was arranged with John Newton and director William Fruei at the home of Dick Smith, who would be creating the film’s makeup effect. At this gathering, the design of the snake was worked out. “We didn’t want it to look completely like a snake,” Fruei said, “we also want it to get too far away. I wanted something that was more prehistoric in essence, something that could represent evil. I’m not sure we succeeded, but it’s certainly very fierce looking.”

Since Mendez worked in New York and the film company was based in Toronto, once the look of the face was determined, he was given a virtual free hand in developing the rest of the monster. “I was in this incredible position to do a monster the way I...
wanted,” Mendez said. “They told me, in effect, to do the monster and we’ll see you when it’s done.”

To build his robot, Mendez called in Lewis Gluck, an artist who began experimenting with remote-controlled mechanical devices while working with handicapped children. Gluck has handled a number of odd assignments—building a remote-controlled venetian blind for a TV commercial and inventing an automatic gel changer for theater lights—but DEATH BITE is certainly the oddest yet.

“It started out as six snakes, each one doing something different—climbing up a shower door, wiggling this way, wiggling that way,” Gluck recalled. “It finally came down to making one snake as animated as possible.”

The list of what the mechanical serpent had to do—considering how much time and money were available—was staggering. It had to rise up from the ground, the head had to move up and down, the jaw had to open, the eyes needed to move, and it had to be able to strike forward. Facilities for venom, mucus and blood had to be built in. And it had to fit into a package three inches in diameter to fit inside the latex snake that Mendez and Martz were building.

“I came up with a mechanical prototype, but the thing kept getting heavier and heavier as the head got bigger,” Gluck said. “We couldn’t do it anymore with push-pull cables—the way Carlo Rambaldi built the Alien—because this thing was weighing too much. Just think of the mechanical effort having to move a 20-pound head around. I ended up with a hydraulic set-up.”

Gluck began work early in August, knowing that the finished snake was due in Canada at the beginning of October. By the time Gluck worked out all the design bugs—for instance, air pressure proved not as subtle as the hydraulics—he had three weeks to build it.

Mendez and Martz were meanwhile working on the modeling for

Right: The robot serpent built by Ray Mendez and Lewis Gluck, bolted to a dolly for a traveling shot. Below: Laurie Brown is attacked by the serpent.
When it came time to hire someone to develop the unusual makeup effects needed in DEATH BITE, co-producer John Newton decided to go with the best: Dick Smith.

Several of the effects were somewhat routine—wounds, resurrected corpses, swelling arms and the like—but Smith stretched his creative muscle for the grisly death of Al Waxman (sequence left), the only time the effect of the serpent's lethal bite is fully shown on-camera. Neither Newton nor director William Fruet knew exactly what they wanted when they approached Smith about the sequence. But in the middle of an impromptu lecture from the makeup artist about the difficulty of coming up with unique effects, Smith suddenly thought of the answer: putting up a foam latex mask with trichloroethylene, the same chemical solvent used to make the words “help me” rise up on Linda Blair in THE EXORCIST.

“It's somewhat appropriate,” Smith said. “It's a liquid, like venom, going in and causing swelling. And it has a different kind of look than putting "air bladders" underneath a foam latex appliance [as was done on William Hurt for ALTERED STATES], which has a kind of even, round swelling. This stuff looks a little more cancerous and diseased.”

Smith broke the sequence down into two segments. Waxman's face would first be distorted using an elaborate series of bladders. A latex mask matching the final state of the bladder makeup would then be treated with trichloroethylene, completing the effect.

“We wanted to make his whole face into a horrible, lumpy mass with the bladders, which would leave us with a practical form to make the tri-chloroethylene technique workable—we'd have enough substance for the chemical to attack,” said Smith, who again worked with Carl Fullerton, who helped perfect the bladder technique for ALTERED STATES. “We made the most complicated ‘bladders that we’d ever done. We ended up using eight different bladders with very involved shapes that covered most of his face.” A system was devised to precisely control the timing of each bladder’s inflation. Every bladder had its own air line, and each line had a small hole in it to act as a vent. “We operated this thing like a flute,” Smith said. “Putting a finger over the hole would immediately make the air go into the bladder. I played four of the bladders and Carl played the other four.”

When it came time to apply the bladders and thin latex skin, Smith was startled to discover that they didn’t fit—in the months since he had taken a cast of Waxman’s face, the actor had gained weight. “It was a nightmare,” recalled Smith, who was able to “cheat” by extending Waxman’s sideburns to cover the makeup’s seams. With the extra work, it took nearly seven hours to apply the makeup (below, far left), which had to look natural when the scene began.

As Waxman tries to leave the van, the camera cuts to a shot of his arm swelling up, a complex bladder effect supervised by Fullerton. The cut-away facilitated the switch to Smith’s head-
the different snakes needed: two 22-foot bodies to be manipulated by wires; three six-foot necks to work with Gluck’s mechanical armature; and a series of puppet heads, including one rigged to swallow a sailor’s arm and three rigged to blow up. “This sounds like it should have taken a long time,” Mendez said. “We did the whole thing in two weeks, from conception to delivery in Canada. It was around the clock. I can’t begin to describe what an intense work experience it was.”

With his background at the Museum of Natural History, Mendez was adamant that the serpent not only look menacing, but real. “I was making the monster as much for the naturalists as for the paying audience,” Mendez said. “I made it for the guys who go to monster movies with me and say, ‘Hey, they made that without the right organs, arms, legs, etc., and it looks like junk. I think it’s missing this and it should have that . . . I wanted them to see a monster with everything there. Anatomically correct is what we decided to go for.”

To keep the beast as “correct” as possible, Mendez and his small crew glued thousands of individual scales into place. The fangs were hand-carved, and Mendez worked out a new method for casting eyes to make them incredibly realistic. “The snake is real!” Mendez said. “You could go all the way into that mouth, and it’s real. You can even feel it when you close your eyes and check the teeth, the fangs. The way it drips venom is correct. I went all the way with it, even though you may never see that. But for me, it had to be that way.”

W ith Mendez and Gluck working on their assignments, thoughts turned to what would happen when man and snake meet. “We had our monster,” explained John Newton, “we knew we had to develop a good result. We did a couple of tests and realized that the only way we could do it was to go to the best. We called up Dick Smith, who we knew from his work on David Cronenberg’s SCANNERS. Smith told us he would do it if we didn’t mind him coming up with the necessary effects to illustrate, dramatically, the power of the snake.”

Smith recalled he was originally called for advice on the effect of a man’s arm swelling as a result of a snake bite, an effect similar to Smith’s work on ALTERED STATES. The veteran makeup artist suggested the producers contact Stephan Dupuis, whom Smith had worked with on SCANNERS. But Dupuis, who recently completed a stint on QUEST FOR FIRE, was reluctant to handle the new project solo, and the two artists agreed to work together.

When Newton and Fruet later visited Smith, they told him of another sequence near the film’s end, in which one of the villains gets bitten in the neck. They asked if, perhaps, Smith didn’t have some effect up his sleeve, something he’d wanted to try but had never been able to use before. “It was kind of funny what happened then,” Smith recalled. “I gave them a half-anxious lecture. I told them, ‘You chaps don’t understand. We makeup artists don’t just have all these marvelous effects just kicking around in the back of our heads. We can’t come up with a great idea on the spur of the moment, just like that. It takes a lot of hard work, a full quarter century of thinking and experimentation to come up with new innovations.’

“So here I am giving them this whole pitch, and as I’m telling them this idea comes to my mind. I stop and tell them, ‘You know, a funny thing just happened. I just got this wild idea!’ Smith had recalled an effect devised for THE EXORCIST, in which the words “Help me” rise up on Linda Blair’s skin. The illusion was achieved by painting the letters on a foam latex arm. Smith put tri-chloroethylene, a cleaning fluid that causes foam latex to instantly swell. “It practically explodes,” Smith explained. “Because the reaction is so fast, it produces an instant wind-up effect, and I used it in THE EXORCIST for the sequence where Linda Blair’s skin rises up.”

“With the reaction so fast, we’d never run out of time,” Smith continued. “To me the tri-chloroethylene is like a poison, disrupting the foam latex flesh. The snake bite (and the snake venom) immediately struck me.”

Immediately, he took Newton and Fruet down to his basement workshop, tore a piece of foam latex he had conveniently left over, and tried the effect out. “Not only did it swell up, but where it was torn it kind of opened like a rose,” Smith said. The reaction from Smith’s small audience was “unbelievable.” Smith said he wished coming up with every idea were that easy. But when it came to putting it into effect, it became a quite complicated thing to do.

The effect was used on actor Al Waxman, who plays a thug hired to steal the serpent by a devil worship cult. Waxman sees the snake outside the van’s back window and panics, and locks himself in. But he fails to notice the back door is still open. The serpent isn’t so stupid and comes after him, seizing him by the neck, shaking him around and leaving him to pulp and die.

Early stages of the makeup (see box page 90) were accomplished by a complex series of air bladders similar to those used in ALTERED STATES. Later stages used the tri-chloroethane technique on an articulated head-and-shoulders dummy, rigged to have the eyes bulge and roll around. When the dummy came out, it was a tongue stickout. The result leaves Waxman’s head a bloody, lumpy mess.

Although the head-swelling sequence is shocking, it also had to far exceed today’s rauled standards—Fruet did not think DEATH BITE needed to rely on its gore to score with audiences. “Our film is structured so that we could take every key scene of excitement, cut out the gore, and still have a very exciting, suspenseful film,” Fruet explained. “It was carefully crafted this way. It’s one thing that executive producer John Pozhke kept hammer-
One of the snake scenes left for the film's visual effect team was a challenge to Fruet and effects coordinator Brian Warner, an English veteran with experience on several of the Bond films, both SUPERMAN epics and STAR WARS. The snake was to be the main feature of the film, the snare to enter a college dorm to track down a lab assistant. The scene required the snake to be a long, slithering serpent, able to turn in a tight radius, and to slither around the edge of a bathtub.

The snake was finally built: a 24-foot-long piece of rubber with a hard core and a soft, pliable surface. The snare was also a long, flexible snake, built of several sections of soft, rubbery material.

Mendez and Gluck completed their work, and the snake was sent to a technical team in Toronto. The snake was to be taped to a 40-foot-long set that would be used as the set for the snake's entry into the dorm. The technical team was to build a long, narrow corridor, with a small door at the end, to be used as the entrance to the dorm.

The snake was to enter the dorm, slithering along the corridor, and then enter the dorm room through the small door. The snake was to be filmed through a long, narrow corridor, with a small door at the end, to be used as the entrance to the dorm.

The snake was to be filmed through a long, narrow corridor, with a small door at the end, to be used as the entrance to the dorm.

When the producers of DEATH BITE asked Ray Mendez to create the film's mythical serpent-god, they may have gotten more than they asked for. Because in addition to creating an effective scary monster, Mendez and his crew produced a huge serpent that looked and acted real.

A naturalist who worked at New York's American Museum of Natural History for more than a decade, Mendez was originally contacted to create puppet snake heads when the script still concerned the misadventures of a real snake. When the concept was changed, Mendez was given a virtual free hand to design and build the film's monstrous serpent.

To give the serpent the range of movement no puppet could provide, Mendez enlisted the aid of Lewis Gluck, a mechanical wizard of sorts used to tackling odd assignments.

"They wanted to have as much latitude as possible filming the serpent," Gluck said. "They wanted to be able to come right up to it and have the snake interact with the actors. I ended up with a six-foot-long hydraulic set-up (below). The neck could go from the forward to the "S" and strike down. When you pull on one of the control valves, there is a push and pull action on the pistons, which would pull cables, which, in turn, would make the serpent move.

"To design it," he continued. "I laid out on the floor what we wanted the snake to do, and then cut the segments in aluminum and welded it together. We kept trimming away at it to give us as much articulation as we needed in each area."

Gluck had two months to create the robot serpent, but spent five weeks just working out design bugs. With only three weeks left to build the serpent, he had to scramble to find suppliers willing to deliver the necessary mechanics on time. "I'd call someone up and they would be talking about tomorrow!" Gluck said. "A rush job meant we could get it in two weeks. Two weeks! It had to be on the truck in two weeks. They had a hard time dealing with tomorrow!"

While Gluck was racing the clock to build the serpent's insides, Mendez and assistant Neal Martz were working equally frantically, designing and fabricating the assortment of serpent heads and bodies needed.

Lewis Gluck poses with the aluminum and fiber-glass skeleton of the robot serpent.
"I can't say it was fun," Mendez recalled of the hectic pace, which continued through two weeks of shooting in Canada. "But it was exciting and exhilarating."

While Mendez designed a somewhat conventional-looking monster, his methods were decidedly unconventional. For example, to create a six-foot length of serpent in one piece, Mendez used giant, 31∕4-foot syringes to inject foam latex by the gallon. Since commercial ovens weren't big enough to handle molds this size, Mendez built his own, made out of wood with heat guns.

Originally, Mendez was going to use Bau foam, a very flexible formula. But it proved too difficult to handle in the large batches needed, and a heavier, stiffer foam was used instead. While it meant the mechanical snake had to work harder—extra pumps were needed to power the hydraulics—the rigid foam helped hide the serpent's mechanics. "The foam was just thick enough, and just rigid enough, so the individual movements become total movements," Mendez said.

With his years of specialized training, Mendez was able to give the serpent those special touches which set it apart from other screen beasts. "I wanted the eyes to be almost hidden," Mendez explained. "When you get a look at them, it's real intense. I also made sure there was a lot of mucas. Too many monsters aren't dry, and real things aren't dry—they're slobbering and globbing.

Building the snake so it would appear and act real had an additional benefit—it could be photographed in action alongside the human cast. "The actors got down and dirty with the serpent," Mendez said proudly. "The amount of special effects they had to do around the monster was minimal. It works; the snake was real!"
OPEN LETTERS

THE STUDIO (LAWYER) STRIKES BACK

The article written by Kyle Counts about the possible filming of PSYCHO II [12:14] has just come to our attention. So that the public will not be misled, we wish to note the following: Universal is the sole and exclusive owner of all motion picture rights to the movie PSYCHO directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and to the underlying material written by Robert Bloch. Universal has not licensed any sequel or rights to such property to The Picture Striking Company Inc. or to Messer Counts and January, nor does it intend to do so. Any motion picture contained in the storyline described in the article by Mr. Counts will constitute an infringement of our rights and we will use every legal right and remedy to prevent such infringement.

Universal would urge and caution any potential investors or distributors in the type of project described in the article to carefully examine and independently judge the legal status of this matter.

Theodore M. Mittleman
House Counsel,
Universal Studios
Universal City, California

SHOCKING TREATMENT

Allen Smithee's opening sentence to his review of SHOCK TREATMENT [12:15] states that he is, "in no way, shape or form, a member of the cult that adores THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW." With the word no in italics, he apparently equates this with something akin to the black plague. He then proceeds to give the film a generally lukewarm review. Now what, I must ask, in the name of all rationality, is the purpose of assigning someone who is so obviously predisposed against the film such a review? Further to this, the review is headlined "Rocky Horror Fans Won't Have To Wait In Line to See This Turkey." It stimulates my sense-of-wonder to consider how this reviewer, since he has so emphatically stated he is not a member of that cult, could even suppose what that cult's response would be to this film.

And if this were not editorially dishonest enough, the piece is signed Allen Smithee. Now, give us a break! Are we all supposedly such dumbheads that you think we won't realize the use of the same pseudonym most recently used by producer Michael Ritchie for STUDENT BODIES? Well, what should we expect from the editorial staff that previously treated us to editorial opinion by Patrick Hobby, a pseudonym created by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Scott Holton
Publicity Consultant, 20th Century-Fox

Allen Smithee responds: While I would not presume to speak for Mr. Hobby, even the sloppiest, most cursory checking would have confirmed that I am a thoroughly extant and duly registered member of the Director's Guild. Furthermore, I'm confident Michael Ritchie could easily put to rest this idle rumor going around concerning my latest assignment.

As to Mr. Holton's unwarranted charges regarding my review of SHOCK TREATMENT, does he really want to go on record denying the cinema's answer to a massive dose of Thorazine? My review was a model of kindness and restraint. Also, the reaction of the ROCKY HORROR cult (to which I need not belong in order to recognize the vast superiority of the original film) has been a deafening silence. RHPS cultists may suffer from gross synaptic collapse, but you can't fool them this easily.

I'd like Scott Holton and the public at large to know that I fully expect to appear again, both as a reviewer in these pages (despite the frequently witched taste of the editors), and as a respected auteurst director. My next project, entitled HHU... is set for early 1983 at RKO, which the real Howard Hughes runs from his base inside the Bermuda Triangle.

ANOTHER DINO HYPE?

Your back yard ad promoting your CONAN double issue [12:16] really set me off. You say that CONAN promises to be the genre event of '82. To whom? Dino and his hye machine? Not to me. You couldn't get me to see a Dino De Laurentis film. I wasn't fooled by KING KONG OR HURRICANE, and I see CONAN as just more Dino hype, a $40 million HERCULES. The casting of a bodybuilder, a drummer and a suffer doesn't inspire trust. It sounds like the great Dino tradition: grab a game show panelist or some Hawaiian beachboy and make them a star. And if the end result costs 50 times as much as the original movie and is 50 times less entertaining, only the theaters and the viewers get stuck.

Emily Scanlan
San Francisco, California

The casting of CONAN, like most other aspects of the film, was in the hands of director John Milius. Dino's input in making the film was, apparently, only slight.

RATING THE RATINGS

David Wilt's letter suggesting changes in our film reviews [12:15] expresses my own feeling. But please, no Film Ratings; better to return Capsule Comments (expanded to include multiple opinions), a more valuable service that I think CHIP should give some notice to every genre film released, however wretched.

The confusion over your reviews might be made clear by a brief explanation—are they assigned or chosen from among submissions or what? Ideally, I think it should be possible to refer to a CQF review at some future date and account with some confidence that reflects the general feeling among informed fans about a film at the time it was released; the idiosyncratic or ax-grinding viewpoint would be allowed but clearly separated from the main review.

David Balsam
West Lynn, Oregon

There is no need to return to the Film Ratings chart. In fact, I doubt the value of the film reviews themselves. I think what your readers, including myself, are saying is that we would like to see articles, however brief, about films currently in release without an abundance of qualitative analysis. But I've found that I can't trust reviews to steer me towards one film or another. A listener must see a film to make a personal judgement.

Rick Munyon
Sylmar, California

Though reaction to David Wilt's letter was mixed, we've decided to bring back our Film Ratings chart (page 87). As we've said before, reviews don't reflect a single editorial philosophy, just a celebration of a principle we hold dear (see letters, 11:3). However, we're hoping the Film Ratings will provide a more balanced view. At the very least, you'll know what seven of us think.

CINEMANCIANIQUE

BRAVE STORIES

READ THE BOOK, FORGET THE MOVIE

You laid an egg in devoting 20 pages to GHOST STORY [12:10]. Screenwriter Lawrence D. Cohen has transformed a classic novel of terror into a jacket-leaf rendition that's nothing there to hold up 108 minutes of screen time. The essence of the novel was its unpredictability, and its flowing and continuously moving storyline. Any moron can explain the basic premise of the novel's plot in five minutes. It's the execution of combining the plot with the supernatural elements that made the book a classic. By deleting the supernatural elements of the novel, we get a mystery story that might have been shown on ABC's DARKROOM series with host James Coburn intoning, "See what happens to those who fail to attend class, especially when one is at medical school!"

Horror novels that have great potential as films are being mishandled in the most disturbing manner. Horror film fans are becoming more and more frustrated especially when you give advance coverage that's almost "too good." You're putting the candy in front of us, but when we eat it, it's stale.

James Diaz
San Jose, California

Director John Irvin took the poetry out of GHOST STORY, one of the best supernatural stories since M. R. James, and turned it into tabloid journalism. Instead of an immortal shape-shifter casting her glamour in upstate New York, we are given a parade of rotting corpses. It's not that it's a bad movie, because it isn't. It's just that it's the wrong movie.

Rachel Montalvo
San Antonio, Texas

This man's disgusted with our genitals

How dare you print such a disgusting picture of Craig Wasson in your GHOST STORY coverage [12:12]?
THE MYSTERIOUS HONG KONG SLASHER

While on a trip to Hong Kong, I caught a showing of George Romero's MARTIN. Not surprisingly the film lasted there only two days—because the exhibited print was hazily distorted. Cut to only 80 minutes, some scenes were chopped in half, others simply deleted, and others inserted at some new point in the film. The result was that this intricate, brilliant film was confused, often looked cheap and exploitative and revealed Romero's considerable talents only in individual scenes left intact. The credits on this print—re-titled WAMPYR—were for the most part Italian. What happened?

George Godwin
Manitoba, Canada

We contacted producer Richard Rubinstein, who told us the following: "We did license MARTIN in certain foreign territories (which included Hong Kong) to a distributor based in Italy. We didn't know anyone cut it up, perhaps the Hong Kong distributor made some changes?"

CORRECTION:

Last issue, we incorrectly identified the author of a story on FLIKCS [102:15]. The story was written by Bill Waldbill. We regret our error.

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—Gene Roddenberry

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