CINEFANTASTIQUE

March

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Buffy, Vampire Slayer

Scream queen Sarah Michelle Gellar on her horror stardom.

Michael Crichton's "Sphere"
H.R. Giger's "Species 2"
Reinventing "Lost in Space"
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
"Far Beyond the Stars"

Volume 29 Number 11
CINEFANTASTIQUE is published each and every month, with issues jam-packed with the latest stories on the hottest films you want to see.

Don't miss our next issue (shown left), as we take an inside look at the making of LOST IN SPACE, the big bug, big screen reincarnation of the camp Irwin Allen TV show of the '60s. Our coverage includes a report from the set at England's Pinewood studios, including interviews with Gary Oldman, who plays the new incarnation of Dr. Smith, and Heather Graham, plus a retrospective look at the original series, featuring interviews with Mark Goddard and Jonathan Harris, the original Dr. Smith!

Also in the same issue, we preview SPECIES 2 and GODS AND MONSTERS, the fictionalized film bio of FRANKENSTEIN director James Whale. Plus the awards season is approaching, so we deliver our genre Oscar picks, along with our annual look at the previous year's best offerings in film, video and laserdisc, plus all the latest genre news and reviews!

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“The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder”

MARCH 1998

Action heroines and teen horror seem to be on the ascent, and we have both in our cover story on TV hit BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER. Correspondent Mitch Persons haunted the set of the Fox show to provide a behind-the-scenes look at how series creator Joss Whedon has enlivened genre staples, using horror as a metaphor for teen angst. Buffy slays her vampire opponents with the mix of ease and disgust one might have squeezing a zit in front of the bathroom mirror. Yet Whedon uses the horror as underpinning for a darker view of the turbulent emotions beneath the show’s pop culture gloss, a peek at the genuine agony of youth approaching the dark chasm of adulthood.

This issue also looks at the filming of Michael Crichton’s SPHERE. San Francisco correspondent Lawrence French provides a report from the underwater set to show how director Barry Levinson avoided the costly budget and scheduling ABYSS that plagued James Cameron. French interviews Crichton, who acts as co-producer to insure the faithfulness of the film’s adaptation, and also talks to Peter Coyote, who plays the mission leader of a scientific team exploring an ancient alien ship. Cinematographer Adam Greenberg, who worked for Cameron, explains how the underwater scenes were filmed without using the budget.

Also previewed in this issue is producer and screenwriter Akiva Goldsman’s retooling of ’60s sci-fi series LOST IN SPACE into a Hollywood event picture. London correspondent Alan Jones caught up with Goldsman on the set at Shepperton Studios. New York correspondent Dan Scapperotti takes a peek at MGM’s big summer attraction SPECIES 2, reporting from the production’s studio in a warehouse outside Baltimore. And on the STAR TREK beat, Anna Kaplan looks behind the scenes of DEEP SPACE NINE’s sweeps show, a time-travel indictment of ’50s racial prejudice, directed by star Avery Brooks.

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ALIEN OUTBREAK

VIRUS (Universal)

This techno-thriller from TERMINATOR-producer Gale Anne Hurd stars Jamie Lee Curtis (HALLOWEEN), William Baldwin, and Donald Sutherland (who starred in previous virus-oriented movie, OUTBREAK). The plot follows the crew of an ocean-going tugboat, who find refuge during a storm aboard a top-secret Russian research vessel. However, their rescue turns to terror as they discover that the Russians have been annihilated by an alien life form that has infested the ship and that regards humans as a virus to be eliminated. Oscar-winning effects man John Bruno (GHOSTBUSTERS) makes his directing debut, working from a script by Jonathan Hensleigh and Dennis Feldman (SPECIES). Pictured: William Baldwin, Joanna Pacula, Cliff Curtis, and Jamie Lee Curtis.

May

THE BORROWERS

(Polygram) February 13

John Goodman lends U.S. marquee value to this English production about little people (the "Borrowers" of the title) who live beneath the floorboards of a normalized family's house. Peter Hewitt (BILL & TED'S BOGUS JOURNEY) directed this adaptation of the series of novels by Mary Norton, which previously formed the basis of an American TV-movie in 1973 and a BBC series in 1992. SEE PAGE 56.

THE BUTCHER BOY (WB) Spring

After a brief, limited run last year to qualify for Academy Awards, this Neil Jordan film receives a wider release. Eamonn Owens plays a small boy in an Irish town who retreats into the fragmented comic-book world of his dreams in order to escape the harsh realities of his real life. Stephen Rea co-stars, and Sinead O'Connor shows up as a foul-mouthed Virgin Mary.

DARK CITY (New Line) February 27

It's hard to believe that New Line Cinema shelved out money for this fascinating but extremely idiosyncratic film from director Alex Proyas (THE CROW), which plays more like a cult-art-house favorite than a mainstream commercial movie. We should, of course, applaud the studio for taking the risk, but maybe they didn't know what they were going to get—which could explain why they kept delaying the release (the most recent false start was January 9). Now that we know they're not hiding a turkey, we can only hope they find a way to market this ambitious effort to its appropriate audience—presumably, fans of film noir, dystopian science fiction, and the writings of Philip K. Dick. REVIEWED ON PAGE 59.

EDEN (Legacy) March 27 (N.Y. & L.A.)

Since screening at the Sundance festival (and gaining a favorable review in Daily Variety) in January 1996, this film has sat on the shelf over a year, awaiting distribution (an earlier announced date of January 31 was pushed back to March). Fortunately, the result is worth the wait. Joanna Going (PHANTOMS) plays a beautiful 80s housewife in this subdued art house effort, written and directed by Howard Goldberg. She has the wisdom, education, and enthusiasm to make a great college professor, but two things stand in her way: her husband won't hear of it, and she is physically challenged by multiple sclerosis. Oppressed both physically and mentally by her situation, she finds a unique avenue of escape: astral projection. The whole thing is presented in a metaphorical rather than literal manner, but the effect is quite intriguing, and the beautiful Going does a credible job of proving she's a real actress, not just a pretty face. Dylan Walsh and Sean Patrick Flanery co-star.

GENERAL CHAOS

(Manga) March-April (exclusive)

This anthology of adult animation opened in New York at the beginning of February, now it moves into Los Angeles in March and San Francisco in April, with other dates to follow. Basically, if you enjoyed Spike and Mike's Festival of Sick and Twisted Animation, you'll be right at home with this rival compilation—which recreates both the strengths and the weaknesses of its model. For instance, interspersed with some real gems (including one about a parrot who needs a cracker as bad as an addict needs crack) are some shorts that are not only bad—they're not even animation! (Okay, AMERICAN FLATULATORS has a tiny bit of rotoscoping, but does that justify its inclusion when the whole thing is nothing but a bad joke revealed in the title?) Let's not scare you off, rest assured that entries by Bill Plympton and Bolex Brothers are worth not only the price of admission but also of sitting through the lesser offerings.

NIGHT WATCH (Dimension) March 20

A LIFE LESS ORDINARY'S Ewan McGregor (pictured below) stars in this psycho-thriller that's been awaiting U.S. distribution over a year. Advanced word has actually been favorable, so we can only be glad that Dimension (after delays too numerous to list here) is finally giving us a chance to see it.

SPHERE (WB) February 13

Dustin Hoffman, Sharon Stone, and Samuel L. Jackson star in Barry Levinson's film of Michael Crichton's excellent novel. Although Crichton did not work on the script, he does take a producer credit, and the result looks like a faithful adaptation. Let's hope it turns out better than the lamentable LOST WORLD. SEE PAGE 10.

WIDE AWAKE (Miramax) March 27

Newcomer Joseph Cross stars in this borderland genre effort, about a fifth grader who begins searching for God after the death of his grandfather (Robert Loggia). With such a plot WIDE AWAKE could have become stuffy; instead, writer-director M. Night Shyamalan fashions a film for the multiplex crowd, peppered with just enough humor to alleviate the heavier moments and capping it with a moment of fantasy. Denis Leary, Dana Delany, and Rosie O'Donnell costar. Mike Lyons

RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)

DIRECT-TO-VIDEO

THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT (Buena Vista)

REANIMATOR's Stuart Gordon directed Ray Bradbury's adaptation of his own short story. Edward James Olmos, Joe Mantegna, Esai Morales, Gregory Sierra, and Clifton Gonza- les star as five men, down on their luck and with only $100 between them, who buy one magical white suit that transforms their lives, bringing out their innermost desires and making their dreams come true. Said Gordon of bringing the tale to the small screen, "It's a simply story that transcends its origins, since it's a magical fable about friendship, sharing, and dreams fulfilled." Spring
**HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC**

**KEEP ON TREKKIN’**

The Next Generation crews up for their next mission in outer space.

by Frank Barron

After the tremendous rebound the feature film franchise took with STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT, Paramount has given the go-ahead to another installment. Jonathan Frakes, who made his feature directing debut with FIRST CONTACT, will helm the new film, which will be written by Michael Piller, a veteran contributor to the TV series. Rick Berman will again produce. A title has not yet been announced.

Berman, who ensured there was plenty of action and adventure in FIRST CONTACT, noted, "There is more excitement in science fiction pictures in the last couple of years. There are too many special effects pictures that have no stories. You've got to deliver a story—have some heart and humor. STAR TREK stories are all grounded in and driven by the characters. The space stuff is an addendum, in a way. If you just tell stories about rocket ships, it gets very boring. You've got to tell stories about people.”

Frakes, who also returns in his role as Commander Will Riker, explained how he got the directing job: "Most A-list directors don't want to make a STAR TREK movie. One of the reasons I got the job was because I am aware of this strange world that STAR TREK is—and you have to be true and loyal to STAR TREK protocol. The fans watch closely, and the director is really responsible."

Of his success with handling FIRST CONTACT, Frakes said, "I knew the intimacy of the characters. I tried to bring the fun back, using humor where possible. I think a laugh every few minutes in a film with tense action-adventure is going to help. I'm proud of the laughs in FIRST CONTACT.” Frakes said he tried to recapture some of the fun of the classic TREK series, in which "Kirk and Spock and Bones... would kid each other—be ironic and sarcastic—kind of jab each other in the ribs.”

Of doing a feature film, rather than television, Frakes said, "With a feature, you have time to actually rehearse a scene—which you don't get on TV. You have time for pre-production, to plan some shots and talk to the producer and cameraman. You're also able to get more shots. To make an action film, you've got to have lots of shots and lots of movement—something to give the editor to work with."

Frakes, who admitted being influenced by ALIEN and ALIENS, reveals that, in acting school, his teacher taught him "to steal from the good ones.” He added, "I think Ridley Scott and James Cameron are pretty good ones to steal from.”

Brent Spiner, who will reportedly receive $5-million to return as the android Data, acknowledged that "a lot of actors sort of poot-poo the idea of being in a STAR TREK movie, but they also recognize these are delicious roles to play. STAR TREK affords actors a level of performance you don't ordinarily get in a picture. It's a heightened style of playing that you can go further with than with most material. And it's fun,” he grinned. "STAR TREK changed my life.”

Patrick Stewart has agreed to return as Captain Jean-Luc Picard, for a payday of $9.5-million. Before reading Michael Piller's screenplay, the actor admitted that, after FIRST CONTACT, "I don't know where we go from here, but if we keep doing good work—work that actually gets better—well, that's my commitment. We should make absolutely terrific movies that just happen to be STAR TREK movies."

Patrick Stewart is signed on to star in the next STAR TREK feature film. Frakes will direct, as he did on STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT.

**STAR WARS**

by Judd Hollander & Sue Feinberg

Ewan McGregor is rapidly amassing some impressive acting credits in a series of artful films that impinge (even if they do not always leap into) genre territory: A SHALLOW GRAVE, TRAINSPOTTING, THE PILLOW BOOK, A LIFE LESS ORDINARY, and NIGHTWATCH.

Since he was inspired to become an actor by his uncle, Denis Lawson, who appeared in STAR WARS as an X-wing fighter pilot, it is perhaps appropriate that McGregor's latest role should be the young Obi-Wan Kenobi in the first STAR WARS prequel, tentatively titled STAR WARS: THE BEGINNING. McGregor said that the original STAR WARS "was the first film I ever went to the cinema to see him in, when I was six. I used to know every word in the film. Me and my friends used to take parts, and we'd just do the whole dialogue as we watched it. It was very bizarre when I first put on my Jedi gear, very bizarre."

While on tour to promote A LIFE LESS ORDINARY, McGregor had little to say about his role as the younger version of the Jedi Knight originally played by Alec Guinness, because he can't reveal anything about the film, having signed a non-disclosure agreement. However, he did note, "I think there's 18 months post-production on the film; it had two years preproduction and a three and a half month shoot. So that shows you how important the actors are,” he laughed. The film is due for release sometime in 1999.

**Short Notes**

Oscar-winner Tom Hanks (FORREST GUMP) is negotiating to star in THE GREEN MILE. The film is being adapted by Frank Darabont (THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION) from Stephen King's six-part serialized novel.

Jennifer Jason Leigh and Jude Law have signed to appear in David Cronenberg's next film, EXISTENCE, which should start shooting in April. The $15- to 20-million film will revolve around a researcher (Leigh) whose virtual reality technology goes haywire, blurring real and imagined incidents (rather like Cronenberg's earlier effort VIDEODROME). Producer Frank Mancuso Jr. (SPECIES) has a new project set up at MGM: DOOMSDAY, which will be written by J.B. White (HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN), from a story by him and Bo Zenga. The thriller is based on the premise that mankind is already four-sevenths of the way to the end of the world, as foretold in the Book of Revelations. Actress Meg Ryan (ANASTASIA) will turn to producing with LOST SOULS, about a woman convinced she is the target of a conspiracy that will allow the Devil to walk the Earth.
GODZILLA REBORN?
The name is familiar but the face has changed in this ID4 style remake.

by Chuck Wagner

Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich make big movies but do not usually work with big stars—until now. Now, they’re working with the biggest star of all: Godzilla!

Near the corner of 5th and Main in downtown Los Angeles, Devlin explained how this came to be. “[TriStar] came to us a couple of years ago about doing GODZILLA, and we actually turned it down. We thought, ‘How do you overcome the cheese factor?’ We didn’t really know how to make it properly, and so we passed on it.”

Meanwhile, director Jan DeBont (TWISTER) signed on to helm a version written by Ted Elliot & Terry Rossio. After DeBont left due to budget disputes, what led Devlin and Emmerich to reconsider the project? “Well, there were two things,” said Devlin. “One was seeing that script and realizing that it could be done. Then Roland and I started talking about story ideas and the direction we would go with it, what we would do. The final nail was we were in Europe promoting ID4 when Patrick Tatopoulos came over with his drawings of the new Godzilla—what our version could look like. The second we saw the drawings it was like, ‘All right, we’ve got to go do this!’ Because of the limitations of technology, the Godzilla of before is this lumbering Frankenstein coming down the street. We’ve got this agile, quick, scary, wild creature. Suddenly, all these possibilities opened up, and what you could do in a film seemed endless, so that’s when we decided, ‘Let’s do it!’

Indeed, Devlin has previously stated that the new Godzilla will be a nimble creature of immense size—20 stories tall—and given the scale factors, when he runs the scaled-up speeds will be in the neighborhood of 500 miles per hour! Whether he breathes fire is a closely guarded secret: all Devlin would say is, “He has a few tricks up his sleeve—some you’ve seen before and some that are new.”

How did Toho, the owners of GODZILLA, react to this new creature? “Jan DeBont told us that he had had a lot of problems, that every time they’d wanted to make a slight change [in the appearance of Godzilla] it was a big ordeal. So what we did is we went for a completely different look—not slightly different, totally different. We brought it to Toho and said, ‘Look, this is the way we’d do it.’ They took a long time in deciding, and they finally said, ‘You know what? We don’t even want to comment on it; we’ll just say yes or no.’ And they said, ‘We love this look; we love your idea; we back you 100%; go do it!’ It was so different—it was like a whole rebirth of Godzilla—and I think they appreciated that.”

If the monster is so different, then why call it Godzilla? “The original title was a combination of the Japanese word God and the Japanese word for whale.” (Devlin is half-right: the monster’s original Japanese name, Gojira, is a combination of the English word gorilla and the Japanese word for whale, kujira.) “I don’t want to spoil the best gag in this film, but in the picture he’s originally called Gojira, but then it gets bastardized in a humorous way. This film is much more like the original Godzilla movie—before the Raymond Burr edition—much more like that version than any other version of Godzilla. We want to go back to the whole legend again. We want to distance ourselves from the other films, but pay homage to them as well. We want to do this as if we had just come up with this idea, and there was no history.”

Production Starts

LUCINDA’S SPELL
Writer-director Jon Jacobs, who gave us the cult flick GIRL WITH THE HUNGRY EYES a few years ago, returns with another low-budget supernatural opus. The erotic tale, told tongue-in-cheek, concerns a New Orleans witch (GIRL’S Christina Fulton) struggling to win a contest of magic put on by the local coven that despises her.

SMALL SOLDIERS
Director Joe Dante (GREMLINS) goes behind the camera of this DreamWorks production, written by Adam Rifkin (MOUSE HUNT) and Ted Elliot & Terry Rossio. Gregory Smith, Kirsten Dunst (INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE), and Dick Miller star in this story of a child who becomes involved in a war between rival toys.

Bradbury Chronicles
by Judd Hollander

The works of Ray Bradbury have seldom been satisfactorily adapted to the screen; however, apparently with the old adage “if at first you don’t succeed” in mind. Hollywood is trying again, with two of his more well-known works: THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES and FAHRENHEIT 451. According to Bradbury, CHRONICLES is set up at Universal with “some of the people affiliated with [Steven Spielberg]. One of his producers, Jerry Mullen, will be my producer, but Spielberg won’t have anything to do with it. We’re looking for a director now. I turned in the final script, and they okayed it; now they are talking to three or four directors. I’m still waiting to hear from Mel Gibson about FAHRENHEIT 451. I talked to [Gibson’s people] the other day, and they claim they’re going to do the preproduction in the spring, and they’ll start filming in the summer. I hope it’s all going to work out.

Obituaries
by Jay Stevenson

William Alland
The 81-year-old producer died on November 10, from heart disease. Once a member of Orson Welles’ Mercury Theater, he played the reporter trying to track down the meaning of the word “Rosebud” in CITIZEN KANE (1941). Later, he went behind the camera to produce numerous films, including several genre items. The best of these were directed by Jack Arnold: IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE (1953), CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON (1954), REVENGE OF THE CREATURE and TARANTULA (both 1955), and 1958’s THE SPACE CHILDREN (which is not considered on par with the others). 1954’s THIS ISLAND EARTH (on which an uncredited Arnold took over from director Joseph Newman) is considered by many to be a genre classic, although this status was somewhat diminished by MYS- TERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE. Alland’s other genre credits are: THE BLACK CASTLE (1952), THE CREATURE WALKS AMONG US and THE FEMALE MONSTER (both 1955), THE DEADLY MANTIS and THE LAND UN- KNOWN (1957), and THE COLOSSUS OF NEW YORK (1958).
SPECIES 2

Henstridge returns as new human-alien.

By Dan Scapperotti

A series of buildings surrounded by walled towers and a significant military presence houses a top security research facility designed to keep prying eyes out, but more importantly to keep its experimental subject in. A scientific team lead by a once reluctant Dr. Laura Baker has cloned a new human-alien specimen named Eve from a frozen lab embryo. Eve is the new incarnation of the ill-fated Sil, who wreaked havoc in SPECIES before being destroyed in the underground sewers of Los Angeles.

Returning to her genetic roots as Sil’s 1998 counterpart, Eve, is the stunning Natasha Henstridge. While Chris Bremecato’s script for SPECIES 2 could easily be filmed without the actress’ involvement, producer Frank Mancuso realized that Henstridge was a vital ingredient in the mix that made the first film so successful. While the menace of the Frankenstein monster’s lumbering hulk was blunted by Karloff’s performance, so too did Henstridge’s combination of beauty and vulnerability make Sil a sympathetic character whose innocent growing awareness is infected by a murderous desire to procreate her race.

Mancuso held a meeting with the actress and explained that he wanted her back, but if she chose not to sign on to the project it could be tailored in another direction. “I’d rather have her be one of the elements that came back then not,” said Mancuso, “but, at that moment in time, it wasn’t central to the movie. When she did commit we made her more central to the movie.”

Eve is a bird in a gilded cage. Thanks to Laura Baker, recognition is given to Eve’s human half and, although the military aspects of the project, namely to find means of defending against the alien creatures from outer space, are addressed they also try and make provisions for their prisoner’s comfort. A multi-leveled glass-enclosed environment has been erected in the vast laboratory, including a bedroom, living room and garden. The team of biologists is composed solely of women. Still, Eve is primarily a pretty experimental lab rat. Hurting towards Earth, however, is a new player in the deadly spawn game that will give Eve a chance to fulfill her destiny and the armed guards surrounding the facility may not be enough to stop her.

Special effects expert Steve Johnson was one of the first to be tapped by Mancuso when he green lighted the project. Johnson had worked with fantasy designer extraordinaire H. R. Giger on the creature makeup for the original film. This time around, Johnson’s work has been tripled and he was faced with not only bringing to life two of Giger’s creatures but complicated transformation sequences without a heavy dose of CGI effects work. Johnson transplanted a team of fifteen staff members from his California based XFX, Inc. to set up an East Coast shop in the production’s Columbia, Maryland facility.

Digging deeper than ever before into his bag of tricks, Johnson imaginatively produced sequences that he says will startle audiences as well as baffle them. Peter Medak, whose films THE KRAYS, ROMEO IS BLEEDING and THE RULING CLASS lean toward the dramatic, is directing. The cast, along with Henstridge, includes Marg Helgenberger returning as Dr. Laura Baker, Michael Madsen reprising his role as Press Lennox and newcomer Justin Lazard as astronaut Patrick Ross whose mission to Mars brings back more than soil samples.

MGM opens SPECIES 2 in May.
Akiva Goldsman brings the space opera to the screen.

By Alan Jones

"Look, of course I fantasize about writing a STAR WARS movie. Who wouldn't?" remarked LOST IN SPACE producer/writer Akiva Goldsman. "But if I did get such an assignment, it would be an awfully hard job because you are starting from something absolutely amazing to begin with. They always say great novels make great movies and good to okay novels make great movies because there's more room for reinvention. With LOST IN SPACE I got to be true to my idea of the thing, rather than the thing itself, and I know I've been loyal to all the other nine-year-olds who were also watching the TV series and going 'Cool.'" Goldsman's reinvention of the arch '60s series as a megabuck Hollywood blockbuster opens nationwide April 3 from New Line Cinema.

In fact, landing the script assignment for LOST IN SPACE was a dream ticket for the Brooklyn Heights-born writer who teamed up with director Joel Schumacher for the consecutive boxoffice hits THE CLIENT, BATMAN FOREVER, A TIME TO KILL and BATMAN & ROBIN after winning a reputation for his first script, SILENT FALL, directed by Bruce Beresford. Prior to becoming a screenwriter, Goldsman worked extensively with autistic and schizophrenic children (he's the son of two prominent child psychologists), and with that background is convinced he was the right man for the job of bringing producer Irwin Allen's '60s space opera to the screen. Noted Goldsman, "I could reinvent it totally from the inside—coloring inside the line I call it."

Not that Goldsman has any strong opinion either way on the current trend of turning nostalgically popular TV series into movies. "I was so personally grateful for STAR TREK: THE WRATH OF KHAN, I can barely tell you, though!" he said. "I just wept with joy over that when it came after STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE, which by rights should have nailed the coffin shut. Then director Nick Meyer delivered KHAN and brought STAR TREK back to us all. It was a gift, literally. I loved that. How can anyone not be joyous about TV series-turned-movies when they work. The BRADY BUNCH was cute too. And director Barry Sonnenfeld did a wonderful job with ADDAMS FAMILY VALUES. It was so funny with line after brilliant line you wanted to put your head through a window. There's no difference between adapting an old TV show or a best-selling book to me."

Nevertheless, LOST IN SPACE was a very hard script for Goldsman to write. "I had to capture the tone via trial and error because it had to be so densely constructed," he said. "If I hadn't written it, I would swear it was written by someone who knew nothing about writing for movies, or how they are made, because it's so complex. What I did was sullenly my production knowledge and write with my imagination. I have a good ear for dialogue and generally people in my scripts sound real. That's what's most consistent about my scripts—they all deal with real people in whatever the situation, either real or unreal. Here, smart people are exposed to the unnatural, the hyperbolic and the surreal, and as a result they say clever things and are funny about their situation. That doesn't mean the events themselves are comedic. But if the world is exploding, and you are smart, you will say something funny about it. That's pretty much how I feel about life and it's that tone I've tried to capture in LOST IN SPACE."

Another link to Goldsman's other scripts came with the LOST IN SPACE focus on family and relationships. "That connection attracted to me to this story in the first place," he said. "I'm telling a tale that's been told a thousand times before. What does dad do? Does he go to work? Or does he stay at home and help out with the kids? Now, I'd have to be a brilliant writer like Arthur Miller to write that story set in a living room and a factory. But I don't have to be a genius to put the story in space and have things blowing up on alien landscapes. I can be more flat-footed about it, and send the story out there a little more widely because that's the luxury of this medium. And I can hide what is a classic dilemma about family and how it works because so many of ours don't."

"We knew we were dealing with an unlikely premise to begin with," he continued. "Which is, why send an entire family into out-
er space in the first place? [Director] Stephen [Hopkins] and I spent a lot of time rationalizing that, which is why the film takes time setting the proposition up. There was a treatment version of the story that began with them taking off and immediately becoming lost in space. But we didn’t want to do that. It was too easy. We are both science fiction fans and we wanted it to be based in real science fiction.

Goldsmid chose to use time travel as the crux of the LOST IN SPACE plot because he felt it was such a much-loved science fiction staple. "It’s always been fascinating to me," he said. "I was very enamored with the idea of being able to confront your own father as a peer. There’s always moments of reckoning in everyone’s lives, but usually they come too late. The monster we thought our father wasn’t that monster anymore and it’s incumbent on us to be graceful about it. You know what I mean, you’re not that little boy anymore. All our fantasies of confrontation, reconciliation, accusation and forgiveness are robbed by time but in the science fiction universe you don’t have to let them be stolen. What happens if your father leaves home only to come back an instant later and 20 years have passed? How can that moment be played out with emotion and drama? I was struck with that idea and I needed time travel to facilitate it."

There’s an episode from the original TV series that proved something of an inspiration to Goldsmid when he was writing the script as he explained. "It’s one I’ve always remembered because it was so painful to me. Will Robinson returns home to Earth via a matter transfer machine and ends up in a small town. He can’t get anyone to believe it’s really him and it’s the day before the actual Jupiter II launch. He tries calling Mission Control on a pay phone using all these dimes to make a collect call—it was the ‘60s after all—and no one will accept it. It was such a wonderfully real and serious dilemma and it truly inspired me." (The show Goldsmid is referring to is the Christ-mas Special from the first series—Episode 15—titled "Return from Outer Space.")

The tone of Goldsmid’s script after three drafts in development got less comedic as it went on. He said, "I’m generally grateful for that happening. There were more one-liners along the lines of the trick I used in BATMAN FOREVER. There was a moment when I had Robin say ‘Holy Rusted Metal, Batman,’ and he goes, ‘What?’ The reply being, ‘The metal, it’s full of holes.’ That’s actually the right thing to do when dealing with such a much-loved series. Okay you guys, we get it, but it’s not anything outside of the story. If you don’t get the gag, it doesn’t matter. The character isn’t stepping out of the movie reality to go, nudge, nudge, wink, wink. With Dr. Smith’s dialogue I tried to make such lines as ‘Never fear, Smith is here’ and ‘We’re doomed’ come out of the real situation. The idea is they make perfect sense if you’ve never seen LOST IN SPACE, but if you have it’s an extra bonus.

"In order to necessitate a hyperbolic level of dialogue for Smith, I knew it needed to be a man who loved words. Part of how I solved the problem I had with the initial series character was to give him a sociopath’s ability for manipulation. And such a person also takes pleasure in something really aesthetic. For a sociopath, it’s the precision of the language that becomes more fun than human emotion. Those ideas fitted in nicely with my concept of Smith being a soldier, not a buffoon. You couldn’t wish for a better actor than Gary Oldman to bring those aspects to the fore."

For many viewers, one of the show’s lapses in logic was the fact that no one ever killed Dr. Smith after he continually kept trying to destroy the Robinson family. Goldsmid said they’d solved that problem in the movie. "Here. The Robinsons make a deal with Smith to save their daughter Judy, critically ill after the crash. If he saves her life, they will let him live, which he does despite the power in the sick bay going down as he tries to stimulate her heart because the Jupiter II is hurtling towards the sun. Reviving Judy means Smith buys himself a place in the mission. That gives us good reason to keep him alive through this episode and hopefully many more.”
A 300-year-old spacecraft is discovered on the ocean floor and government authorities quickly assemble a group of top scientists to document the discovery. Once inside the submerged craft the scientists encounter a mysterious sphere from an alien civilization. Each of the scientists who come in contact with the sphere find that it somehow enables them to physically manifest their subconscious fears. That is the startling premise of Michael Crichton’s Sphere. When first published in 1987, Sphere’s success seemingly inspired a whole flood of undersea movies, including DEEPSTAR SIX, LEVIATHAN, LORDS OF THE DEEP and THE ABYSS. Now, the novel that began the trend will finally surface on February 13, courtesy of director Barry Levinson.

When he first began working on the novel, one of Michael Crichton’s ideas was to do a story contrary to the cheery optimism popularized by such alien encounter films as Steven Spielberg’s CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND and E.T. “At the time I was writing Sphere,” said Crichton, “I was thinking about the sort of Carl Saganesque, pie-in-the-sky thing, where people say, ‘Wont it be wonderful when the aliens land?’ Which is a little bit like saying, ‘Wont it be wonderful when a virus lands?’ No, it wont be wonderful, it actually will be pretty scary. It wont bring out the best in people, it will bring out the worst.

Oceanauts enter the SPHERE, what they think is the remains of a 300-year-old alien spaceship at the bottom of the ocean floor. Left: Michael Crichton’s 1987 novel. Below: The oceanauts excavate the ancient ship, production design by Norman Reynolds. Bottom right: The stellar cast of oceanauts prepare for deep sea EVA, (l to r) Sharon Stone, Dustin Hoffman and Peter Coyote.
films Crichton's underwater alien adventure.

"When the aliens land, it won't be Carl Saganesque pie-in-the-sky," said writer Michael Crichton. "It won't bring out the best in people. It will bring out the worst."

Director Barry Levinson (l) directs Dustin Hoffman as psychologist Dr. Norman Goodman and Samuel L. Jackson as Harry Adams, the skeptical mathematician who is the first to have contact with the SPHERE.

So I was doing a story to counter a kind of giddy idiocy that I was perceiving at the time. I don't think an alien encounter will be friendly, and I don't think high-powered scientists make a very good team [to meet them]. If you're trapped in an elevator, the last thing you'd want is for it to be full of Nobel Prize-winning scientists. They'll all become hysterical, instantly. What you'd want is to have Navy SEALs. People who are trained and tough, who are able to maintain discipline and self-control. So I was interested in the notion of this group of scientists, and how they'd react under pressure.

Although SPHERE had been kicking around for some time, Levinson didn't become aware of it until shortly after he finished directing DISCLOSURE, which was co-produced by Levinson's longtime associate Peter Girotto and Crichton's producing partner, Andrew Wald. "When we finished DISCLOSURE, I was talking with Andrew," said Girotto, "and we were discussing how well everything had gone. I said to Andrew, 'Doesn't Michael have anything else, because Barry's dying to do a science-fiction film.' Andrew replied, 'Well, he's got SPHERE,' so I said, 'Let me read it,' and I thought it was great. Later, I talked to Barry about it, and when he read the book, he got very excited about it, so away we went."

One reason the book was still available, was because Crichton wasn't overly eager to see it made into a movie. "At the time it was written, everybody was afraid of it for budgetary reasons," noted the author, "so I just waited. I have never been in a rush to sell things. So SPHERE took 11 years, ER took me 20, what's the difference? They'll eventually get done, but it's more important to me that they be done well."

Getting a workable script from the book was the next step, and although Levinson and Crichton are both experienced screenwriters, they elected to step back and let someone else tackle the scripting chores. "The first problem we had was a typical one," explained Girotto. "People wanted to depart from the book. I don't know why, but a lot of times writers do everything but write a script that follows the book. This is Barry's third movie from a book, [after DISCLOSURE and SLEEPERS], and when he makes a movie from a novel, he wants to do it because he enjoyed the book." Another reason for keeping the story close to the book, is the fact that it's sold over four million copies. "We don't want to disappoint all the people who read the book," said Wald. "Michael is also very strong in story structure, so if you start changing the pieces of his puzzle, you end up in a place you don't want to be."

"Warner Bros. had been developing SPHERE," said Levinson, "and they had done two earlier scripts, neither of which worked for me." At that point, Levinson allowed his assistant, Stephen Hauser, to do a draft of the script, and the result was more to his liking. "After Stephen did his draft," said Levinson, "I brought in Paul Attanasio [QUIZ SHOW], who did the version we actually shot. The two of them fashioned what is on the screen. The earlier drafts were too hardware-oriented and you lost sight of the characters, so it didn't hold my interest. I understand you need a certain amount of spectacle and hardware, but ultimately, the real essence of what Crichton wrote is that you have people a thousand feet under the water, and strange things start to take place. Then, the behavior among these people starts to get more and more peculiar. How they interact with one another and their paranoia heightens, those were the things to work on, and let the other elements support that. There's a natural acceleration to the piece, and I didn't want it to get lost in a hardware movie."

Although Crichton didn't write the screenplay, as co-producer he remained involved in the development of the script, providing notes and comments on the various drafts. "I worked with Barry on DISCLOSURE," remarked Crichton, "and he's very respectful of the underlying material, so some of the traditional Hollywood tensions between book and movie weren't there. Of course, everyone has different ideas about what constitutes fidelity. I don't think that slavishly reproducing scenes from the book is what's at issue. I think the issue is to capture some spirit and tone from the novel. The problem is one of compression. A screenplay is 120 pages, and if you convert those pages into the ordinary narrative format of a novel, it would be 40 pages. In essence you're going to take a 400 page book, and keep 40 pages. You're going to keep 10% and in the process of boiling it down, you hope you're able to retain what's important in the story."

With a final script that placed the focus
The novelist would rather fix the script than write it.

By Lawrence French

Although Michael Crichton has written scripts from his novels Jurassic Park and Disclosure, when it came time to adapt Sphere to the screen, he felt he could best serve the project as a producer. “I’ve tried in recent years not to do scripts from my books,” said Crichton. “My new idea is to do original scripts or novels, but if I do a novel, I don’t do the script. It’s like having the same baby too many times. There was never even a discussion about me doing the script for Sphere.”

As producer of the film, Crichton is able to maintain a degree of control, without having to take a totally hands-on approach. “Michael felt he’d rather help fix the script than write it,” said producer Andrew Wald. “He had been thinking about Sphere for a long time, but he wanted to give his comments from one step back. On Disclosure, the picture we did before this, he did write the first draft, because he wanted to make sure the story points that were important to him were carried through. On Sphere, Michael gave detailed notes on every draft. He sees all the dailies, but he’s holding back his comments until [director] Barry [Levinson] has assembled the picture. Barry then has a fresh pair of eyes that can look at the picture and say, ‘This could be tightened up here,’ or ‘This is great.’ In that way, Michael is a tremendous asset.”

Levinson agreed, noting that, “Michael isn’t all over you on the set, as can happen with some producers. He knows about the process of moviemaking, but he’s not interested in being on the set, just for the sake of being there. He looks at the script and makes notes on it, and then we discuss it. He gives an overview and lets you know if you’re starting to go wrong, so you can keep things on the track you’re after.”

Unlike many science fiction writers, who firmly believe that some form of alien life has visited the Earth, Crichton stressed that the possibility of such an occurrence is sheer conjecture. “In truth, nobody knows,” said Crichton. “I think we know so little about the origin of life on this planet that we’re not really in a position to make a skillful guess, whether this is an event that has occurred repeatedly in the history of the universe, or very, very rarely, or maybe only once. All the talk, whether it’s among scientists, among the SETI people, or among the Roswell people, is speculation. You might as well speculate whether there’s life after death. We don’t know that, either. I think it’s important to clearly identify what we don’t know, so when someone opens their mouth to talk about how it will be, we can recognize they’re just full of it, because we don’t know.”

With the release of Sphere and the upcoming Eaters of the Dead, all of Crichton’s novels, excepting his most recent, Airframe, will have been made into movies. However, the ending of Sphere is ripe with sequel possibilities, although it seems doubtful that Crichton will write one. “No one has discussed a sequel,” declared Crichton, “and the ending wasn’t written for that reason. It’s the same ending as the book. The whole sequel thing is so overblown. I don’t know how many people have said to me that the Nedry character in Jurassic Park drops the canister (containing the dinosaur DNA samples), in order to set-up a sequel, but in fact it’s nothing of the sort. The canister rolls away in a cutaway, to allow the director to jump Nedry into the Jeep, where he dies in the next shot. That’s what it’s there for, but everyone says, ‘sequel, sequel, sequel,’ because they don’t know anything about movies. You don’t need to set-up a sequel in order to make one. The notion that some plot element has been inserted for the sequel is almost always wrong. In my experience, anytime somebody thinks about the sequel while they’re making the picture, they end up making a stinky movie, and nobody wants a sequel anyway.”

Crichton, who has previously directed such science fiction-themed pictures as Westworld, Coma and Looker, stopped directing in 1988 to concentrate on writing, but may eventually return to the director’s chair. “I think I’ll direct at some point,” said Crichton, “but I don’t especially want to right now. If I were to direct one of these movies, I’d have to stop all writing for at least a year, and so far I haven’t been prepared to do that.”
firmly on the characters, it was no problem assembling a top-notch cast to commit to the project. Peter Coyote, who plays Barnes, the government leader of the ill-fated mission, expressed a typical reaction: "I'm such a Barry Levinson fan," said Coyote, "that if you told me he was reading the yellow pages I would have shown up. When I read the script, I thought it was really smart, and I got right away that it was an alien-less science fiction movie. If anything, the alien is the human unconscious. I thought this was exactly the kind of thing Barry could do, because it's really about the psychological interplay between the people. In a funny way, it's actually a drawing-room drama of manners, it's just that all this strange shit happens outside the drawing-room!"

Dustin Hoffman headlines the cast as Dr. Norman Goodman, a psychologist summoned by the government to evaluate the sunken spaceship. "Dustin is the first actor we approached," remarked Giuliano. "He likes working with Barry, and he loved the material. When I first read the book, it was hard to imagine anyone but Dustin playing Norman. The usual Hollywood tradition would be to get some young, handsome actor to play the part, but the character was written as a mature man in his 50s, who's had some experience with life, not as an action hero."

SPHERE will mark Levinson's fourth collaboration with Hoffman, and the director was pleased to be working with the actor once more. "Dustin has a persona that makes him seem like an ordinary guy," noted Levinson. "He's also got the intelligence, so you believe without any question that he could be a psychologist."

Although Hoffman is known for his dramatic roles and comedies, producer Wald laughingly recalled that after doing OUTBREAK and SPHERE, Hoffman kept saying, "I want to be known as the first Jewish-American action-adventure hero." However, Levinson emphasizes that Hoffman's role is not an action-adventure hero, and says he doesn't play that kind of character in the movie. Part of Hoffman's extensive preparation for the role, included taking extensive notes from the original book. "It was unbelievable," said Coyote. "I thought I was a note-taker, but when I got to the set, Dustin gave me 80 pages of notes, cross-indexed between the book and the script. It must be why he gets paid so much money. At first I laughed at it, but it was actually genius that he did that. Very often we would refer to it, when we were improvising. We would go to the section of the book that Dustin had underlined, and pull some great line out, and improv around that. It was very interesting. Barry seemed totally relaxed about it."

In fact, Levinson found Hoffman's preparation very stimulating. "When anything an actor does helps him prepare for the role, that's helpful," says the director. "Dustin had his own checklist of scenes, with some of the lines from the book underlined, to see if this might be something we'd want to keep, that wasn't included in the script. We would review those points, and compare notes, to see if there was anything valid we might have missed. I find anything an actor can add that's interesting or important to be useful."

To play Beth Halperin, a biochemist who has a troubled past which may ultimately threaten the safety of the mission, Levinson chose Sharon Stone. Samuel L. Jackson plays Harry Adams, a skeptical mathematician who is the first to have actual contact with the alien sphere. Liev Schreiber plays Ted Fielding, an astrophysicist, while Queen Latifah and Marga Gomez round out the cast as crew members of the deep sea habitat that serves as the base of operations for the mission.

Levinson feels that correct casting is enormously important to a movie. "When you cast well, the actor will ultimately improve the role," said the director. "If you've cast wrong, all you're trying to do is fix the problem, all during the movie, as opposed to getting the performance to another level. So you always try to get the best actor for the part, because if you miscast you're just trying to get by."

Peter Coyote readily agreed, explaining: "Barry knows that once the movie is cast, the script is like the armature in a sculpture, and each actor is going to bring his ideas and life experience to the part, and therefore the movie is going to be better. That's what's so crazy about struggles for control. The director has absolute final control in the cutting room. So if the director hires good actors, who are smart and have a lot of ideas, encourage them! Encourage them to bring it all to the table and then prune it away. That's what Barry has the competence to do."

Producer Peter Giuliano noted that almost four months were devoted to pre-production planning of SPHERE. "Barry wants everything very well organized and laid out before he starts shooting," explained Giuliano. "By preparing the film in advance, I hope to set up an environment that is as trouble-free as possible. That means not only hiring the best people, but making sure everyone can work together, because sometimes you can have different personalities that may not get along. My job is really to help the director do his best work."

Since Levinson had never worked underwater before, he found the long pre-production period very beneficial. "There was an enormous amount of testing we needed to do," explained Levinson, "in order to get the right kind of density to the water. We needed a certain kind of lighting, depending on how murky or how clear the water would be. We did continual diving tests with our camera gear, to see how it would work underwater, and tried to figure it out with the camera crews, so we could move as quickly as possible. We started testing in a pool, and finally we went into our huge tanks, to figure out the best way to accomplish the work, without spending an extraordinary amount of time. In the end, this whole movie was shot in 69 days. There are movies that shoot much longer than that, but don't have the kinds of complexities we faced in terms of production. So doing all that testing in pre-production, to find out what was going to happen, helped us resolve the various problems. It
allowed us to shoot all the scenes underwater, with a minimum amount of downtime."

The thorough preparation period also allowed Levinson the freedom of being more spontaneous and creative on the set. "During the shooting," said Giuliano, "Barry might add scenes that have never been in the script before. He'll often move scenes or characters from one place to another, because as he's making the film, he'll see certain things that are evolving, and he wants to move it in a certain direction. That's much easier to do once things are organized and orderly."

Levinson also eschewed storyboarding, except for scenes where it's absolutely essential, such as the explosion of the underwater miniatures. "I wanted to have it loose enough so the actors could experiment," said Levinson. "It's my feeling that you lose some behavior if you storyboard, and I didn't want to lose any behavior that might show itself. I try to keep things as loose as I can, although you have certain obligations in this type of film. But the way I work, I can't sacrifice the characters for the hardware. I want to be able to try different things, and see if the actors can find other moments. Throughout the movie the actors would add little things at various times, but it's not like there's a whole scene that's improvised. In the end it's just little things that creep in, a line or two at a time."

Despite an ample pre-production phase, Warner Bros. executives became fearful that the film might spin out of control, as had happened previously on so many movies dealing with water, such as WATERWORLD and TITANIC. The result was a one-month shut-down, to reassess filming costs. "The studio was very concerned, because we were dealing with water," noted Giuliano. "Movies with water usually have mechanical and budget problems, but we were able to learn from everybody else's mistakes. We had hired some really talented people, and we had enough time to prepare everything properly, so in the end we were lucky. But any movie dealing with water is going to be a cause for concern, and a lot of big movies start out with one figure, and balloon to another after production starts. That's what the studio was afraid of, but I think they lost sight of how Barry works, because when he says, 'This is my budget,' then that's what the film comes in for. During the filming, they realized that the movie was coming in on budget, and eventually everybody got more relaxed."

During the shut-down, Warners executives wanted to shave about $10 million from the initial budget of approximately $85 million, as well as shorten the shooting schedule from 90 days to 70. "Believe me," said Giuliano, "there are many people concerned about how every penny was going to be spent on this movie. That meant we had to focus on things that were really important to the story. For certain things we were able to cut corners and use cinema tricks, but there were other things we felt we really needed to keep. For instance, we wanted to build an airlift that leads into the spaceship, and it was going to be very very expensive set, because it had to be practical. It had to actually work underwater, so the actors could go into it, have the water empty out, then go into another chamber, so they could get next to the spacecraft and figure out how to open the door. That was all real, and there was a lot of pressure on us not to build it. Finally, after we talked about it, we decided it was an essential element of the story, so we went ahead and built it."

Another potential problem was avoided when a proposal for shooting underwater scenes in huge dry dock tanks (used to pull ships out of San Francisco Bay), was eventually abandoned. Cinematographer Adam Greenberg (TERMINATOR 2) explained that, "with the dry dock, you'd be dealing with a depth of 35 feet and a length of 600 feet. I felt there was no need for that, so I did an underwater lighting test in a covered swimming pool that was only seven feet deep. I showed the test to Barry and he said, 'It looks like 2,000 feet.' I thought the same thing, so we tried to convince everyone to give up the dry dock idea, because that could have been a major mistake. Eventually, they agreed to do everything in a controlled situation."

A "controlled situation" meant finding a suitable location where five tanks could be built, each about 40 feet wide, and varying in depth from 19 to 26 feet. The perfect facility was found at Mare Island Naval Station, a decommissioned military base in Vallejo, California, near San Francisco. The abandoned warehouses and hangars (which during World War II reportedly housed the first atomic bombs), could easily accommodate the tanks and huge sets needed for filming. "At one point we were looking at a big tank facility that held about eight million gallons," said producer Wald, "and the people at Sea World advised us that the smaller the volume of water you use, the better off you'll be, because then it can be treated as a science, like a city water system. When you get to a bigger volume of water, it's much harder to control, because from day to day the water can change color and density. In our smaller tanks the water could be filtered and heated much easier."

Another area of major concern was the special effects budget. ILM was originally scheduled to handle the effects work, but only did some preliminary tests of the sphere ball, before they were replaced by effects supervisor Jeff Okun, and his producer Tom Boland (STARGATE). "We're cheaper than ILM," said Okun. "We're two independent guys who seek out the lowest prices in town, with the highest quality work. ILM does great work, but the work comes with their overhead, their facility, and who knows how many shows they're working on at the same time."

"During the shut-down," explained Levinson, "we tried to evaluate whether we could accomplish certain sets and things with CGI, without physically having to build them. Then, when we finally decided to do some of the sets digitally, we had to find out the best way to do it. We discussed it with various vendors, to see what the costs would be and finally found the proper balance. It was purely a matter of dollars and
Peter Coyote
One actor who is not afraid of being on the edge.

By Lawrence French

Peter Coyote is an actor who likes to take risks. He has shown absolutely no qualms about appearing in sexually frank films by internationally renowned directors such as Roman Polanski (BITTER MOON), Diane Kury (A MAN IN LOVE) and Pedro Almodovar (Kika). He has also been a participant in such mainstream films as Steven Spielberg’s E.T., JAGGED EDGE and CROSS CREEK. So when director Barry Levinson offered him a part in SPHERE, Coyote jumped at the chance, knowing Levinson was the kind of director who encourages his actors to take risks.

“Barry steps back and gives you the room to find things and to change them,” said Coyote. “He trusts that you’ve done your homework. Because he’s been an actor, he talks to you like an actor. He doesn’t say, ‘Look camera left, give me a little chuckle, and run your hands through your hair.’ Those are the directors who die early. Some actor freaks out and kills them. I was thankful that Barry gave me the room to make the character something complex.”

In SPHERE, Coyote plays Harold Barnes, an official from a top secret government agency who has assembled a team of experts to investigate the discovery of what is presumably an alien spacecraft. Levinson met Coyote socially, and thought he would be an interesting choice for the role. “Peter has an intelligence and also a certain amount of power,” said Levinson. “I thought he would work well in the part, because I didn’t want to have just a tough military guy.”

Barnes finds his authority continually challenged, especially by Sharon Stone’s character, who thinks Barnes is covertly working in weapons procurement for the Pentagon. “I die trying to save everybody,” said Coyote. “So I didn’t look at Barnes as the bad guy. Sharon Stone’s character thinks I’m lying to her, and you tend to believe Sharon, because she’s a star and I’m not.”

Levinson noted that audience suspicions about duplicitous government officials may also contribute to the perception of Barnes as a villain. “Any time you associate certain people with the military,” said Levinson, “they think, ‘Oh, he must be the bad guy.’ But I don’t really believe that. In fact, I never looked at the movie as having a villain.”

In fact, Barnes is more of a tragic hero, since he makes a series of unfortunate mistakes that continually place the mission in jeopardy. Michael Crichton noted that this was always part of his intention. “In stories I write,” stated the author, “mechanical and technological systems usually fail, and people screw up. That’s real life and this is a story where things don’t go as planned.”

Coyote laughingly joked, “They were thinking about calling the movie, ‘Barnes’ Last Mistake.’ His real problem is, he can’t control these egocentric scientists. They’re all strong-willed people who go off and do whatever they want. Barnes is trying to maintain military discipline and safety, but little by little it starts to slip away from him. At one point he says to himself, ‘I don’t know what I’m supposed to do,’ and that’s really the first crack in his armor.”

Coyote found working with Stone, Dustin Hoffman and Sam Jackson to be an enjoyable experience. “Everyone, except Sharon, was in the same makeup trailer,” revealed Coyote. “So before the day even started, we had goofed around, told jokes, teased each other and gossiped. Normally, every star has his own makeup trailer, but Dustin, Sam, Liev Schreiber and I were all in makeup together, everyday. It was a wonderful way to work. I think stars who isolate themselves in their own trailer miss a huge opportunity.”

Coyote was also surprised to find that the supposed rigors of underwater filming were nonexistent. “I got so relaxed I fell asleep,” admitted Coyote. “I was very comfortable in the helmet and diving suit, so I just took a nap while they were setting up the lights. I figured if I started drowning somebody would wake me up. It’s funny, because usually there’s a rule of thumb that the more pleasant a film is to do, the more of a bomb it turns out to be. But that wasn’t true on E.T., which was a delight from the first day to the last, and I certainly hope it isn’t the case with SPHERE. Although the box-office isn’t in yet, I have high hopes for SPHERE. I think it’s going to be a great film, and it was a totally enjoyable experience. I’m hoping it will remind the powers-that-be in Hollywood that I actually live in the United States, and that I’m a working actor.”

Coyote as mission commander Harold Barnes, heading up a scientific team travelling under stress.
"The sphere went the gamut. Should it glow, have a semi-liquid surface?" said FX supervisor Jeff Okun. "When Sam Jackson goes inside, does it morph?"

One of the key effects scenes that will be done with CGI was the huge cargo bay of the sunken spacecraft, where the group of scientists first encounter the alien sphere. "It's all a virtual set," said Jeff Okun. "It's being done as a photo realistic 3-D environment. We shot all the actors wandering around in front of a green screen that had been especially devised by Adam Greenberg. It was interesting, because Barry has a different approach to the effects work than most people. He's willing to let things go at the drop of a hat. Or he'll add things, if you can reasonably support your approach. The cargo bay was a case like that, because the concept for it changed as the scene got acted out. We found the actors were developing interesting nuances that could be added to the design, because the sphere selectively reflects things, so we were able to keep redesigning it until the very end."

The first glimpses of the sphere needed to be truly spectacular, which presented a special challenge to the filmmakers. "They had already done massive design research on what the sphere should look like," explained Okun, "and they ended up right back where they started. It got so ridiculous that Barry finally said, 'What if we think of it as a giant ball bearing?'"

Noted Levinson, "The thing I wanted to avoid was to have something with a door that opens, so you can go inside. That makes it very mechanical, and I wanted it to be stranger than that. So now, when they first see it, they assume that it can't open, and what happens is, it reflects everything in the cargo bay but the people who are standing in front of it. So you know there's something weird if it's reflecting everything but you. Then, when Sam Jackson goes inside it, we show how the sphere captures your image on its surface, and as it rotates your image, you disappear. That makes it something beyond our understanding, which is the effect I wanted to go for."

To bring off Levinson's concept, Okun experimented with many different options. "We went through the whole gamut of choices," said Okun. "Should it glow, should it have a semi-liquid surface? When Sam Jackson first goes inside it, should it morph into a 3-D mercury image of him? The more we went out in left field with our ideas, the more we found that coming back to reality was really the best solution. So right now it's like frozen mercury, but we've still got time to deal with it, so we're in the process of doing some things that will add a little bit of magic to it."

Other major effects scenes call for the construction of elab-
SPHERE
CREATURE & MAKEUP FX

By Lawrence French

XFX made the deep sea jellyfish hit their marks.

The mummified astronaut found at the controls of the alien ship, built by Yada, costumes by Yada and Mark Boyle.

The animatronic sea snake that attacks Hoffman, sculpted by Hiroshi Yada, costumes by Yada, Mark Killingsworth and Joe Colwell, with mechanics by Todd Minobe.

Right: Chris Nelson puppeteers the action on the underwater set.

The head, and then injected with silicone gel that's very soft and flexible. That’s encapsulated on the skin, so it moves very naturally and has weight. It wrinkles like flesh would, and no other material really does that. We created the entire head, upper torso and arm that way. The veins were all intrinsic, and ac-

The animatronic plastic that gave us the diaphragm that opens and closes, so they could move. This mechanism we built would fill the plastic bell with water, then shoot it out. Then, with a series of tiny monofilaments we could direct them any way we wanted. They worked very successfully. You could actually cut them into a NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC documentary and you wouldn't know the difference. Real jellyfish wouldn't hit their marks as well.

Effects supervisor Jeff Okun recalled that the sequence grew from a handful of jellyfish to a whole school, and their numbers would be enhanced by CGI for longshots. "Barry decided to make it this incredibly vast and beautiful garden of jellyfish," said Okun. "They’re just out there in the ocean when Fletcher is trying to get back to the habitat, but they aren’t supposed to be evil. It’s like a huge field of sunflowers that you’re just drawn into."

When the jellyfish sting and kill Fletcher, she’s brought inside the habitat, and her body is examined by Sharon Stone and Dustin Hoffman. “We wanted to create something that looked like an enormous blister on her face,” explained Johnson. “We wanted her to be very swollen, and also have some jellyfish still stuck on her face. We made a dummy head of Queen Latifah, that allowed us to pull jellyfish tentacles out of her nose and eye sockets. The first time we shoved about two feet of tentacles inside her head, and Sharon Stone was taking them out like a magician does with silk scarfs. They liked that effect, but they thought it was just a little bit too much.”

To create the fake head prosthetic for Queen Latifah, Johnson used a new technique. "Normally you use foam rubber, starting with the sculpture," said Johnson, “but we wanted to see through it, so we took technology from plastic surgeons. We used a silicone gel-fill appliance, like when a breast is remade. It’s a thin layer of silicone sprayed into the mould of
the final editing process, since Levinson favors implying some horrific events rather than showing them. In fact, when the habitat comes under attack from a giant squid, Johnson was hoping to create the creature, but it will be only an indistinct image on a sonar screen. “I thought it would be too much to actually see the squid,” Levinson said. “When you see a giant squid, no matter how well they’re done, they look fake. I’ve seen all these movies with giant squids and I never believe they’re real. They may look exactly like that, but I still don’t believe it. I felt it would be more frightening if you weren’t sure.”

Late in the film, when Dustin Hoffman is in the bathroom, he suddenly finds he’s in the company of long, eel-like hagfish. “We chose hagfish because of their disgusting qualities,” said Johnson. “When you pick them up they excrete this nasty slime to keep their bodies warm, but the slime proved to be just a little too disgusting, so we didn’t use it. To design them, we took a close look at some real hagfish, to see what was really striking about them. What I found was, they’re basically just tubes that aren’t very interesting in their movement. So we put about 90% of them on tracks, which gave incredible life to their movement. We used small scale model railroad tracks that we put on the floor of the bathroom in a curved pattern, and flooded the floor with about an inch of water, so the tracks were hidden. We’d lead the hag snakes along the tracks, so you got this really cool squiggling movement that kicked up water as they moved. We also made a loose skin on them, so as they wiggle, their skin wrinkles accordingly.”

The use of tracks also allowed for some sustained shots of the hagfish in motion. “We had one shot where a hagsnake travels about 20 feet across the floor and then goes up Dustin Hoffman’s leg,” revealed Johnson. “We just led the track up Dustin Hoffman’s leg, had the fish take a twenty-foot run, and then it actually goes up Dustin’s leg. Afterwards, Jeff Okun can remove the track and all the rods and wires from the shot with his digital technology.”

At one point Dustin Hoffman encounters a sea snake. “For the design of the sea snake,” says Johnson, “we wanted to indicate that this was a very deep sea creature that evolved in an environment with no light. So we did a hybrid of things that exist in nature. We took some details from real creatures, but were able to play with the design a little. To build it, we used translucent state-of-the art silicone, that is not only glass clear, but incredibly flexible. If you look closely at some of the early shots, the sea snake is back-lit, so you can see the skeleton all the way through it, as well as all the internal organs. The teeth are also really clear. We actually built the first one with a series of fiber optics inside, to create a luminescence that some deep sea creatures actually have, but because of the lighting circumstances, it never worked out.”

Having worked on the design of undersea aliens for THE ABYSS, Johnson found his experience on this deep sea picture far less strenuous. “I don’t think any possible aspect of THE ABYSS could be considered smooth,” admitted Johnson. “SPHERE has been much smoother. Barry’s great to work with, because he’s surrounded himself with a really good team of people. He’s hired people that are experts in their field and he lets them do their job. He has nothing to prove at this point, so if you make a suggestion, he doesn’t feel you’re stepping on his toes. He knows what’s he’s hired you for.”

![Corpse of Peter Coyote as Barnes, sliced in half by a door and washed down a corridor, dummy sculpted by Greg Smith, cosmetics by Tom Killeen and Mark Boley.](image1)

![Dustin Hoffman and Sharon Stone examine the corpse of Fletcher (Queen Latifah) after the jellyfish attack, sculpted by Smith, cosmetics by MacDonald and Boley, Above: The corpse of Edmund (Marga Gomez), built by Joe Colwell, cosmetics by David Dupuis and Boley.](image2)
“The sphere’s purpose, origin remain a mystery,” said Crichton. “The whole idea of explanations in sci-fi is frivolous. Things in the world are not all explicable.”

After several of the characters discover how to enter the sphere, it unknowingly gives them the power to manifest their unconscious fears, a concept previously explored in FORBIDDEN PLANET. Subsequently, the habitat comes under attack when these subconscious forces (‘the monsters from the id’) manifest themselves, first as seemingly harmless jellyfish, then in the form of a giant squid, and later as poisonous sea snakes. “Barry only wanted to use creatures that exist in nature,” said Okun. “We tried doing some really scary supernatural things, but he was very adamant about keeping it real. So we’re using only deep sea creatures that you’d find in nature, but having them act unnaturally. Barry would give us a book of sea-dwelling creatures, and say, ‘Design something scary like that,’ and he was right, because there’s some pretty scary stuff you can find in the ocean.”

By using real life sea animals, Levinson is avoiding the traditional monster situation, as well as allowing the characters, and the audience to wonder if the events unfolding are real or imaginary. “We have a situation where nobody knows who’s telling the truth, or what the truth is,” stated Levinson. “It comes down to three people—Hoffman, Stone and Jackson. All their perceptions have been so affected that none of them know what’s real, and what isn’t. That’s the element I wanted to explore in the piece. That’s what sets it up in a way that makes it interesting.”

Although the sphere enables the characters to unleash their subconscious fears, it is an artifact like the monolith in 2001—its purpose and origin remain a complete and total mystery. “It’s a sort of deus ex machina,” said Crichton. “It’s the thing that makes it all happen, and at the end of the movie you don’t know where it came from or what it is. In that sense it’s exactly like your appendix. I think that the whole idea of explanations in science fiction is usually frivolous. It tends to be a kind of neatly tied-up thing, or else a set-up, which is unravelled and then explained at the end. Audiences have seen a lot of that, so it’s become a sort of standard form. One of the things I like about SPHERE, is it’s not the usual movie you’ve seen a lot of, and it doesn’t play by the usual rules. In any case, I think it’s realistic that things that are discovered, or things that are found in the world, are not all explicable. I also think that the most likely outcome of contact with an alien artifact, if such a thing were to happen, is that we would never know where it came from. It’s silly to imagine you would. There’s a tradition of neatly tying-up all the loose ends, in all kinds of narratives, where in real life that’s not the case.

Levinson agreed with Crichton, saying, “I don’t think you could ever explain the sphere fully. To explain it sometimes makes things less interesting. It’s like the stranger who comes to town. If you knew the guy used to work as a blacksmith, and his whole history, it would take the edge off the guy. To know how the sphere got picked up by the spacecraft, from what corner of the galaxy, I don’t think that’s particularly pertinent. But, if you go up to the sphere and connect with it, it takes you inside, so it has a profound effect on you. It’s not a passive object that doesn’t do anything, but a misunderstanding among the characters about what it does or doesn’t do.”

With much of the action taking place in underwater tanks, it was essential for all the actors to undergo diving training, prior to the start of filming. “The actors spent two weeks with diving instructor Kris Newman,” said Wald, “and they all elected to go on and become fully certified in scuba diving. Dustin Hoffman was not a big diver, but Sharon Stone, Liev Schreiber and Queen Latifah had previous diving experience. In the end we were amazed at how quickly everyone got the hang of it. They all had to become comfortable with their hand-eye coordination underwater, so they could do practically anything. The diving instructors had them do all sorts of exercises, like egg races, rolling bowling balls with a stick, and finally they practiced swimming through the airlock.”

Unlike the actors, Levinson felt from the very beginning that he didn’t need to direct underwater. “Barry doesn’t need to be right next to the camera, like some directors,” said Wald. “It doesn’t matter what you see anyway, it’s what’s going on the film that’s important. So Barry directed from the video village, where he could look at the monitors and see what the camera was capturing.” Another reason Levinson didn’t want to direct underwater, had to do with efficiency. “If you’re under the water, it’s much harder to communicate,” noted the director. “From above I could talk right into the actors’ helmets and they would know what I wanted. I could look at the monitors and see what was needed in the scene, and tell the camera operators and actors about certain positions they needed to be in. Getting into the tank does you no good at all, because you can’t control the circumstances like you can from above. It might have been fun to be in the tank, swimming around, just for kicks, but it wouldn’t have been time well spent.”

Surprisingly, Levinson didn’t make the out-of-the-water scenes much easier on himself when he insisted on building the underwater habitat set, where the major portion of the movie takes place, in one continuous piece. With a vast array of rooms and corridors, all fairly
There’s a psychological aspect of SPHERE that’s about the imperfect condition of man,” Levinson said. “We let our paranoia dominate too much.”

Inside the alien ship the explorers make a startling discovery.
“I don’t think an alien encounter will be friendly,” said Crichton.

Always been interested in science fiction,” stated Levinson, “but, I’ve stayed away from it when it gets into things with monsters. I like the TWILIGHT ZONE-type of science fiction, where there were odd things taking place, without leading up to the monster situation. I don’t want to sound pretentious, but there’s a psychological aspect to SPHERE that’s really about the imperfect condition of man.

It’s discussed at the very end of the film, how although we seem very sophisticated, on a certain level, we’re very basic and primitive and allow our paranoia to dominate too much. That’s at the heart of what Crichton was working on. That’s what I wanted to stay with and connect to, rather than just having a bunch of events happen that scare you. Those things are in there, but what’s causing it, the motivations behind it, how we perceive it is essential in trying to do the piece.

On a certain very basic level we are the monsters.”

For his part, Michael Crichton is eagerly anticipating the finished movie. “I think SPHERE is going to be a very unusual movie,” he said. “It has a cast that is very atypical for a science fiction picture. It’s a really good group of actors. It has a director who doesn’t ordinaril
ly do this kind of film and who has elicited really tremendous performances. It has a psychological complexity that isn’t usually found in this type of movie, and in fact, it’s what the movie is about. This movie is a story of people under pressure, facing a situation that is unprecedented for them. Barry has done it very effectively, his focus is very clear. I can’t think of another movie that’s comparable to it. It’s very funny, it’s scary, and it’s intelligent. I don’t know where else you’re going to find a movie that talks about Einstein, Giotto, and Zen. The reality of this story is it’s a metaphor for something else. It’s really a story about what human beings do when the chips are down and how they act under pressure. In that sense it’s not a very flattering story. I think that if there is one thing this century has shown, it’s that the good side is a lot less in evidence than the dark side.”
By Lawrence French

When cinematographer Adam Greenberg came to work on SPHERE, he had no previous experience working underwater, but was well-versed in mammoth productions, having shot James Cameron's TERMINATOR 2, as well as such films as FIRST KNIGHT, NEAR DARK and Barry Levinson's TOYS. After doing extensive research and tests, (including looking at the "Making of ABYSS" video), Greenberg tried to simplify many of the problems that had beleaguered other underwater films.

"I met with people who had experience in the field," said Greenberg, "and tried to learn from their mistakes. I saw what Jim Cameron had done underwater, and they had a lot of difficulties on THE ABYSS. Cameron sometimes likes to make things difficult, but the most difficult way is not always the best way. We found there was no need to go 35 feet deep and decompress every time you come up, because if you're supposed to be 1000 feet underwater you can't see more than 20 or 25 feet anyway. I was able to shoot in underwater tanks that were only 16 feet deep, and the actors could work in them without any problem."

One of the first decisions Greenberg and director Levinson made was to shoot in the Super 35 format, which allowed for a 2.35 to 1 wide-screen aspect ratio, without the need to use cumbersome anamorphic lenses underwater. "I told Barry that the movie needed a wide screen look," said Greenberg. "So we shot in Super 35, not because it's better than anamorphic, but because it's better underwater. I would have preferred to shoot in Panavision, because you get much better results, but it would have been more difficult to shoot anamorphic underwater. It's almost impossible. Secondly, the habitat set was built as a practical location, and the distance between the actors and the camera was very short, maybe two or three feet. Anamorphic lenses don't have that short a focus." Levinson also preferred using the widescreen format, feeling it would heighten the sense of claustrophobia, as well as allow for more interesting compositions.

In discussing the style of the film, Greenberg wanted to avoid a typically polished Hollywood look, and go for a more gritty and unconventional appearance. "I was trying for a very realistic, harsh look to the movie," explained Greenberg. "I don't like dark photography, although this has a very high contrast style that's very strong. It gives you quite a dramatic feeling. At one point in the movie, there's a fire in the habitat, and Barry came up with the idea that everything after the fire would be shot using smoke, because there's no way for them to get rid of the smoke under the water. We decided, because of the fire, they would have only limited emergency lighting, so now there's very little light. The actors come out of darkness into illumination, there are shadows and shafts of light, and flickering red and yellow lights, which worked very effectively."

Greenberg's harsh lighting approach was not welcome by Sharon Stone, who felt it would detract from her natural assets. "When Sharon Stone first came to the movie, I don't think she knew what kind of picture she was going to be acting in," said Greenberg. "She wanted to play the beauty, and when I met her, she said, 'I don't want you to photograph me from below, I want you to only shoot me from one side, and don't give me any harsh light.' I was laughing at her instructions, but what can you do? I told her, 'In the movie, we are 1000 feet deep, the power is out, and that's what has to determine the look. It's not about your being glamorous.' When you need to look glamorous, don’t worry, you will.' In the beginning of the movie, when they're above the surface, she looks very beautiful, but actors are actors. She didn't see the rushes, but she had woman friends in makeup and hairdressing who would whisper things in her ear. Of course, they didn't have any idea of what the movie was about. My main job is to tell the story of the movie. I didn't want to make something sweet and beautiful, when it needed to have a harsh reality to it. Later on, when Sharon understood what we were going for, she was very pleased."

Greenberg was very happy with the results he obtained, and he credits second unit director David Ellis and his underwater camera crew as part of the main reason. "The first two weeks, I was with the second unit crew, supervising the lighting," said Greenberg. "They were the underwater experts and did a great job. I supervised the look of the second unit by seeing the dailies, talked with Gary Ellis and corrected any problems."
Faith Ford sets out to prove she's more than... FOR MORE.

COME BACK...FOR MORE.

Faith Ford as altar sacrifice to Damian Chapa in Trimm's ersatz Stephen King adaptation, debuting in theaters this spring.

By Craig Reid

A giant pentagram covers a cavernous cave deep within the icy confines of Antarctica. The center of this heathen-shape spews the death of fire soaked in mortal blood of mortals now beckoned by the leader of evil. Inside each of the five open casket-like arms of the pentagram lies a poor zombie waiting to lose his soul. Separating the fiery center pit from the star's arms is a network of blood carrying troughs which originate from a sacrificial altar where a young blonde maiden awaits the wavy bladed knife of the devil's helper to plummet through her heart. In a scene reminiscent of the Shaw Brother's Hammer film classic, LEGENDS OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN VAMPIRES, blood will ooze down into these troughs from the sacrificial bed to the other victims.

A being, eyes blackened like the evil he is, ominously stares down at his virginal sacrifice. Suddenly we hear an ear-piercing scream, you know, the gratuitous, classic horror, blood-curdling scream that B-movie scream queens have been using for years. But wait, do my eyes deceive me? They don't. That blonde screaming starlet is none other than... Faith Ford? That's right. Faith Ford, affectionately known as the air-headed Corky Sherwood, who constantly scrambles the brains of Murphy Brown, is now making her feature film debut, in of all things, the ersatz Stephen King vehicle SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK... FOR MORE. Go figure. Just as you think Hollywood is predictable, producer Diana Zahn and executive producers Philip Goldfine (president of Seagal-Nasso Productions) and Michael Meltzer, pull the rug out from under our feet with a curve ball.

The set is nestled opposite “Magic Mountain” in the foothills of Santa Clarita. Faith Ford sports scraggly blonde hair, bags under her eyes and looks like something the cat dragged in. Ford gleefully introduced herself saying, “You know, the greatest thing about this film is that I don’t have to look glamorous, and I totally love it.”

With the immense success of Scream and its imitators, it suddenly seems that horror flicks are enjoying a taste of the mainstream. Goldfine commented on the resurgence of horror, then tackled the obvious question, “Faith Ford in horror? What gives?”

Noted Goldfine, a former entomologist, “Horror has always been there but now that Scream has received notoriety it has propelled horror into the mainstream again.” Goldfine and Meltzer produced the first SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK, AGAIN for Dino DeLaurentiis in 1995 (27:9:19). The duo are currently finishing up a remake of CARNIVAL OF SOULS, presented by Wes Craven.

“The reason I bought Wes Craven aboard for CARNIVAL OF SOULS was actually before Scream came out,” said Goldfine. “I knew it would be successful, but not a monster hit. I worked with Wes when he was doing the NIGHTMARE [ON ELM STREET] films at New Line. Now everyone is interested in horror and I wonder how long that will last.”

Goldfine thinks the way to keep the resurgence alive is to make horror films that are fresh and original. Despite its remake trappings, Goldfine feels this King-inspired project qualifies. The original 1991 film, starring Tim Matheson (see 21:6:14) was based on King’s Nightshift story, as was the sequel, but the new film is a departure, set in Antarctica. Noted Goldfine, “Essentially it is a scary thriller as opposed to a gore fest like the last one.”

But what about Faith Ford? Goldfine grinned. “It is a dangerous choice. She is an accomplished actress known for one thing. But she is so much more than that.”

Draped in a '60s style tie-dye shirt, producer Diana Zahn added, “We also wanted her for the reason that she hasn’t done this genre before but first of all because she is a great actress and she really wanted to do something completely different from Corky. And Jennifer Wells is tough and strong, but is also motherly at the same time and is intelligent. Faith is intelligent and she wasn’t afraid to show up not beautiful every day on the set. She is excited about that and she loves the part.”

Goldfine continued, “Right. What is also neat is that her character has been secluded for a year and a half in Antarctica. What does she do? It’s interesting to see what a sitcom actress is going to do with that. She just gives this emotional gut wrenching performance. She has quite a bit of a history be-
COME RE

a sit-com star.

hind her and life experience behind her which she can bring to the table.”

And part of that experience includes Ford’s recent divorce, something that seems almost faddish in Hollywood. But it pained her to talk about it, so we didn’t. Named after one of her mother’s friends, the Pineville, Louisiana-born lass picked up acting in high school, travelled throughout the United States in speech tournaments and, before her 18th birthday, moved to NYC to work as a model. She started doing commercials which led to roles on the soaps ONE LIFE TO LIVE and ANOTHER WORLD. After appearing on THIRTY SOMETHING, she eventually met MURPHY BROWN’s creator Dianne English and won the role of Corky, earning five Emmy nominations.

Noted Goldfein, “Warner Brothers cast Michael Keaton to play Batman. Everyone said, “What the hell are you doing hiring a sit-com star to play the Dark Knight?” [Ford] wasn’t the safest choice, but was the most interesting choice.”

Time will tell when Trimark Pictures opens Ford’s horror film debut this spring.
Dutch Master of Suspense
George Sluizer

Reflections on making thrillers and the death of River Phoenix.

By Jan Doense

In 1988 Dutch filmmaker George Sluizer, whose latest film CRIMETIME was previewed in our pages last year (28:8:14), made SPOORLOOS, a taut little thriller that became an international arthouse hit. Four years later Sluizer himself directed the American remake entitled THE VANISHING, which starred Jeff Bridges and Kiefer Sutherland. Though not nearly as grim as the original, the remake still stands out as an above average Hollywood thriller.

In 1993 Sluizer was about to finish shooting the psychological thriller DARK BLOOD when one of the leading actors, River Phoenix, suddenly died. A lengthy legal battle over insurance monies followed, leading to at least one conclusion: DARK BLOOD will never be seen by movie audiences. In the following interview, concluded over a period of several years, Sluizer discusses his two versions of THE VANISHING as well as the tragic events surrounding the filming of DARK BLOOD.

Commenting on the rather unusual situation of a Dutch director doing a Hollywood remake of his own film, Sluizer (born in Paris, France, on June 25, 1932) noted he had received a lot of inquiries from U.S. filmmakers for the remake rights for SPOORLOOS (literally translated: "Without a Trace"—JD). He began soliciting the interest of major studios himself and discovered interest at both Fox and Columbia. Said Sluizer, "I chose Fox because Larry Bresner and Joe Roth, who ended up producing the remake, made the best offer—not only financially, but also regarding the way the project was going to be executed."

Sluizer did not insist on directing the remake himself, but Fox asked him to. "Perhaps they thought I could be another Paul Verhoeven," said Sluizer. "My English is good, so they knew there wouldn't be any communication problems."

 Asked whether he experienced any difficulties with Dutch author Tim Krabb (actor Jeroen Krabb's brother) regarding the sales of the remake rights because of the substantial differences between his book and the original film on the one hand and the remake on the other, Sluizer noted, "In a way the remake has nothing to do with the novel; it was based on
the original film. No one at Fox read the novel before they decided they wanted to do the remake. In a way, however, the remake sticks closer to the novel than the original film. In the novel the second girlfriend plays a much bigger role than SPOORLOOS. When it became apparent that Fox wanted a happy ending, I advised Todd Graff, who wrote the screenplay, to extend the role of the second girlfriend, played by Nancy Travis. She was the only character in the story who could come to the rescue in the end.”

One of the most noteworthy elements of the original film was its incredibly grim ending. In true Hollywood fashion it was toned-down considerably for the remake, resulting in harsh criticism from people who admired the original. “I suggested to add the new scene in which Nancy Travis tries to make Jeff Bridges drink the drugged coffee,” said Sluizer. “It was imperative that her actions would retain a certain logic. My deal with Fox simply dictated that the bad guy shouldn't get away with it, no matter what. There was no way to have it otherwise.”

Sluizer tried to convince Fox to stay with the original’s down-beat ending, showing them research that indicated that 80% of all murderers in the United States never get caught. I guess maybe American audiences don't like to be confronted with such facts,” said Sluizer. “They pay to be entertained, which means they don't want to go home feeling depressed. Even though they may have seen a lot of misery on the big screen.”

Asked whether screenwriter Todd Graff ever read the novel, Sluizer said, “He never read it because it hadn't been translated to English yet. I did give him my post-production script of SPOORLOOS, which was slightly different from the original screenplay.”

Discussing author Tim Krabb’s involvement in writing the original screenplay, Sluizer stated, “He wrote the first draft of the screenplay. We wrote the second and third draft together. Tim was rather insecure, because he had never written a screenplay before. When working on the third draft we had an argument, which depressed me so much that I didn’t feel like making the film at all. Then we broke up and I wrote the last two drafts myself. I would say that, in the final version, our input was fifty-fifty. But of course it was his novel to begin with. His involvement with the remake was nil, except for the fact that he received money [Sluizer laughed]. Fox didn’t allow him to get involved. Had I only sold the remake rights I wouldn't even have been involved myself.”

Sluizer pushed for some of his own changes in the remake. “For example: Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu, who played the villain in the original film, looked very ordinary. But in the remake I pushed Jeff Bridges to portray a more pathological character, someone who makes you think right away: this guy is not entirely normal. He walks in a strange way and has a funny look in his eyes. It also had to do with the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ that Fox wanted to be more visible. This different approach is also evident in the final duel. In SPOORLOOS it’s kind of an intellectual battle between two gentlemen, whereas in THE VANISHING it’s more of a breakdown: Kiefer [Sutherland] is tired of his obsession, he's exhausted. Even if he acts like a tough guy he really feels more like crying on Jeff Bridges’ shoulder. It’s a totally different

Jeff Bridges played the psychopath in Sluizer’s 1993 remake of SPOORLOOS, titled THE VANISHING. Bridges attempts to force Nancy Travis to take poison when she has come to her boyfriend's rescue.
SLUIZER ON REMAKING HIS FILM

"SPoorloos plays like a game of chess. THE VANISHING has more to do with emotion and guts. The metaphysical approach wouldn’t be right for an American film."

approach, stemming from the fact that SPOORLOOS plays like a game of chess whereas THE VANISHING has more to do with emotion and ‘guts.’ The metaphysical approach of SPOORLOOS wouldn’t be right for an American film.”

So which version of THE VANISHING does Sluizer prefer? “Let me put it this way: SPOORLOOS is ‘my movie,’ THE VANISHING is a movie I made—containing many nice things, some even better than in the original perhaps, but also a lot that’s not mine. As an author I prefer SPOORLOOS and fortunately many people enjoyed it too. I think The New York Times wrote that they considered SPOORLOOS to be a work of art with a capital A, but THE VANISHING to be considerably better than the average Hollywood thriller.”

One of the remarkable aspects of SPOORLOOS is the fact that the two main characters actually have a lot in common, and that Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu tends to become more “sympathetic” once you get to know him as opposed to “good guy” Gene Bervoets, who develops some unsympathetic characteristics. In THE VANISHING you never get to know the characters as well as in SPOORLOOS. "That had to do with the fact that the screenplay was too long," commented Sluizer. “So the character development went out and the action stayed in. On paper the characters were more developed. Indeed, in the remake the Rex character was never as ‘evil,’ as perverse, as in SPOORLOOS. I had a lengthy discussion about the scene in which Kiefer walks away in the tunnel. He didn’t want to be an unsympathetic hero. He felt that couldn’t happen in an American film. In the end the edge was taken off that scene because Kiefer doesn’t smile as he walks out of the tunnel, as Gene did in the original film. This makes the whole thing a little less perverse than in SPOORLOOS. Furthermore, the remake is much more of a good guy/bad guy confrontation. That’s part of American mainstream cinema.”

Looking at Sluizer’s filmography, which consists mostly of documentaries and—prior to SPOORLOOS—three so-called arthouse movies, one wouldn’t immediately expect him to direct an American mainstream film. "Indeed, I don’t think that was to be expected," said Sluizer, “but it just so happened—and I do like adventure. Also I think it is part of my profession to make a major Hollywood film, if only once. Whether I will continue in that direction is another thing. I turned down a couple of major films, including a $70 million project. Making big money is not my main goal when making films. It’s such a difficult and time consuming process. I would be willing to fool around for a week or so, but not for a year. One year of my life to me is worth more than $10 million. So I’d rather do things I can totally support. The bigger the budget is, the bigger the restrictions are." THE VANISHING was filmed on a budget of $20 million with an additional $15 million spent for prints and advertising.

Asked whether he has any special affection for “cinefantastique,” Sluizer commented, “Not especially. I like suspense, because I think that’s always a good ingredient for a film. I am not especially attracted to thrillers, horror or science fiction. I do like to watch them but I would probably have a hard time making them. Actually I don’t think in genres. I tend to think more in terms of ideas that crystallize inside my head and result in a film like SPOORLOOS, which contains certain elements that make it a ‘thriller.’ Frankly I wouldn’t like being pinned down on one genre. I am much too changeable.”

So the obvious question is what motivates Sluizer as a filmmaker. “Suspense,” he answered—and laughed. “No, seriously: it’s very complicated to capture this in a few phrases. I believe there is always something I’d like to pass on as a filmmaker, something I would like to let ‘vibrate’ in someone else. In that sense I do like the thriller genre, because I like to thrill the unknown inside the viewer. Tension, suspense; those are key words for me. They form a kind of
George Sluizer's thriller opened Hollywood doors.

By Alan Jones

Few European directors have made the splash George Sluizer did when SPOORLOOS (1988) went on the festival circuit and eventually became a huge international art-house success. It was something the Parisian-born Dutchman had dreamed about ever since he worked as assistant director on his first film, Mike Todd's AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS (1956), graduating to producer of Werner Herzog's controversial FITZCARRALDO (1982) and becoming writer/director of such well-received home-grown fare as RED DESERT PENITENTIARY (1988). On Dutch turf, THE VANISHING was a box-office sensation going on release with the oldest publicity trick in the book—no one was allowed into the cinema during the last 19 minutes. That was because Sluizer insisted his deadly psychological cat and mouse game needed to unfold at an even pace to position its vice-like grip on the appalled audience before exploding with the full mind-numbing lingering horror contained in the blood-freezing climax.

Produced by Sluizer and Anne Lardon, and written by Tim Krabbe from his novel The Golden Egg, SPOORLOOS told the story of Rex (Gene Bervoets) and his girlfriend Saskia (Johanna Ter Steege) who stop at a gas station while driving through France on vaca-tion. Saskia goes to buy drinks—and never returns. Over the next three distressing years, Rex becomes obsessed with finding out what exactly did happen to her. Is she alive or dead? Did she leave him on pur-pose or get abducted? Was she raped, tortured, or worse? Much worse as it turns out and only one person knows the truth:

Raymond Lemorne (Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu), a happily married family man fascinated by the human capacity for cru-ciety and the limits of his own criminal perversity. How this intellectual sadist keeps Rex dangling on the precipice of agonized revelation via enigmatic postcards, and then offers him the chance to undergo what Saskia went through to satisfy his burning curiosity, capped Sluizer’s mental minefield of Freudian truths concerning the awful logic behind the motivations of an insane mind.

With the kind of critical attention SPOORLOOS was getting, it was only a matter of time before Hollywood took note. Ever since Disney hit pay dirt with their remake of the popular French comedy THREE MEN AND A BABY, studios were hunting for similar foreign projects to make the translated transition. MY FA-THER THE HERO and NINE MONTHS are two recent examples. It was 20th Century-Fox who offered Sluizer the chance to direct a big budget American remake of SPOORLOOS, which became THE VANISHING and in 1992 he began filming a streamlined version, scripted by actor Todd Graff (Hippie in THE ABYSS), starring Jeff Bridges as the disturbed maniac Barney, with Kiefer Sutherland playing Jeff and Sandra Bullock as the doomed Diane. (Sluizer wasn’t the first director to remake his original: both Roger Vadim with AND GOD CREATED WOMEN in 1988 and Francis Veber with the comedy LES FUGITIFS/THREE FUGI-TIVES in 1989 beat him to it).

But rather than being a disquieting exercise in dread, the glossy remake was more a hypered-up Brian De Palma thriller supplying an explanatory ending the downbeat original didn’t think was necessary. Also the negligible role of Rex’s new lover was beefed up in the bon-sai remake. Nancy Travis as Rita was solely there to indulge in shrill formula revenge during the shock climax. Looking back on the badly received remake, Sluizer said, “Speaking as a craftsman, I think it was very well made. But it goes way off track in the final reel by accenting the horror rather than the psychological resonances. The epilogue is really silly and story-wise I regret the loss of atmosphere it signalled. The remake was for more unsophisticated audiences and the American press were right to kill it off. But you know something? In territo-ries where the original was never released, and there was never any comparison, it was a big hit and did better than FALLING DOWN and CAPE FEAR. I was upset for Jeff Bridges because I do think he gave a remarkable performance.”

Sluizer continued, “I had to visualize everything the original left unsaid because that’s the American way. When I talk about THE VANISHING now, I must vividly remember what was initially agreed upon and what happened during post-pro-duction. Fox President Joe Roth moved to Disney for a start and when Rupert Murdoch took over the studio he made it clear he didn’t want sex and violence in Fox movies. He was looking for investment in family movies like HOME ALONE and didn’t want to be seen promoting viol-ent entertainment. I agreed to certain provisions which were not met by my own compro-mises so I do feel THE VAN-ISHING remake was a victim of a great many unforeseen cir-cumstances. There’s good and bad points about working in Hollywood. If you have a subject that fits the American filmmaking approach, then fine, do it there. I thought THE VANISHING fit, but Fox didn’t want any of my personal input. That’s why most American movies are like episodes of DYNASTY—they’re faceless and who knows who directs each one?”

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SLUIZER ON THE STATE OF ART

"I'm not bothered by remakes (of European films). It's annoying the American film industry doesn't have the guts to stimulate in their own ranks what they acquire in Europe."

A clever plot element in SPOORLOOS is derived from both the killer and the hero listening to the daily radio reports on the 'Tour de France,' a famous annual cycle-race. Unfortunately this element disappeared in the American remake. "That idea was wholly Tim's," stated Sluizer. "I thought of using baseball instead of cycling for the remake but the whole element was considered too European, too intellectual. They wanted me to tell the story straight, with no false bottoms. Sports terms are often war terms. For example, commentators say, 'Will he bury him?,' which means: pass him by. For that report on the duel between Fignon and Hinault [two famous real-life French cyclists] as used in SPOORLOOS, I listened to 20 volumes of Tour de France reports, selected the quotes that were most convenient for the movie and had them read again by a narrator."

For the most part, Sluizer said he had no difficulty making the transition to Hollywood for THE VANISHING. "The writing stage went rather well up until the final draft. I disagreed with a few things, but the writer was more important than the director and if you don't agree with that: there's the door! During the shooting, I didn't experience any pressure whatsoever. Apart from the time pressure, but that's inherent to every movie. For three months I didn't see any executives. They did see the rushes and said, 'This looks fine, fantastic.' That was all. With the expection of one scene—a love scene—which gave them kind of a shock. I tend to stage love scenes like any other scene. So: no romantic lighting or politely moaning ladies if it's not functional. Not that there was much to see in this particular scene, but the way it was edited gave you something to fantasize about. Anyhow, the scene is out now. Which annoys me, for reasons of principle."

Other than that I didn't experience any problems. During the post-production stage, up to and including the delivery of the director's cut, then the producers and the studio showed up with their remarks, but they were not unreasonable. Finally, we had the sneak previews and I did have some problems with those. That whole system has really grown crooked. It's basically like 'Something has to be altered because the statistics say so'. That's nonsense. Following these sneak previews a few changes were made that are not favorable to the movie, nor to the audience. I think they even made the movie less commercial. But even if the head of the studio disagrees with the results of the previews, they are observed. The public determines the fate of the film and that's not always sound."

Following THE VANISHING Sluizer set out to direct DARK BLOOD, yet another English language picture (see sidebar, page 53). "DARK BLOOD was a project that came to me via the
Dark Blood

A star's death doomed the unhappy production.

By Alan Jones

If George Sluizer thought his experience remaking THE VANISHING was bad, the project he embarked on next proved to be an even bigger nightmare. DARK BLOOD was a psychological thriller Sluizer had been formulating in his mind well before THE VANISHING had even become a Dutch reality. It was a complex chiller about how people cope under extreme conditions—a rather prophetic throughline considering the final outcome—and concerned an unhappily married couple whose car breaks down in the middle of the New Mexico desert near a nuclear testing site. Stranded, and at their wits end, they look for help and find a young hippie widower living in a hidden cave where he has built a holy grotto and is waiting for the apocalypse by making little dolls he says contain special survival powers. Slowly, the wife and the disheveled nomad become mutually attracted to each other and eventually embark on a wild affair much to the apocalyptic rage of her frightened husband. Then it's revealed that the wife and her lover share a connection only the boy knows about...and the final coda of Sluizer's menacing ton marries manual switched into macabre gear.

Produced by Joanne (DUST DEVIL) Sellar, with an $8 million budget raised from America's New Line Cinema and Britain's Scala Productions, DARK BLOOD began shooting in the Fall of 1993 on location in New Mexico starring Judy (NAKED LUNCH) Davis, Jonathan (SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES) Pryce and, after Johnny Depp didn't get back to Sluizer in time, River Phoenix.

Reports that the production was a far from happy one began circulating almost immediately; Sluizer was clashing first with his producer and then with his leading lady. Allegedly Davis was rewriting Sluizer's sacred script and changing some vital decisions he made in pre-production. Then Davis called Sluizer, "An act of the Devil!" The director countered, "Judy called me every nasty name on the picture. But I was the normal one; she was the mean devil! Yes, she's a great actress but that's not the point I'm making. She made things very difficult because she's so fucked-up and problematic. That happens when people are on the edge. I heard she was difficult with David Lean on A PASSAGE TO INDIA, too. I'm reasonably dictatorial on set and she clearly didn't like it. She says she likes a director to have a vision but she doesn't really. It's fake intellectualism on her part. Depending on who you are, and how you work, stuff like that gets either bigger or smaller. It was like the marriage in the story. I kept thinking, who's fault is this, hers or mine?"

Unfortunately none of this mattered in the end because on October 31, 1993, 23-year-old River Phoenix died of a drug overdose outside The Viper Room Hollywood nightclub. As only the DARK BLOOD exteriors had been shot, it was considered impossible to continue without him and insurance covered the entire cost of the production. Replacing Phoenix with another actor and starting again was not considered an option. Nor was there any hope the project could be revived in the future. And the fact there is all this footage going to waste really rankles and upsets Sluizer.

"It's the worst thing that has ever happened to me in my career," he said. "I've worked on numerous difficult films, FITZCARRALDO for example, but I've always managed to finish them no matter how insurmountable the problems seemed to be. DARK BLOOD has defeated me. I wasn't sure if I ever wanted to make movies again after this as it left me so desolate. I couldn't touch a piece of film for six months."

He continued, "Losing River was so traumatic I can't begin to tell you. Had he been 75 years old, naturally I'd have been more philosophical about it. But he was so young... I guess I'd become a kind of mini-father-figure to him because his family situation was very complicated. We got on really well together and I can honestly say his work in DARK BLOOD was brilliant. People keep telling me Jonathan Pryce is fabulous in CARRINGTON. Well, he was just as good in DARK BLOOD I can assure you. I still get so very angry over it. The time it took to set up as a go project. The tremendous amount of energy we all invested in it. Gone forever. I felt like a pregnant woman who has a miscarriage. Having your baby die on you for the most tragic of reasons is just too hard to bear sometimes."

It was to put the whole tragedy and disappointment behind him once and for all that despondent Sluizer decided to ease himself back into the movie business by directing CRIMETIME. "I'm clinging to this project with a toughness I never knew I had in me," he said. "I'm fiercely protective over CRIMETIME, to a fault, I know, and that has everything to do with DARK BLOOD still haunting me. It will take a long time to get over it."

Judy Davis, Phoenix' co-star in DARK BLOOD, a macabre love affair with a Sluizer twist.
THE NIGHT RIVER PHOENIX DIED

"At three in the morning his agent called and told me he had died. I thought I was dreaming, having a nightmare. You couldn’t have had the slightest idea that this would happen."

Sluizer behind the camera on THE VANISHING. The director’s latest film, CRIMETIME, was released on video last year by Trimark.

In Utah, Sluizer stated: "We were shooting at a very remote location. There were a few small motels in the village and a few houses we had hired. River stayed in a kind of farm, some ten kilometers away from Jonathan Pryce who, on his turn, lived three kilometers away from me. The rest of the cast and crew stayed in motels at several kilometers distance. So we were relatively spread out, but since there was very little to do there we saw each other a lot. Jonathan became friends with River so they were often together. I had to work in the evenings from time to time so I couldn’t always be with them. From Jonathan I know that River was bored sometimes, also because his girlfriend couldn’t always be there. It wasn’t an easy production. There were problems with Judy Davis. She and River didn’t get along well. Also—it is well known by now—she and I didn’t get along very well. So we experienced some tension. And it wasn’t very easy to get away from that out there."

Asked what caused the friction between the two of them, Sluizer commented, "It was psychological warfare. I did some production work on Werner Herzog’s FITZCARRALDO, with Klaus Kinski. Kinski was known for his difficult behavior, but that was really kindergarten stuff compared to my experiences with Judy Davis. It had an effect on River, too. For example, he asked me to have his love scenes with her postponed. So, in the end they haven’t been shot. Jonathan had less trouble with it, he opposed her. But River would rather run away. But now and then she made difficulties when they had to play, for instance she took a certain position so that he couldn’t hear her... In fact these problems began with her wanting to change the script, even other actors’ lines. When someone had to call her ‘bitch’ she said ‘but I’m not a bitch, can’t he express himself differently?’"

After shooting in Utah, the DARK BLOOD crew moved to New Mexico for a couple of days shooting. As Sluizer recalled, "River was finished before we, we still had to do a night shoot. And then he said something I didn’t quite understand at the time. He said: ‘I’m going back to the bad, bad city.’ In retrospect, ‘bad’ meant the friends, the nightclubs, the music, whatever. Something he probably knew not to be very healthy, but which he needed: to go out, to party. This had been impossible for him for eight weeks. When the rest of us returned to Los Angeles, we had two days off before starting on a studio shoot for which some construction work still had to be finished.

"The last time I had spoken to River he had lost his voice a bit because of all his shouting, so I was a little worried that he wouldn’t have it back in time. I called him to ask how his voice was, and actually it was rather well. This was on the day before we were to recommence shooting, a Saturday. Then we started shooting at the studio and he was, let’s say... he was behaving in a way I felt he hadn’t before. Somehow he couldn’t judge distances very well. But anyway, the shooting went well.

"He went home. We were staying in the same hotel and when I arrived at about ten that night he was just leaving. The next day, Sunday, he had an appointment with Terry Gilliam to talk about BRAZIL, which was his favorite movie. He was extremely enthusiastic about this meeting, which had been arranged for him by Jonathan Pryce. And later that Sunday he had an appointment set with me, to go through some things for the shooting on Monday. I saw him leaving with his girlfriend, his brother and a couple of other people, so I wished him a good time and said, ‘See you tomorrow.’ That was at ten p.m. At three in the morning his agent called and told me he had died. At first I thought I was dreaming, having a nightmare. Until of course I realized I had really answered the phone. Unbelievable.... It was something I had absolutely never reckoned with."

"With certain people you more or less take into account that something might happen. For example on THE VANISHING, with Kiefer [Sutherland], who is—let’s say—a stiff drinker. So I wouldn’t have
been surprised if he had arrived on the set drunk in the morning. He was able to down two bottles of whiskey in the evening and it was a miracle to me that you could hardly notice anything of it the next morning at seven. But as for River, you couldn't have had the slightest idea that this would happen. And I think I speak for everyone who knew him then. As far as I'm concerned, what happened was an accident. I think he didn't realize what he was doing.

"A strange thing happened during his final shots: he had a long monologue which was rather difficult, so we had to do many takes. Normally I do three or four takes, but now we did maybe nine. After that last take I said 'cut' and the director of photography, Ed Lachman, turned off the camera. This was on Saturday. Next Monday, after his death, we nevertheless viewed the rushes. It appeared that the camera had kept on running. We saw River who, when I said 'cut,' took a short breath and then walked away from the camera, between all the candles that were burning in that scene, and disappeared into the dark, into nothing... I'm rather down to earth, but this was a coincidental image that really struck me."

Sluizer agreed with the decision not to finish the film without Phoenix. "This movie relies too much on emotional facial expression," said Sluizer of the option to use CGI as in THE CROW. "What's more, it would have cost something like an extra $6 million and even then the guarantee of success couldn't be given. Another option was to partially reshoot the film with another actor in River's role, but I think the audience would never have agreed with that. You can't, so to speak, replace James Dean with another actor one day after his death. You need some time first and then you have to question whether it still makes sense."

Asked whether he might ever consider reshooting DARK BLOOD altogether, with an entirely new cast, Sluizer responded: "The insurance company owns all the rights. I already made a bid for them. They are asking more than I can pay, but this is a matter of negotiations. I'm not sure though if I could ever do something with that project again myself."

Sluizer is all the more depressed by what happened since the footage that had already been shot suggested that DARK BLOOD could have been a very good film. "Jonathan Pryce was absolutely brilliant, worthy of an Oscar," said Sluizer. "And if you ask me, River played by far his best role ever, with more nuances, more layers than all of his preceding roles. I saw all of his films and this was definitely his strongest performance ever. It was a bizarre role, on the verge of madness and thus fascinating. Judy Davis was very good as well, a strong performance. And I'm saying this regardless of the personal problems we had."

As asked what he set out to do after the tragic events surrounding DARK BLOOD, Sluizer said, "Honestly, I didn't feel like doing anything for quite some time. Not only did I lose a son in a way, but also a film I had been working on for years. It takes some time before you realize that and then the sadness turns into anger. Something like 'Asshole, how could you do this to me?!' And not only to me but also to the others, of course. I lost my desire for filmmaking and it took awhile before the appetite came back. But a kind of fear still remains."

In the meantime, Sluizer did CRIME TIME, which was picked up by Trimark Stateswide, but has gone unreleased. He is currently working on BLACK AND WHITE, based on a book by Bruce Malmuth.
Buffy, Vampire Slayer

Bringing classic horror to a whole new audience.

By Mitch Persons

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER, Mutant Enemy Inc.'s TV series about the youngest, strongest, and prettiest vampire mauler ever (played by young, strong, and pretty Sarah Michelle Gellar,) has safely moved into its second season on the WB network. The series, which bears a loose resemblance to the film of the same name, is the creation of Joss Whedon, the original scriptwriter of the movie, and, in partnership with Kazui/Sandollar Productions, its executive producer. Whedon admitted to being a little bowled over by the show’s success.

There’s a part of me,” Whedon said, “that needs to be entirely convinced that everything I do is going to be a humongous hit, and everything’s going to work out really well. That’s sort of a little insane Pollyanna that you have to have in order to make it through this business. So, on one level it’s like, ‘this is the way I wanted it to be, and it’s happening.’ But I was truly surprised. I was amazed by the initial reviews. I was amazed that people were kind enough to try to get what we were doing, because it would have been so easy to not even watch a show that had a title as sophomoric as BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER.

“That title, by the way, is one of the things I fought for. The only disagreement I’ve ever really had with the network was I would not let go of the title. A lot of people said ‘But it’s stupid, and it’s the title of a comedy movie, and people won’t take it seriously,’ and I’m sure there are some people who still don’t. But for the most part, people do see that we really have a quality show, and I’m happy it’s back.”

Another person who is pleased by BUFFY’s return is Nicholas

Buff cast: (l to r) David Boreanaz as Angel, Sarah Michelle Gellar as Buffy Summers, Alyson Hannigan as Willow Rosenberg, Nicholas Brendon (seated) as Xander Harris, Anthony Stewart Head as Rupert Giles and Charisma Carpenter as Cordelia Chase.
Brendon, who plays Xander Harris, Buffy’s frustrated would-be boyfriend. “This season,” Brandon said, “I get a chance to be a hero in at least three episodes. In the first season Xander is kind of wimpish. He’s an ‘I’ll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today’-type guy. Actually, I was all right with that—Xander was my first real acting role. This year, my character is stepping up a bit; I think he understands more of what’s around him, what has to be done—and he does it.

“I’m really tickled I have a chance to expand on Xander’s character. When “Prophecy Girl,” our last episode of the first season aired, I didn’t know if we were coming back or not. Neither did anybody else. It was suggested to Joss that we give viewers a cliffhanger, but instead he gave them a
BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER
EPILOGUE

By Mitch Persons

"It's my first day. I was afraid that I was going to be behind in all my classes, that I wouldn't make any friends, that I would have last month's hair. I didn't think that there would be vampires on campus."

—Buffy

WELCOME TO THE HELLMOUTH ★★★


Sunnydale High, somewhere in Southern California, the first day of school. Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar), is a child of divorced parents, a transfer from another school. It seems she was expelled for burning down the gymnasium! Buffy soon encounters Willow Rosenberg ( Alyson Hannigan,) a highly intelligent, though painfully shy computer whiz, Xander Harris (Nicholas Brendon), an amiable, if somewhat dense, friend of Willow's, and Cordelia Chase (Charisma Carpenter), the school bitch, and Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head), the school librarian, who shows the startled girl a huge tome entitled "Vampyr.

Buffy learns from Giles that the town of Sunnydale is actually situated on top of a place called "The Hellmouth," which is a veritable breeding-ground for vampires and all sorts of evil. Giles also knows what Buffy really is: "The Slayer," the one person born into each generation whose sole duty is to slay vampires. Giles is "The Watcher," the one who is to guide her on her life's mission.

Charisma Carpenter as Cordelia
in the grip of X-Files' Brian Thompson as Luke, in "The Harvest."

Part II of the pilot is faster-paced, with more dark humor than Part I. Especially hilarious, as well as being deliciously gruesome, is The Harvest party at the Bronze. Brian Thompson, who made such a deep impression as the shape-shifting hit man in THE X-FILES, is obviously having the time of his life playing Luke. It is a pity that his character was vaporized by Buffy so early in the series.

You're the slayer and we're The Slayer-ettes."

—Willow

WITCH ★★★

Written by Dana Russin. Directed by Stephen Cragg.

Giles is slightly dismayed at his protege, Buffy. She wants to try out for cheerleading, and he would rather she stick to her vampire-slaying. Giles, Buffy, Xander and Willow, who now look upon themselves as a Slayer team, plan to stop Amy from using witchcraft to eliminate all her cheerleading competition. Giles, with Buffy, forces his way into Amy's house, and confronts Amy's mother, Catherine (Robin Riker). It turns out that there is a witch involved, but it is not Amy. It is Catherine, who has switched bodies with her daughter, whose room is tastefully decorated with bat's wings and effigies of all the fallen cheerleaders. When Catherine tries to deliver a spell, Buffy pulls a mirror between them. Catherine inadvertently hexes herself, and vanishes in a blaze of pink light.

There is a very definite resemblance here to the "Texas Cheerleader" scandal of a few years ago. This episode has its usual high comedic moments, but it is noteworthy for its overall dark tone: the obsessive need to succeed, the unbelievable evildoings of Catherine, the suspenseful climax. There are also some genuinely frightening segments. The image of the clean-cut Amy/Catherine swinging a huge axe is a real stomach-turner.

This is a very well-written and well-plotted episode. It is also an example of some very interesting "firsts." It is the first time Xander admits his fondness for Buffy (he tries to ask her out on a date,

Smokin' cheerleaders: a "Witch" makes it hot for the competition during Sunnydale High's cheerleader tryouts.

but blows it.) It is the first time that Xander and Willow look upon themselves as part of Buffy's "team." It is also the first time that Giles breaks out of his shell as a complacent watcher and actually becomes a hero.

"Oh, this is fun. We're on monster island!"

—Xander

TEACHER'S PET ★★★


Kindly science teacher Dr. Gregory is attacked and killed while alone in his classroom. He is dragged away by some kind of "thing" with insect-like arms.

Natalie French, the new substitute science teacher, is a vision of loveliness. Xander takes one look at her and immediately falls in love.

The headless corpse of Dr. Gregory is discovered in the cafeteria refrigerator.

Natalie makes arrangements with Xander to meet in her apartment that evening for "cocktails." When Xander shows up at Natalie's apartment, she hands him a spiked martini, and revets to her true form—a praying mantis, which must mate with a virgin and then destroys itself by devouring its head. Giles and Buffy break in on Natalie just as she is about to descend on Xander. Using a machete, cans of Raid, and a bat sonar designed to make Natalie's nervous system "go to hell," Buffy and Giles kill Natalie.

The slayer gets her training from Giles, the Sunnydale High librarian, in "Welcome to the Hellmouth."

The Master (Mark Metcalfe) a hideous demon, and his multi-muscled benchmark, Luke (Brian Thompson,) live deep beneath the town of Sunnydale. The Master has been trapped in the underworld for sixty years. If he is ever to break free, he must gain strength through his vampire minions, or "vessels," to be gathered in a "harvest" from above.

The pilot's exposition is done with a light touch, with many quips from Buffy. There are no real scares. The characters of The Master and Luke, not unlike Marty Feldman's character of Ygor in YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN, are far too ingratiable to be really frightening. The vampire makeup is more bizarre than it is horrifying.

"Ladies and gentlemen, there is no cause for alarm. Actually, there is cause for alarm; it just won't do any good."

—Luke

THE HARVEST ★★★

Written by Jose Whedon. Directed by John Kretchmer.

Buffy realizes that as The Slayer, she must hunt down The Master and destroy him.

Xander takes a gander at Natalie French (Musetta Vander), Sunnydale's new science teacher in "Teacher's Pet."

This story appears to be working on two levels. The first makes a comment on what just about every high school student has gone through: a crush on a teacher. The second level deals with Buffy's encounter with Claws, a vampire with a hook who knows Natalie's whereabouts. This appears to be scripter David Greenwall's version of the Urban Legend that deals with an escaped lunatic who had a hook in place of a hand.

"She is the strangest girl!"

—Giles

"She is the strangest girl!"

—Owen, Buffy's date

NEVER KILL A BOY ON THE FIRST DATE ★★


After her nightly kill, Buffy discovers a ring that was left by the vampire. It has the design of what appears to be a sunburst on it. Giles goes through his many books and finds that the design represents something called the Order of Aurelius, an organization of the Undead dedicated to finding the Anointed, a fierce demon whose calling is to wipe out humanity.

There is some degree of pathos apparent in this segment. Buffy is aware of her life's duty, but she is
also a very normal teenage girl, and wants desperately to have some kind of a social life. Giles, who can be unbearably priggish at times, also shows his softer side when Buffy bemoans losing her relationship with Owen, a hunk. When Buffy dances with Owen at the Bronze, Sarah Michelle Gellar must have been standing on a box. Even so, the top of her head barely comes up to the middle of Owen’s chest.

As with “Teacher’s Pet,” there are echoes of a famous folk tale—that tale being “Hansel and Gretel.” As everybody knows, in “Hansel and Gretel,” the two children save themselves by pushing the witch into an oven. Here, Buffy does the same thing with Military Guy, suspected to be the “anointed one."

All “Buffy” episodes have neat, crisp dialogue, and “Never Kill a Boy on the First Date” is no exception. However, the constant use of the word “date” throughout the show does get a little wearing after a while.

The Military Guy (Geoff Meed), a religious fanatic turned-vampire rises from a slab in the morgue in “Never Kill a Boy on the First Date.”

“Why couldn’t Xander be possessed by a puppy, or some ducks?” —Willow

THE PACK ★★★★1/2
Written by Matt Kienne and Joe Reinkemeyer; Directed by Bruce Seth Green.

At a school field trip to the local zoo, Buffy, and a sensitive art student, Lance, are ridiculed by fellow students Kyle, Rhoda, Tor and Heidi. In the Hyena House, Rhoda, Kyle, Tor and Heidi try to throw Lance in with the hyena’s, but Xander rescues him. The hyena’s come out of hibernation, and immobilize the group by staring at them with glowing eyes of demons. The Pack breaks into a storage room where the school mascot, Herbert the pig, is being kept. Within seconds, the poor pig is eaten. Principal Flutie knows who is responsible for the demise of Herbert. He locates Kyle, Rhoda, Tor and Heidi and takes them to his office for a reprimand. The group surrounds the prissy principal and devours him.

Buffy goes to reliable Giles because she suspects that something has happened to Xander, and that it all began after he paid that visit to the Hyena House. Giles mentions that there are certain people known as “Primals,” who worship animals, and have the ability to draw the spirits of the animals into themselves, and the zookeeper turns out to be the culprit who bewitched the students.

Anthony Stewart Head noted he used an acting trick to make Giles appear dizzy. “Right at the end, when I was supposed to get knocked out, and was staggering through a door, and said, ‘Did I miss anything?’ it was one of those moments you think, this could be really nasty, this could be awful, because ‘Did I miss anything?’ is not the best line of all to deliver. This was the punch-line, the payoff, and it just suddenly occurred to me, something I had heard from my acting teacher, Milton Katselas, to try spinning around if you need to be dizzy. So I did. I spun around about six or seven times, and then

Rivals Xander (Nicholas Brendon) and Angel (David Boreanaz), a vampire with a heart, in first season finale "Prophecy Girl."

closure with just a little bit of a hangnail.”

That hangnail was made to order for Anthony Stewart Head, who essays Buffy’s mentor, the erudite Rupert Giles. “I was quite relieved,” Head said in his refined British accent, “that BUFFY didn’t wind up with one of those cliffhangers. I have some disquieting memories about endings like that. Before BUFFY, I had done a syndicated sci-fi series called VR5, with Laurie Singer. Well, in the last episode, Laurie’s character went out into the 709 or something, and was, to all intents and purposes, lost. Then the series was cancelled, and we never did find out what happened to her. She’s probably still out there somewhere.

“That was an odd, odd feeling. I like a sense of completion in whatever I do, and VR5’s ending so abruptly left all of us completely hanging. If you watch ‘Prophecy Girl’ very carefully, you’ll see that there are some threads that could be picked up for the next season.”

Joss Whedon concurred. “There were some openings. Although if the series had ended right then and there, the episode was strong enough to stand on its own. The same kind of situation existed, by the way, with the feature film. We left room for a possible sequel, but because the grosses were not terrific, it was never made.”

Then the video started to sell fairly well. Fran Rubel Kuzui, who directed the feature BUFFY, and Gail Berman at Sandollar Productions had exclusive rights to the film. They had some interest in developing BUFFY as a TV series. They approached me because they more or less had to—I was under contract to them. I guess they thought I would just pass this thing by, but I was so intrigued by it, the whole thing just started snowball.

“There were some changes that I insisted on, though. If you notice, the movie is broader than the TV show. The series takes itself a little more seriously in terms of its horror and whatnot, and generally, because it’s sustained over hopefully, years, the characters have to be drawn a little more subtly than they do for a strictly comedic film. Another thing about the movie is that it’s about Buffy learning to be Buffy. It’s about a girl who has never asked to be anything but pretty for her entire life and then is suddenly asked to be a real grownup. She’s kind of, not stupid, exactly, but ignorant at the beginning of the film, and sort of flaky. Then she learns all these values. In the series, Buffy’s already done that; she’s already a hero. She’s still a 16-year-old girl, and has normal, teenage priorities, but she’s not the blissfully ignorant girl of the movie.”

An additional embellishment on the feature film is the stepped-up counterpart in-
opened the door on ‘Action.’ The whole room was spinning, and it came across well on camera, because it really looked like I’ve just been whacked on the head.”

Noted Nicholas Brendon, whose Xander falls under the spell of “The Pack,” “I pretty much had an idea going on of what I wanted to do, but it wasn’t clearly formed. I talked to Joss Whedon about what he wanted out of the part. He told me, you get annoyed very easily, you get headaches, and your posture changes a bit. If you’re a hyena, you slouch a bit more. The hyena is an evil character, but if you play an evil character, you don’t want to go over the top. You can be more evil if you’re subtle. When you have a conversation, you whisper, you make eye contact, and then you drive your point home like a stake through the heart.”

There was more to Brendan’s performance in “The Pack” than just slouching and whispering. He gives a dimension to Xander, that of total and uncompromising evil, that matches some of the best performances of Jack Nicholson.

There are other outstanding moments. A nearly fatal dodgeball game is done with practically no sound effects—no shouting, no laughing, only the noise of the ball as it ricochets off the walls and students’ bodies. It brings to mind the silent, deadly stalking of the hyena’s. The sight of the five triumphant, possessed students standing and gloowering at a very perplexed and frightened Buffy is an image that remains long after the “game” is supposed to be over.

“Opposites attract, Buffy with ‘Angel,’ David Boreanaz as a vampire on the wagon, introducing a new regular.

the presence of Darla, who was Angel’s first flame four hundred years before.

But though Angel may be a vampire, he still has a soul, and, quite possibly, a heart. He parts with Buffy at the show’s end with a burning kiss.

Buffy and Angel make quite a handsome and unsympathetic couple. The thrills are once more provided by Darla, who manages to be totally and completely evil.

“I can just tell something’s wrong with Willow. My spider sense is tingling.” —Buffy

I ROBOT, YOU JANE

Written by Ashley Gable and Tom Swyden.

Directed by Stephen Pous.

It seems that in 15th-century Italy, the demon Moloch is wreaking havoc with the local citizenry. He drew people to his evil by promising them love, power, and knowledge. A few sorcerers got together, intoned a spell, and imprisoned the demon in a book. Five hundred years later, Willow is scanning some newly-received books into the school’s computer, one of which is Moloch’s prison.

Giles, Buffy and Xander figure out that Moloch is “Malcolm” trapped in the computer, and needs someone to free him. Giles and the new computer teacher, Ms. Calendar, cast a spell to eliminate the demon. Buffy and Xander find Willow facing a metal-clad monster who claims that he is Moloch in solid form. Taking a wide swing at Buffy, he misses her and plucks his metal arm into an electrical switch box. In a blaze of sparks and lightening, he sizzles out and dies.

“I, Robot, You Jane” is another well-constructed episode. It brings not only the usual supernatural mystery, but also a discourse on the old versus the new: books versus computers. Giles’s arguments for reading make a great deal of sense, but so does Ms. Calendar’s insistence on keeping up with technology. Toward the end, even Giles has to admit that computers have a place in this world. After all, it was computer knowledge that saved Willow’s life.

A metallicized Moloch, a 15th-century Italian demon, takes a swing at Buffy in “I, Robot, You Jane.”

“Sarah Michelle Gellar makes you feel everything she’s going through. She is also great at pouting.”

—Joss Whedon, creator—

Buffy’s staking vampires, and then resuming the life of a “normal” high school student. “That’s how I pitched the show,” said Whedon, “with that counterpoint in mind. There’s humor in it. And there’s also, believe it or not, a lot of reality. Adolescence is that point where things are juxtaposed very oddly. In the episode ‘Never Kill a Boy on Your First Date,’ Buffy’s date is as important to her as the end of the world. I think to have somebody who’s actually dealing with the end of the world and at the same time having to deal with a typical teenage scenario is a lot like what it is to be in high school—everything is thrown together in one big mixing bowl, and it’s hard to figure out which situation to deal with first.

“A lot of those nuances in Buffy come not from the script, but from Sarah Michelle Gellar’s performance. It’s astounding to believe that this 20-year-old girl has been acting for the past 15 years! She’s like the best actress ever. She brings an enormous amount of thoughtfulness to her role. She always works very hard, and it always pays off. She is a great identification figure. Even though she’s a vampire slayer, she still makes you feel everything she goes through, and that’s not easy to do. She is also,” Whedon said with a chuckle, “great at pouting.”

Whedon’s admiration extends to the other cast members as well. “Take Alyson Hannigan, who does the part of Buffy’s friend, Willow Rosenberg. She’s tremendous in the role of this shy girl. She treats Willow’s life-long love for Xander as a smoldering passion that she knows will never reach fruition. Another actress might make it a little more obvious, but Alyson’s underplaying is just perfect.

“Alyson shares a kind of eccentricity with Willow, and her distinctive voice has affected the way I write her character. I wanted Willow to have that kind of insanely colorful interior life that truly shy people often have. And Alyson has that. She definitely has a looseness that I found creeping into the way Willow talked, which was great. To an extent, all of the actors conform to the way I write the character, but it really stands out in Willow’s case.”

Hannigan tended to agree with Whedon’s analysis. “At first,” the bubbly actress confessed, “I thought, ‘Oh no, I’m dif-
PRIME MOVER
JOSHD HIREDON

The show's hands-on executive producer sweats all the details.

By Mitch Persons

"I can hit pretty high on the perfectionist meter," said BUFFY executive producer Joss Whedon. "For instance, more than other producer/writers I’ve heard about, I’m very strict about my actors being word-perfect with everything that I write. I write in a very specific way, and for somebody to sort of extemporize loosely based on what I’ve written doesn’t get it done for me. The actors know this, so they treat the text with enormous respect.

"I also insist on being on the set most of the time, so I basically have my hand in every pie on the show. You just have to do that in order to make a show work. No matter how many really, really talented people you have working for you, if you don’t have a unified vision, ultimately, it’s not going to gel."

Whedon's perfectionism notwithstanding, most of those involved in BUFFY have nothing but glowing things to say about their boss. Noted Alyson Hannigan, who plays Buffy's helpmate, Willow. "He's a genius! I've never respected anyone more than I respect Joss. He's just brilliant. I would love to just get inside his brain for an hour and look around. He has ideas after ideas after ideas. And they're great. And he's so nice! He's wonderful. He could have such an attitude, and that would be okay, but he's really smart, and could be such a jerk, and he's not."

Director Bruce Seth Green, who has helmed more episodes of the series than anyone else, continued the testimonials: "There is no doubt who the creative force of the show is—it's Joss from start to finish. The entire tone of everything is set by him. Once I have a script, I get a very, very clear feeling from him what he expects the direction of the show to be. Sometimes he's very specific, and other times he'll say, 'Do what you feel is appropriate,' but make no mistake, he's in charge, and he knows what he's doing."

 summmed up Anthony Stewart Head, who plays Giles, always the sage: "I can't remember how old Joss is, but he's either very early thirties or late twenties. He wrote the original film, BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER when he was something like twenty-one, twenty-two. He's extremely talented, extremely prolific, and he's finally getting the recognition he rightfully deserves."

"And he has such a fine, fine feeling for character. He goes with you. If he feels you give him something, then he'll run with it. My character of Giles has developed in character as time has gone on, and I feed back as much as I possibly can. At times, though, there are some lines that don't quite ring true as an Englishman, and I'll say to Joss, 'I don't think I can say it this way,' and he'll go 'Sorry, Tony, it has to be.' He is also very specific about the moments when you can use humor and the moments when you can't. There are times when there is something that is screamingly obvious that is just shouting out for you to do, and Joss will say, 'Can't do it, not there.' He'll just pull the rug out from underneath the whole thing, and you'll go, 'Oh, all right, okay.'"

"Yes, that can be frustrating, but Joss is the man at the helm, and I certainly want to keep him there.”
Willow's heart-wrenching denunciation of the demon Moloch shows just how good an actress Alyson Hannigan is. It's difficult enough to verbally confront a living, breathing, human and make it believable, but a seven-foot-tall walking pile of pinball machine parts? Impressive, indeed.

“Dummies creep me out.” —Buffy

PUPPET

Written by Rob DeHearth and Dean Batali; Directed by Effen Pressman.

Giles is put in charge of the yearly talent show at school. Principal Snyder (Armin Shimerman) a creep if there ever was one, orders Xander, Willow and Buffy to be part of the show. Snyder wants to punish the trio for cutting out of school early the day before (he wasn't aware that they had an appointment to slay a demon.) One of the acts to audition is Morgan, the school brain, and his dummy, Sid. It is a pretty terrible act until Morgan makes it appear as if Sid is cracking jokes on his own.

While some of the auditions are going on, a girl is savagely attacked in the locker room. When her body is found, it is discovered that her heart has been cut out. Buffy learns that the last person the murdered girl was seen talking to was Morgan, who was holding his head and moaning pitifully. Morgan was also observed having a private conversation with his dummy, Sid. At the next rehearsal, Giles reveals that in his research, he has discovered that there is a brotherhood of seven demons, who every seven years needs a human heart and brain to maintain their humanity. Without these vital organs, the demons would revert back to their original form. Could Morgan be one of them? Willow comes up with a more stunning revelation: she has read that on rare occasions, inanimate objects of human qualities, such as dolls and mannequins, who already possess some kind of mystic consciousness, act upon their desire to be human by harvesting organs. Suspicions grow when Morgan's body is found, his brain removed.

Buffy easily subdues Sid who reveals that he is not a demon, but a demon hunter. Years ago he was turned into a dummy by one of the seven demons. Sid has managed to kill six of them. It is only by killing the seventh and last demon that Sid can know the freedom of death. He traced the caller to the Sunnydale talent show, but thought that Buffy was the one he was after. A good whodunit, with some nice twists. There is a very short time where it appears as if the slimy Mr. Snyder is the murderer. (During one shot, his face is in shadows. This would make anybody else look sinister, but his loving-cup ears are backlight in such a way that he becomes a comic, and not a malevolent, figure.) Sarah Michelle Gellar is at her scariest and cutest. What is truly amazing, though, is the way Sid's face seems to change from mood to mood, without so much as a twitch of one of his patent-leather eyebrows.

Buffy and Sid, the dummy, in "Puppet," putting a good-guy twist on a tried-and-true horror tale.

ferten.’ And then as time went on, I was like, ‘You know what? We’re kind of similar.’ Willow has computer smarts beyond belief, and that aspect to her is more than me, but I think we’re similar in a lot of ways. Like we’re both in our own little world, and sometimes people just don’t really understand that. I don’t think Willow is as weird as I am. Sometimes I can go off on tangents, where Willow never really does, but it’s at the point now where the crew and the cast have gotten used to my particular kind of quirkiness, so it’s okay.

“Speaking of quirkiness,” she continued, “I want to talk about something that happened with Tony [Head] one day. I really love him, he’s just the sweetest man. He’s smart, and so wonderful, and has a heart of gold. But he puts mothballs in his clothing!”

“During the first couple of episodes, I was getting these headaches. I couldn’t figure out why. But these headaches were getting really, really painful. And so this one time, we were sitting in the library doing a scene, and I was sitting on a chair, and Tony’s coat was on the chair. I said, ‘What is that horrible smell?’ And Tony’s like, ‘Oh, there are mothballs in my pocket,’ and he goes into this explanation about how he is a Method actor, and that this smell brings the character to him. He had 12 mothballs in his pockets, and I go, ‘What, are you crazy?’ So he goes, ‘Yes, I guess it is a bit much.’ So he narrowed it down to two mothballs, and my headaches went away.”

Tony Head does go to great lengths to establish a character, “But,” he said, “I wouldn’t say that I was Method. Now, my style of acting has definitely changed since I came over to L.A. from England. In the U.K. the way of coaching, for the most part, is a bit more stylized, more technical. After a long while of that kind of training, I worked with a teacher here in California named Milton Katzeles, who gave a very interesting insight into acting and life. If I’m staggering into a room after I’ve just been wrestling on the floor with a vampire who’s nearly taken my life, I would rather go out and roll on the studio floor and actually look like I’ve been in a tussle than have someone come and spray me with dirt. If you’re playing someone who’s slashed his wrists, you’re not going to actually go out and slash your wrists, but there are things that I feel that you can do to help yourself — remembering any suicidal thoughts, if you’ve had any, or recalling a time when you thought you were severely injured, that sort of thing.”

The well-trained Head does a superb job as the intelligent (and sometimes pompous) Giles. Charisma Carpenter, who is equally superb as Buffy’s rival, Cordelia Chase, is pretty much a newcomer to the acting trade. “My first series role was in BAYWATCH,” Carpenter said, “Then I did MALIBU SHORES and then BUFFY.

“When I first started playing Cordelia, I thought she was really sharp, because she always had these snappy one-liners. She once mentioned that she didn’t like certain things not because they were expensive, but because they cost too much. I thought that was a pretty witty remark. Then I realized that was typical of some of the airheaded things Cordelia comes up with sometimes. But I don’t think she’s dumb. She’s manipulative, and you have to have certain smarts to make people do what you want them to. I mean, Cordelia’s popular, but she’s popular on purpose. And she’s misunderstood. She obviously has a bad relationship with her mom. She is always reaffirming her importance, either with her looks, her wardrobe, or her words. Some of Cordelia’s bravado
Scream Queen
Sarah Michelle Gellar

The young soap opera veteran on finding a home in horror, from a hit series to teen movie shockers.

By Debra Warlick & Dale Kutzera

When the producers of BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER set out to cast the lead role, they needed someone who could handle drama, comedy, and the occasional vampire ass-whupping. They needed an actress who looked great in a cheerleader outfit, yet understood that Buffy had to be stronger and more realistic than the humorously vacuous eye-candy Kristy Swanson portrayed in the 1992 feature film. Sarah Michelle Gellar fit the bill.

Gellar appreciated the fact that the series takes a more serious tone than the 1992 movie starring Kristy Swanson.

“There was no second place,” said executive producer Joss Whedon. “We read tons of people and several were staggeringly untalented. Buffy is a tough part. It is a character actress in the part of a leading lady. This girl has to look the part of the blond bimbo who dies in reel two and yet she’s not that. Buffy is a very loopy, very funny, very strange person—kind of eccentric. Sarah has all those qualities and you don’t find them in a beautiful young girl very often. She gave us a reading that was letter perfect and then said, ‘By the way, it doesn’t say this on my resume, but I did take Tae Kwan Do for four years and I’m a brown belt. Is that good?’”

For Buffy, that’s perfect. Gellar, the veteran of two years on ALL MY CHILDREN (she played Kendall Hart, Susan Lucci’s daughter) still found the auditioning process grueling. Slim and compact, with sympathetic eyes and auburn hair, she recalled the process with a voice that maintains perfect diction even when speaking at ninety-miles-an-hour. “My manager spoke to the WB [Network] and they mentioned they had this show, Buffy. He thought it would be a great opportunity to use my Tae

Kwan Do and to do comedy and drama. I probably had eleven auditions and four tests. It was the most awful experience of my life, but I was so driven. I had read the script and heard about Joss Whedon and how wonderful he was. I went in (to audition) the week he was nominated for the Oscar for TOY STORY. I thought, ‘I’m going to have this role.’ Something inside of me said this is something I really love and want to do. He tells me I nailed it, but I still went through eleven auditions. The thing about our show is it’s done by WB, by San-
dollar, by Joss—so it is all those different people to go through.”

“This is very different from the movie,” Gellar said. “What we did was take the concept of the movie of this 16-year-old girl who is popular and has a perfect life, but there is something missing and she feels the kind of 16 year-old aching that everyone feels. Am I an adult? Am I a child? And suddenly she has to save the world. Now she is an outcast. She doesn’t fit in. She doesn’t know if she wants to be a cheerleader or fight vampires, and that is what makes her interesting and believable. Buffy is a person who is lost, who doesn’t know where she belongs, and you feel for her.”

A prime example of the series desire to blend staples of the horror genre with the angst of teenage life was first season’s “Nightmares.” In it, each character experiences their worst fears. Buffy, as you might imagine, dreams she has become a vampire. Another more poignant and personal nightmare, however, involves her divorced parents. “She is afraid that the reason her parents got divorced is because of her,” explained Gellar, “and there is this awful scene where her father comes in and tells her, ‘The reason I got divorced was because of you.’ Can you imagine? I did the scene and cried and couldn’t stop for 10 minutes. It’s very upsetting.”

Gellar went through her own awkward phase in junior high school. “That was my time to feel that I didn’t know where I fit in. I tried to be jock. I tried to be cool. And I couldn’t find my place. I think that is what Willow, Zander, and Buffy are all going through. That’s what makes them such wonderful friends—they are helping each other go through this time.”

It was during Gellar’s “jock” phase that she began studying Tae Kwan Do. She was also a competitive figure skater for four years and is now studying kick boxing.
Gellar. "When I went through the sets for the first time I cried, because they are so beautiful. You get the feeling this is real."

Gellar hopes fans of both high school and horror genres will identify with Buffy and the bizarre situations she finds herself in. "Buffy has an amazing spirit and I hope that is never broken with her. She always finds something positive, there is always something good even with all the evil she is surrounded by. She is happy and she will work through it. Although she has problems at times, she has this wonderful unbridled spirit and I hope that never gets lost. I would just like to see her cope with life and the situation she has been dealt in the most positive way possible."

Now that the show has become a major hit on WB, Gellar has branched out with major roles in horror films like I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER and SCREAM 2. Gellar said that originally she was not too interested in taking on the role of "Helen" the beauty queen in the film. "That honestly is the biggest departure for me that I've ever played," she said. "At first glance, I almost thought this isn't the role for me. I don't want to play the quintessential dumb blonde, some babe in the woods character. But luckily, [screenwriter Kevin Williamson] writes these real people. When you first meet Helen, she is this stereotype who has nothing but her looks going for her. But the problem is that this is what people expected of her. And she does have this burning desire to get out."

Nevertheless, Gellar saw parallels in the role to herself. "I'm a dumb blonde," she laughed, then paused to say, "Hell, I'm not even a blonde."

"I think he [Williamson] took the blonde bimbo role to a new level. I think that for so long horror was comedy almost, with a big-breasted woman saying 'Oh, look, a bad man.' Helen is not that, she makes wrong choices but she fights back."

Gellar has resigned herself to horror roles at this stage in her career. As a 20-year-old actress who plays high school and college roles, there isn't much out there that isn't a caricature," she said. "What Kevin did, and what's been done for me with Buffy, is written as three-dimensional human beings. As a young person that's hard to find."

The success of BUFFY and the astounding grosses of I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER have been a surprise for Gellar. "I got very lucky," she said. "I got I KNOW WHAT YOU DID the week Buffy premiered. I went to a small town in North Carolina [to film the movie], where we didn't even get 'Buffy.' I was spared from it right away while all this craze was happening. Apparently, for every Ralph's [a grocery story chain] in LA, there was a Buffy billboard. I didn't see any of it. I would talk to people here and they would say, 'there are 200 more websites now, and this person downloaded this many times and I went to this comic book convention and it was crazy."

"I had two months to prepare myself for the madness that apparently was the show. And it was really a nice time for me because if I had been shooting I KNOW WHAT YOU DID in LA, I would have been surrounded by that. Luckily, I had the summer for myself where it was about the work. And then I went to SCREAM and went to BUFFY."

As a trained martial artist who must stay in fighting form to battle blood-suckers, staying in shape proved difficult during her movie roles. "They wouldn't let me go to the gym," said Gellar. "As Buffy, I trained constantly. When we were in Wilmington, they had a great gym. The boys had trainers, I worked out on my own, cause my trainer was back in LA. And we moved down to Southport, and I had to drive an hour a day to go to the gym and I started to feel like that defeated the purpose."

"So they opened a gym in Southport and I was so excited. I go to the gym, they ask for my driver's license, I figured it was for licensing purposes. They say you're not 21 and they say 'you

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and nastiness is used to cover up what I see as her vulnerability.

"That vulnerability really came through in the episode called 'Invisible Girl,' where she admitted to actually being very lonely at times. She became a little more sympathetic in that show, but not a whole lot, since she reverted back into the old, snobby Cordelia in the last scene."

Newcomers like Carpenter and Brendon could very easily find themselves at odds with more seasoned veterans such as Tony Head and Sarah Michelle Gellar. "That doesn't really exist in BUFFY at all," said Whedon. "I really like the spirit of what's going on with us. I think there's a kind of 'let's-do-a-show-in-the-old-barn' feel. It's not like we're working on this huge prestigious show where everyone's an old vet. There's a lot of energy here, and there's nobody saying, 'Shut up, give me my paycheck, here's the lines, where do I stand?' And not just the actors, it's the whole crew. 'Prophecy Girl' was the first episode that I directed, and it was lovely. The grips gave a shit about the story. The whole thing was like, there was a lot of love on that set. I'm trying to think of a way to say this that doesn't sound weak and corny, but it was very moving, because everyone was really trying. Everybody really cared.

"That caring doesn't come easily. With the kind of pace and pressure that we have, you either become the most dysfunctional unit in the history of the world, or you become a tight-knit family."

"I think of the BUFFY crew as an extremely close family. I have enough confidence in the teamwork among Sarah, Alyson, Nick, Charisma and Tony, where I can dare to give their characters more depth in this second season. Viewers may have already noticed a change in Giles. We've taken a little trip into his past, and we've discovered that he wasn't always quite as stuffy as he appears. Xander finally finds love. Cordelia is now a much more vulnerable girl, even though she still holds onto most of her Valley Girl bitchiness."

Charisma Carpenter had some early doubts about whether or not Cordelia would be given a chance to show another side of her personality. "I was concerned that the public just wouldn't take to the series. Then, around mid-season, I had this dream. The cast and Joss, and Joss' assistant, George Snyder, we were all in some hotel room, like in Cannes, and we were there promoting the show. There was a huge carnival-like festival on our account. We're overlooking this pool, and there are clowns on stilts, and acrobats on the floor, and somebody tooling around on a jet-ski in the pool, and then in the distance there was a police barricade. In the further distance was a mob of people, so many people, just to see us. We're all just looking at each other, like, 'Oh my God, do you believe this?' And then somebody shouts, somebody waves, so we start waving back, and the crowd goes nuts! They're screaming, they're yelling, then they begin chanting that they love Buffy, they love Buffy.

"Now, Alyson [Hannigan] knew I was worried, so I told her about my dream. She said, 'That's so great. It's an omen, a sign. That means that people are going to go bananas over our show.'"

"At the time I didn't believe that I was having a prophetic vision, but we are enjoying a second season of the series. Hopefully, we'll be having a third and a fourth. So, in spite of my insecure feelings, Alyson and my dream turned out to be 100% correct. People really did go bananas over BUFFY."

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"We are defined by the things we fear."

—The Master

**NIGHTMARES**

*Story* by Jose Whedon, *Teleplay* by David Greenwalt; *Directed* by Bruce Seth Green.

Buffy has a dream in which she is pursued by The Master, and then murdered by him. Soon things are getting totally out of control in Sunnydale, as everyone's nightmares become a reality. Xander walks into a classroom and discovers that he is wearing nothing but his underwear! Cordelia looks into a mirror and sees that her hair has become a virtual brillo pad. Buffy's father comes to see her at school and confesses that he and her mother split up because they couldn't stand having a daughter like her. The nightmares turn out to be the manifestations of a young boy in a coma, beaten by his own baseball coach, who Buffy subdues.

"Nightmares" is the third first season segment directed by Bruce Seth Green, by far the year's best episode. There is an unbearable feeling of dread as each new nightmare becomes worse than the one before.

This is a very cerebral kind of horror, but it works extremely well. It is reminiscent of the kind of atmosphere that was created in the original 1950 version of INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS. The climax of "Nightmares," with everyone's fear colliding with everyone else's, brings to mind Kevin McCarthy's terror when he realized that he was totally helpless to do anything about it.

There are echoes of other films as well: Xander's encounter with a clown demon is not unlike parts of Stephen King's IT. Buffy's hand reaching up from the grave to grab Giles' wrist could be mistaken for a similar scene in CARRIE.

Whedon and Greenwalt have managed to include a reference to a very important social issue: that of child abuse. It is to their credit that the message of eliminating this very real horror, the cause of all the nightmares, is not lost among all the fantasy.

Buffy turns vampire—in her dreams—in "Nightmares," a show that focused on the serious issue of child abuse.

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**INVISIBLE GIRL**

*Story* by Jose Whedon, *Teleplay* by Ashley Gable and Tom Szydlo; *Directed* by Rona Berdy.

Cordelia, the school narcissist, is all aglitter and agog about possibly being chosen as Sunnydale High's May Queen. Mitch, her date for the festive occasion, is taking a break in the locker room when he hears the sound of a girl laughing. Turning to see where the laughter is coming from, he is brutally clubbed by a baseball bat—nothing else,
KRISTY SWANSON
THE ORIGINAL SLAYER

The actress who played the movie Buffy has gone on to other roles, but enjoys the recognition.

By Mitch Persons

To millions of fans, Sarah Michelle Gellar is the quintessential BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER. However, four years before she made her debut in the TV series, the part was essayed by Kristy Swanson in the theatrical feature. The similarity in the names of the shows has led to some interesting encounters for Ms. Swanson.

"So many people have gotten confused," said Swanson in her gold-flecked voice. "They say to me, 'You're Buffy, the Vampire Slayer. Aren't you? You're the girl on the TV show.' I tell them, 'No, I was the original Buffy—the one in the movie.' Then they ask, 'Did they ever ask you to play the part in the show?' When I tell them no, they ask 'Doesn't that bother you?' And I go, 'No, not at all.' Why would it? First of all, I'm twenty-seven, too old to play the part of a high school girl. Secondly, I've already played Buffy, already made my mark in a film that's something of a classic. People get the wrong idea. They think I'm sensitive about talking about the TV show, whereas I'm actually proud to discuss it.

"The series is very different than the movie. Other than the fact that some of the characters are basically the same, it has nothing to do with the film whatsoever. First of all, the show is shot differently; it's darker, more Nancy Drew-ish. And also, the TV show is much more serious. The film was a lot lighter, fluffier, with more satire."

"The TV show is more genuine-looking than the movie, and I really like that. The actors don't have a lot of makeup on, they're not wearing perfect clothes. Everyone looks like a real person, even though they spend a lot of time doing things that ordinary people just don't do, like slaying vampires.

"It's a good show for young people, kids, and adults can watch it too. It's good because there is actually a female who is strong and brave—she's a good role model for just about everybody."

Swanson's enthusiasm for the show stretches out to Joss Whedon, who wrote the original screenplay, and to Fran Kuzui, who served as director. "I really like Joss a lot. I think he's a great guy. And Fran! Fran was wonderful to work with! She is very intelligent, very bright, very articulate. We worked together very well. We communicated. We laughed a lot, had a lot of fun. I think I was 20 or 21 when I did BUFFY, and Fran was not only my director, but if I got sick, or I was feeling a little down, she became almost a second mother. She is very, very sweet."

Since Swanson was so close to Kuzui, she was asked if she knew of her plan to make a theatrical BUFFY sequel. "I heard it being buffed around," admitted Swanson. "But I don't know, it's weird with sequels. If a movie is a huge hit right off the bat then they'll go and do a sequel right away. BUFFY the film has taken a long time to catch on, but if they do make a sequel, I think that would be great."

"As for my possible role in a sequel, I don't think I could play the part of a teenager, but maybe there could be an entirely different concept. How about Buffy as a mom and her daughter as the new vampire slayer, something like that?"

Swanson does not have to wait for a BUFFY sequel to come out to be working. She scored a big hit as the plucky Diana Palmer in THE PHANTOM. That was followed by a part in EIGHT HEADS IN A DUFFLE BAG.

"EIGHT HEADS got to be something of a joke," Swanson laughed. "I used to tell people, just wait until it comes out, then
they told me it was already out. That didn’t go so well, but that’s okay. It certainly doesn’t have anything to do with me, per se. I can put it behind me. In January I did a movie called SELF STORAGE with Joe Pantoliano, Ayre Gross, Tom Wood, and John Considine. Tony Spiridakis co-authored and directed it. The film went to the Montreal Film Festival where we placed in the top 21 of 420 films. I did another film right after that, LOVER GIRL, which was produced by Alison Anders and Larry Ratner, and directed by Lisa Adario and Joe Syracuse. That went to the Toronto Film Festival, the AFI Film Festival, and then Sundance. Finally, I just finished DADDY with Lloyd and Beau Bridges. That was fun, because it was set in the South, so I had a chance to do a southern accent. I play a sociopath in this small Southern town, the very epitome of a Southern Belle-gossip type.

With all this work, Swanson somehow has not been able to get completely away from the BUFFY influence. “Just last week I was househunting, and I went over to Brentwood to look a place over. I walk in, and I look on the refrigerator, and there’s a photo of Joss Whedon and his then-girlfriend. I’m going, ‘That’s weird!’ Then I’m looking around the house, and I see some mail kind of sitting out, and it says Joss Whedon on it. And then, I see a BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER script, one of the TV show scripts resting on a table. I go, ‘Oh my God, this is Joss’ house!’ Obviously this was the house that he was renting, and moved from, or whatever, and here I was, innocently househunting in Joss’ house. It was very strange, a real trip, I just couldn’t believe it.”

Giles

PROPHECY GIRL

Written and directed by Joss Whedon.

Giles is extremely agitated as he pores over an ancient book of prophecies called “The Pergamen Codex, foretelling the death of The Slayer at the hands of The Master, on the evening of the Spring Fling. Below the library, The Master is eagerly awaiting the time he can be free of his imprisonment.

"Tomorrow night, Buffy will face The Master, and she will die!"

—Giles

Angel (David Boreanaz) cradles Buffy, killed by the Master in "Prophecy Girl," the stunning first season finale.

Buffy is terrified. “I’m only sixteen years old,” she sobs. In a frenzy, she tears the silver crucifix from her neck, and tells Giles and Angel that she is quitting. She goes to see Cordelia and Willow discover a group of students savagely slaughtered in the school’s AV room. Willow tells Buffy, who decides that prophecy or not, she is going to face The Master and try to kill him before he kills her.

Buffy shoots The Master with her crossbow, but it does not faze him. He grabs her, bites her, then throws her into a pool of brackish water. With Buffy now dead, The Master walks out through the Hellmouth into the upper world. Xander delivers CPR, and brings Buffy back to life. The Master and Buffy fight it out. Buffy hurl the demon through a skylight, where he is impaled on a sharp piece of jagged wood. He crumbles and dies.

“Prophecy Girl” was written and directed by Joss Whedon.

WITHIN THREE DAYS, THE NEW HOPE WILL ARRIVE. WE WILL PUT OUR FAITH IN HIM. HE WILL SHOW US THE WAY.

—Absalom

The prevailing sense of an apocalypse is carried out visually as well. As soon as Buffy puts on her formal gown, she becomes a wraith-like messenger of death. The shot of the mutilated bodies of the students is a moment of pure, unfiltered horror. The Master’s exorcising demise (done in an extreme closeup with his face literally being sucked up off his skull) is a shock moment unequaled in previous episodes.

A subplot, involving Xander’s unrequited love for Buffy, while seemingly intended to give a counterpart of normalcy, is equally disturbing. Xander, who considers himself more or less of a clown, becomes a genuinely pathetic figure. “We did a lot of inventive things with "Prophecy Girl," said Xander’s alter ego, Nicholas Brendon. "There was excellent photography, great music, and a lot of well-written scenes."

Charisma Carpenter shared Brendon’s enthusiasm. "Some of the acting was unbelievable. The scene between Xander and Buffy, where he asks her to go to the prom with him, that was such a great scene. If you take a good look at Nicky [Brendon’s] face, he goes from nervous to hopeful to devasted all in the space of a few seconds."

Similarly, Sarah Michelle Gellar’s performance runs a wide range of emotions. One of her most heart-wrenching scenes is with her mother, Joyce (Kristine Sutherland.) While Joyce prattles on about the school dance, Buffy appears to be calmly taking in every word. Her eyes, however, betray her deep sense of fear. Later on, as Buffy leads Xander and Angel to The Master, she walks as if she were Joan of Arc on her way to save France.

"When She Was Bad"

Written and directed by Joss Whedon.

It is the night before school is to begin. Xander

Giles (Anthony Stewart Head) strangles Buffy in second season opener "When She Was Bad," a neat nightmare sequence.
and Willow, after spending “the most boring summer ever” sit on a wall outside a cemetery playing trivia games. The game gets serious, and just as Xander is about to kiss Willow, a vampire intervenes. Buffy appears out of nowhere, and quickly subdues the monster. Xander and Willow are happy to see their old chum, but notice a certain distance in her. Xander tells Buffy that they are standing right by the cemetery where Giles buried the bones of The Master.

The remaining followers of The Master are holed up in a deserted warehouse. They are led by Collin the Anointed, and a creature known as Absalom (Brent Jennings), who seeks just as evil as The Master and just as determined to rule the Earth.

As good as the season opener is, it is a trifle confusing. We know that Buffy is suffering from some form of emotional trauma, but what kind? There doesn’t seem to be any real answers.

Disregarding that, there are, true to form, some very fine moments. The nightmare Buffy has is a chiller (Xander’s calmly eating an apple, and Willow’s neutral gaze as Buffy is being strangled by Giles is a nice, sardonic touch.) The torturing of the vampire girl is a strange mixture of surprise and empathy. For the first time, Buffy shows a truly sadistic streak. As evil as the creature being tormented is, there is a definite feeling of sympathy for her, as Buffy gleefully rams a crucifix down the girl’s throat, then brutally shuts her mouth over it.

Daryl (Ingo Neuhaus), a reanimated football jock in “Some Assembly Required,” a BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN HH.

“Why would anybody want to make a girl?”—Buffy

**SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED**

Written by Ty King; Directed by Bruce Seth Green.

On her nightly rounds, Buffy discovers an empty grave, and close by, a girl’s shoe. She does a bit of research and finds out that the body that is missing was that of a young cheerleader name Courtney, who, with two other cheerleaders, were killed in a recent automobile crash.

Cordelia is leaving cheerleading practice and discovers several female body parts in her car. The police identify the body parts as belonging to the three recently deceased girls. Curious, the Slayer group go to the cemetery that evening and unear the coffins of Courtney’s companions in the fatal crash. The coffins are found to be empty. It turns out that there are two Sunnydale students who are planning to put together a genuine Bride of Frankenstein—Chris and Eric. They are deeply in the throes of creating a girlfriend for Daryl, who though badly scarred from a fall during rock climbing, is still very much alive. Buffy and Chris, discovering that Daryl has flown the coop, find Cordelia’s pom-pom at the game. They go dashing off to rescue her.

When a bunsen burner is knocked over. Daryl perishes in the flames, along with the headless monstrosity that Chris and Eric had put together.

Suffice to say that there have been better episodes.

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**BUFFY**

**MOVIE DIRECTOR FRAN RUBEL KUZUI**

The architect of the franchise formula plans another film.

**By Mitch Persons**

Fran Rubel Kuzui, along with her husband Kaz, Joss Whedon, Gail Berman, and Sandy Gallin, is an executive producer of TV’s BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER. This energetic, genial woman is also the director of the feature film that spawned the series.

In London doing promotional work for her Kuzui Enterprises/Sandollar Television Productions, Kuzui spoke about the origins of the film. “Joss Whedon had written the original script, which, in all honesty, had been rejected by almost every studio in the United States. When somebody showed me the script, I saw an enormous potential in it. I optioned it, and then paid Joss to rewrite it according to my concept and ideas.

“Joss’ screenplay had Buffy just roaming around, sticking stakes through vampire’s hearts. There was no humor, and absolutely none of the martial arts that you saw in the final film. I think Joss envisioned his story as being a De Palma-type movie, something like CARRIE. Also, he had written the character of Buffy as being so stupid and empty, she was totally unbelievable. I said to Joss, ‘You can’t have this doltish seventeen-year-old girl just going in and spearing vampires. It simply isn’t going to hold up for an entire movie. Now, at the time I was a very big fan of John Woo and his original Hong Kong martial arts movies. I especially admired Woo’s use of humor: he could have you watching a bloody fight, yet have you chuckling at the same time. I showed the films to Joss, and suggested that we use the elements of martial arts and humor in BUFFY.

“That’s how all the tongue-in-cheek fighting got into the movie. Also, we made Buffy much more believable. She’s no longer a two-dimensional buffoon, but a girl who eventually takes personal responsibility for her power. I saw the whole concept of Buffy as very much about girls in high school who don’t want to acknowledge that they’re different. They’re encouraged to marry the brightest, smartest, best-look-

Kuzui, whose Sandollar Productions co-produces the WB series, takes credit for the humor and martial arts touches, and has plans to make a second Buffy movie next year.
Kristy Swanson toasts another vampire in Kuzui's 1992 feature based on Whedon's spec script which Kuzui suggested spicing up with action, comedy and a feminine perspective.

ing guy who is going to take care of them. Then they find out that they may not be the kind of material that bright, smart, good-looking guys are strong, or they have a handicap, or they're not popular. They don't realize that their difference is also their power. Maybe they're chosen for something else, whether it's to be a doctor, or an astronaut, a mother or a vampire slayer. Sometimes they're not destined just to be somebody's wife.

"I emphasized that detail in the story because I wanted girls to know that it was okay to be different, it was okay to kick serious butt. I also wanted them to know that even with acknowledging their power, they just might be able to get ahold of that bright, smart hunk anyway."

At the end of the film, the liberated Buffy rides off into the sunrise with her new boyfried, Pike, played by Luke Perry (who perhaps was not bright or smart, but was definitely a hunk.) There seemed to be an indication by that scene that there was going to be a sequel to the movie.

"That's true," Kuzui said. "I wanted to make the sequel in Hong Kong, and make it even more of a martial arts movie than BUFFY. I lost interest in it though, and it wasn't until a few years later that my partner, Gail Berman, approached me about possibly turning BUFFY into a TV series. Gail's timing has been right, because I agreed to go ahead and do it. I was contractually entitled to write and direct the pilot, but Joss was also under contract. I felt that maybe it was really Joss' time to do the creative work, so he wrote and directed a 20-minute demo pilot which WB-TV bought.

"I loved doing the movie, loved so much of it that I was ecstatic when I was given the opportunity for it to have another life as a TV show.

"The popularity of BUFFY is astounding, and it still amazes me. At the outset, it was really made for young girl viewers, but now, there are some older women who are fans. There was one lady, a banker I was doing business with, who called me recently and told me she had missed one of the episodes, and asked me if I could get her a tape of it. I thought that was so great, I just had to laugh.

"Gathering that older audience was a supreme irony. In the original film we had Luke Perry from BEVERLY HILLS 90210. Our intention in using Luke was that we wanted to capture the same audience that 90210 had. Now, with the TV series, we've gone way beyond that."

The TV BUFFY was not Kuzui's only project. "At the time that BUFFY started, I was simultaneously producing theatrical films. One of them was TELLING LIES IN AMERICA, which was recently shown at the New York Film Festival. It's from a script by Joe Eszterhas, and stars Kevin Bacon and Brad Renfro. Another film we produced was ORGAZMO, which was created by Trey Parker of SOUTH PARK fame. That was shown at the Toronto Film Festival, and then at the Sundance Film Festival. It's going to be released soon by October films.

"But BUFFY is never far from my mind. We are developing a website, and," said Kuzui, almost secretly, "I am planning a sequel to the movie, which should be in the works sometime this year."
At a field trip to a museum, the Slayer Trio pass by the mummy of a sacrificed Incan Princess, who clutches a stone seal to her bosom. After the museum closes, Rodney sneaks in to steal the seal, which breaks into shards when he lifts it. The mummy, suddenly alive, reaches up and strangles him.

The mummy, now restored, turns up as Impada, Buffy's exchange student, who has a crush on Xander. Impada holds Willow in a death-grip, threatening to lay one on the girl's lips. Xander tells Impada that if she wants life that badly, she must get it by kissing him. Impada's love for Xander turns out to be genuine. She refuses to kiss him. As he holds the girl in his arms, she turns back into the mummy and fades away.

Another fun outing, with the hormonal juices flowing freely. Xander and Impada make a nice couple. Cordelia, dressed in a skimpy Hawaiian outfit, makes a nice (very nice) single. Willow becomes the object of affection of a shy musician named Oz (Seth Green.)

The special effects are expertly choreographed, in particular Impada's regression back into a mummy while dancing with Xander. As the girl's hand turns from flesh to parchment, there is the distinct sound of skin drying out.

"Hurry! Buffy's being attacked by a snake-thing!"
—Willow

**REPTILE BOY**

Written and directed by David Greenwalt.

It is the dead of night, and a young girl is being chased through a cemetery by a group of men wearing what appear to be monks habits. The men corner the girl, and drag her off. Tom, a new college man in town, is not a charming presence, but the leader of a group of demon-worshipers, and one of the men in monks habits who abducted the young girl. Once a year, Tom and his cronies sacrifice young females to their god, a monstrous half-man, half-snake named Makida.

Buffy is in a bad state, having been given a drugged drink. She awakens in a dark dungeon, chained to the wall. Next to her is a manacled Cordelia. Giles, Angel, Willow and Xander break in and beat the bad frat boys to within an inch of their lives. Buffy breaks free from her chains and stabs Makida to death.

As with "Welcome to the Hellmouth," there are no big scares, but there is a certain amount of suspense. The visuals are superb (not the least of which is seeing Buffy in a cocktail dress.)

The creature Makida looks almost identical to another repulsive villain—the slug-like Fluke from "The Host" episode of the X-FILES. David Greenwalt, who wrote and directed "Reptile Boy" was also involved in THE X-FILES. The similarity between the two monsters is probably just a coincidence.

Makida, the "Reptile Boy," a half-man, half-snake god requiring an annual virgin sacrifice—a tall order!

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**By Mitch Persons**

Recently, when Joss Whedon was asked what he thought about director Bruce Seth Green, he said, "He is 'Buffy's' golden boy. This man does very classy, elegant work. He directed three episodes of our first season. He's coming back for multiples this year."

Green is no newcomer to genre TV. He has been directing since 1983, and has given viewers notable episodes of V, SEAQUEST, and HERCULES. He has also done such non-genre shows as T.J. HOOKER, MAGNUM P.I., and DOOGIE HOWSER, M.D." The three episodes that Green directed for BUFFY "Teacher's Pet," "The Pack," and "Nightmares," are high on just about everybody's list of favorite shows.

With all this experience and adulation, the man might be expected to have something of an inflated ego. Nothing could be further from the truth. Green is an ingratiating, soft-spoken individual who takes his quite obvious talent pretty much in stride.

"I'm very, very proud to have the opportunity to work on BUFFY," Green said with typical modesty, "And yes, I give myself credit for my work, but I can't give myself total credit. Without a vision, a television director is working pretty much with empty air. I'm involved with people who have a clear-cut vision of what they want—and I'm talking in particular about Joss. He's very much in love with his show and its characters, and he really cares how things turn out. He's with you every step of the way. I've seen executive producers who have created something, then they drop the project like a hot lead pellet and go on to create five other things. Also, with Joss, everything is very clear. Many times in episodic TV, you get a lot of voices from lots of places, and you're kind of left in the dark as far as the tone of the episode, and things like that. Joss speaks with one voice and one voice only, and I appreciate that."

The professional relationship with Joss Whedon began in typical "Hollywood" fashion. "My agent set up an interview with Joss and [co-executive producer] David Greenwalt before BUFFY actually debuted. I had seen the pilot that Joss had written, and they told me what they wanted to do with the series, and we just kind of talked and chatted. Our conversation ended on a friendly, but pretty much non-committal note.

"Then I got a call to direct 'Teacher's Pet.' I was supposed to do only that one segment, but it came in on time and on budget, and they liked that. When another director dropped out of doing 'The Pack,' they asked me to take over. With 'Nightmares,' I think there was a conflict with the original director, so they brought me in for that episode, as well. Out of the twelve episodes the first season I did those three, which is quite a lot. This season I've done four. I guess you could say the producers are pleased with my work."

Green explains just why he thinks his work is so popular. "In feature films, a director usually develops his own project. In television, a director is there after the script, and in many cases, after a lot of the
BUFFY is a show that mixes humor and horror. If I think I can stage a scene so that it's scarier or funnier than it appears on paper, I go ahead and do so.

"In ‘Nightmares,’ the vision that Xander has, when he finds all those candy bars, and then he runs into the clown who tries to stab him, the way the scene was written is that Xander is just wandering down the corridors of the school when he has his nightmare. There seemed to be no real suspense to that, so I suggested that we change the setting somewhat. Instead of a straight hallway, we made the set up to resemble a maze. I had diaphanous plastic sheets draped all around. The clown is unseen until he slices through the plastic. It made for a very scary sequence. In the same show, at the very beginning, when the girl goes down to the basement of the school for a smoke, I had the monster who goes after her hit the lamp, which swings back and forth. What that little maneuver did was give the scene an uneven, ghostly look.

"When I directed ‘The Pack,’ I had to take a more subtle approach. I read the script, and I said, ‘This is very unusual. This could be a lot of fun,’ but I was at a loss as to how to make it work, because it's about a pack of kids eating the principal, and turning into hyenas. On the first day of rehearsal, as soon as I saw the actors who would be playing The Pack, I knew what to do. They were very talented, very versatile people. I just had them expand on their already considerable abilities. The humor and the believability of the story—and it is a pretty hard story to swallow—came through the use of the cast.

BUFFY slays a vampire in “Halloween,” Bruce Seth Green’s second season holiday show, CGI effects by Digital Magic. As a TV director Green sees his mission as “amplifying the context.”

"Be seeing you!" —Note to Giles from Ethan.

HALLOWEEN

Written by Carl Ellsworth; Directed by Bruce Seth Green.

It’s the afternoon of Halloween. Principal Snyder (Old Mr. Nasty) has assigned three groups of children to Buffy, Xander and Willow to take time or treating. The chums then visit Ethan’s Costume Shop to pick out an appropriate costume for that evening. Willow chooses a ghost’s outfit, and Xander a soldier’s. Buffy picks an eighteenth-century Daphne Du Maurier-type gown and wig. Kindly-seeming Ethan, however, is a sorcerer who is in league with Spike. Invoking a spell with the aid of a statue of Janus, the Roman god of light, Ethan manages to make each person who purchased an outfit at his shop become that costume. Xander turns into a brave soldier (complete with an M-16), Willow becomes a real ghost, and Buffy changes into a simpering wimp. The only one who appears to be immune from the spell is Cordelia, who is dressed in a tailor-made cat’s outfit. Spike, now knowing that Buffy no longer has her Slayer powers, tracks her down and attempts to kill her.

A fiendishly good segment. Bruce Seth Green, it appears, has a way with confrontation. An icky-cold verbal battle between Giles and Ethan—age-old enemies—is a chilling, suspenseful scene, accented by backlighting and the masterful acting of the two principals.

And speaking of acting, Nicholas Brendon, who has a tendency to underrate his own abilities, has done another fine job of transforming himself into something other than the timid Xander (remember “The Pack?”) Sarah Michelle Gellar has a little more difficulty with her role as the 18th-century virgin. The look is there, certainly, but she doesn’t quite capture the innocent quality such a character might have.

Angel nearly gets transformed into a demon in "The Dark Age," another outstanding second season show directed by Bruce Seth Green.

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CUBE

Director Vincenzo Natale debuts with a tight terror in a box.

By Gary Kimber

Imagine yourself inexplicably thrown into a room of unknown origins along with five strangers. There is no food or water, and unless you can extricate yourself by moving from room to room until you find a way out, you will die. Thousands of rooms await you along with deadly traps.

This is the premise of rising young filmmaker Vincenzo Natale’s directorial debut. Written by Natale along with Andre Bijelic and Graeme Manson, the film takes a hard look at the human condition. The existential question posed by their predicament makes CUBE a cut above the usual genre fare. It stars David Hewlett (PIN, SCANNERS 2). Modestly budgeted at $350,000 and beautifully photographed, the film had its world premiere at the 1997 Toronto Film Festival and looks like it cost a lot more because many of Toronto’s film professionals donated their time gratis, signing a deferral agreement on any profits made. Detroit-born Natale got great bang for the buck from C.O.R.E. Digital and Caligari Studios.

Natale talked about the project as he put the finishing touches on the sound mix for CUBE at a production facility in Deluxe, Toronto. Dressed in shorts, he is relaxed, sitting behind the mixing board. He bears a notable resemblance to another Canadian director, David Cronenberg. “What attracted me to the premise of THE CUBE was you could interpret it in many ways,” he said. “It lends itself to allegory because there is no context to the story. We don’t see the outside world where these people came from. My interpretation of it has several levels. On one level, it’s about how we struggle through life. In the broadest sense that is what the film is about. It is a bit Shakespearean in that what the film says is the real enemy these people face is within themselves. This place is the most hostile, horrible place you can imagine. Even that is not as terrible as the enemy they find within. It’s a big mathematical puzzle they have to solve. As they go along, they discover each has something to offer to escape. Ultimately, their downfall comes through mistrust and human failings. They find a way to navigate a way out, but succumb to their own weaknesses.”

Nicole deBoer, David Hewlett and Andrew Miller find themselves trapped in a series of box-like rooms in the maze of the CUBE, CGI effects (below) by Toronto’s C.O.R.E. Digital Effects.
The film was produced and funded under the aegis of the Canadian Film Centre (CFC) in late 1996 and shot in Toronto at Wallace Studios in 21 days. It was on the basis of a 20-minute short called ELEVATED that the CFC selected Natale for funding. Colin Brenton was executive director of the feature film program at the Centre from 1992-1996. It was his responsibility to choose which directors would be supported. "The Canadian Film Centre is a training school geared towards people in the film business who have been at it for a while," said Brenton. "Directors and writers go there for a six- or nine-month course to refine their skills. In a way, it's like a finishing school. Something like the American Film Institute. It is not a regular film school.

"We create a safe, cozy little environment for the director to get his feet wet. We pride ourselves on the fact once I give a green light, the filmmakers have total creative control unless they went ahead and made a completely different movie."

Prior to CUBE, Natale had made ELEVATED at the Centre, a story of three people trapped in an elevator, one of whom appears to have escaped from an attacker on the outside. "ELEVATED was a testing ground for me artistically, to see what I could do within a very confined space," said Natale. "This was the major stumbling block. They had a hard time at the CFC imagining CUBE as a feature film. That a movie that takes place entirely in a box could be exciting. It was not a problem for me because I think about LIFEBOAT, which is one of my favorite movies. The old Hitchcock film where no one even stands up or hardly even moves. It is one of the most suspenseful films I have ever seen."

Brenton said he chose Natale for funding "because he was so meticulous and thorough in his
development of the project. When he came to me to propose we do the film, he had a great presentation. He made story-boards in a booklet explaining the film. The icing on the cake was seeing the short film he did at the Centre, ELEVATED. Okay, here is a film with three people in a tiny elevator and it holds your interest. Maybe now I can buy the idea CUBE won't be boring with six people in a room for ninety minutes.”

Breton even got down in the trenches with the crew. “For some reason I was just totally into the story,” he said. “The first couple of days I went down to the set to check things out. I started acting like a grip and a P.A. I got film fever over it. I had a blast. It was the toughest picture I’ve ever worked on though. Like a nightmare. You have 25 mostly inexperienced people running around on a set and your entire set is a 14 by 14 foot cube.”

Like CUBE, ELEVATED cost only a small percentage in cash. Budgeted at $12,000, the figure, including donated costs is closer to $100,000. “I’ve been making short films in Super 8 since I was a kid,” said Natale. “This was the first time someone actually gave me money to do something.” Two other Natale short films are MOUTH and PLAYGROUND both of an undefined, surrealistic nature.

“Ever since I can remember, I have been fascinated by horror and fantasy films,” he said. “It’s sad because it is a genre that has so much prejudice against it. I always feel I have to qualify why I am doing it. I think that is changing though. For some reason, early on, people decided it was ‘kid stuff’ and therefore it was never given the budgets or serious treatment. In Europe it’s different because there is such a strong tradition of fantasy in literature. Here, it was never seen as an adult form of entertainment. Fantasy films now gross so much money that is changing.

“I find the imagery in horror potent. If you are a visual filmmaker you can’t help but be attracted to it. It is the most base, visceral genre around. There is something animalistically satisfying. When you go right to the core of it, I believe what people are truly afraid of is dying. Horror is a way of dealing with the fear we have buried deep within us. It’s a way of confronting us within the safe confines of watching a movie.”

But Natale professed a need not to be defined as a horror director. “I have other interests,” he said. “It’s unfortunate but when you put boundaries on yourself people tend to uphold them and it becomes hard to shake.

“I have always had an interest in fantasy. Real life has never interested me. I consider Peter Greenaway fantasy and Jean Luc Goddard. The restrictions people put on that genre are pretty tight. I don’t think they encompass what fantasy really is. If I had to define myself as a filmmaker, I would say I am a fantasist but in keeping with my broader definition of fantasy which includes some directors who normally don’t fit into that category.”

Although born in Detroit, Michigan, Natale has lived in Toronto since the age of one, and considers himself a red-blooded Canadian. He has no formal film education but attended Ryerson Film Polytechnic’s film program briefly. Now in his late 20’s, he is largely self-taught honing his visual style while working for Nelvana animation for five years as a storyboard artist. “I learned a lot there,” he said. “It was a bit like film school for me. As a storyboard artist you get to plot the action from the script and plot the camera angles. I learned traditional storytelling there.”

In the opening scene of CUBE, we see a character die in a particularly nasty manner, courtesy of Caligari Studios and C.O.R.E. Digital. A short-lived actor named Julian Hitchings literally goes to pieces. He becomes “Julienned” as Natale joked. What Caligari (Ray and Louise Macintosh and Russell Cate) did was build two replicas of the character. They made one of his head and shoulders which appears to spontaneously bleed in a grid pattern and one of his head falling apart on cue. It is an unusually memorable way to die and gets the show off to an impressive start. The other major effect they did was for Ren (Wayne Robson). “He enters a room and his face is sprayed with acid,” explained Louise Macintosh. “We had to do his face melting away in stages. The first stage used a few prosthetics and special makeup. A second more advanced stage involved some smoke and steam. In the third stage, the head was hollowed out and he melted away.”
Like everyone else on CUBE, Caligari worked for nothing hoping the exposure would pay off in the long run. Prior to CUBE, they met Natale while providing gory effects for ELEVATED.

Due to Natale’s careful pre-planning, there were no unexpected changes made on set. “Vincenzo draws everything on storyboards,” said Ray Macintosh. “He has a clear vision of what he wants. Especially on this project where the budget is so tight, preparation is essential. It saved a lot of heartache.” Added Louise Macintosh, “I certainly think Vincenzo has the potential to be as well-known and well-thought of as David Cronenberg.”

One of the hottest effects companies in North America is C.O.R.E. Digital (the acronym stands for Company of Righteous Effects) is based in Toronto. Begun in 1994 by Bob Munroe, Derek Grim, Kyle Menzies and John Mariella, and funded by William Shatner, recent work includes LEXX, ADVENTURES IN THE DARK ZONE and MIMIC. Munroe explains, “We did the mimics for MIMIC.”

Spectacular work by C.O.R.E. Digital Effects give CUBE’s outside look a depth of space which opens up the claustrophobic scenario. Like everyone else, C.O.R.E.’s work was donated as a gesture of goodwill to promote the Canadian film industry... as well as themselves.

“When CUBE got approved by the CFC, they came to us because there was a need for quite a few effects,” said Bob Munroe. “On feature film project budgets they couldn’t afford to go to a house and pay market rates. All along we have been trying to promote the use of effects in Canadian films. We thought this would be a great opportunity for both of us to benefit. Our goal was to expose C.O.R.E. to a broader Canadian audience. The more directors who use this technology the better off we are. What we are trying to prove more than anything was that using this technology is not as expensive as you think. It adds production value to a shoot.”

Emily Roach and Yves Therrien were the principal animators with Munroe and John Mariella serving as animation directors. They put in 50-hour weeks for three months working exclusively on CUBE. They “created the outside of the Cube. Everything they didn’t have models for,” said Munroe. “Also, various death traps, spiked rooms, wire traps. The dicer that comes down to reveal what it was that cubed Julian into little squares,” said Roach.

Noted Munroe, “Vincenzo is one of the brightest directors we’ve come through that film school. I think he has got an incredible future. He is too nice a person for his own good. He has to learn to be nasty.” Roach chimed in. “That will come with the territory. He had an incredible eye and incredible vision, said Roach. “He had a hard time relating to the techno-speak in CGI but knew exactly how he wanted things done.” Added Munroe, “He was a perfectionist in the good sense of the word. Every change Vincenzo wanted seemed to make the scene work a little better.”

David Hewlett plays the man who, it seems, helped build the cube as part of a useless government makework project, the purpose of which has long been forgotten. Being part of an ensemble cast, his role in CUBE does not stand out as well as his debut in the underrated 1988 release, PIN. In PIN Hewlett played a paranoid schizophrenic suffering from delusions about the anatomically correct teaching mannequin his doctor/father uses. The doll (called PIN) begins speaking to him and violence ensues. There is a quality of Anthony Perkins’ performance as Norman Bates in PSYCHO that Hewlett caught in PIN.

Originally from England, Hewlett goes back a long way with Natale. Both attended Toronto boarding school together making 8 and 16mm films in their teenage years. “Vincenzo knows exactly what he is doing and conveys that confidence to the actors,” said Hewlett. “On a completely selfish level he is going to do extremely well. It makes sense to be a part of that. I have always felt this guy is going to be huge. I never had any doubt about that. Any sacrifices I have made in time or money are small. I see them as an investment in the future. When he is doing the next ALIEN picture, I can get a piece of it.”

Natale said Hewlett “has been in every film I have made and as long as I get to make films he will continue to be. He is a really good friend and a terrific actor. He has always been an inspiration for me.”

What the Cube ultimately represents is never spelled out by the director. It can be interpreted in a number of different ways on different levels. “Everyone in the Cube has their own perspective on what it is,” said Hewlett. “From my characters’ point of view, it is a government makework project. To others it is an alien construct. To others it is a political torture device. I don’t think there is a definitive answer. What is so terrifying about it is you stick mice in a maze and they don’t know what the big, underlying meaning is. Same situation here. They spend their whole time trying to get out but out to where?

“One level you can enjoy it as a violent, comic-action story with plenty of gore and death. Underneath there is this other intelligent level going on. Looking at the way people think and feel. If these idiots would get together and help each other as opposed to constantly bickering, they would have stood a better chance at getting out.”

CUBE seems to promise a bright future for Natale and great delights in store for fans of cinefantastique. Noted the Canadian Film Centre’s Colin Brennon, “I think he has a great future ahead of him. We are all banking on him to be our next David Cronenberg. To be international in scope.”

David Hewlett as Worth, who helped build the CUBE as part of a forgotten government make-work project.
Prince Valiant

An epic adaptation of the Arthurian comic strip.

By Alan Jones

The spirit of Camelot lives on in PRINCE VALIANT, Constantin Films’ $20 million production, based on the celebrated comic-strip adventures conceived and drawn by Harold R. Foster. British newcomer Stephen Moyer leaps into action in the medieval maverick title role as a young squire in King Arthur’s court who inadvertently embarks on a quest to save his country while trying to learn the mysterious secret of his past. The film was directed by Anthony Hickox (WAXWORK) and co-written by Hickox and producer Carsten Lorenz (MOON 44). Although the film has opened in Germany, Paramount Pictures has declined to pick up its option to release it theatrically Stateside.

In a fairytale plot packed with swashbuckling fantasy, escapist fun, dragons, and sorcery, Prince Valiant uses both wit and sword to save Camelot from the pillaging Vikings who have stolen Excalibur and are threatening to overthrow the famous Knights of the Round Table. Starring alongside Moyer are Edward Fox as King Arthur; Joanna Lumley as his estranged evil sister Morgan Le Fey, the puppetmaster behind all the dastardly deeds; and Thomas Kretschmann (THE STENDBAL SYNDROME) is Thagnar the Viking warrior who helps Morgan steal Merlin’s spellbook. Katherine Heigl plays the feisty Princess Ilene, Valiant’s unlikely ally in battle—and in love. Other key roles are filled by Udo Kier (THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO) as Thagnar’s brother, Sigon the Usurper; Ron Perlman (CITY OF THE LOST CHILDREN) is Boltar the Dragon Man, who holds the key to Valiant’s heritage; and Warwick Davis (LEPRECHAUN) plays Pechet, Valiant’s devoted servant. Making their feature film debuts are supermodels Jodie Kidd, as the Lady of the Lake, and Marcus Schenkenberg as the giant Tiny.

Hickox first encountered the project in 1995 at Constantin Films (the company that co-produced the unreleased FANTASTIC FOUR in order to maintain their option on the material). “But at that time,” said Hickox, “although some Constantin personnel fought hard for me, they really wanted one of the big boys like director Renny Harlin with a huge budget to match.” Then, in 1995, Hickox directed the stylish thriller INVASION OF PRIVACY, starring Mili Avital and Naomi Campbell, which was co-produced by Lorenz. Hickox recalled, “We were finishing INVASION OF PRIVACY, when Constantin executive producer Bernd Eichinger called and asked us to team up to make PRINCE VALIANT. They’d heard how well Carsten and I had been getting along. Their long period of developing the project for a top director, and with a huge budget, hadn’t panned out and they had to get any PRINCE VALIANT in front of the cameras before their option ran out.”

Lorenz said, “Every studio at the time Tony made his first PRINCE VALIANT pitch was gearing up to make a medieval costume drama: BRAVEHEART, ROB ROY, FIRST KNIGHT. So we knew when we took on PRINCE VALIANT at the tail end of that cycle that we’d have to make it extra special and give it a whole new and unusual spin.” Lorenz added, “Like James

Top left: Thomas Kretschmann as PRINCE VALIANT’s villain, Thagnar the Viking Warrior. Below: Udo Kier as Thagnar’s brother, Sigon the Usurper. The Arthurian comic strip adaptation has no U.S. release.
King Arthur (Edward Fox) makes his squere Valiant (Stephen Moyer) a Knight of the Round Table.

Bond, Valiant is concerned with justice and truth. He's Generation X medieval-style with lofty ideals but little knowledge of how to put them into practice. We've given him some rather neat medieval gadgets—nothing outlandish or strange—just weapons built into the knights' armor like crossbows, blades, and drills. Tony and I took the basic approach that if they had the knowledge, but had to use contemporary materials, what would they have come up with? We also had to bear in mind our contract to deliver a PG-rated film. There's no blood in our fantasy Camelot, and we've given it the lightness of ROBIN HOOD: PRINCE OF THIEVES. We haven't taken historical accuracy too seriously, only seriously enough to make certain philosophical points. The whole idea of Camelot and one person with ideals keeping the nation together is still a very potent one. I think that's why the King Arthur myth continues to be so popular filmically. You can always find modern parallels to mine deeply in the dense subject matter.

Hickox and Lorenz began co-scripting PRINCE VALIANT in September, 1995, and decided not to base their story on any particular comic strip adventure. Instead an eclectic amalgam of thrilling incident, regal pageantry, and evil sorcery from Harold R. Foster's overall body of imagination was considered the best way to go. Lorenz said, "Naturally we decided to place our story against the backdrop of Camelot, Excalibur, King Arthur, and his Knights of the Round Table, so we wouldn't have to explain too much to the audience about the background. They know these legendary characters and events already. Out of the huge wealth of Foster strips we probably picked the best loved and most vivid [images], e.g. the pit of alligators. It was really important in my mind that, while sticking to the comic book

PRINCE VALIANT universe to three-dimensional life. Some establishing scenes are rendered in comic-strip panels before dissolving into live action at the turn of the animated page. Lorenz said, "$20 million might not seem like a lot of money in budget terms these days but it's a fortune for Tony and me. It's the highest budget either of us have ever had. When I made MOON 44 with Roland Emmerich, our special effects backdrops was a Styrofoam-sprayed warehouse! The PRINCE VALIANT budget has been enough to manufacture everything from scratch—you can't run down to your local store for medieval goods—and to pay for the large number of extras."

Hickox said, "I've always been accused of being over-the-top. Critics always said I was excessive in my horror films and, while we haven't used either blood or violence in PRINCE VALIANT, I think that trait shows up here in the amount of fun, tension and wild excitement there is on screen. I've simply substituted gore with other excesses."

British newcomer Moyer as Valiant, grieves over wounded body of Princess Iren (Katherine Heigl) in the Constantin Films production.

"The hardest part was to keep the script on budget. There was an overload of witches, monsters, and spells in the first draft, which ran 150 pages."

—Director Tony Hickox—
Avery Brooks directs an episode on racism set in 1950s America.

By Anna Kaplan

In time-honored STAR TREK tradition, DEEP SPACE NINE will present an episode dealing directly with the topic of racism in "Far Beyond the Stars." Scheduled to air during the February television sweeps, the teleplay was written by Ira Steven Behr and Hans Beimler, from a story by Marc Scott Zicree, and directed by Avery Brooks (Captain Sisko). Sisko falls into a coma, and experiences what seems to be a dream about being a science fiction writer named Benny, living in New York in 1953. Benny has written the story of DEEP SPACE NINE, impressing a group of fellow scribes at the offices of the imaginary "Incredible Tales." But the editor, played by Rene Auberjonois, has no intention of publishing the story. He says to Benny, "Your hero is a Negro captain in charge of a space station, for Christ's sake. It's not believable."

The actors playing writers go on to argue about racism. The roles were filled by DEEP SPACE NINE regulars and some of the recurring guest cast, out of alien make-up. Armin Shimerman (Quark) plays a liberal thinker who comes to Benny's defense. Also present is Nana Visitori (Kira), as the feisty Kay, married to the very English but brown Julius, played by her real-life husband Alexander Siddig (Dr. Bashir). Colm Meaney does a turn as an American who smokes a pipe, plays bongos and writes noncontroversial stories about robots. J.G. Hertzler (Martok) is the magazine's illustrator, while Terry Farrell (Dax) takes on the job of secretary. As they read Benny's story and react, they talk about the fascinating characters, a multiethnic group of strong men and women that seems unbelievable to the magazine's editor. Noted Siddig, "You cannot have something in the '50s, dealing with a multicultural group of people, especially like our cast, and not talk about race at some point, in America."

Later, on the streets of Harlem, Brooks, Cirroc Lofton (Jake), and Brock Peters (Joseph Sisko) are chased by policemen Jeffrey Combs (Weyoun) and Marc Alaimo (Gul Dukat). Racial epithets are tossed out. Of course, this backward look at the 1950's becomes a way to explore racism today. The whole piece works well as science fiction, never answering the question of where the dream ends and reality begins. This is STAR TREK at its best, thought-provoking and perhaps controversial, using science fiction to tackle bigger social and ethical issues. The actors relished the chance to do this. For many of them, the episode took on additional layers of meaning as they related personally to their characters.

Auberjonois, as the editor defending the status quo and therefore racism, played a "bad guy." Stepping out of the magazine office set, and looking very historically accurate, Auberjonois said, "It's a very special episode for a whole bunch of reasons. This is like creating a whole new character. It means you've got to work, you've actually got to put some thought into it. When [executive producer] Ira Behr was first talking to me about it, I think he was afraid that I wasn't going to want to do it because [my character] is the bad guy. I like to think I'm a good actor. When a good actor is playing a 'bad guy' you look for a way, because you can't play a bad person. No bad person thinks they're bad. This character does not believe he is bad. He's just doing his job. Of course that's how some of the greatest sins of humanity are committed, by people doing their jobs. This man is just doing his job."

In 1953, the status quo also included McCarthyism and the cold war. During the hunt for alleged subversives headed by Joseph McCarthy and others in the government, many writers and actors were blacklisted and prevented from working. In the course of "Far Beyond the Stars," the editor calls Shimerman's character a "Red," echoing charges often made during the McCarthy period, with which Auberjonois had
“Avery is doing a story about a black man, and directing it, so there’s a lot of passion. Emotions run high, in a very good way.”

—Rene Auberjonois, actor—

personal experience. He explained, “I was thirteen years old at that time. I was very aware that I lived in a community of a lot of black-listed actors. My dad was the head of the French desk of ‘Voice of America’ and he was in fact investigated by McCarthy. I have a really direct connection to this. I’m probably the only cast member old enough to really remember this period.”

Armin Shimerman described his character as one of those that would have been a target of the blacklists. He said, “The character’s name is Herbert Rosoff, and he is, I believe, out of that good leftie tradition of socialists that were around in the forties and fifties who cared about the under class and about the working man. He certainly feels for Benny, the character that Avery is portraying. It is a great delineation of a fifties liberal. He’s standing up [against] injustice, and thank God for the people who did or else our world today in the nineties would be a lot different. Originally the character was a communist, and I’m a little bit disappointed that he’s still not, but I cer-

tainly see him as a socialist. As a socialist, he’s loud and he’s angry, and he wants the world to change a lot faster than it will.”

He continued, “I believe that the best thing that STAR TREK can do is talk about our present day existence through the metaphor of the 24th century. That’s what we’re talking about. We’re talking about the element of racism in our country, and we’re talking about the fact that one class often does not get the breaks or the opportunities that another class does simply because of

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How not to (re)make a beloved children's

By Dan Persons

Mind you, I'm not wholly adverse to the proposition that cute, li'l, six-inch-high, kid's-story protagonists should be reduced to grease smears by any means necessary. It's just that I never thought I'd have these feelings for this particular reason. THE BORROWERS, the award-winning kid's book from the heart of the 1950s, has been adapted to the screen at least twice before: once during the seventies, and more recently as a Ted Turner TV movie starring Ian Holme. Why anyone would want to tackle the material again is beyond me, unless the new adaptation was such an original take on the topic that the lure was impossible to resist.

Well, Sparky, how's this for original thinking? Take a much-beloved kid's story, strip away every element that makes it much-beloved, plunk it down into an over-designed movie-reality that negates what's left of the delicate fantasy, and then miscast your headline performer so egregiously that it only cements the widely-held belief that the man has absolutely no aptitude in choosing leading roles. Release on President's Day weekend and wait for the bucks to roll in. Yessir, that's entertainment.

Technically sophisticated and thematically repugnant, THE BORROWERS, updated to 1998, becomes the latest example of the theory that these days, "family" films have to either be BARNEY bland or so hyped-up and teen-friendly that the Three Stooges would wince in their seats. Not satisfied with a family of miniature Borrowers whose adventures arise organically from their environment underneath the floorboards of a cozy British home, screenwriters Gavin Scott and John Kamps, producers Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, and Rachel Talalay (the latter the director of TANK GIRL—warning!), and director Peter Hewitt (BILL AND TED'S BOGUS JOURNEY—warning, danger!) have conspired to introduce into this setup an effete, mercenary lawyer who wishes to raze the house and exterminate the tiny Clock family. The Borrower's only recourse: unite with their brethren and fight back! It'd be inspirational—on the order of WATERSHIP DOWN or THE HOBBIT—if only the results weren't so coarse, violent, and dumb.

I have to admit here: I went blind into the screening, knowing only that John Goodman was the lead actor. Fair enough, I thought—Mr. Goodman had been getting the short end of the stick in his film career, making lots of money with the likes of THE FLINTSTONES and KING RALPH, but garnering little respect for investing his considerable talents in such unadulterated crap. What a clever idea, I thought, to take the expansive, but definitely teddy-bearish Goodman and cast him in a gentle, family-oriented adventure about miniature people. Surely the man who emerged, dignity intact, from his time with bipolar poster-girl Roseanne would have enough finesse to handle the role of patriarch of either the normal-sized "bean" (for human-being) family or, more wittily, the miniature Borrowers.

Skunked again. Here's what Goodman, who actually plays the evil lawyer Oscius P. Potter, goes through in the course of THE BORROWERS: he is electrocuted, brained with a hammer, impaled with pins, scalped with caustic foam, maced with bug bomb, baptised in molten cheese, and trussed up like a Christmas goose. When, during the ultra-violent finale, Mr. Goodman bends over to snatch at a Borrower, the ever-subtle Mr. Hewitt zooms in on the actor's prodigious posterior, splashing Goodman's ass across the Panavision screen as if it was a LAWRENCE OF ARABIA desert and the director considered himself David Lean. In short, with this film, John Goodman's been effectively Glenn Closed, John Hughesed, Chris Columbused. He's gone from well-regarded actor to funny fatman in a HOME ALONE knockoff. Congrats, John—you need more than a good agent, you need someone who'll bitch-slap you silly if you ever again think of assaying another such role.

Some good does come out of this generally wrong-headed, mean-spirited fiasco. The child actors—Flora Newbiggin and Tom Felton as the miniature Clock siblings and Bradley Pierce as the human boy who joins them in their adventures—each individually ex-
Peter Hewitt

The director wants to do family fare.

By Alan Jones

BORROWERS director Peter Hewitt made his debut in 1990 with the BAFTA award-winning short THE CANDY SHOW and gained his first feature film credit with BILL & TED'S BOGUS JOURNEY. "After that my career took a dip," stated the thoughtful Hewitt. "I didn't like the typecasting BILL & TED brought me. It got to the point where all I was offered were another CONEHEADS or WAYNE'S WORLD 2. That's why I did WILD PALMS for television, and then TOM & HUCK for Disney. I've wanted to veer more towards family-oriented drama and THE BORROWERS was perfect for me."

The one visual technique Hewitt didn't resort to in THE BORROWERS was false perspective as showcased particularly well in Disney's DARBY O'GILL AND THE LITTLE PEOPLE. "We thought about it but didn't use it in the end," he said. "If I'd had two people standing so far away from each other to achieve the trick I couldn't have moved the camera at all. The shots would have been too static with that approach. We did investigate the best way of doing every shot and although that cropped up, we decided against it. It seems we've staggered from one technical problem to the next hoping the movie would get easier as we went on through the schedule but it hasn't. I remember shooting on location in the first week thinking, 'Once this is over and we're off location it will get easier.' Then it was, 'Once we get off this set and into the next things will change.' But it never did! Making THE BORROWERS has been tough. My one constant thought's been, 'How on earth did Ridley Scott make BLADE RUNNER?'

In fact, to Hewitt, it seems like he's shot four movies in total as he explained. "There was the John Goodman movie. We only had him for five weeks which meant filming all his scenes first. Then we shot the rest of the 'human beans.' The Borrowers were next on the giant sets. And we finished off with the blue screen work. Goodman is in the picture because I absolutely adore his work. It was touch and go that we'd get him but once he became available the rest of the cast fell into place. At first there was the feeling that all the humans should be American so it wouldn't seem odd, but I resisted that, casting Hugh Laurie as a policeman and Mark Williams as the exterminator. The Borrowers all became English, because Jim and Pelia are English so it was obvious their kids would be too."

Although producer Working Title does see THE BORROWERS in terms of a potential franchise, with toy lines and other sundry tie-ins, that's not what it's about in Hewitt's mind. Said the director, whose next project is the live-action film version of Gerry Anderson's cult puppet series THUNDERBIRDS. "I was interested solely in getting the funniest, brightest and sharpest script together so we could forge ahead and make a fabulous film. If there are sequels to be done it will come out of the fact that they're interesting projects grounded in a good base. I'll be satisfied just knowing that an audience believes it when John Goodman picks up a Borrower and looks them straight in the eye without me having to pander to them stylistically. What do you have to bear in mind when you're making a kid's movie for all the family? Never think for a moment you're making a kid's movie for all the family!"
In this animation prize fight, the audience is the winner

ANASTASIA

Voices:

Anastasia: Meg Ryan
Dmitri: John Cusack
Vladimir: Alexei Grosney
Rasputin: Christopher Lloyd
Bartok: Hank Azaria
Sophie: Bernadette Peters
Young Anastasia: Kareen Dunst
Dowager Empress Marie: Angela Lansbury

THE LITTLE MERMAID

Voices:

Louie: Rene Auberjonois
Eric: Christopher Daniel Barnes
Ariel: Jodi Benson
Pinocchio: Pat Carroll
Flotsam and Jetsam: Paddi Edwards
Scuttle: Buddy Hackett
Flounder: Jason Marin
Triton: Kenneth Mars
Carabotta: Edie McClurg
Seahorse: Will Ryan

Fox’s animated ANASTASIA effectively copied the Disney formula for success.

by Mike Lyons

Last November, it sometimes seemed as if the animated heroines of ANASTASIA and THE LITTLE MERMAID were about to meet in a World Wrestling Federation cage match. At least, such was the media spin on the “War in Toontown,” which saw the re-issue of Disney’s THE LITTLE MER-

MAID one week before Fox Animation’s ambitious first feature, ANASTASIA. Putting media hype aside, viewers were treated to not only a reliable classic back on the big screen, but also a surprisingly impressive debut.

Reminders of the animation grudge match surface throughout ANASTASIA. The film is such a shameless copy of the Disney paradigm (which in turn was a shameless copy of the Broadway musical paradigm) that comparisons are not only inevitable; they seem expected. ANASTASIA cannily utilizes all the elements: the big opening production number, the beautiful heroine, her unsuspecting Prince Charming, the villainous sorcerer, the sidekicks (both smart aleck and cute), and of course the happy ending.

Some of these elements do, however, seem a bit forced. Rasputin and Bartok are wonderfully realized animated personalities, but their roles never really gel in terms of plot. Stuck in his limbo, Rasputin becomes one of animation’s most passive villains, sending his glonkin-like minions out to do his dirty work while watching the action on a mystical orb. Because of this, his final confrontation with Anastasia is too little too late. Bartok’s jittery movements are coupled perfectly with Hank Azaria’s sardonic vocal performance, but the character is never really defined as good or evil. You begin to wonder why exactly he’s on Rasputin’s side, and (other than a means to sell toys) there’s really no need for the character.

In Bartok’s defense, he is a nice break from the ultra-realistic animation of the lead characters, who act, react, move, sing and dance as if they’ve just walked over from live-action. This startling artistry is a break from the usual animated routine, but at times it’s also distracting, reducing the magic the medium can provide.

ANASTASIA is slick and pre-packaged, but it’s also entertaining and compelling (a rarity among non-Disney animated films). The story, which takes us from the Russian Revolution to 1920s Paris, moves like lightning, never getting bogged down. Ironically, the film plays faster and looser with history than Disney’s POCAHONTAS, which took more heat for fudging the facts. To their credit, the filmmakers don’t assault viewers with the themes of following one’s heart and finding one’s place in the world; instead, we discover the messages as the characters do.

ANASTASIA is as lush and colorful a royal ball that opens the film. Don Bluth (who co-directed with longtime collaborator Gary Goldman) has always had a keen sense of character and production design (elements that buoyed even his mediocre outings). In ANASTASIA, animation and voice are matched perfectly, coming together to form unique performers. And, from a spectacular train wreck sequence to fireworks over the Eiffel Tower, there is not one scene in the film that isn’t pleasant to watch. This is Bluth’s best work in years; despite its shortcomings, the end result is a satisfying experience.

Ironically, the film’s biggest competitor, the re-issued LITTLE MERMAID, is a film whose success sparked the current animation renaissance that gave ANASTASIA life. Despite its availability on home video, MERMAID most definitely warranted a second look on the big screen during its limited run. The film represents some of Disney’s finest work: the love-struck look in Ariel’s eyes; the campy, slithering Ursula; the nervous skittering of Sebastian the Crab, and the dense, cold feel of the ocean are as enchanting as ever. So are Alan Menken and the late Howard Ashman’s songs—so catchy you hum them no matter how many times you hear them (“Under the Sea” is even more exhilarating when splashed across the big screen in six-track stereo).

It was also nice to see this Disney musical formula we’ve all become accustomed to, in its nascent form. In all, THE LITTLE MERMAID is a nice, quaint reminder of what animated films were like before they became overwhelming marketing machines.

Ultimately, the “battle” between ANASTASIA and THE LITTLE MERMAID was good news for animation buffs. A decade ago, the medium was nothing more than a dusty corner of Hollywood. Now, we actually have choices—one week apart, no less! This is one “war” in which the audience definitely won.
**REVIEWS**

**FILM RATINGS**

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

**ALIEN RESURRECTION**


It is a little hard for this third sequel to ratchet up the movie's sense of dread. The sequence that marked Ridley Scott's initial entry, but that certainly didn't stop the filmmakers from trying. Joss Whedon's script works hard to justify the existence of a new film, and actually comes with a few new wrinkles; the most obvious (and effective) is bringing back Ripley not as the familiar character we know, but as a clone. Sigourney Weaver makes the most out of this new characterization, emphasizing her enhanced strength and sensory powers without ever quite turning Ripley into a superhuman. The rest of the cast (except for Winona Ryder, who is a little weak) do a good job of portraying grungy space truckers, conspiratorial military types, and demented scientists.

French director Jean-Pierre Jeunet jumps into the alien universe as if he were born to it; the film's imagery is twisted and warped but always fascinating to watch (especially when the cloned Ripley, with a number tattooed on her arm, encounters a lab containing the seven previous, aborted attempts). There are a few problems, however: as in ALIENS, the creatures' acidic blood is ignored whenever it is inconvenient (numerous beasts explode without breaching the hull or even spattering the nearby humans); and the thematic exploration of Ripley's new identity is abandoned once the monsters run amok. But this is still an effective entry in the series.

- Steve Biodrowski

**FLUBBER**


In this high-gloss remake of Disney's cartoon THE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR (1961), there's a moment when Professor Brainard's robot sidekick, Weebot, actually has a death scene. At the screening I attended, as the professor (Williams) sat tearfully over his creations, the audience was so quiet that you'd have thought Old Yeller was dying. This is the kind of film FLUBBER is—something ridiculous, completely commercial, bluntly derivative, and yet somewhat likeable. John Hughes (sharing script credit with the late Bill Walsh, who wrote the original) again rehashes his trademark HOME ALONE slapstick; however, while some of it is hilarious, much of it is tirelessly repetitive. Williams does what he can in an underwritten role, and Harden seems lost as the professor put-upon fiancé. Christopher McDonald (as a rival for Harden) and Ted Levine (as a comic thugs abused by cartoon violence) sink their teeth into their roles with glee.

The visual effects are the film's lure. The green goo is even given a show-off effects sequence, in which it breaks into a whirling samba number. The scene does nothing for the plot, but it's undeniably fun to watch. FLUBBER is redeemed by such moments, which come along just as the plot is beginning to unravel, giving way to a setpiece that leaves one with a child-like smile. Despite its faults, FLUBBER is a guilty pleasure, except for those who didn't shed a tear for poor Weebot.

- Mike Lyons

**DARK CITY**


A truly fascinating piece of weirdness masquerading as a mainstream movie. Alex Proyas' DARK CITY takes its time building up audience identification with its amnesiac hero, but in the end the whole thing pays off in a way that is engaging and moving. Meanwhile, the production design and special effects do their best to create a science fiction film noir cityscape that almost rivals BLADE RUNNER, and for a time, it seems as if the film will be nothing but an empty exercise in style. These fears are put to rest, as the reasons for the weird look and life of the nameless city are gradually revealed.

John Murdoch (Sewell) wakes in a hotel room with a murder victim and almost no memory of his life. While trying to determine whether he really is a murderer, he also tracks down his past. But here's the rub: the past he's seeking may not be his real one; in fact, it may be only a fabrication by the Strangers, a mysterious legion who rule, unexplained, over the bowels of the city. Although this is not a horror film, it is frightening on a profound level, as the implications of its premise are genuinely disturbing: what is the nature of identity, of who we are, if we can't trust our own memories? Ultimately, the film offers some sentimental answers; but by the time this happens, you'll feel so relieved from the oppressive gloom that, rather than quibble, you will want to surrender yourself to the uplifting reassurances.

- Steve Biodrowski

**MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNihilation**


A misfortune of the cult popularity of Hong Kong Fant-Asia films is that Hollywood liberally "borrows" action sight gags from them, assuming that American audiences haven't seen the originals. Three years ago MORTAL KOMBAT pleaded guilty to this crime. Its special effects and set design were helpless against a weak story, uneven acting, and farcically vapid characters. Because it starred Hong Kong-born Robin Shou, it was seen as legitimate to emulate the films of Tsui Hark and Ching Siu Tung. Although the film fared well in America, it bombed in Asia, because the stylized action was a rehash of old ideas sugar-coated with American special effects.

Three years later, the fights are still painfully unoriginal, but this time the pugilistic finale mimics Tetsuya Yamashita's Mortal Kombat: Folktale flick, MAGIC SERPENT, wherein the two main combatants turn into their animalistic forms, a giant frog and a flying dragon, and do battle at the evil warlord's abode. In MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNihilation, our hero turns into a whole-life heathen to battle the evil warlord, who morphs into a multi-headed hydra (a la JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS). At least the transition is clever.

Whereas the fights could have been an exciting exploitation of group confrontations and mass hysteria, they weakly fizzle into a series of one-on-one confrontations, where crummy editing and too many close-ups hide disabilities rather than add intensity. And if you thought Steven Segal's environmental soliloquy in ON DEADLY GROUND was blantly, ANNihilation's message of "working together as a team" is so much in your face that even Kwa Ching Caine wasn't this obvious (although the message is a positive one for young filmmakers). To end on a positive note, the cinematography was visually stimulating; the lighting was electrically intoxicating; and the techno-disco score and sound effects saved the action bits and gave the film some true excitement.

- Craig D. Reid

**SCREAM 2**

Director: Wes Craven. Writer: Kevin Williamson. Dimension, 12:97. 120 mins. R. With: David Arquette, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Judy Geoghan, Skeet Ulric, oz, on.

The first scene of this sequel is surprisingly good: During a screening of STAB—supposedly based on the events of SCREAM—a psycho-killer begins acting out the action of the film-within-a-film. In this one brief moment, SCREAM 2 delivers on the promise that SCREAM failed to fulfill, creating a fun and scary self-referential work. And this, unfortunately, we're back to the same old grind: Kevin Williamson pales on the cluttered plot we're supposed to forgive given the movie's tack-and-slash scenario because the characters talk about these cliches. Williamson is already repeating himself (e.g., the victim locked in the back seat of the police car, as in KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST NIGHT). Wes Craven is on a creative roll as well, as possible, but the plot absurdities ultimately overwhelm the exercise... And for a director who's always avoided condensing portrayals of teen-agers, he fails badly with his caricatured sorority girls. A college-aged stage play, intended to uphold the material by reminding us that horror has its roots in Greek tragedy, only backfires, showcasing Neve Campbell's limits as an actress, and reminding us that her character is hardly a Cassandra figure.

- Steve Biodrowski
THE BORDERLAND:
“Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil”

By Anthony P. Montesano

The Clint Eastwood-directed MIDNIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF GOOD AND EVIL (Warner Bros., 11/97, 155 mins, R) begins and ends in Bonaventure Cemetery in Savannah, Georgia. The soulful strains of the melancholy “Skylark” play on the soundtrack as the camera drifts to the statue of a young girl who seems to balance the very nature of Good and Evil in the palm of her hands. It is a magnificent framing to this sometimes haunting film which tells a tale of secrets, murder, lies, and the supernatural.

The book, written by John Berendt, tells the true story of Jim Williams, a socially prominent antiques dealer (and closeted gay man) who was tried four times for shooting his own house cover. The book (and to a lesser extent the film) is populated by a handful of Southern Gothic characters including Minerva, the local voodoo priestess and the Lady Chablis, a being thrown by Jim Williams (Kevin Spacey) at his estate. But what starts out as a 500-word article turns into a book-length project when Williams is charged with murder and Kevin Spacey (Kevin Spacey) plays the role of the man who lives around him. Unlike Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) in BLUE VELVET, who exclaims, “I’m seeing something that was always hidden,” while his curiosity takes him deep into a world of darkness, Cusack’s Kelso always keeps to the moral high ground. Early in the film, Kelso is shown a painting which he immediately identifies as another painting. He, like Beaumont in BLUE VELVET, also sees “something that was always hidden.”

“Have you x-rayed it?” he asks, wanting to learn the true painting.

“No, I rather enjoy not knowing what it’s covering up,” replies Spacey’s Williams.

This film could have taken its place among classics of American Gothic cinema such as David Lynch’s BLUE VELVET and Alfred Hitchcock’s SHADOW OF A DOUBT, but unlike those films, GARDEN OF GOOD AND EVIL does not maintain a consistent tone long enough to create any lasting dramatic impact. That’s not to say the film is without its moments; in fact, there is much to recommend it. The ending in particular is wonderfully uneasy, recalling the true situation depicted in the “Escape Clause” episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE. And the supernatural influences of the voodoo priestess Minerva (Irra F. Hall) are felt throughout, and Her final warnings provide the most effective moments of uneasiness. “To understand the living, you must commune with the dead,” says Minerva, who stands as a silent sentinel overseeing the hidden lives of Savannah.

DIRECT-TO-VIDEO

MADE-FOR-TELEVISION

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: THE ENCHANTED CHRISTMAS


This top-notch piece of animation, a direct-to-video sequel to Disney’s landmark 1991 film, takes place within the time frame of the original story, when the supporting characters (Mrs. Potts, Lumiere, and Cogsworth) were still enchanted objects. The Prince, since being turned into a Beast on Christmas night, has forbidden Christmas. Belle takes it upon herself to reintroduce the holiday to the castle.

What makes ENCHANTED CHRISTMAS so enjoyable is the return of all the original voices and personalities, which meld perfectly with a trio of new characters. Two of them—Angelique, the castle decorator, now a Christmas ornament (Bernadette Peters) and Fife, the court musician (Paul "Pee Wee Herman" Ruebens) are instantly likable. The third new character, Forte the pipe organ, is created with fluid, computer generated imagery, and has been given the sneer-like mouth shapes of its vocal counterpart, Tim Curry, along with a truly menacing persona.

The character is also an example of how expressive and full the animation is in an opening candle light procession and a scene in which Belle is rescued from thin ice are standouts. Sure, it may not be as lush as the original, and the music may be slightly below par, but compare it to any of the static waste that’s usually thrown out on video, and it passes with all its vibrant colors.

•• Mike Lyons

REISSUES, REVIVALS, AND RESTORATIONS:
“Repulsion” and “Dracula”

By Steve Biodrowski

Video may have killed the radio star, but more significantly it has almost killed off the B Movie House. With old films now available on tape and disc, it is less financially viable to re-release them theatrically (unless you’re talking about STAR WARS). For those of us who consider the theatre-going experience an essential part of enjoying a movie, it was a pleasure to have the opportunity of seeing both Tod Browning’s 1931 DRACULA, and Roman Polanski’s 1968 RE-PULSION on the big screen. The two films are so different that they don’t warrant discussion together, except insofar as it was nice to reassess both of them in light of their reputations. DRACULA almost comes off better, if only because its reputation is so low; while REPULSION cannot quite live up to the level of perfection that has been claimed for it.

It’s taken for granted today that DRACULA is slow, talky, and memorable only for Bela Lugosi’s performance. So it is pleasant to report that the film actually does play well for an audience of eager fans. The first half is startlingly good—filled with a delicious atmosphere and melodrama—and when things slow down later, they never quite grind to a halt. The film may not be a masterpiece, but it is much better than generally regarded, and deserves more critical latitude than F.W. Murnau’s overrated silent snoopfest, NOSFERATU.

REPULSION, on the other hand, is a little gem of a movie that manages to merge well with art house aesthetics—one of the first films to do so after George Franju’s 1958 EYES WITHOUT A FACE. Using the simplest of resources, Polanski created a disturbing monster with his woman’s (Catherine Deneuve) descent into madness in a way that invites audience identification even while creepin’ you out. Much of the imagery is memorably revolting (a rotting rabbit) or surreally disturbing (hands emerging from the walls to fondle the hallucinating woman). Still, the film does not quite sustain full tension for its entire run time; it does grow repetitive. (I lost count of the number of times the character’s psychosis solitude was interrupted by the ringing phone, always shown in the same closeup. When she finally cuts the cord, it’s supposed to symbolize her final break with the outside world; instead, I wanted to cheer, “At last!”)

This minor quibble is not meant to detract from the film’s greatness but rather to point out, once again, that certain films seem to get a fairer shake from critics than others. This is especially true in the horror genre, where a little bit of artistry goes a long way toward earning favorable reviews that less ambitious but equally effective films also deserve.
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KULL KUDDA BEEN A KONTENDER
Just read your review of KULL THE CONQUEROR [19:8:55]. Best, most incisive review I've read yet. Given that your reviewer agrees with most of the others, I'm glad to have been the only naysayer among all those cheerleaders touting the film in your Kull issue [29:3]. I'm looking real smart right about now. Dubious victory. I'd rather have that Howard adaptation which, as your reviewer says, "can truly take us to the Hyborian Age." Sadly, we had the script that did it, before its eversion. I should send you a copy sometime.

Charles Edward Pogue via email

TRIBBLE QUIBBLES FROM ENTERPRISE MODEL-BUILDER
The November Special Double-Issue [29:6/7] featuring your annual review of Star Trek, particularly the story about DS9's "Trials and Tribble-ations" episode, is a must-have edition for Trek fans. Specifically, I refer to Anna L. Kaplan's article beginning on page 64 whereby she provides a captivating account of its production.

It's too bad that those responsible for supervising and building the new versions of the Enterprise and K-7 space station miniatures for the show didn't save themselves a lot of time and needless grief in reproducing the original models if they had retrieved the 30th anniversary issue [27:11/12] of Cinefantastique wherein they would have read Dan Fiebert's detailed account of building those models. It may come as a surprise to those same parties that the original drawings as well as a swath of the gray-green surface color still exist. And so do the decals for the 3-foot Enterprise model. I might add that in Herbert Solow's recent book titled Star Trek Sketchbook, what is purported to be the "The Final Drawing" of the Enterprise, is unlike what I worked from to build both the 3-foot and 11foot versions. And as much as I would like to render my sympathy, I find it very difficult to believe for one minute that "Greg Jein went to unbelievable lengths to make this ship [Enterprise] identical to the 11-footer." Especially if he was duplicating the present-day version of the ship currently stored at the National Air & Space Museum, and not as it appeared back in 1967.

As for the K-7 model, according to Ms. Kaplan's quote of effects supervisor Gary Hutzel that "No one even has a production photograph of anyone standing next to it, so we have no idea even how big it was" is positive proof of how little effort was expended to uncover its size and details. There does exist a 35mm outtake of myself in close proximity of the space station as I controlled its rotating speed and lights while the camera rolled at Howard Anderson Co.'s studio on Fairfax Ave. in Hollywood on September 1 & 5, 1967. In one of the few roles it played during the life of the Star Trek series, the 3-foot version of the Enterprise "maneuvered" in the background. My perception of Jein's version of the K-7 satellite model is that it is entirely too large and rigged with far too many lights. I must also correct Hutzel when he is quoted as saying "The original 11-foot Enterprise is mostly made of wood." Not so! The primary hull is formed of Royalite plastic held together by a wood frame. The secondary hull consists of segmented sugar pine while the pods or propulsion units are comprised of rolled sheet metal over wooden ribs. Inspect it again, Gary!

In Kaplan's interview, Jein describes the original Enterprise possessing "a lot of detail, a lot of subtle color details..." When delivered for filming the first as well as the second Star Trek pilot, the overall color scheme of the model was a single tone of color, except of course for the ports, windows, identifying marks, main sensor and the domes of the propulsion units. A lighter tone of the same basic color accentuated the few add-on details. But what was done to the 11-foot Enterprise model many years later, under the guise of a "restoration" job, is another story.

Other than my nit-picking, Star Trek's "Trials and Tribble-ations" episode will someday rank as a classic in its own right. It was an incredible achievement of effects wizardry.

Richard C. Datin
Reno, NV

TREK DESIGNER STEVE BURG
Thank you for the fine article on the STAR TREK VOYAGER visual effects, [29:6/7]. In the article "Scorpion, Part 1" by Anna Kaplan, [page 95] credit for the design work by Steve Burg was given to Peter Lauritson, Dan Curry and myself, Ronald B. Moore.

The species 8472 was designed with input from many people. Working under the supervision of Peter Lauritson, Dan Curry and myself, Steve Burg created many drawings of the creature, and we were able to pick one that the CGI facility was able to create as a computer model.

Making VOYAGER is a group effort. As the visual effects supervisor, I have come to depend on the many people I work with. This was a simple oversight that was as much our fault as yours. I hope for Steve's benefit you can see that this note gets published.

Ronald B. Moore
STAR TREK VOYAGER Visual Effects Supervisor
 Paramount Pictures
 Los Angeles, CA, 90038

HE WAS NO SHERLOCK HOLMES
Since the premise of FAIRY TALE: A TRUE STORY [29:6/7:18] is just a little misleading, I thought perhaps you'd like to get a bit more background on the event that inspired it.

The Christmas 1920 issue of Strand magazine featured an astonishing piece by Sherlock Holmes creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—astonishing first because it claimed that actual, living fairies had been photographed and second because it was not presented as fiction. Two Yorkshire girls had shown him photos they had taken of fairies and he believed every word they told him. He had learned of the girls' feat via Edward L. Gardner, an advocate of theosophy who firmly believed in the reality of gnomes, elves and fairies. Doyle was sent two photos, supposedly taken on July and September 1917. The first showed ten-year-old Frances Griffiths with four fairies, three of them winged and the fourth playing a pipe. The photo was taken by her cousin, Elsie Wright, age 16, who is seen in the second picture playing with a gnome. Eventually it was revealed that there were three other photos, all showing one or another of the two girls in the company of tiny winged figures.

Doyle's reasons for believing the photos genuine are specious and credulous. For one, since the photos were taken by "two children of the artisan class" "photographic tricks would be beyond them." He had the prints and negatives examined by experts, including those at Kodak, who found no evidence of such obvious tricks as double exposures. Indeed, it is pronounced that it would take a high degree of skill to have created the fairy pictures. Doyle, however, in dismissing the girls' photographic abilities totally discounts the fact that Elsie worked in a photographer's shop.

Doyle was so impressed that he wrote and published a book, The Coming of the Fairies which proceeded to an embarrassing armament to his fans for the next 75 years. The book, and Doyle's argument, can be summed up this way: two unsophisticated (i.e., working class) girls, unfamiliar with trick photography and with no apparent motive, photographed fairies and a gnome in their garden. The photos are pronounced genuine by experts. The girls have no reason for creating a hoax; they never received a cent for their efforts, neither then nor at any other time (and they lived well into their nineties).

But Elsie and Frances did fake the photographs. Aside from the evidence in the photos, there are two devastating facts: first, the discovery by British author Fred Gienings that the fairies in the photos were cut out of (or more probably traced from) Princess Mary's Gift Book (published in 1915) and second, the girls themselves, not long before their recent deaths, finally admitted to faking the pictures. And that was that.

Ron Miller
King George VA 22485

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You won’t want to miss our next issue, devoted to Gillian X in which Anderson speaks candidly about her role on the X-FILES and the spin-off that’s debuting in May. Plus a review of the movie and videography of Anderson’s choice episodes from the series, and a look at her surprising Website. It’s the most consummate coverage ever published on the alluring Anderson.

And also in the same issue, interviews with DEEP SPACE NINE’s Chase Masterson and MURPHY BROWN’s Faith Ford on uniting for a Stephen King saga titled SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK... FOR MORE. In the Nostalgia Dept. we look at ’70s siren Fiona Lewis, the actress and Brit bombshell who posed for Playboy. Plus an interview with newcomer Olivia Williams on starring opposite Kevin Costner in THE POSTMAN, and a profile of VAMPFIRE artist Fauve, who poses exclusively for you! Subscribe today, and pick up those back issues you may have missed!

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