

# CINEFANTASTIQUE

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## TALES FROM THE CRYPT

HBO'S GROSS  
HORROR COMICS  
OF THE '50S

**STEPHEN KING**  
Horror's man of letters  
looks askance at Hollywood

**BEAUTY AND  
THE BEAST**  
Beauty offed, Beast turns  
Rambo in ratings retooling

**ALWAYS**  
Preview Steven Spielberg's  
haunting romantic fantasy

Heh, heh, heh,  
kiddies! You  
shouldn't even be  
watching HBO's  
Crypt-Keeper.



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The magazine with a "Sense of Wonder."

JANUARY, 1990

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I was too young to discover *Tales From the Crypt* and the other EC horror comics when they were published in the early '50s. I first encountered them in 1961, at the age of 12, in second-hand bookstores where they could be had for as little as 35¢. I cherished my collection long after I had lost interest in other comics. They were macabre, *Grand Guignol* works of art, and there was nothing quite like them.

Thumbing through the old issues and seeing them visualized by top filmmakers on HBO has been a nostalgic treat. It's nice to see the horror gems so meticulously crafted by the great comic artists assembled by EC publisher William Gaines brought to a wider audience in faithful adaptations that are true to the grim spirit of the originals.

For this issue's cover story, Hollywood correspondent Sheldon Teitelbaum regularly haunted the TALES FROM THE CRYPT set during filming, talking to each of the directors charged with bringing EC horror to the unwary masses, including Robert Zemeckis, Walter Hill, Richard Donner, Tom Holland, and Mary Lambert. Teitelbaum also traveled to New York to interview Gaines, the 80-year old, silver locked godfather of horror comics, who still publishes *Mad Magazine* from his EC headquarters on Madison Avenue.

With just six stories in the can, TALES FROM THE CRYPT has clearly established itself as the best of the horror anthology shows on TV, but it's still too soon to say whether the series will live up to EC's potential for horror greatness. Nineteen new episodes to be cablecast next year should tell the tale. And if the show fails to equal the EC masterpieces that inspired it, we still have the comics.

If the episodes aired thus far seem a trifle tame in the shocks department, especially when compared to memories of the sensation created in the Fifties by the comics' gore-drenched contents, it could be that films, television, and the public's sensitivity to horror have finally caught up with Gaines' avant garde approach. But it was EC that paved the way for the flood of blood that followed in its wake.

Frederick S. Clarke

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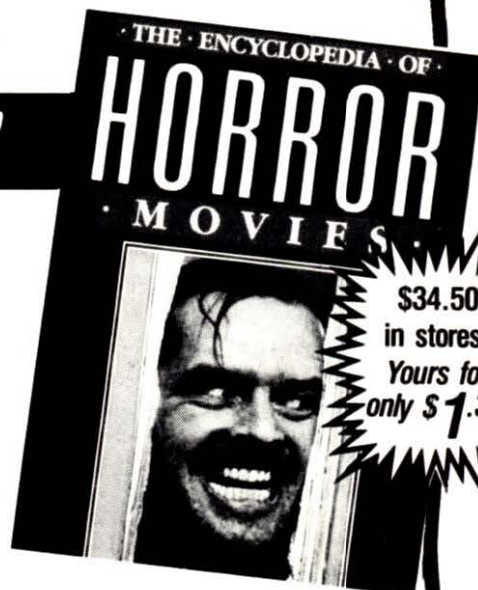
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# STEPHEN KING

## After the boxoffice success of PET SEMATARY

By Gary L. Wood

As a direct result of PET SEMATARY's impressive box-office (more than \$57 million gross in the U.S. and Canada alone) several Stephen King film projects are again actively on the drawing boards in Hollywood. "Everything has all at once gotten hot," said King from his home in Bangor, Maine. "[There's renewed interest in] stuff that's been sitting around."

The most anticipated of the upcoming films will be King's epic THE STAND, being readied by PET SEMATARY producer Richard Rubinstein of Laurel Productions. "Rospo Pallenberg, who wrote *The Emerald Forest*, has done a treatment on it," said King. "I think the treatment has a lot of problems, but the fact that they're willing to part with up to \$30,000 just to get a treatment is a sign that they're serious about it."

Rubinstein at Laurel confirmed that indeed they are very serious about it, working on developing THE STAND in association with Warner Bros. The script is currently being written by Pallenberg with no director set, though Rubinstein's former Laurel partner George Romero was once attached to the project.

King himself said he put quite a bit of effort into bringing THE STAND to the screen. "I wrote about five drafts," he said. "I finally just pushed it right off my desk! I called up Richard Rubinstein and said, 'You want it? You got it! Find somebody to write it and put this shit together, because I'm too close to it and I can't encapsulate it too much.' And I'm glad that I'm out of it, too."

King said he didn't relish facing fans of the book disappointed by any scaled-down

movie version. "Talk about an informed readership!" said King. "It's just waiting! They're all going to see this movie when it opens on its first night. And, unless a lot of factors come together like they hardly ever do in Hollywood—the only case I can think of is ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST where the casting was perfect, the director was perfect, and the screenplay worked like a charm—and unless that happens, they're going to go away and they're going to be pissed! They're not going to settle for 70% successful. They want it all!"

Romero is also being considered to direct a six-hour mini-series of King's IT for ABC based on a teleplay by Lawrence D. Cohen (CARRIE). Dan Doran of ABC said that the Lorimar-Telepictures production is a "long-range development project, and it's not even a firm, 100% commitment yet." Doran said Romero's involvement was only "tentative," and the earliest possible date the mini-series could air would be May, 1990.

King is skeptical about this one. "Don't hold your breath," he said. "ABC is one of the networks that still has a fairly strong censorship code. I think the first rule is that you can't put children in mortal jeopardy. And that's all IT is about, children in mortal jeopardy. I thought when they offered to buy it, 'This will probably never get made.'"

And if the IT mini-series never sees the light of day, King won't be too upset. "Their check was good," he said.

THE TALISMAN is another King project, based on a book written with Peter Straub, that has been moved onto the front burners after a dormant period. There was initial excitement a few years ago when the rights



King (right) chats with Fred Gwynne on the set of PET SEMATARY, filmed in King's hometown of Bangor, Maine. The hit film has inspired a slew of King film projects.

were bought by Universal for director Steven Spielberg, for production at Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment.

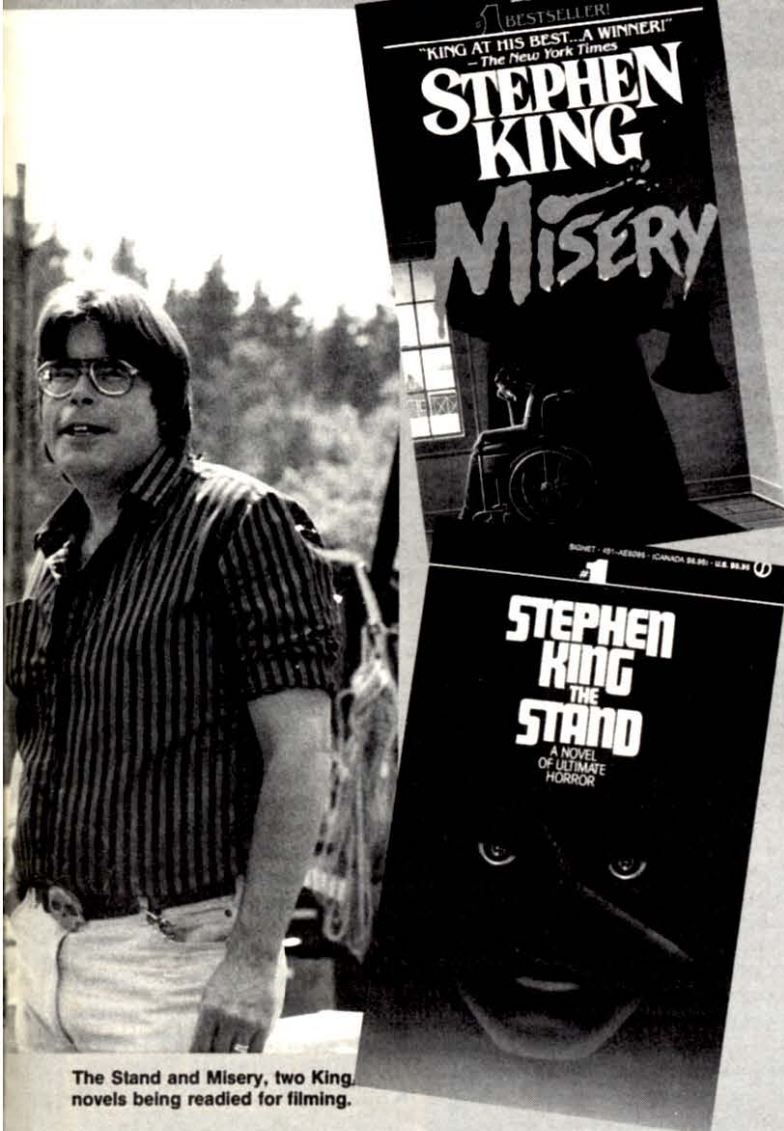
"Universal didn't want to buy that for him, you know?" said King. "You have to picture Steven as this bright, able child who is going to Mommy and Daddy saying, 'Buy me this! Buy me this! I want it! I want it! I want it!' And the mother and father know that this is going to end up in the attic with most of the other toys that the kid really, really wanted. I think

eventually it'll be a mini-series on CBS, but I haven't heard a lot about it."

A spokesman at Amblin confirmed that Spielberg's company and MCA, Universal's parent company, jointly own THE TALISMAN rights and that Amblin is now developing the property as a mini-series. "It's something that we decided would really work for television just in the past couple of months," said the source. "Right now we're just organizing it, and putting it together."

# STRIKES BACK!

the horror best seller is hot again in Hollywood.



The Stand and Misery, two King novels being readied for filming.

After the rights were bought, Amblin bowed out of Universal's feature film plans. "Universal was going to develop it," said the source, "but now it's back with Amblin."

King has mixed emotions about Hollywood's renewed interest in his work. On one hand, it will make him even wealthier—if that matters—but on the other hand, it could lead to more embarrassing films such as CHILDREN OF THE CORN and THE RUNNING MAN. And it could lead

to major disappointments such as Stanley Kubrick's THE SHINING. The history of Hollywood's failure to mine the potential in King's work keeps the author from getting his hopes up. In particular, he recalls the painful disappointment he felt in director John Carpenter's CHRISTINE, a film which he was sure would be a hit.

Hollywood screenwriter Larry Ferguson, who learned the ins and outs of adapting bestsellers by turning Tom

Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October* into a script for Paramount, pegged Hollywood's King failures to the fact that King is so skilled with words. Ferguson said that when you read the novel *Cujo*, "You can get *inside* that dog's head, and it's very, very scary in there. But you shoot that on 70mm, wraparound Dolby stereo, *you've got a dog.*"

The most exciting news on the theatrical horizon is the purchase of the film rights to King's *Misery* by Rob Reiner, who adapted King's story "The Body" into the hit film STAND BY ME. Though the production is still in the writing stage, King can drop his doubts a bit on this project. "It'll make a hell of a movie if they do it right," he said. "I think Rob will. If anybody can, he can."

"William Goldman [MARAATHON MAN, THE PRINCESS BRIDE] did a script of that and again, you've got the same situation as CUJO, potentially anyway. You can give it 70mm, you can give it Dolby sound, anything you want to do, and you've still got a fat, crazy woman. That's it! It's like the dog. But Goldman was able to take that script, which is this very inward, static situation where a woman is keeping this writer hostage, and he was able to create one new character, just one new character who's on the outside, who can move around. And the character is the synthesis of some of the minor characters in the book. [Goldman was able] to break that wide open and give it an entirely new slant, which is something that never happened with CUJO."

Other King film projects include THINNER, one of the novels written under his Richard Bachman byline, which has been optioned by Warner Bros. King is fairly positive on

this. "It looks like maybe they'll do it," he said. "I think John Candy would be perfect. He'd have to lose some weight, and maybe it'd save his life." "Graveyard Shift" and "Night-flyers," two King short stories, have also been optioned. And there has been talk of making *The Long Walk*, another Bachman novel, into a film, but no one holds an option on it as yet.

For those who believe that everything that Stephen King writes is immediately turned into a movie, King submits this list: *The Tommyknockers* has had no one even offer to buy the film rights. "See? Not everything I write gets made into a movie."

No one has yet shown any interest in *The Dark Tower* series. "Although, I think Rutger Hauer would make a hell of a gunslinger."

One novel which has had a lack of interest, and surprised King, is *The Eyes of the Dragon*. "No one's even offered, but it would make such a *great* full-length cartoon," he said. "I'm really surprised that nobody at Disney, or anybody like that, has ever called."

King has always said that anyone can make a movie out of his writings if they are willing to pay the price; yet, money is not an object for him. If he never received another offer to purchase the film rights to his work, it would be okay with King, "because so many of [the past films] have turned out to be odd shoes."

King summed up his feelings about the way Hollywood comes a-courting with the words of a respected colleague. Said King, "John Updike [author of *The Witches of Eastwick*] once said that the ideal film situation for a writer is when they pay you a lot of money for your book and then they never make it." □

# Beauty and the Beast

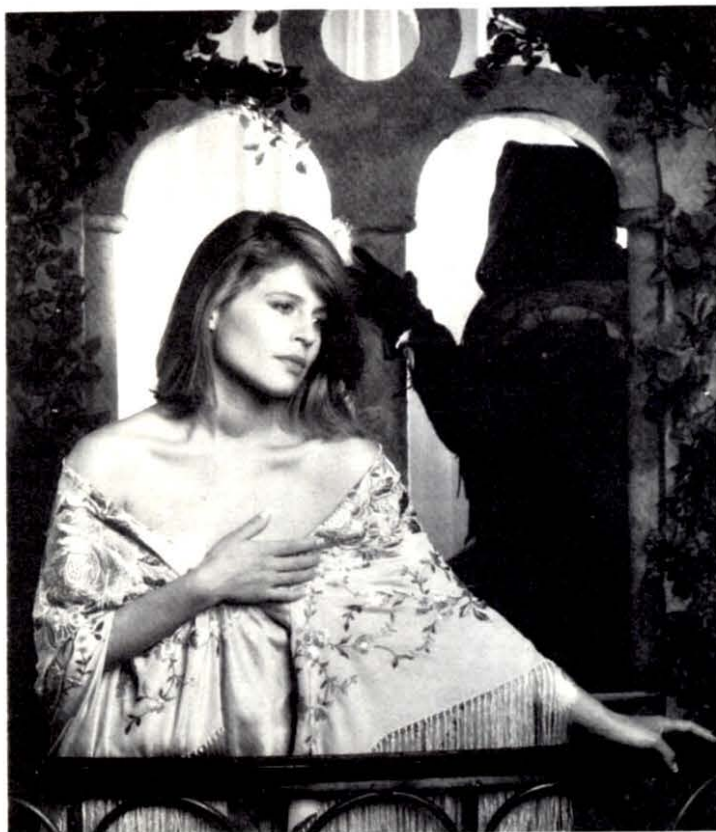
**Can TV's quality fantasy series attract a male audience without spoiling the romance?**

By Mark Dawidziak

When BEAUTY AND THE BEAST failed to make the CBS Fall schedule, irate fans flooded the third-place network with 4,200 letters of protest. The Save-the-Beast campaign was fueled by Viewers for Quality Television, a pressure group that the three commercial networks find particularly bothersome. The Beast Brigade was positively roaring over the idea of a season without prime-time television's oddest couple, beastly Vincent and beautiful Catherine. Similar avalanches of letters were credited with winning reprieves for STAR TREK and CAGNEY & LACEY.

The uproar forced CBS into a flurry of explanations and assurances. The Beast isn't dead, network executives told the rankled ranks of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST devotees, he's merely getting a facelift. In fact, they added, Ron Koslow, the show's creator and supervising producer, requested a break to retool the concept. Rather than cancel the romantic fantasy series, CBS placed it on hiatus so Koslow could figure out how to broaden the program's appeal.

Since premiering in September, 1987, BEAUTY AND THE BEAST has been extremely popular with women. The Beast's charms, however, have been lost on men and children. Given a firm 12-episode order last May, Koslow decided to



Pregnant star Linda Hamilton won't appear in all of the twelve new episodes, and is rumored to be killed off after giving birth to a child to make way for a new co-star.

try to revamp the series without alienating its loyal and vocal fans.

That may be tricky because the changes call for the beast to lose his beauty. Producers confirm that Linda Hamilton asked to be dropped from the series, and they decided her character, Catherine, should be killed off. Hamilton, who was pregnant in real life for the bulk of the third season shoot-

ing schedule, wanted to devote more time to her baby than a series commitment would allow. Catherine will die in the special two-hour episode that will start the program's mid-season run, which could be as early as November.

Producers also confirmed that a new villain will be added to the show and Jo Anderson of NBC's short-lived DREAM STREET will join the cast as

Diana Bennet after a couple of episodes.

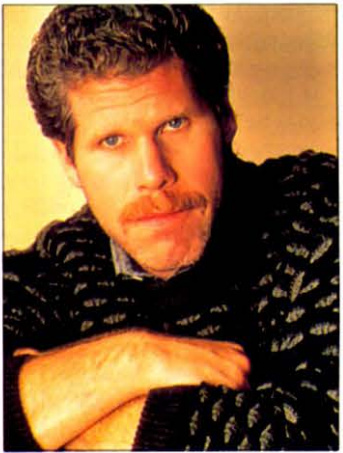
But fans are worried about how Catherine will leave the show. *TV Guide* carried a story about a Philadelphia focus group given a two-page synopsis of the two-hour episode. The market research participants were quoted as saying that a pregnant Catherine would be captured, tortured, and murdered by an evil character named Gabriel, but not before she gives birth to a mysterious child. A source close to the program said some of the details are partially correct. "Some things are just wrong," said CBS press representative Elaine Mallon, who added that the new episodes will have more action.

Although BEAUTY AND THE BEAST is guaranteed to return as a midseason replacement, fans are wondering if CBS Entertainment President Kim LeMasters' enthusiasm for the program has cooled. That does seem to be the case. LeMasters enjoys pointing to BEAUTY AND THE BEAST as proof that his network is "adventurous and will continue to be adventurous," yet he downplays the response to the series' absence from the Fall lineup.

"We always get a lot of response on shows that have a very loyal following," LeMasters said a week before BEAUTY AND THE BEAST resumed production last July. "Certainly, you know, it happened



**Ron Perlman as Vincent, the Beast, and the man behind the mask (below). Fans are worried that CBS's call for an action-oriented series will sacrifice the mythology for martial arts.**



with DESIGNING WOMEN and CAGNEY & LACEY. BEAUTY AND THE BEAST has its fans. We are aware of these people. We communicate with them. We talk with them. But I'll tell you what, if I receive 10 million letters from 10 million different people, that would be an easy one to say, 'I think there's a reason to do it again.' We forget the vast universe that network television exists in. I mean, a rating point is worth almost a million people. And when you think, 'You get 5,000 letters [on BEAUTY AND THE BEAST]. What if they represented 10 people for every letter. That's 50,000.' That's not near the vastness of the universe."

LeMasters is only reiterating the familiar complaint against fantasy and science fiction dramas on network television: they tend to attract small and dedicated followings. None of the best known—THET WILIGHTZONE, THE OUTER LIMITS, STAR TREK, AMAZING STORIES, LOST IN SPACE, BATTLESTAR GALACTICA—ever made the top 25 of any season. All of the recent attempts (V, SOMETHING IS OUT THERE, MAX HEADROOM, HARD TIME ON PLANET EARTH) have crashed to the bottom of the ratings. History is solidly against BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, and Koslow knows the prime-time deck is stacked in a manner that does not favor Vincent's survival. CBS has few successful nights, and it isn't likely that BEAUTY AND THE BEAST will inherit an attractive time slot.

And the fans are concerned about the network's mandate to Koslow: find a way to get more men and children watching the series. They wonder whether the CBS-ordered changes will alter their Beast into something beyond recognition. "When a network changes a show, it's like brain surgery with a baseball bat," said Stephanie A. Wiltse, who publishes the BEAUTY AND THE BEAST newsletter *Pipeline* in Albany, N.Y. "We tend to feel that shows taken off for retooling have been the worse for it."

Further irking fans were the remarks of LeMasters' boss,

## RETOOLING THE MYTH

**"When a network changes a show, it's like brain surgery with a baseball bat," said Beast fanatic Stephanie A. Wiltse. "Shows taken off for retooling have been the worse for it."**



Roy Dotrice as Vincent's father, looking after the Beast in a refined, cultured world beneath the streets of New York City, a format that hasn't attracted male viewers.

CBS president Howard Stringer, who flippantly dismissed the pro-Beast movement. "BEAUTY AND THE BEAST is an exotic show with a very loyal following," Stringer said during a press conference. "I mean, I've got a lot of letters from nuns. I don't know what to make of that. In fact, a coalition of nuns makes me very nervous, actually."

"The fact of the matter is, when shows drop below a level of performance, it's hard to justify keeping them on, particularly when the slide is on that way... I do regret dropping shows, but there's a certain inevitability about it. I mean, we're not talking about *Hamlet* here."

That's the kind of talk certain to put BEAUTY AND THE BEAST fans in a full uproar.

"I don't know what he's talking about," said Wiltse, a desktop publisher. "We've got all sorts of people coming out of the woodwork every day to support this show. I have 1,000 subscribers to the *Pipeline*, and only three of them are nuns."

Hoping to prove the ratings and the CBS research wrong, the Beast Brigade used the summer to conduct a survey to

prove that the series appeals to a wide audience. They also hope to show advertisers that BEAUTY AND THE BEAST attracts educated, affluent viewers. "The Nielson ratings don't say it all," said Jill Berenyi, a 46-year-old Ohio medical technologist who helped distribute the survey.

Even CBS can't deny that the development of a BEAUTY AND THE BEAST fandom has been rather impressive. In addition to Wiltse's *Pipeline*, there are about 40 newsletters and fanzines devoted to the series. These include *The Whispering Gallery* in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and *Once Upon a Time* in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The pilot episode has been released on home-video cassette. There are BEAUTY AND THE BEAST calendars, buttons, and graphic novels. And to boost their morale, fans gathered this year at conventions in Minneapolis, Grand Rapids (The Beast Feast), San Jose and Washington, D.C.

The Beast himself, actor Ron Perlman, has been far from silent while the fan fur has been flying. "I have mixed feelings about not being on the schedule this Fall," he said. "On the one hand, it's given us a

chance to take the show and breathe new life into it. We can take the concept into exciting new areas. We have nothing to lose. In that way, this might have been the best thing that could have happened.

"On the other hand... well, the other hand is obvious. On another network, we probably would have had the chance to stay on the air longer and in a better time slot. We're on a network that's in trouble, and that's created an irony. The network needs shows that are innovative, yet it can't support them. It's unfortunate that we have to live by something as insidious and insipid as the Nielsen ratings, but there's always inequity in the arts."

Those fans hoping for help from Viewers for Quality Television may be disappointed. While the organization rushed to the defense of such recent endangered series as FRANK'S PLACE and A YEAR IN THE LIFE, each was canceled. When a place on the schedule opens up for BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, the ratings will have to show a dramatic improvement if the series is to break through the fantasy barrier that has sent so many shows to the cancellation graveyard.

Still, in its first season, BEAUTY AND THE BEAST looked like a strong contender to defy those odds. Produced by Paul Junger Witt and Tony Thomas, the team responsible for NBC's THE GOLDEN GIRLS (created by Witt's wife, writer Susan Harris), the fantasy series followed the relationship between beautiful assistant district attorney Catherine Chandler (Linda Hamilton) and Vincent, the powerful but noble man/beast who lives in the vast secret tunnel system beneath Manhattan.

Critical response to the CBS series was encouraging. Reviews gave BEAUTY AND THE BEAST high marks for impressive production values (particularly the eerie underworld sets) and noted that the program could reach a wide audience by blending elements—romance, action, and fantasy. Although BEAUTY AND THE BEAST was barely making the top 40 during its first four months, the fanta-





Perlman and Hamilton embody the bittersweet poetic tragedy of an impossible love. The twelve new shows tell one continuing, epic story CBS hopes will lift the ratings.

sy/adventure series was regularly beating its NBC and ABC competition. So, while averaging less than 14% of the nation's TV households, *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* was emerging as one of the 1987-88 season's few new hits. By the end of its first season, *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* was gaining momentum. Each week, more viewers were discovering the series. NBC Entertainment President Brandon Tartikoff added to the ambitious program's luster by saying it was one of the only shows on a competing network that he wished he had on his lineup.

Perlman's soulful portrayal of Vincent certainly had a great deal to do with this success. Yet, during that first season, he probably could have walked unrecognized through Times Square at high noon. When millions of viewers saw Perlman each week, he was covered with layers of fur, latex and greasepaint. After four hours in the makeup chair, he emerged as the lion-hearted, lion-faced Vincent. This isn't the 39-year-old actor's first experience with extensive makeup. He was unrecognizable in two theatri-

cal films: as a prehistoric tribesman in *QUEST FOR FIRE* (1981) and as the hunchbacked Salvatore in *THE NAME OF THE ROSE* (1986). Perlman said that he didn't mind looking at the camera through eyes engulfed by prosthetic makeup. Anonymity had its blessings.

"If I had my way," Perlman said during the first season, "I'd go through the rest of my career without being recognized. I'd like to feel that I'm being recognized for the work. That's all I got into it for. I don't want to sound like I'm biting the hand that feeds me, but fame to the point where you lose your privacy can be encumbering.

"I've been able to maintain a rather healthy, normal lifestyle with my family and my privacy. When I was much younger, vanity played a greater part in my life than it does now. I've come to believe that I've reached all of my goals in my life, because, to me, the greatest joy is playing the humanity... written by great writers. In doing so, you almost have to lose yourself. And what better way to lose yourself than to be a creature?"

Two years later, however, Perlman has discovered that more and more people are recognizing him out of the Vincent makeup. "I've found out that it's very difficult to maintain a low profile with a TV show," said Perlman, who lives in Los Angeles with his wife, fashion designer Opal Stone, and their five-year-old daughter, Blake Amanda. "That's the price you pay. But I've managed to find a way to keep things in perspective."

But none of the dangers that Vincent faced proved as threatening as last year's Writer's Guild of America strike. The five-month walkout kept *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* from starting production on its second season. When the strike ended, the expensive hour dramas were the slowest in getting back on the air. The half-hour situation comedies recovered much more quickly. The delay prevented *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* from capitalizing on its first-season momentum. By the time *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* started its second season in its 8-9 p.m. Friday time slot, ABC's two sitcoms, *PERFECT STRAN-*

*GERS* and *FULL HOUSE*, had been on the air several weeks and had regained control of the hour. *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* never overcame that disadvantage.

Not even a burst of awards could get the series back on track. Nominated for 12 Emmys at the end of its first season, *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* took home statuettes for cinematography, art direction, and music. Perlman also picked up a Golden Globe award. None of this translated into ratings.

A move to Mondays was unsuccessful, and *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* finished the 1988-89 season ranked 69th out of 105 series, but garnered eight more Emmy nominations. The second season ended with a cliffhanger. Vincent was warned by his father (Roy Dotrice) that the beast side of his personality was beginning to dominate. Rather than become a threat to Catherine and his friends, Vincent retreated deeper into the netherworld. The finale, however, did not help the *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* cause. After fans had screamed about their show not

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# BACK TO THE FUTURE

By Frederick S. Clarke

Steven Spielberg's Amblin Productions filmed BACK TO THE FUTURE 2 and 3 back-to-back to economize on production costs. Universal opens Part 2 November 22, with Part 3 scheduled for release six months later, in May, 1990. According to a source close to the production, Part 2 has no ending, just a trailer for Part 3 and the words "To Be Continued." Will audiences feel suckered when they learn that they have to wait, then pay again to see the story wrapped up? With the original BACK TO THE FUTURE, the tenth biggest money-making film in history, having reaped over \$100 million in the domestic market alone, the misgivings of a captive audience don't appear to be high on Amblin's list.

(Audiences might really get mad if it's true—as rumored—that Amblin didn't plan to do two movies, but decided to pad out Bob Gale's script for Part 2, titled PARADOX, to fill another movie because the cost of filming the story's future scenes was proving too expensive.)

Unfortunately, the film's vision of the future as realized by director Robert Zemeckis, who co-wrote the script with Gale, is straight out of THE JETSONS, and just as cartoon cute. According to those who saw executive producer Frank Marshall's slide show on the film at the World Science Fiction Convention in September, the film's future scenes look like "the '50s extrapolated to the year 2000."

Picking up right from the end of BACK TO THE FUTURE, Marty (Michael J. Fox) and time-tripping eccentric scientist Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd) rocket their flying DeLorean to Hill Valley in the year 2015, complete with elevated streets, flying skateboards, and lots of merchandising plugs for name brands.

**To see the ending, come back in six months and pony up six more dollars!**



Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd), Marty (Michael J. Fox) and Einstein, back in the future and finding such wonders as form-fitting jackets and a plug for Nike shoes.

The futuristic miniatures and matte work for the film were supervised by Ken Ralston of ILM, who used motion control camerawork to combine the actors in multiple roles. Fox plays not only his future self but also his own son and daughter. The elaborate makeups are the work of Kenny Myers (STAR TREK V). Myers took over from Ken Chase, who created the multiple role makeups in the original film, after Chase was reportedly hired, then fired, on the sequel.

ILM's motion control split screen magic combines Tom Wilson with himself, reprising his role as the no-good Biff Tannen, as he tries to pass a book of future sports statistics to his bemused younger self, while riding in a '50s roadster. When young Biff just tosses the book over his shoulder, ILM rigged Wilson's arm with a bar

connected to a stepper motor to composite the scene. The book figures in BACK TO THE FUTURE 2's slim plot, a kind of take-off on IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, in which Biff's use of the book to amass wealth and power changes the future into a nightmare world for Marty.

Gale and Zemeckis' script is full of stunts and action as Marty again faces off against old high school rival Biff in both the past and the future. One elaborate sequence, reprising the skateboard action of the first film, this time on flying skateboards, reportedly resulted in the serious injury of stunt performer Cheryl Wheeler-Dixon. In the scene, Wheeler-Dixon doubled for Darlene Vogel as one of Biff's bad girls, persuing the airborne Fox. When Marty makes an evasive maneuver, Wheeler-Dixon and three other stunt per-

formers were to fly between the columns of the Hill Valley courthouse and crash through plate glass windows.

The shot was set up by second unit director Max Kleven, who took over much of the film's action work from Zemeckis in order to meet Amblin's ambitious production schedule. Kleven and stunt coordinator Walter Scott rehearsed the scene first without the glass, swinging the stunt performers on wires, where they were dropped onto cardboard boxes. On the first take however, Wheeler-Dixon was swung into one of the pillars instead. Although the effects man inside was supposed to visually spot the stunt performers before dropping them, Wheeler-Dixon, eighteen feet up, was dropped onto the concrete below.

Though Spielberg himself was said by a source on the set to have rushed to the production scene and raised hell about the stunt's set-up, Amblin has tried to cover up the incident, sensitive about adverse publicity since the death of actor Vic Morrow and two children during stunt work on their production of TWILIGHT ZONE—THE MOVIE in 1982. When reached for comment, Amblin publicity spokesman Marvin Levy at first denied any accident had taken place. When cited the specifics, Levy said, "I have a vague recollection of it, now. But nothing much happened. The girl wasn't hurt."

Wheeler-Dixon, who took the fall, doesn't agree. "I was in intensive care for five days," she said. "I broke my wrist, dislocated bones in my hand, tore ligaments in my arm, and had two metal plates permanently implanted in the left side of my face during reconstructive surgery." Wheeler-Dixon, reached at home, recuperating, was perky and in good spirits, but said she couldn't comment

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# COMING

## CAPTAIN AMERICA

*Comic books are hot as the Marvel hero of two generations heads for the big screen.*

By Bill Florence

With BATMAN one for the boxoffice record books, 21st Century Film Corporation's CAPTAIN AMERICA is likely to be the next comic book hero to reach movie screens, scheduled for release next spring. Directed by Albert Pyun (CYBORG) and based on a 1941 Marvel Comics character created by Joe Simon and revived by Jack Kirby at Marvel in the '60s, Matt Salinger plays the superhero in a head-to-toe red, white, and blue latex rubber suit fabricated by Vin Burnham Costumes, the London-based firm that had similarly form-fit the Bat-gear on Michael Keaton.

The makers of the new superhero movie insist that their project was around, at least in script form, long before Warner Bros released BATMAN. "I read it about three years ago as a writing sample," said Pyun of writer Stephen Tolkin's script, faithful to both of the comic's incarnations. "I was blown away at the quality of it and its really unique approach to the comic book genre. At the time, Cannon had the rights to it and the rights lapsed right back to Marvel. So it didn't look like it could be made, but I was pretty persistent over three years. It finally all came together."

What has not come together is the proposed SPIDERMAN feature Pyun was to have directed for Cannon, still in development at 21st Century. "I'm really not sure where SPIDERMAN stands," said Pyun. "We ran into a lot of problems with it, not the least of which was the creation of a new company." Former Cannon topper and CAPTAIN AMERICA producer Menahem Goian took over 21st Century after Cannon was bought out by Pathe, taking several properties with him.

"Frankly, the CAPTAIN AMERICA script was superior to any of the early drafts done for SPIDERMAN," said Pyun. "It was something I had wanted to do for a long time. So when I knew that there was going to be a hold up on SPIDERMAN, I immediately pushed to be allowed to do

CAPTAIN AMERICA."

The feature boasts a budget of "more than \$10 million," grinned Pyun, "and it is rising quickly." The film, line produced by Tom Karnowski, who works almost exclusively with Pyun, features Salinger in the dual role of Captain America/Steve Rogers, newcomer Kim Dillingham in the dual role of Bernice Stewart (Rogers' girlfriend in 1941) and her daughter, Sharon, and Scott Paulin as the superhero's arch enemy, the Red Skull. The supporting cast includes Ned Beatty, Michael Nouri, Ronny Cox, and Darren McGavin. Bill Mummy of LOST IN SPACE fame also appears.

Principal photography began last July with six weeks work in the tiny medieval town of Rovigno, Yugoslavia, doubling for WW II Italy, in scenes of Captain America's showdown with Nazi villain The Red Skull. Filming wrapped in Redondo Beach, California, serving as Rogers' hometown, visited after the superhero is discovered frozen at the North Pole and thawed out in the present day.

Though Pyun, Salinger, and Mummy admitted to being comic book fans with a familiarity with



Matt Salinger, true to the comics as Uncle Sam's red, white and blue secret weapon.

CAPTAIN AMERICA—Mummy owns the 1941 first issue—the film was Karnowski's first exposure. "I don't think he is one of the front runner comic book characters," said Karnowski. "He's one of the earlier ones. I am sure this movie will bring him more to the forefront."

When asked what kind of audience he expects the movie to appeal to, Karnowski responded, "I think this is the kind of movie that will appeal to a very wide range of people, in the same way that BACK TO THE FUTURE had that appeal to a broad section

of the audience. We also have some of the same elements [as that film], in terms of time. That is something that I really like about this picture—the sort of 'fishout of water' quality to the story. Rogers, a man of the 1940's, suddenly finds himself in our world today, and you have a nice perspective of what you think of as being a very pure period of American history, when good was good and bad was bad, black was black and white was white. Life was simpler back then, and clear cut. So we see our world through his eyes and that makes it very interesting." □

## ROBOCOP 2: FILMING FOR SUMMER RELEASE

Filming began in June in Houston on ROBOCOP II which is scheduled for release next summer by Orion Pictures. The script, written by Frank Miller, author of the seminal Batman graphic novel *The Dark Knight*, and Walon Green (PHASE IV), pits the titular hero against "evil scientist" Belinda Bauer, and Old Detroit's drug kingpin Tommy Noonan.

Peter Weller returns as the half-man half-robot supercop whose sole directive is to "protect and serve." Also returning for the sequel is Nancy Allen as Weller's partner, Dan O'Herlihy as the CEO of Omni Con-

Peter Weller, back punching as Robo.



mer Products (RoboCop's creators), as well as O.C.P.'s good-guy V.P. Felton Perry.

Directed by Irvin Kirschner (THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK), the film promises to deliver some inventive visuals with Oscar-nominee Rob Bottin updating his 1987 "robo-suit" and Chris Walas (THE FLY II) delivering the remainder of the special makeup effects. Two other ROBOCOP veterans, stop-motion animator Phil Tippet (designer of ROBOCOP's dynamic Police Droid Ed-209) and matte painter Rocco Gioffre (renderer of Delta City's glimmering skyline), will again stamp the film with their futuristic visions. □

# SLEEPAWAY CAMP 2 & 3

Transvestite "Jason" stalks the video market with two simultaneously produced sequels.

By Gregory Nicoll

Angela is back—and Nelson Entertainment has got her! The third installment in the grisly SLEEPAWAY CAMP horror film series—this one entitled SLEEPAWAY CAMP 3: TEENAGE WASTELAND—is scheduled for video release in mid-November after a brief, limited theatrical run in certain major markets. The Double Helix production was shot in the Atlanta area during October of 1987, lensed back-to-back with the series' second entry, SLEEPAWAY CAMP 2: UNHAPPY CAMPERS. Both sequels used the same crew and locations, and both feature actress Pamela Springsteen (sister of rock star Bruce Springsteen) in the role of transsexual murderess Angela Baker.

The original SLEEPAWAY CAMP, a 1983 release from American Eagle Film Corporation, (written and directed by Robert Hiltzik) opened with a tragic boating accident involving the family of young Angela (Collette Lee Corcoran), then flashed forward eight years to a summer camp where an older Angela (now played by Felissa Rose) and her cousin Rick are spending their vacation. After the shy Angela was harassed by other campers and the staff, a series of murders begins—the work of an unseen killer. Suspicion falls on Rick (who appears to be overzealously "protecting" Angela) but the movie's shocking final scene revealed Angela as the killer—and, furthermore, that



Pamela Springsteen as the camper-slashing Angela, with director Michael Simpson.

"Angela" was a boy. The real Angela died in the boating accident and for the past eight years, Peter, her surviving brother, impersonated her.

Despite numerous flaws, SLEEPAWAY CAMP earned what one source at Double Helix described as "about six times" its cost and was New York's top-grossing title the weekend it opened. It has since become a video shop standard.

The pair of sequels came about when Jerry Silva, a co-producer of the original film, approached Double Helix about putting the long-planned project together. Double Helix staffer Michael Hitchcock wrote the two scripts under the pseudonym Fritz Gordon. The remote Georgia shooting

locations minimized production costs, keeping the sequels within their approximately \$1 million budget. Atlanta filmmaker Michael Simpson (IMPURE THOUGHTS, FUNLAND, FAST FOOD) assumed directing chores during the Fall of 1987, with his then partner Bob Phillips serving as production manager. Responsibility for the film's many and varied gore effects fell on Georgia's makeup effects specialist Bill "Splat" Johnson, a graduate of the legendary professional training course conducted by makeup veteran Dick Smith (THE EXORCIST, ALTERED STATES).

In SLEEPAWAY CAMP 2 Angela Baker has had a sex change and returns to camp as a female

counselor. Enraged by the open debauchery there, she goes on another murder spree and butchers virtually every other character in the film. SLEEPAWAY CAMP 3 takes an interesting new turn. As it opens, Angela slaughters a girl who was on her way to camp. Angela then assumes the dead girl's identity and attends camp once again—as a camper. The summer camp depicted in the third film is an experimental retreat for troubled kids, where the children of rich and poor families interact and learn more about each other and the world.

Despite the frantic pace of its production, SLEEPAWAY CAMP 3: TEENAGE WASTELAND contains some extremely impressive splatter effects. These were singled out for special praise in a surprisingly favorable review of the film which appeared in *Variety* last summer. "What I prefer about SLEEPAWAY 3," said Johnson, "is that the methods used in the murders are much more clever." Featured gore sequences in the new film include a girl being dropped head first from atop a tall flagpole and a woman buried up to her neck being run over with a lawnmower.

"Response to SLEEPAWAY CAMP 2 was so good—and video pre-sales on SLEEPAWAY CAMP 3 have been so strong," observed director Simpson, "that I'm already discussing a SLEEPAWAY CAMP 4. I'm up for it. Pam Springsteen's up for it. If I can re-assemble the same crew, we'll probably be doing it." □

## BOXOFFICE SURVEY: GENRE TOTALS UP AFTER LAST YEAR'S DROP

An analysis of the 50 Top Grossing Films, as reported weekly by *Variety*, reveals that in the first three quarters of 1989 (39 weeks through 9/27), revenue from horror, fantasy, and science fiction films rose 38.9% from last year's total, while boxoffice in general increased only 5.1%. Genre films captured 41.1% of the total revenues (26.5% last year).

Though fewer genre titles were released, as with films in general, big summer blockbusters like *BATMAN* and *INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE* more than compensated

for the difference. Of the 237 films that comprised the weekly listings, 74 or 31.2% were genre titles. There were 20 science fiction films (compared to 17 last year), accounting for 8.4% of all films, and 11.8% of all boxoffice; 31 fantasy films (31 last year), accounting for 13.1% of all films and 24.9% of revenue; and 23 horror films (34 last year), accounting for 9.7% of all films and 4.4% of all revenue.

Top-grossing genre films in the *Variety* totals are listed at right (through 10/18). Titles are indicated as horror (h), fantasy (f), and science fiction (sf), fol-

lowed by the number of weeks each title made it into the Top 50 listing since January 1. The dollar amounts listed represent only a small sample of a film's total earnings (about one-fourth of a film's domestic gross).

Horror, a normally prolific category, saw the number of titles released fall a whopping 47.8%. And, just one horror entry (*PET SEMATARY*) made it into the top ten. Notably absent from the list are the perennial sequels to *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* and *FRIDAY THE 13TH*, which did less business than expected. □

### TOP GENRE FILMS OF '89

<i>BATMAN</i> (f, 16) .....	\$55,050,065
<i>INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE</i> (f, 20) .....	\$45,637,374
<i>GHOSTBUSTERS II</i> (f, 13) .....	\$21,050,072
<i>HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS</i> (sf, 16) .....	\$16,963,364
<i>FIELD OF DREAMS</i> (f, 21) .....	\$16,439,756
<i>TWINS</i> (f, 9) .....	\$14,363,915
<i>PET SEMATARY</i> (h, 15) .....	\$13,021,205
<i>THE ABYSS</i> (sf, 9) .....	\$12,294,234
<i>STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER</i> (sf, 12) .....	\$10,852,504
<i>THE NAKED GUN</i> (f, 8) .....	\$9,416,094
<i>LICENCE TO KILL</i> (sf, 11) .....	\$9,200,086
<i>BILL &amp; TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE</i> (sf, 11) .....	\$7,180,532
<i>THE 'BURBS</i> (f, 6) .....	\$6,961,912
<i>FLETCH LIVES</i> (f, 8) .....	\$6,276,735
<i>THE FLY II</i> (sf, 5) .....	\$5,519,913
<i>PETER PAN</i> (f, 9) .....	\$5,113,043

# Always

## Steven Spielberg's idea of a love triangle would involve a ghost.

By Frederick S. Clarke

Steven Spielberg's second fantasy film of the year, *ALWAYS*, opens nationwide December 22, just in time for the feel-good Christmas season. The Universal Pictures release stars Richard Dreyfuss and Holly Hunter (*BROADCAST NEWS*) as star-crossed lovers whose bond reaches beyond death itself. Though Spielberg has recently expressed in interviews an interest in tackling more mature themes, *ALWAYS* isn't exactly a move in that direction. The picture is an adult love story to be sure, but it's told from Spielberg's patented child's eye view as an emotionally manipulative tear-jerker. Indeed, Spielberg's passion to make *ALWAYS*, based on the 1943 MGM Spencer Tracy vehicle *A GUY NAMED JOE*, springs from the director's memories of viewing the original on television as a 14 year-old, one of the first films to make him cry.

The film is based on MGM's *A GUY NAMED JOE* (1943) in which ghost Spencer Tracy (r) butts into the earthly romance of Irene Dunne and Van Johnson.



Director Steven Spielberg.

*ALWAYS* was written for Spielberg by Jerry Belson (*SMILE*) and Ron Bass (*BLACK WIDOW*), based on Dalton Trumbo's script for the original. For the most part their script eschews the '40s style tough guy-/tough girl romantic banter of the original, the kind of aggressive adolescent view of romance Spielberg adopted for Harrison Ford and his leading ladies in the *INDIANA JONES* films. Spielberg himself wrote

revisions before production began earlier this year.

Viewing *A GUY NAMED JOE*, which MGM/UA released on video in 1988, it's easy to see what attracted Spielberg to the project. Tracy plays a risk-taking World War II fighter pilot who dies in a suicide bombing run on a German aircraft carrier, only to return as a guardian angel at the side of fellow combat pilots. Directed by Victor Fleming, the film dates badly due to its nature as a war-time morale-booster. Spielberg has wisely jettisoned the original's World War II setting, transferring the action to the realm of modern-day pilots who fight forest fires from the air.

Dreyfuss plays the role of Tracy's egotistical but charming pilot hero with the focus of the story shifted more squarely on his doomed romance with support flyer Hunter, played by Irene Dunne in the original. Replacing the martial strains of the old film's oft-repeated Air Force theme song is the use of the romantic ballad "I'll Be Seeing You," once considered as a title for the remake, as Dreyfuss' guardian angel mission becomes complicated when Hunter begins to fall for the pilot Dreyfuss has been assigned to help, newcomer Brad Johnson taking the role in the original that made Van Johnson a star.

Spielberg's handling of the film's romance may have been informed by the director's own personal situation. Tabloid gossip reported from the set has linked the



Richard Dreyfuss continues to hold the torch for Holly Hunter even after he's passed into the great beyond.

director romantically with his new leading lady. And *The National Enquirer* had one on-set observer quote Dreyfuss as telling Spielberg "Maybe you'd better play the scene," after being shown repeatedly by the director how he should hold and kiss Hunter.

Thankfully, Spielberg avoids *A GUY NAMED JOE*'s cliched vision of heaven in the clouds, choosing to set the induction of Dreyfuss as an angel on a surreal basketball court in the forest, presided over by the reassuring presence of a long-dead uncle. Dreyfuss goes down in flames in his plane after it catches fire in a bold maneuver that saves the life of his wisecracking sidekick played by John Goodman, the role acted by Ward Bond in the original. In a nice twist, providing a cyclical closure not found in the old film, Dreyfuss is seen on the court at the end, posing as the uncle of a new inductee.

Also more credible is the remake's finale, in which Hunter flies off to save kids trapped by a forest fire. In the original, Dunne, rather improbably, takes off in a bomber and succeeds in blowing up the major ammunition depot of the Japanese in the South Pacific. Besides scaling down the heroics, the new version has Dreyfuss' ghost clasp Hunter hand-in-hand to save her from drowning when her plane crashes. In yet another twist not found in the original, Dreyfuss learns that his heavenly mission all along was to save Hunter because angels are in a position to help most those that they loved best in life.

For fans of *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*, *ALWAYS* is the story of an impossible love rendered in all its idyllic purity, schmaltz on an epic scale, dished out by the genre's foremost practitioner. □



# JOEL SCHUMACHER

The director of *THE LOST BOYS* lands two plum fantasy and science fiction projects.

By Art Michaels

Despite middling-to-hostile critical response to his earlier genre film efforts, *THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WOMAN* and *THE LOST BOYS*, Joel Schumacher will direct two sought-after megaprojects of the *cinéfantastique*. For composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, Schumacher will direct the film version of Webber's stage hit *The Phantom of the Opera*. And for Stonebridge, the company owned by Michael Douglas, Schumacher will film *THE FLATLINERS*, to shoot first this Fall from a script by newcomer Peter Filardi.

According to sources, *FLATLINERS* deals with "sexy, frightening, and metaphysical adventures" encountered by four medical students who simulate near-death experiences with an EKG machine. Schumacher cast the \$20 million film—special effects could send the budget upward—with familiar faces, not stars.

Last summer, the *ALTERED STATES*-ish *FLATLINERS* became a *cause célèbre*. Executives for Columbia Pictures—



Joel Schumacher

who were among the bidders for the screen rights to *FLATLINERS*—discovered that producer Scott Rudin (who, at the time, had an exclusive deal to make films for Columbia) had "secretly" tried to top his own employer's bid for the Filardi script. Rudin paid a reported \$250,000. By the terms of a well-publicized settlement between the studio and the producer, Rudin will now act as "hands off" executive producer on such pet projects as *FLATLINERS*, as well as the futuristic *PIN CUSHION*, to which John Carpenter and Cher had been attached, with Ray Stark and Daniel Melnick producing.

It will be interesting to see whether *THE FLATLINERS*—which Schumacher could have in theatres by late Summer or early Fall, 1990—packs half as much intrigue as the machinations that preceded it.

At about the same time, if all goes as planned, Schumacher should be shooting the movie version of composer Webber's stage phenomenon, *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*—a project in



Schumacher's big-budget film version of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* will feature Michael Crawford and Sarah Brightman (Mrs. Webber).

which both Steven Spielberg and Michael Jackson had reportedly expressed interest. Schumacher said that composer-lyricist Webber had caught up with his movies—which range from *D.C. CAB* to *COUSINS*—at the urging of Paramount executive Gary Luchessi. Apparently, Webber liked what he saw. After preliminary meetings between Webber and Schumacher in London and Los Angeles, the multi-millionaire offered Schumacher the chance to direct the film of what will likely become musical theatre's all-time money maker.

"It was thrilling," said Schumacher, the specifics of whose deal with Webber's Really Useful Company are currently in negotiation. In an effort to exert creative control over his work, Webber—whom Schumacher said will be "very actively involved" in the film—will offer to prospective studio bidders a package deal including Schumacher and the stars of the hit musical, Michael Crawford as The Phantom and Sara Brightman (Webber's wife) as his singing protegee. Apparently, the winning studio will be the one that offers Webber the most attractive creative and financial terms. It will be interesting to see whether Universal, which has made noises to the effect that it has a lock on the underlying film rights, will raise a ruckus.

For now, Schumacher and Webber are sketching in plans for the film. "We haven't yet decided on what country to shoot the movie," explained Schumacher, who hints the movie version will boast eye-popping production values that make the play worth seeing. "I'd like to shoot a couple

of scenes in Paris. But it's a fantasy, an opera, and we're going to be anything but literal about it."

Schumacher and Webber's *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* will not only brush up against memories of past movie versions starring Lon Chaney, Claude Rains, and Herbert Lom, but also with two in-the-works variations. Robert Englund peels off his Freddy Krueger get-up for a straight-ahead horror version from 21st Century Releasing this October, complete with decapitations and exploding blood bags (20:1:31). And Wolfgang Petersen (*THE NEVERENDING STORY*) has long been planning an upscale version—with music by Michel Legrand—set during the Nazi occupation. Marlon Brando has been mentioned in conjunction with Petersen's project, for which the director has reworked a reportedly brilliant, brooding script by Dennis Potter (*THE SINGING DETECTIVE*). Sources suggest that Petersen's on-again, off-again project has been eclipsed by budgetary and casting problems, as well as by Petersen's involvement with a psychological thriller, *THE PLASTIC NIGHTMARE*, reportedly to star William Hurt and Sissy Spacek.

*THE FLATLINERS* and *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* could easily vault Joel Schumacher to Hollywood's front ranks of directors, or they could reaffirm how poor the industry's judgement is about who should call the shots on big-budget fantasy films. Imagine *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* in the hands of such stylists as David Lynch or Martin Scorsese. "Now," observed Schumacher, "I just have to do them well." □

## CHILD'S PLAY 2 NIXED BY UA

United Artists, which filmed the original, has passed on its option to make *CHILD'S PLAY 2* at the direction of its new owners, Qintex Australia Ltd. The move reflected Qintex's decision to take a moral stand against "exploitation" horror films. Judging from the bidding war that ensued among other major studios to pick up the rights to the profitable horror franchise, it's not a view shared by many. Universal won the coveted rights to make the David Kirschner production, with filming set for November. John Lafia directs from a script by Don Mancini with Kevin Yagher again bringing the murderous Chucky to animatronic life. □



Took a lickin', but still tickin' at Universal, Kevin Yagher's Chucky.

# LEATHERFACE

## THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE III

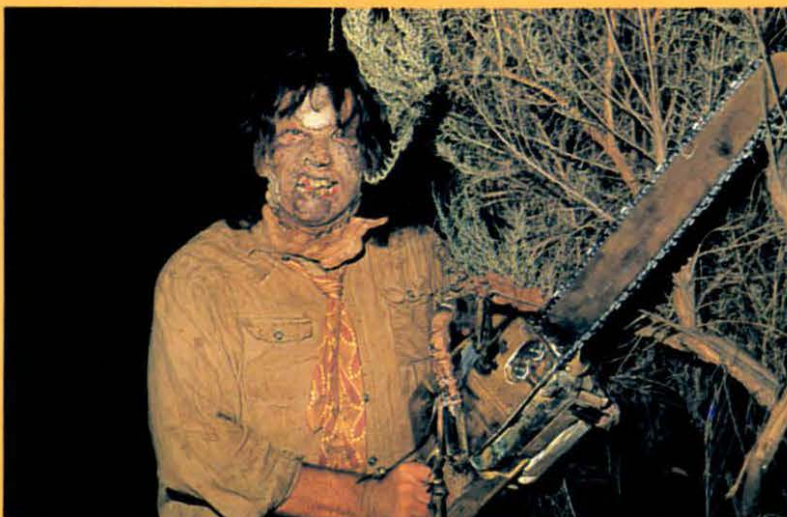
### New Line tries to launch a new horror franchise on the ashes of Tobe Hooper's failed sequel.

By Steve Biodrowski

Does the world really need another TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE sequel? New Line Cinema hopes so, and after the box-office disappointment of their latest Freddy Krueger opus, they are no doubt eager to see if audiences agree when LEATHERFACE: THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE III opens on November 3rd.

New Line, which acquired distribution rights to the original TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE in 1979, wanted to produce the first sequel in 1986; but at that time, director Tobe Hooper, who owned sequel rights along with his co-writer Kim Henkel and several other investors, was under contract to The Cannon Group, which wanted the sequel in exchange for financing Hooper's big-budget efforts, LIFEFORCE and INVADERS FROM MARS. When Cannon's sequel flopped, the rights reverted to the original investors, and New Line thought it would be a good idea to try again, according to production executive Michael DeLuca, who guided the project through development.

None of the original cast and crew worked directly on LEATHERFACE. "[Hooper] was doing SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION," explained DeLuca. "I don't think he was really interested. I've kept in touch with Kim Henkel through the whole process, and Kim's seen the scripts and given a lot of good input." The film was



R. A. Mihaloff as Leatherface: another old saw, or will boxoffice lightning strike twice?

written by splatterpunk author David J. Schow and directed by Jeff Burr (THE OFFSPRING, STEPFATHER II). Makeup effects were provided by Greg Nicotero, and the cast includes Kate Hodge and William Butler as two innocent victims, Ken Foree (DAWN OF THE DEAD) as a weekend warrior who comes to their aid, and R.A. Mihaloff as Leatherface.

Despite its Roman numeral, LEATHERFACE is almost completely divorced from its predecessor, which adopted a comic tone and killed off all its characters, making direct continuity impossible. Instead, DeLuca hired Schow to write a "spiritual sequel to the first film," bringing back Leatherface and creating a new weird family to surround him. "Leatherface was the only character it made sense to bring back," said DeLuca. "You look at the other two films, and the most arresting image and the most

compelling image has always been Leatherface."

Although Schow had never written a feature screenplay, DeLuca felt he could afford the risk on the film's low budget. "I picked David mostly because of his prose work and his reputation as a young, new writer of horror fiction. I thought he was suitable because the project is not fantasy oriented; it's very reality based. It counts on its reality to make it disturbing, and David's writing is of that variety."

Burr, whose THE OFFSPRING hardly endeared him to horror fans, might seem an odd choice for director. It was Burr's work on STEPFATHER II that brought him to the attention of New Line. "David's script came back very visceral, very relentless, and if it were directed with a heavy hand, it might have been a little bit too exploitative," said DeLuca. "What we liked about Jeff was the restraint he

showed in STEPFATHER II, and we thought he could wring true suspense out of a lot of situations in the script, as opposed to just going for the gross out, which is very easy to do in a film like this."

Burr, however, did not like Schow's draft of the script. "It had some interesting things, but what I didn't like was that it was very, very gory for no reason—just wall-to-wall ultra-violence, very Clive Barkerish descriptions of what happens to a human body when it decomposes or gets sliced open," said the director. "In my mind, after Romero and some of the others, you're

not breaking any taboos anymore—you're not breaking any new ground—so why do it?"

Burr did not pursue the project, and New Line selected another director, who had worked on the company's A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET television series. When that director became unavailable due to schedule difficulties, Burr received a last minute phone call asking him to take over—with only three weeks preproduction time to worry about locations, casting, and rewrites. "My tendency was to make it a little more imaginative and character oriented, as opposed to a gore-a-thon," said Burr, "even though I don't think we'll be disappointing the hardcore audience. I tried to get as much family stuff in, because I thought that was what was great about Part I: the oddball characters."

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# TALES FROM THE CRYPT

**Big name directors turn the classic EC horror comics of the '50s into an HBO cable series.**

*By Sheldon Teitelbaum*

The only time Tom Holland ever worked in TV was as director of a segment for Steven Spielberg's *AMAZING STORIES*. The episode was called "Miscalculation," and Holland, who has directed such distinguished horror features as *FRIGHT NIGHT* and *CHILD'S PLAY*, recalled having had a scene of his reshot because he had displayed, he later learned from a story editor, too much cleavage.

It wasn't the kind of experience that made Holland want to quit his day job in features for a career slinging saccharin on the tube. But when producer Joel (48 HOURS, ROADHOUSE, LETHAL WEAPON, DIE HARD) Silver asked him to direct a segment of his new cable series, *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*, handed him a story culled from EC's mid-'50s *Vault of Horror* comic book and told him he could do virtually *anything* he cared to with it—within the bounds of budget—Holland signed up for scale-plus-10 and was

damned happy, he said, to get it.

Holland liked the idea of doing feature-like work for TV without being required to invest the time, energy and commitment a movie demands. He was also encouraged by the track record of the producers involved and by the company he would be keeping—Robert (BACK TO THE FUTURE, WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?) Zemeckis, Walter (48 HOURS, THE WARRIORS) Hill, and Richard (LETHAL WEAPON, SUPERMAN) Donner had preceded him in directing the show's pilot trilogy of tales. And doubtless he was consoled by the freedom from the hassle of network timidity and interference that *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* seemed to offer.

Indeed, once the big guns had been brought aboard, Silver apparently had little trouble attracting such lesser lights as Holland, Howard (PRETTY IN PINK) Deutch, and Mary (PETSEMATARY) Lambert to the project (though attempts to sign up Penny Marshall fell through). Silver

was even able to cut the per-episode budgets on this second slew of stories from the \$850,000 meted out to his heavy hitters to between \$500,000 and \$600,000 for his second stringers. The two sets of trilogies will be distributed abroad by Universal/MCA as two feature films, with the first to hit video stores in this country in October. And HBO has picked up its option on the series for 19 more shows.

Late last May, after wrapping his episode, Holland gazed out at the San Fernando Valley sprawled idyllically in the muddy mist below his breakfast patio and chortled like the hooded old EC Comic Vault-Keeper himself. "If I had handed in my episode ["*Lover, Come Hack to Me*"] to *AMAZING STORIES*," he said, the laughter welling up from a place deep within his tennis-taut abdomen, "they would have had a fucking heart attack."

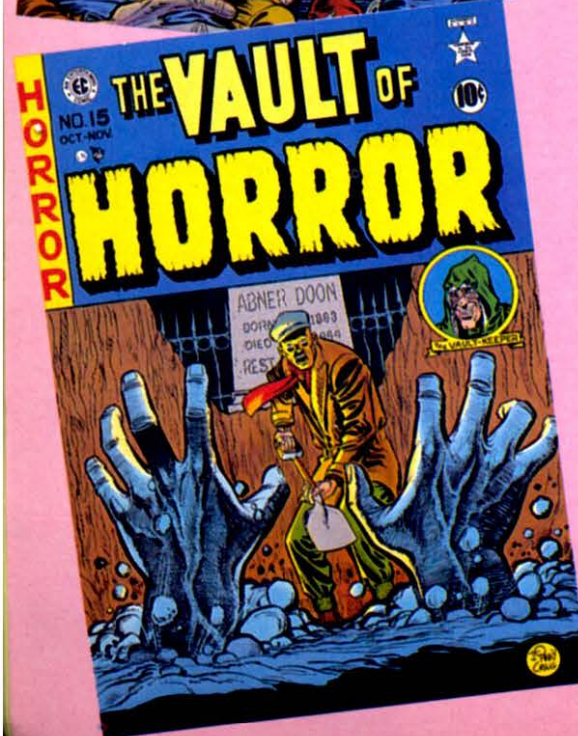
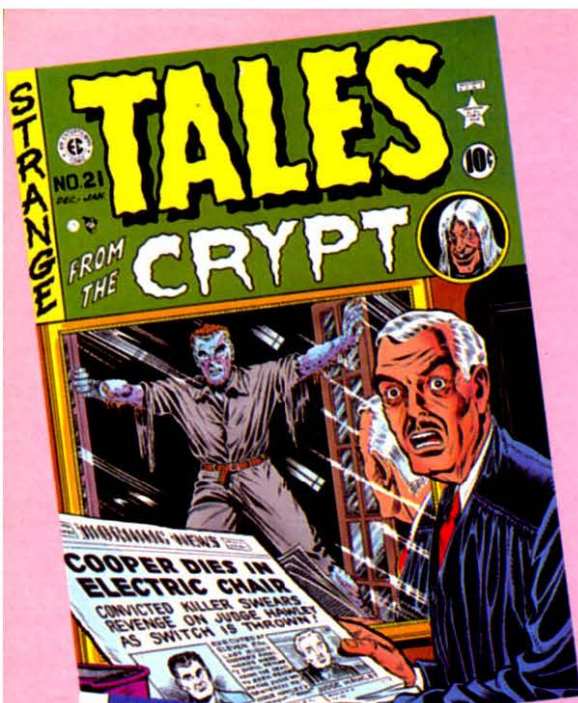
EC Comics, you see, had been notorious for their pronounced lack of most redeeming social and aesthetic attributes, offering a graphically







**TALES FROM THE CRYPT's** heavy hitters of horror (l to r) are director Richard Donner, producer Joel Silver, director Robert Zemeckis and director Walter Hill, posed on the subterranean set of effects man Kevin Yagher's Crypt-Keeper, the puppet jokester who hosts the HBO TV series.



# TALES FROM THE CRYPT

## THE COMICS

*Publisher William M. Gaines on bringing his illustrated horror classics to TV.*

By Sheldon Teitelbaum

*Tales From The Crypt* comic book publisher Bill Gaines' father, M.C. Gaines, died in a boating accident in 1947. M.C. Gaines had been a pioneer of the comics industry; he was the first to introduce the format of the monthly comic book, and was also reputed to have urged DC Comics to purchase the rights to *Superman* and feature the character regularly in *Action Comics*. Under the EC rubric, however, Gaines himself published such little-remembered titles as *Tiny Tots Comics*, *Picture Stories From the Bible*, and the not-entirely successful *International Comics*.

William Gaines took over from his father and began to assemble a new stable of "star" writers and artists, an approach which, in a field noted for its sweatshop conditions and general disdain for those who labored within it, ultimately earned him the title of the "Louis B. Mayer of comics."

Indeed, Gaines' EC horror comics were sufficiently troubling to have inspired the pogrom waged against the comic industry during the mid-'50s by an irate Congress and a buzzing swarm of PTAs. EC historian E.B. Boatner has attributed EC with having opened "new vistas of death from sources previously unimagined by the reader."

Victims, continued Boatner, "were serial-sectioned by giant machines, eaten by ghouls, devoured by rats—from inside and out—pecked by pigeons, stuffed down disposals, skewered on swords, bur-



Gaines, godfather of horror comics.

ied alive, dismembered and used as baseball equipment, hung as living clappers on huge bells, made into sausages and soap, dissolved, southern fried, hacked up by maniacs in Santa Claus suits and offed in unusually high percentages by their wives or husbands."

These legendary strips have long held an allure for filmmakers weaned on them as kids because the EC comics (the "E" initially for "Education,"

later on, more appropriately, for "Entertainment") were inherently filmic, or, at the least, theatrical. "We drew analogies," recalled Gaines, "between the comic page and the stage. We told our writers to think of the individual panels as the proscenium arch, the writer as the playwright, the editor as the director and the publisher as the producer."

"We also insisted that our writers read the things aloud. And we'd make changes on the basis of what we heard. It had to look right, sound right, and read right, so in a sense we were very much aware that these were a kind of stage or movie production."

Notable among Gaines' stars were Al Feldstein and artists Johnny Craig, Jack Kamen, Graham Ingels, Wally Wood, Reed Crandall, Jack Davis, Bernard Krugstein, and Harvey Kurtzman (who refused to work in horror, and instead produced EC's less profitable, but, in Gaines' eyes, far more worthwhile and interesting science fiction comics). Gaines eventually added titles of his own to the line—namely *Crime Patrol*, *Gunfighter*, *Modern Love*

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Left: Gaines' unequaled horror comics, which inspired a whole generation of filmmakers who read them as kids before they were banned in the mid-'50s. The highly cinematic strips featured graphic renderings of some of the top artists in the field like Al Feldstein (top), "Ghastly" Graham Ingels (center), and Johnny Craig (bottom).

horrific layer cake comprised, according to monster meister Stephen King, of "terror on top, horror below, and lowest of all, the gag reflex of revulsion."

Silver and HBO believed, however, that the comics could, if handled properly, be called on to scare the stuffing out of audiences weaned on a disquieting diet of thin network pablum and the more visceral brew available on screen and cassette.

Holland's episode certainly gave William Gaines, founder of the EC Comics line of horror titles *The Haunt of Fear*, *Tales From the Crypt* and *Vault of Horror*—and the man perhaps best known as the creator of *Mad Magazine*—a few arrhythmic moments. The silver-locked and gray-bearded Gaines, who still churns out *Mad Magazine* from his own private vault—a hideously over-air conditioned 13th floor Madison Avenue office in New York—shuddered slightly while contemplating Holland's episode (which Holland wrote with former writing partner Michael McDowell).

"I've seen 15 or 20 scripts," Gaines explained one Friday, early last March, "and by and large I liked them. The producers seem to respect the material, and they have accepted my advice on several plot points. But there is a lot of sex and profanity in some of these scripts which I don't always think is necessary.

"Of course our comics had a lot of gore, and that made some people uncomfortable. I myself never had a problem with the gore. But, my God, you've got people *humping* each other in these things."

At 67, Gaines doesn't feel comfortable with humping—not in plain view anyway. Dragging people's *kishkes* along the floor or stuffing the family jewels into a blender—these practices he doesn't mind, not even with kids watching. But mildly hot sex and what Gaines calls "cuss words" make him nervous.

TALES FROM THE CRYPT as envisioned by producers Silver, William (TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE) Teitler,

Directing horror is really directing. I would have hated to go through my life as a director without having done it. And I have always been a fan of Gaines.



ROBERT ZEMECKIS

and Donner, however, is decidedly *not* intended for kids, even if they themselves were exposed to and developed a reverence for the comics as children.

The pilot trilogy screened last June 10 turned out to be a potent, if somewhat inconsistent brew, largely, it is rumored by sources very high in the production, because of some initial trouble with the quality of the scripts—most of which, thankfully, were eventually ironed out.

The Hill adaptation of "The Man Who Was Death," which was written by Hill and Robert (ACTION JACKSON) Reneau and which starred Bill (K-9) Sadler, as an out-of-work executioner, emerged as a fully updated, highly stylized little feature performed with wit, expertly cut and reminiscent of Hill's 48 HOURS in its comic book intensity. The Zemeckis episode, Fred (THE MONSTER SQUAD) Dekker's adaptation of "And All Through the House" featuring Larry (L.A. LAW) Drake as a murdering Santa Claus and Zemeckis' wife, Mary Ellen Trainor, was less successful, working better as an exercise in comedy than terror. Gaines, however, thought the Zemeckis episode was

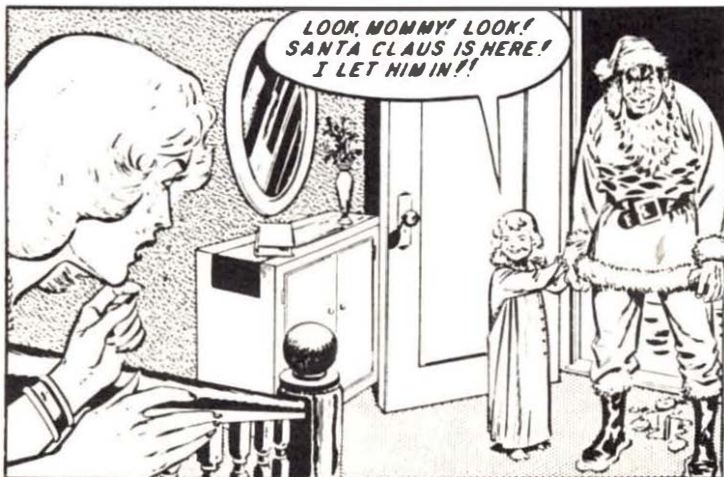
"excellent—the best anyone has ever done," and that *all* of EC's horror stories had been intended as comedy and should be interpreted as such.

Donner's rendition of "Dig That Cat—He's Real Gone," which was penned by Terry (DEAD HEAT) Black and starred Joe (MIDNIGHT RUN, EMPIRE OF THE SUN) Pantoliano as a death-defying carnival performer, contained some interesting cutting, but also seemed oddly understocked in the chill department. It's premise of a gland transplant from a cat giving Pantoliano nine lives is certainly amusing and the segment is expertly filmed and performed, but in a time of genome mapping and hot and cold running fusion, who can believe any of this malarkey?



he inevitable question is this: in the age of sordid tabloid TV, can this TALES FROM THE CRYPT still pack the wallop that made such an indelible impression upon Stephen King and hordes of horror writers, filmmakers, and aficionados, by carving out a niche for itself

"And All Through The House," the pilot episode directed by Robert Zemeckis, had Lindsey Whitney Barry as the little girl who lets in murdering Santa Claus Larry Drake (right), based on Johnny Craig's 1954 strip from Vault of Horror #35 (below).



somewhere out there in Stuart Gordon territory? Or will this series, which however unfettered aesthetically, cannot escape the constraints of time and budget, ultimately devolve into being horror's answer to HAPPY DAYS?

Even Gaines realizes that some of the veins mined by EC have, by now, been tapped dry. "The cornier vampire and werewolf stories we did just won't work today," he said. "We killed them off." The remaining stories haven't lost *all* of their juice; a few of them, in fact, appear to be virtually timeless, if excessively spare for dramatic adaptation. But those who rediscover the comics in the TV adaptations or in expensive, boxed hardcover sets which sell for a hefty price, may regard the once-potent shocks contained in their pages as fairly quaint. These are, after all, the days of Ted Bundy, wilding, and AIDS.

Still, it's strong stuff for HBO, a cable company whose very name—Home Box Office—implies it places a premium on family entertainment. The cabler's embrace of TALES FROM THE CRYPT comes from the realization that merely occupying a niche as a clearing house for feature films that have stopped moving at the corner video shop will not propel them into, or sustain them during the raving '90s. "Original programming," explained Chris Albrecht, senior vice president for original pro-



programming at HBO's West Coast headquarters and the man responsible for such recent anthology shows as VIETNAM WARSTORIES, is the only thing we can offer our subscribers exclusively. We can give them adult fare with a feature film sensibility that simply is not available on network television."

Gaines, who serves as "creative consultant" on the HBO series, intends to see that the comics are done justice to. Gaines has been fiercely protective of the EC Comics properties in the past. In the early '70s, producers Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky of English-based Amicus Productions turned out two EC-inspired anthology features TALES FROM THE CRYPT (1971) and VAULT OF HORROR (1972). Though the films were commercially, if not artistically successful (see 2:4:5 and 3:1:26), Gaines pulled the plug before Amicus could mount THE HAUNT OF FEAR or TALES FROM THE INCREDIBLE, the latter based on EC's science fiction comics.

"I stopped doing business with Rosenberg because I was not happy with the way they would never take any of my suggestions," said Gaines. "I felt they were screwing with the stories, which offended me. Although we made a lot of money with the deal, I called it quits."

According to Walter Hill, TALES FROM THE CRYPT was subsequently optioned by



WILLIAM TEITLER

“ These directors brought the same expectations to these half-hour segments that they brought to their feature films. They’re not compromising their vision. ”

Danny Grodnik, a producer and now the publisher of *National Lampoon* magazine, who some 10 years ago, approached Hill to direct an episode for a feature adaptation Grodnik was allegedly pitching (unbeknownst to Gaines) to Paramount. Grodnik's project, Hill noted, was also to have showcased episodes by John Carpenter and David Cronenberg, but Paramount is said to have eventually lost interest. Gaines, however, said his only recollection of Grodnik was that he had announced his interest to produce a movie based on *Mad*.

Then there was John Hughes' 1985 production of WEIRD SCIENCE, which only used the EC Comics title—Gaines said he didn't much care for the movie. The film's producers came back and asked to use the title for a prospective TV series, but this time Gaines declined, insisting that he would only do so if his horror material were used in the series, which didn't prove amenable to the producers.

Gaines' EC comics material "bounced around Hollywood" until 1988, when producer Joel Silver, who Gaines said had been interested in it for longer

than he can remember, approached him with a deal. Gaines was sufficiently impressed by Silver's credentials and zeal to sell him the rights to as many of the 500 or so stories that had appeared in EC's various horror and science fiction comics as Silver was prepared to adapt in his series. Once the series came to an end, however, the rights would revert back to Gaines. In return, Gaines was hired as a script consultant and was promised he would see the scripts chosen for production in advance and that any advice he could proffer would gratefully be taken into account.

Co-producer William Teitler was not involved in the formative stages of TALES FROM THE CRYPT. He came onto the project in October 1988, a month before Robert Zemeckis was slated to begin shooting his episode. The relatively short amount of time earmarked for preproduction was dictated by Zemeckis' commitment to begin shooting BACK TO THE FUTURE II and III later that Fall.

"We realized that here was

this tremendous opportunity slipping between our fingers," recalled Teitler, "and we decided not to let Zemeckis get away. So we pulled together Fred Dekker's script and began to get the project going."

A soundstage in North Hollywood was quickly rented and a largely non-union production team was assembled. Kevin Yagher, the 26 year-old creator of killer-doll Chucky in Tom Holland's CHILD'S PLAY was brought on to design the animatronic Crypt-Keeper (see sidebar, page 24) and set designers began assembling his inner-sanctum. Richard Edlund of Boss Films, meanwhile, set about designing the series' quick-paced opening sequence (see sidebar, page 21).

"What seems wonderful to me about this production," said Teitler, "was that these directors brought the same expectations to these half-hour segments that they brought to WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT? or 48 HOURS or LETHAL WEAPON. They are not compromising their artistic vision for television. Quite the opposite. They are merely filling them into a smaller container, telling stories as they are used to telling stories."

Zemeckis was too young to have read the EC horror comics as a child—he caught them on the rebound during the '60s, and when Silver suggested he sign on, Zemeckis agreed on the condition that "they be true to the comics in tone and spirit." Silver assured him that this was his intent and, recalled Zemeckis, "the next day all the comics came to my door, and Joel said pick one."

Indeed, Zemeckis said he had long harbored the hope of directing a horror film, but that he could not, given the pinnacle his career had reached, become involved in a project of the stature of, say, A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET sequel. "It would have to be loftier than that for me to invest time in a feature," he said. "Which is too bad, because directing horror is really directing. I would have hated to go through my life as a director

Out-of-work executioner Bill Seder gets a taste of his own medicine in director Walter Hill's noirish "The Man Who Was Death," based on a strip (below) in the April 1950 first issue of EC's Tales From the Crypt, graphic horror with the ambience of an Edward Munch.



without having done it."

Dekker was brought onto the project by Silver, with whom he had been friendly for some time. The two had long wanted to work together, said Dekker, and the tongue-in-cheek sensibility Silver recognized in the EC material seemed to recommend the writer. Moreover, said Dekker, "Robert Zemeckis was familiar with my work as a writer and asked that I do his segment."

Dekker told Zemeckis he wanted to adapt "The Thing From the Grave," a romantic triangle about a woman with two suitors, one of whom kills the other and the woman as well. Eventually the original suitor rises from the grave and exacts his revenge. "I felt—and I said this to everyone—" recalled Dekker, "that we were lacking the prototypical *Tales From The Crypt* story, in which there is romantic deceit, treachery, and you always have someone rising from the grave with maggots falling out of their eye-sockets."

Zemeckis found himself attracted to the Johnny Craig story "All Through the House," not knowing that it had been adapted for the screen 15 years before by Amicus. Dekker acknowledged the story as one of his own favorites, "But I had nixed it right off because of the Amicus movie."

Zemeckis was intent on doing an episode which, he said, would be contained both directorially and practically. "I wanted to do something on one set and with a small cast—I felt a limited environment would let me do something suspenseful." Upon learning from Dekker that Amicus had appar-



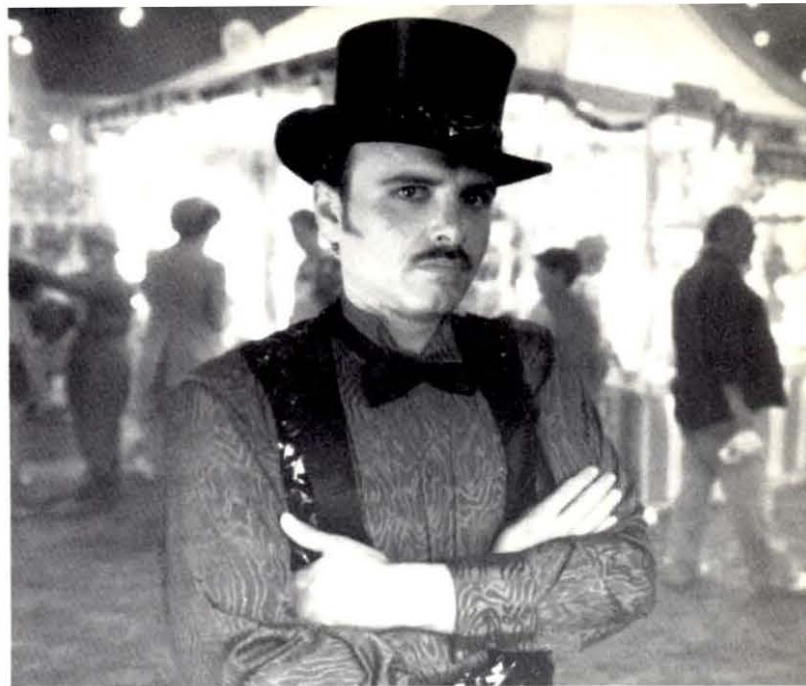
Joe Pantolano as Ulric the Undying in "Dig That Cat... He's Real Gone," director Richard Donner's episode about a carnival daredevil who inherits nine lives from a cat, based on the 1953 strip drawn by Jack Davis (above) from the October issue of *The Haunt of Fear* #21.

ently felt similarly, Zemeckis, somewhat disheartened, rented the cassette of the first TALES FROM THE CRYPT feature. He decided upon viewing it, however, that what he had in mind for the story was nothing like what had been done.

Dekker said he and Zemeckis collaborated on the story "beat by beat." But they realized that the comic strip alone, however accomplished, could not possibly sustain half an hour of narrative. Holed up in Zemeckis' office at Amblin, where Zemeckis was writing his RACK TO THE FUTURE sequels, they devoted three days to embellishing the story's initial "McGuffin" with enough obstacles to flesh out the story to fill the allotted time. Armed with sundry plot points, Dekker sauntered home to bang out a first draft.

Dekker learned to appreciate Zemeckis' capacities as a writer, which he called "a god-

Tom Holland directs Stephen Shellen as a husband about to meet up with an axe in "Love Come Hack to Me." Holland said he liked the freedom of working on HBO.



send." Explained Dekker, "In Hollywood, writers are generally sucked into the black hole of development, meaning that if you agree to write something it is almost a certainty that you will write it five or six times. But Bob knew exactly where he was going, and basically the way I wrote it the first time was the way it was shot. The only thing Bob changed was some dialogue on the set to make the actors more comfortable, and he did come up with one more obstacle for the film's zinger ending," which entailed Trainor inadvertently locking herself in a closet from which she watches in terror as the psycho Santa climbs past her into her daughter's upstairs bedroom, one of the series few genuine shocks thus far.

According to Gaines, Zemeckis and Dekker were also initially inclined, as had been Amicus director Freddie Francis 15 years earlier to little effect, to have Trainor, who has just murdered her husband, throttled in full view by the renegade Santa. But Gaines demurred and made his misgivings known to Zemeckis.

"I didn't like the ending of the British version and the Americans, I learned, wanted to do the same thing," said Gaines. "To Zemeckis' credit, though, I suggested that they just leave her screaming her head off, like we did in the comic. They did, and I think it came off beautifully."

Zemeckis acknowledged that he felt impelled through-

out the production to stick as closely as possible to the intent of the original Craig story. "I have always been a fan of Gaines and I would have hated to think that he'd been disturbed by anything we had done, because we worked hard to keep it pure.

"But there is a certain amount of updating that has to be done—particularly in the area of the attitudes and morality conveyed in the original comics. Also, in the comics, the tale of retribution and the suspense is intellectual. In the film you had to make it visceral. Another thing I thought needed changing was that the comic was told from the murderer's point of view. I have never liked telling stories that way."

Zemeckis shot his episode in a week. Having emerged from two tortuous years on *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?*, his second sojourn in TV (Zemeckis, like Holland, directed a segment of *AMAZING STORIES*) was, he was purported to have said, "like a trip to Disneyland."

"I think what TV offers," he noted, "is the chance to hone your craft a little bit without having immense amounts of money at stake. You can try some things, you can experiment, sort of like when a comedian tries his stuff out at the Comedy Store before doing an HBO special.

"Doing cable TV basically lets you flex as a film director. If all you ever do is features, you always have to cover your-

# TALES FROM THE CRYPT

## THE EFFECTS

*Boss Film shot the show's opening, dizzying plunge into the lair of the Crypt-Keeper.*

*By Sheldon Teitelbaum*

One of the ironies of Steven Spielberg's AMAZING STORIES was that the brief "Storyteller" sequence that began each show proved more memorable than the individual episodes themselves. That will not likely be the case with TALES FROM THE CRYPT—the writing is stronger and the show's attitude is more focused. But the hurly-burly jaunt through the Crypt-Keeper's haunt that starts off each episode has more jolts in it than most of the episodes screened thus far.

The sequence, which has a camera barreling up a hill and into the inner recesses of a suitably creaky gothic castle in one apparently uninterrupted swoop, was crafted by Richard Edlund's Marina Del Rey-based Boss Film effects shop for about \$400,000—roughly half the cost of one of the first episodes.

"If we were doing a \$30 million movie," explained producer Bill Teitler, "we could not have made a more sophisticated or compelling opening. This has miniatures, blue screen, rotoscoped animation—every trick in the trade. And it's exquisite."

This is Boss Film's second foray into TV. Edlund's company previously undertook effects work for Disney's ill-fated EARTH-STAR VOYAGER. "Joel [Silver] wanted us," said Edlund, "because we

have only one quality level whether we're working on TV or features—our best. And we wanted to prove to ourselves we could work well within the limitations of TV."

Edlund worked with Silver on DIE HARD—Boss Film was nominated for an Academy Award for its effects in that movie. It was Silver, said Edlund, who proposed shooting the miniature effects se-



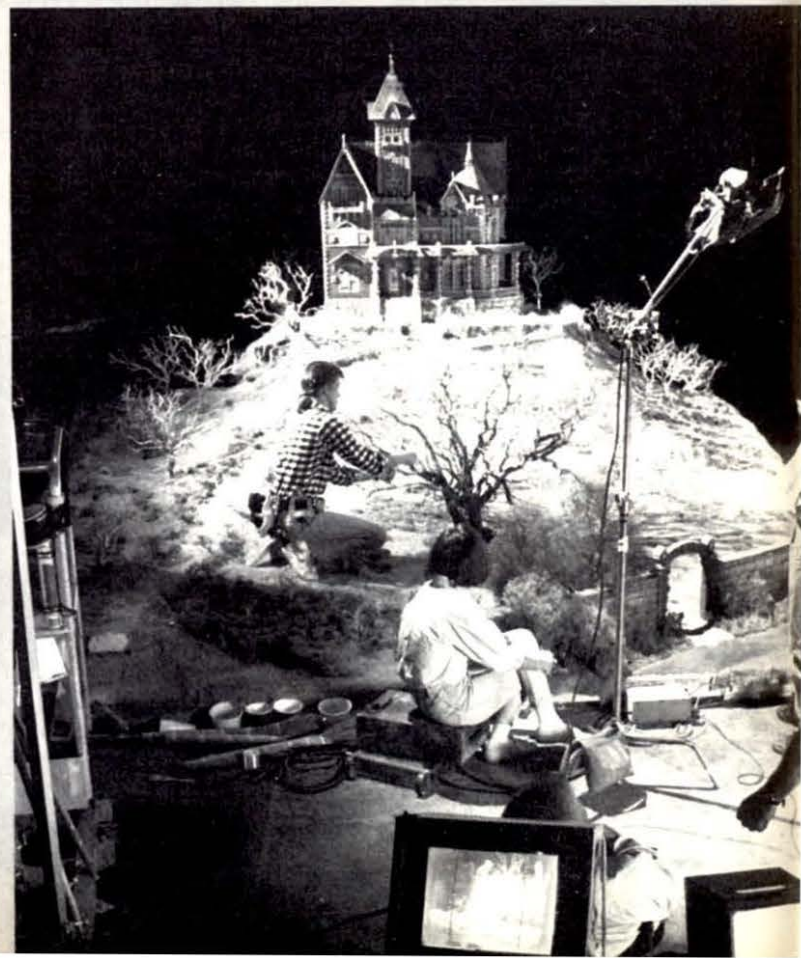
quence as one unending shot, although the idea might have been Robert Zemeckis' to begin with.

Of course, the sequence is nothing of the sort. Once through the front door, the sequence shifts to live-action—the interior set was erected at a sound stage in North Hollywood. In the library the wall panels open to

*continued on page 58*



The miniature of the Crypt-Keeper's house for the series special effects teaser, built at Richard Edlund's Boss Film. Below: readying the set for videotaping. Left: The final effect, as the camera trucks-in amid a storm and lightning flashes.



self. In these you just go for the style—as long as you don't tamper with the material."

Zemeckis said he cast Larry Drake as the crazed Santa because "he had the right edge and spin on the character. He's playing the intensity of a psychotic character, but he also has his tongue firmly planted in cheek." As for Trainor, with whom he had worked on *ROMANCING THE STONE*: "She's never done anything this intense before—neither have I, for that matter. It's a little unsettling having your wife play a murderer."

**P**erhaps but for the grace of motion pictures, director Walter Hill expects he would have become a cartoonist or comic book artist. "There are those who say, in fact, that I've achieved my ambition," he noted somewhat sardonically.

Hill was eight or nine years old when he first encountered EC Comics, and he preferred them over "the stuff the [George] Lucas crowd seemed to like, which was a little too clean for my tastes. The stories in EC were interesting, but it was the renderings by guys like Al Feldstein and Jack Davis that I thought was just breakthrough work."

Hill first picked "The Man Who Was Death" as the basis for a screen adaptation a decade ago, when he had been approached for the Paramount production that was to have placed him in league with Cronenberg and Carpenter. The art, he recalled, possessed a distinct Munchean quality that appealed to him, while the story—in which a prison executioner finds unemployment not to his liking in the wake of the repeal of the death penalty—suggested to him a character study in the style of an Edgar Allan Poe or Ambrose Bierce.

Unlike Zemeckis, Hill had no reservations about sustaining the narrative through the eyes of his protagonist. In fact, Hill has his executioner talk to the camera, trying to seduce the audience to his point of

*"I covered a little less. You don't have as much money on the set as you'd have even in a fairly low budget film. You have to put a finer point on your pencil."*



WALTER HILL

view. It is a theatrical conceit which, given the fate that awaits him at the end, is somewhat akin to that employed by director Rudolph Mate in the 1949 suspenser *D.O.A.*

"I wanted to get into the guy's head," said Hill. "The trick to this piece, if it works, is that although this man is a seriously twisted, grotesque individual, there is something seductively human about him. Truffaut once said that there are no monsters, only the monstrous. It's probably as anti-theatrical a statement as you could make regarding an EC comic but I think it's true."

Indeed, as Talbot, actor Bill Sadler's homespun spin on matters of life—and most especially death—are oddly engaging. Death, Talbot explains as he makes his rounds through some of the seedier sections of Los Angeles, is a disease which must be confronted honestly and with dignity. "It's a disease," he declares. "You eat it, you drink it, you breathe it, you fuck it—we're all pregnant with it. I like death."

Hill cast Sadler, a relative unknown in a series that has avoided using name-brand stars, because "he read the hell out of it." Sadler, who is a country boy from upstate New

York, played the Okie cornball executioner to the hilt. "The great thing was I didn't have to direct him," said Hill. "Sometimes directing is more a case of staying out of the way than pushing things. He was in there from the first minute I met him and I tried not to break the roll. Instead I concentrated all of my energy on the look of the piece."

Hill's lack of obtrusiveness during the shoot is characteristic of his style of direction. "I like things to be plastic," he said. "I don't like showing up with a list of 17 shots. What I like is to rehearse and then figure out how to shoot the scene. Figuring out how to shoot things has always been very easy for me."

The look Hill got is distinctive—sort of a *noir* sensibility tinged with early shades of cyberpunk. Initially, Hill said, he had contemplated doing the episode in black and white—an idea that also appealed to his director of photography, John Leonetti, who compared the final product to "a black and white film shot in color."

"I wanted a lurid comic look," explained Hill, "a more classic EC visual style. I used a lot of wide-angle lenses, a lot of backlight and a ton of color."

The reason I opted for color in the end was I was told I had to do it. Sure I thought it would work in black and white. But I also thought there was a good argument—which I came up with myself—for color. Doing it in black and white would not have

been honoring the tradition of EC Comics. We really needed to make a connection to the comics. So there I was arguing against myself and winning."

Hill does not believe that audiences watching this stuff from the vantage point of the tail-end of a decade not known for its seething social conscience will be put off by the moral tone of these stories, which, he acknowledges, is as grim as can be. "I don't think the times are amoral or immoral any more than any other decade can be said to be so," said Hill. "The abortion debate is certainly about peoples' conceptions of morality. And I think that the debate is going to get bigger."

If there is any blame to be meted out for the decided dearth of grim Grand Guignol in TV and even features, noted Hill, it should be placed at the feet of studio and TV executives who, he believes, have spent the last 15 years undermining two millennia of dramatic history, mainly by tagging as many of its films as it could with requisite happy endings.

"Hollywood has not only avoided tragedy," intoned Hill, "they've refused to let it exist. The studios lack the confidence that American audiences will sustain a movie with an unhappy ending. This is worse than silly—it is stifling a lot of good stories. Hopefully with the advent of original cable programming we can expect to see an end to this kind of nonsense."

Yet Hill would not want to pursue a career in TV—not even in the unfettered environment of cable production. The idea was to make little features for the small screen, but Hill discerned some differences in approach. "I covered a little less and didn't make as many shots as I usually do. You don't have as much money on the set

Walter Hill sets up a shot of convict J. W. Smith in "The Man Who Was Death."



# TALES FROM THE CRYPT

## ANIMATRONICS

*Makeup effects expert Kevin Yagher pulls the strings on the show's droll puppet host.*

*By Sheldon Teitelbaum*

Richard Donner believes Kevin Yagher may have done too good a job designing the Crypt-Keeper. "I think by the end of the third episode he's going to try to get his own series, the little rat," quipped Donner.

"Wait 'til he finds out we own the batteries."

Actually the man with the batteries is Yagher, the 26-year-old former Halloween mask retailer from Dayton, Ohio, who made his mark in this town as designer and creator of the makeup effects work for Freddy Krueger in three of the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET sequels, and who designed and created the malevolent "Good Guy" doll Chucky, of CHILD'S PLAY fame. Other recent Yagher projects include THE HIDDEN, BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE, THE SEVENTH SIGN, 976-EVIL, Weird Al Yankovic's music video FAT, and Michael Lehmann's forthcoming MEET THE APPLIGATES. Yagher's work for TV has appeared in segments of HBO's THE HITCHHIKER, Witt/Thomas Productions' BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (he applied the Beast makeup for the pilot series) and Amblin' Entertainment's AMAZING STORIES.

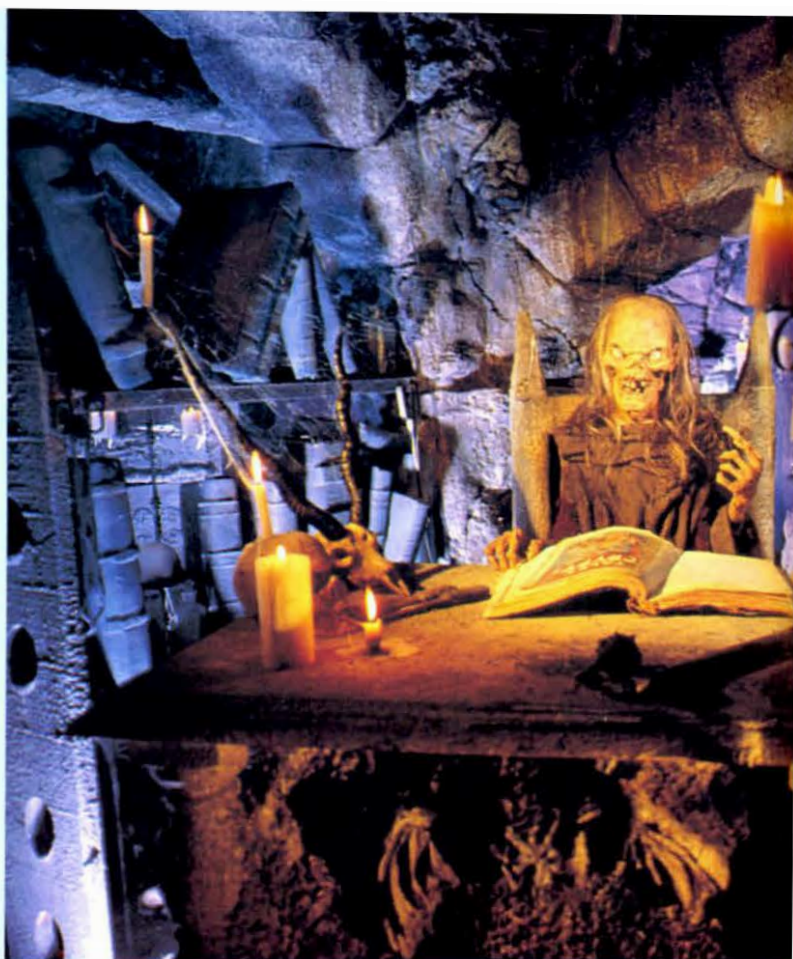
Yagher got into the business through correspondence with veteran makeup effects artist Dick (ALTERED STATES,

THE EXORCIST, THE GODFATHER) Smith, who put him in touch with several West Coast artists. As an effects assistant at several Los Angeles shops, Yagher cut his teeth on such films as DREAMSCAPE, THE LAST STARFIGHTER, and COCOON.

Yagher lives in Burbank, but he has a 4,500 square-foot effects shop, Kevin Yagher Productions, in nearby Glendale, opposite an effects unit maintained by Joel Silver, the producer. Occasionally, recalled Yagher, Silver, seeing monsters in the open garage door, would drop by for a quick look-see. Last November Silver suggested he come on to TALES FROM THE CRYPT to design a servomotor-laden animatronic puppet host for his series. Yagher demurred.

"I had been working straight through five years and was dead on my feet," said Yagher

Yagher poses with the show's witty host, who invariably gets the show's best lines, during filming of the teaser for director Walter Hill's "The Man who Was Death."



Yagher's cable and rod puppet Crypt-Keeper in his imaginatively appointed crypt set.

on the set of the Crypt-Keeper's inner-sanctum in North Hollywood. "I wanted to take a break and then try my hand at writing or directing. But Silver said I could not only build the Crypt-Keeper—I could direct the tags and the teasers. Bingo!"

In addition, Yagher pushed for and received royalty points for any subsequent merchandising of his Crypt-Keeper. He had been denied a percentage of the take for his work on the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET movies, but he did receive some points for CHILD'S PLAY's Chucky. The deal he worked out for the

Crypt-Keeper was the sweetest he had worked out for any of his creations to date.

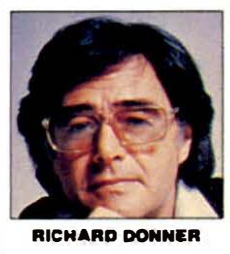
Yagher said Silver did not lock him into a faithful rendering of the Crypt-Keeper as envisioned by the comics. In his original guise—which he became familiar with through his brother, who was allegedly so obsessed with comics that their mother took him to a psychiatrist for evaluation—the Crypt-Keeper is merely a cowed figure with a jutting jaw and warts on his nose and chin. No big deal, and the alternatives available in the other EC comics—the Old Witch and the Vault-Keeper—were no improvement.

"The witch is the only creepy looking one—she had an eyeball hanging out of her skull and she'd hold it out from her. The other hosts were just guys with slime in their mouths, which was boring. I sketched a series of both fleshier and emaciated-looking characters—at one time the Crypt-Keeper looked like a clown. We decided though, that what we really wanted was something so emaciated it couldn't possibly be a human being. In the end,





“I expected to come in, kick ass, and teach all these kids how to do a show in three days, like we did on *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*. Except it's taking eight days, and I guess I've made a fool out of myself in front of a lot of people.”



RICHARD DONNER

Final cost: a bargain at just \$200,000.

though, I settled on the look of an insane, dead warlock.”

Once Yagher's sketches were approved by Silver, Yagher submitted a bid which was deemed too high. Eventually Yagher committed to designing a Crypt-Keeper suitable for the first spate of pilot episodes for \$150,000, which was only a little more than a fifth of what he had spent on Chucky. Moreover, whereas Chucky had taken three months to design and build, Yagher received only 10 weeks to bring his creepy apparition up to snuff.

Yagher's cash flow was not optimal at the time, and he said he went into the hole on this job—at least at first. But for a crack at directing, and with a shot at doing an episode a distinct possibility, Yagher decided this was money well spent.

Yagher built the Crypt-Keeper at his shop in Glendale and transported the creature to the set in April, when he began shooting the first series of bumpers. Yagher brought with him six puppeteers (his shop employs eight people in all): F. Charles Lutkus III, Patty Ma-

continued on page 60

that you'd have even in a fairly low-budget film. You just have to put a finer point on your pencil.”

Hill also hopes that the current spate of comic book adaptations coming out of Hollywood—one which does not seem to be plagued by the campy sensibility and poor production values that have characterized previous waves—brings new attention to what he believes is a distinctively American and much maligned art form. “The American comic book,” noted Hill, “has grown, flowered, regressed, and gone through all of its phases totally without any kind of literary or artistic criticism except in Europe, where they've recognized comics as art for years.

“The thing is, even though film is plastic and comics are two dimensional, they have their economy of approach in common. In comics you have to establish character and plot and atmosphere with very little room to move. They have even less room than you get in TV, and that's not a lot.”

**Y**ou can see Walter Hill directs in low key; Richard Donner, by his own admission, is a screamer. At the North Hollywood

soundstage where much of the show is shot, Donner good-naturedly gave everybody a hard time.

The only one of the first three *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* directors to have worked regularly in television during his formative years, Donner expected to “come in, kick ass, and teach all these non-union kids how to do a show in three days, like we did on the *TWILIGHT ZONE*.” Donner directed some of the best of the old show, including “The Beast at 20,000 Feet,” as well as at least one of the seg-

ments from the revived series.

“Except it's taking eight days, we're going at it till 11 p.m. every night, and I guess I've made a fool of myself in front of a lot of people,” said Donner, only half-jokingly.

Donner, who joined Silver and Teitler on the credit roster as the series executive producer, was shooting *LETHAL WEAPON II* when Silver suggested he team up with writer Terry (DEAD HEAT) Black and direct an episode. The prospect of a return to TV as a director did not thrill him at first. “When I left TV for motion pictures,” he recalled, “I felt a tremendous weight off my chest, mainly because of all the restrictions in network TV.”

Yet the day after Donner wrapped *LETHAL WEAPON II*, in March, he showed up in North Hollywood. Maybe being made an executive producer had something to do with it. Or perhaps his willingness to take TV on again stemmed from his recognition that he was being presented with a chance to do the kind of TV he only dreamed might be possible during his early years in the industry.

“I can tell you,” said Donner, “that had this show gone to the networks they would not have done it.”

The selection of the story for Donner's episode—“Dig That Cat—He's Real Gone”—was Black's, who said he liked his horror “goofy,” and that this story was as goofy as they got. Donner recalled that the episode was culled from one of about 25 comics chosen by Silver's production people as “premium” stories.

Black said he especially enjoyed writing the opening and closing pun-laden “bumpers,” or remarks, about the story for the Crypt-Keeper, who professes, at one point, to be worried about the show

being “buried in the wrong time-slot,” or that people might not like Ulric's “lifeless performance.”

Donner's reasons for approving the story were a tad more base: “I love killing people,” he said. “And I hadn't killed so many people in so many different ways since I did *THE OMEN*.”

Donner said that as a kid, the comics he read were even raunchier than the stuff Hill claimed to be partial to. “Mostly it was Maggie and Jiggs doing dirty stuff that was premium,” he recalled. For horror, though, nothing beat EC, and their influence, even in film, said Donner, was eminently discernible. “I don't know if [Roman] Polanski read EC comics in Poland as a kid, but we all had these somewhere in our lives and a lot of us were influenced by them. We are all influenced by things we read under the blankets.”

Black, who appeared in the episode as a corpse, recalled having first encountered the

Robert Zemeckis poses with wife Mary Ellen Trainor and Larry Drake on the set of “And All Through the House.”



material under his own covers as well. "I'd read them 'til I was too scared to go on and I'd put them away. But then I'd be compelled to go back and read them some more. I knew I'd get nightmares but I couldn't stop myself."

"Dig That Cat—He's Real Gone" was too fanciful to demand much in the way of updating, but Black noted that Donner proved a regular fountain of "bizarre ideas." Said Black, "They were all good bizarre ideas, but for the writer it can be a nightmare—you have to keep going back and redoing it."

"Donner came up with all of these great ways for Ulric to die. The comic had him in an electric chair, but they were doing that in the Hill episode and Donner wanted less conventional, more carnival-like modes of execution—the kinds of things you'd do in front of a paying audience."

"The burial remained, however—it's a marvelous framing device; the guy is alone and isolated, he's slowly dying and can reflect on what's happened. The punch is great even though you suspect all is not going to go well from the first scene. A lot of the old TWILIGHT ZONEs Donner did had this circular structure."

According to Black, the EC story on which the episode is based is a ridiculous story with a nasty edge to it, which made it appropriate for adaptation. He is not convinced, as is Dekker, that there actually is a prototypical *Tales From The Crypt* story. "What all of these do," he said, "is share a view of the world in which there is this horrific aspect, or dimension, which you never suspected existed. That this world is in some ways even ghastlier than you could have imagined as a kid under the covers. So the plots, whatever they are, are always secondary to this sense of flavor."

What the plots do determine, however—and it is this that Donner appeared to have overlooked when he approved his episode—is the level of complexity that will characterize any particular production. Zemeckis had opted for a story



TOM HOLLAND

“When Joel Silver told me I could be as sexual or violent as I wanted—I seldom am—and that he was bringing a feature mentality to TV, I became very interested.”

that transpires in one house among four people, two of whom serve as little more than ciphers. Although Hill ranged all over Los Angeles with his episode, he too stuck fairly close to his protagonist. "But the silly thing I took on is massive," said Donner. "It's a bloody carnival."

Yet Donner thinks that spending as much time and money shooting these episodes as he and his colleagues did—eight days and \$850,000 each—was "nothing less than self-indulgent. You shouldn't even spend \$500,000 on a half-hour episode," said Donner, talking now like a producer. "If you're going to shoot the thing like a comic book you have to write scripts to fit the budget. You have to rely on the imagination of your directors, to say, look guys, here are your limitations—now create. That's what we did in TV and that's how we got out of TV."

Donner said he may direct another episode if he has the time—and if the series is picked up. He is also hoping to recruit other top-drawer directors. Martin Scorsese, among others, has been approached. "Joe Dante will do one, and Steven [Spielberg] was going to do one—we wrote one for him. I wouldn't say they're banging

our doors down out there, but there have been a lot of inquiries from name directors.

"The thing is, there are a lot of bright people out there who haven't had an opportunity to direct and I'd like to give them a chance. If we can get a good focus group and a good story editor behind this—God willing—we'll go through all 550 EC stories and then go on to original material."

Comics were never much of a draw for director Howard Deutch as a kid, and he'd never done horror as an adult. And rather than have a bit of fun slumming, as it were, he spent a goodly portion of his time on the set of TALES FROM THE CRYPT in a protective snit because his star and girlfriend, Lea (BACK TO THE FUTURE, CASUAL SEX, Deutch's own SOME KIND OF WONDERFUL) Thompson, had to work 36 hours straight in his episode before being whisked back to the set of BACK TO THE FUTURE II and III.

Thompson's ordeal was caused by the necessity of having her head encased in a special plaster cast by Kevin Yagher so that she could be

transformed into a hideous crone. Wreaking this transformation on Thompson, however, was apparently considerably less trying than updating the story in which it was slated to occur. "Only Sin Deep," the *Haunt of Fear* story from which the episode

had been adapted, was, according to screenwriter Fred Dekker (who was actually earmarked, at one point, to direct the segment), "hopelessly old-fashioned."

"The problem was," said Dekker, "that as classic as many of these stories are in painting pictures of human depravity, a lot of them are tired. This story especially was far too '50s." Dekker shared his concerns about the story's lack of believability with the producers, but they insisted that he was wrong. Dekker then suggested that the story be done as a period piece, but that approach, too, was nixed. It was Robert Zemeckis, said Dekker, who saved the story by suggesting that the Thompson character become a drop-dead beauty who wants to give up her profession—the world's oldest. "That certainly made it work for me," he said.

Howard Deutch chose the tale, about a girl who pawns her beauty, because of its Faustian, or, as he put it, "Dorian Gray" quality. "I have always been intrigued by the idea of someone making a deal with the devil and getting his comeuppance," said Deutch. For Deutch, however, the challenge of directing a horror mini-feature for TV (beyond

Blood-spattered Amanda Plummer axes hubby in director Tom Holland's "Lover, Come Back To Me," based on George Evans' May 1953 strip in *The Haunt of Fear*.



working within the constraints of a significantly curtailed budget) lay, rather, in “striking a balance between the frightening aspects” on the one hand and the “humor and perspective and humanity” on the other.

“I really wanted to do something that I had never done before. The comics offered an opportunity to get involved in a world that is pure and simple and offers us a chance to take us back to our childhoods. At this point in my life, many of my contemporaries and I want very much to relive our childhoods.

“I worked on everything in this segment—everything from adapting the script to production design,” said Deutch. “Largely it has been just like directing a feature. The talent has certainly been of that level. Fred Dekker, for instance, is awfully talented at making the transition from the comic to the script form. I think I added the humor. But I wouldn’t say we updated it much—the story does have a period feel to it, which we stuck with.”

Tom Holland chose George Evans’ *Haunt of Fear* story “Lover Come Hack to Me” because it offered him as much of an opportunity to generate heat as it did chills. In its tale of two ill-fated honeymooners, a kept man marries a bashful but pretty wallflower, only to learn from a haunted vision that the girl’s mother killed her father 20 years before, and that he is about to meet the same fate.

“What was particularly interesting for me,” said Holland, “was the voyeurism inherent to the story. This guy is fucking this girl and he thinks she’s King Kong—he’s in control—and then he’s blown away when he discovers how much he’s not. This is not a ‘50s sensibility.”

Holland’s episode, by his own admission, contains little suspense. “It is a bizarre little piece: a reversal story with no relationship to the comic beyond the bare bones of the plot. Had I written it strictly along the lines of the plot contained in the comic book, I would have had a 15-minute piece.”

Holland cast Broadway stage actress Amanda Plummer



Lea Thompson sports Kevin Yagher’s old age makeup for “Only Sin Deep,” while cradling a picture of her former beauty. The episode, directed by MTV specialist Howard Ozrich, was based on Milt Kamen’s April 1954 strip from *The Haunt of Fear* #24, the story of a female predator who loses her looks (above).

as the ugly duckling bride. Plummer had won a Tony Award as Agnes of God and had also appeared in *THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP*. Who better to play a woman Holland regarded as severely off-center?

“The story is character driven. You have this slightly off girl who is being fucked over by this man who married her and your heart is just breaking for her. But in 20 minutes you end up sympathizing with the guy. What I really had fun with was Plummer’s metamorphosis from virginal wallflower to a woman who has ‘fuck me’ written on her forehead. And when I finally kill [her husband], it goes right over the top—pushes hard against the envelope of good taste.

“Let’s face it—this is a lot more graphic than anything you get on network TV.”

Holland, who is in his early 40’s, has a difficult time recalling when he first encountered EC Comics. He remembers reading some kind of horror comics behind the post office with the other kids in his neighborhood, but it seems to him that he was just a tad too young to have read them in 1950. A few years ago, however, he bought the bound set of black and white reprints but wasn’t immediately entranced by them.

“These stories had utterly no



redeeming social value or even any characters you could like,” said Holland. “In that sense they contravened the normal dramatic stands. But when Joel Silver told me I could be as sexual or violent as I wanted—I seldom am—and that he was bringing a feature mentality to TV, I became very interested.”

Holland walked away from the experience, believing he may have created his most interesting work to date. For this he credits Silver and Teitler, who, he said, never balked at his most outlandish embellishments. “It was pure joy working with them,” he said. “They were extremely supportive and encouraging, which is not something you usually find in TV.”

If Holland was at all hampered by the tight TV format, it was by budgetary cuts. Holland was ostensibly allotted \$600,000 for his episode, although sources high in the production allege he more likely spent a half-million. This did not leave him with enough money for the kind of elaborate makeup effects that empowered Zemeckis to have his wife pluck a fireplace poker out of someone’s head. Hol-

land got around this, he said, with some deft cutting “and a ton of blood.

“Hell, I bathed her in the stuff,” he said. “I thought Joel would go running from the room when he saw this—I had taken the image of *CARRIE* one step further. But Joel just smiled approvingly. He said my episode, more than any other, best reflected the *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* sensibility.”

Holland doesn’t know if he can afford to make working for the show a habit, however. “I’d love to, but my God, the amount of work that goes into these things! You have to work with a writer, you have to shoot it and dub it. I’ll tell you—I could not do a full season of this—not for scale-plus-10.

“I suppose I’d do another one. But I’d better do a feature and make some money first.”

Mary Lambert was never afforded the luxury of picking a story of her own from the EC collection and developing it with a writer from scratch. Which may have been just as well—working for TV stressed her out considerably.

Late in April, Lambert had

PET SEMATARY in the can and was about to leave for a brief vacation when Joel Silver called her agent and asked if she'd care to direct a segment of TALES FROM THE CRYPT. She would have to appear for work, however, Silver said, the next day. Lambert declined, insisting that she needed the time off. In the end, Silver agreed to postpone the shoot by a week if she agreed to commit to a segment.

Silver had chosen for her a story from *The Vault of Horror* called "Collection Completed," about a man (M. Emmet Walsh) who takes up taxidermy as a hobby and in return for flaying his wife's favorite cat, finds himself as the subject for her sawdust and needles.

As nasty a bit of business as ever there was in an EC comic, the story was routed out to a number of writers, among them David Arnott (who writes for SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE), A. Whitney Brown, Jr., and Battle and Randolph Davis. Lambert received a version which, she decided, required further tightening, some plot changes (in one version, the wife played by Audra Lindley was depicted as bereaved over the death of her child—a plot element Lambert said had nothing to do with the story) and the infusion of a more pronounced feminist sensibility than was originally evident.

"I thought the story was



MARY LAMBERT

**“Animals don't do things unless they want to. Everyone else on the set had a motive for being there: they were getting paid, advancing their careers, getting laid.”**

interesting as a comment on communications and marriage between people,” said Lambert early in June while editing her episode. “This couple had been married for 47 years and the man was embarrassed to be in the bathroom with her. He had used his job as a way of getting out of the house and ignoring his wife's need for fellowship and communication. She, in turn, has poured this hunger into her animals, which to my mind was equally disturbing, if ultimately harmless.”

**P**rovided a script, Lambert did not profess a slavish devotion to the original EC material. She was no late-comer to the comic format however—growing up in Arkansas, the 37 year-old director recalled having had one of the largest and most eclectic collections in her town—“everything from *Superwoman* and *Modern Romance* to *Nancy* and *Dennis the Menace*.” She had not, though, ever been deeply interested in horror comics.

Casting the segment proved far more troublesome, she recalled, than any other ele-

ment of the production, including the extremely taxing six-day shooting schedule necessitated by the half-million dollar budget she had been given. The problem, she said, was that there was simply not enough time to consider people for the roles and have them consider participating.

“The whole casting procedure in Hollywood is so formalized—there are so many rules you're not supposed to break, although they are all the time. So you give it to someone and have to wait two or three days and then show it to someone else. There's just not enough time for that in this kind of project. Also, actors who have achieved a certain stature in their professional lives often won't meet you unless you're offering them a part.”

Lambert's lot was further complicated by the use of animals—more specifically, four cats, three dogs, a parrot, and a guinea pig. Getting a cat to wear a party hat and sit contentedly at a table—especially when it's 10:00 p.m., the tail end of a by-now 16-hour day, and the producers want to wrap for the day in 15 minutes—can be grating. Yet Lam-

bert found the experience “humanizing.”

“Everyone else on the set had specific motives for being there: they were getting paid, advancing their careers, getting laid . . . The animals were there because they had been brought there. And they don't

do things unless they want to. I found that helps put things into perspective, especially when it's late and you're tired.”

Special effects for the segment were provided by veteran makeup man Tom Burman. Burman's main task was to produce an appliance which provided Walsh with the appearance of having been stuffed taxidermically. “Managing the effects work quickly was no great problem,” said Lambert. “Because of PET SEMATARY I had already interviewed everybody in town.”

In the end, Lambert produced a segment for the series which she was wont to characterize as graphic, macabre, and comedic. “When I was told they wanted me for TALES FROM THE CRYPT,” she said, “I expected material that was plainly horrific. But this stuff doesn't always work on a realistic level. It's a very specific genre we [directors] were all working in. My own is really very light and funny. But we all had specific commitments to produce a piece that would work in this format. I think they do that very nicely.”

At a time when TV seems intent upon dishing out banal, weekly dramatic renderings of current diseases, social issues and personalities, scriptwriter Fred Dekker detects a value in TALES FROM THE CRYPT. “The stories have a simplicity and elegance and effectiveness,” said Dekker. “You get a strong sense that there's no veil of pretense. It's a half hour every week where you get the bejesus scared out of you—that's really the only function the show has.”

And if the series falls somewhat short of that, Dekker said he has been promised an opportunity to direct an episode once the series gets established and he stands ready to bring out the ghouls and rotting zombies. □

M. Emmet Walsh gets stuffed in director Mary Lambert's "Collection Completed," makeup by Tom Burman, an episode based on the July 1952 Graham Ingels strip from *The Vault of Horror* #25 (below).



# TALES FROM THE CRYPT

## THE SERIES

*Heh, heh, heh, kiddies!  
Nineteen more stories are set to  
emerge from the HBO crypt.*

**By Sheldon Teitelbaum**

Although afforded an unusually cool reception by the critics, the first six segments of TALES FROM THE CRYPT generated enough heat at HBO for the crusading cable company to give Joel Silver and Bill Teitler the go-ahead to produce an additional 19 episodes. (HBO, it should be recalled, had in fact commissioned the writing of nine additional scripts to the first six actually shot.)

According to Teitler, production was to begin in North Hollywood on October 9, with Walter Hill slated to direct an episode he wrote called "Cutting Cards," based on the October 1952 Fred Peters strip from *Tales from the Crypt* #32, about two gamblers obsessed with a game of "chop poker." The shows will likely start airing, said Teitler, in early Janu-

ary, 1990, and negotiations are now underway with Warner Brothers, which will be releasing the last three segments abroad theatrically (Universal is releasing the first three), to market the first six of the 19 episodes.

Walter Hill's continued involvement came as no great surprise—there had been talk, in fact, of Hill, Robert Zemeckis, and Richard Donner directing three new episodes each during the course of the year. As of now, however, it seems likely, or so believes Teitler, that they will each take on one episode apiece.

Teitler was loath to name all of the directors lined up for the series, but used epithets such as "world class," "gigantic," and "tremendous" to describe them. He and Silver do seem to be holding out for the possibility that both Martin Scorsese and Stephen Spielberg will find the



Fred Dekker gets the chance to direct "The Thing From The Grave," the February 1951 strip by Al Feldstein from *Tales From The Crypt* #22 that Dekker believes is the archetypal EC Comics horror tale.

time to squeeze an episode into their cramped schedules.

Writers and directors whose participation appears assured at this juncture include Fred Dekker, who is writing and directing "The Thing From The Grave," based on the February 1951 Al Feldstein strip from *Tales from the Crypt* #22, about a murderer who is stalked by the rotting corpse of the man he has killed. Chris (THE FLY II) Walas, is set to direct

Jeri Barchilion's adaptation of "Till Death," based on the December 1952 Johnny Craig strip from *The Vault of Horror* #28, about a Haitian plantation owner whose joy at the return of his dead wife as a zombie soon turns to disgust. Writers Jeffrey Price and Peter Seaman (WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT), are set to both write and direct an as-yet-unnamed segment. Frank Dara-

continued on page 61

"Till Death," the December 1952 strip by Johnny Craig about a Haitian zombie for *The Vault of Horror* #28, will be directed by Oscar-winning makeup artist Chris Walas.



# The Little

## Walt Disney puts a bra and a happy face on

By Kyle Counts

Can the Fall movie season support two animated feature films? That question will be answered this November, when Disney's *THE LITTLE MERMAID* goes fin-to-paw against Don Bluth's *ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN*. Followers of the art form will recall that the rival animation companies faced a similar battle last year, when Disney's *OLIVER & COMPANY* and Bluth's *THE LAND BEFORE TIME* competed at the boxoffice in November. In that pivotal skirmish for kiddie dollars, both films garnered respectably healthy boxoffice revenues, though Disney emerged the clear victor. When asked if there was concern at the studio about once again facing off with Bluth—a former Disney employee who has since gone on to become the company's only serious competition in the animated film market—a Disney publicist sniffed, "It didn't hurt us last time."

The studio's goal is to fulfill Walt Disney's original dream of releasing a new animated feature every year. With three projects now in various stages of completion—*THE LITTLE MERMAID* in postproduction, *THE RESCUERS DOWN UNDER* in production (due in 1990) and *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* in preproduction—this objective appears to be right on schedule.

Andreas Deja, one of *THE LITTLE MERMAID*'s key animators (he was responsible for the character of Triton), will be one of two directing animators on *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*, with Dick Perdue serving as overall director. Said Deja before departing for England for preproduction work, "BEAUTY AND THE BEAST will be a groundbreak-



Ariel's directing animator, Glen Keane, works from a sculpt of the little mermaid.

ing film for Disney, and very big. We're going to be trying some new things, maybe give the picture a European look—a Gothic style, with characters coming in and out of light. The whole thing will be very painterly." The story and script have already been developed; animation will begin in April of 1990 and will be completed by April of the following year, with a year of postproduction after that.

*THE LITTLE MERMAID*, based on a short story by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, represents Disney's return to the use of classic fairy tales as source material for their longform animated product; as such it is the company's first fairy tale since *SLEEPING BEAUTY* in 1958. In the '40s Disney was considering doing a Hans Christian Andersen anthology picture, one segment of which was to be *THE LITTLE MERMAID*. Kay Nielsen, a renowned artist who worked at the studio at the time, did a series of inspirational sketches (since lost), but that appears to be as far as the project got.

*THE LITTLE MERMAID*

reunites the writing/directing team of Ron Clements and John Musker, who (with Dave Michener and Burny Mattinson) helmed *THE GREAT MOUSE DETECTIVE*. *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS* composers Howard Ashman and Alan Menken have penned seven original songs for the film, with Ashman also serving as co-producer with Musker.

It was Clements who brought the Andersen short story to the attention of the powers-that-be at Disney. When he arrived at a round-table meeting held specifically to discuss new projects, he brought with him a two-page treatment based on *THE LITTLE MERMAID*, which he had discovered in a bookstore. Studio head Michael Eisner was particularly taken with the idea of doing an animated underwater fantasy.

Freely adapted from the Andersen story, *THE LITTLE MERMAID* concerns an unhappy mermaid named Ariel (voice by Jody Benson, who starred in Ashman and Menken's Broadway musical *SMILE*), who longs to be human—much to the dismay of her sea-king father, Triton

(Kenneth Mars). The love-struck little mermaid strikes a bargain with an evil sea witch—half octopus, half-woman—named Ursula (Pat Carroll, who once upon a time played one of the wicked stepsisters in Rogers and Hammerstein's Broadway production of *CINDERELLA*) for a potion that will make her human so that she can win the heart of a handsome prince (Christopher Barnes).

Musker, who wrote *THE LITTLE MERMAID* with Clements, believes that fairy tales are a rich source of storytelling. "Fairy tales have universal appeal—I don't think we ever outgrow them," he explained from his office at Disney. "They're made for a medium like animation; a film like this couldn't be done nearly as convincingly in live action. I like stories with fairly broad strokes, and this story is set in a fantastic landscape, which adds to its timeless quality."

Not all fairy tales have happy endings, however, and that was the chief problem posed by Andersen's short story. Said Musker, "The story itself is only four or five pages long, and it's very downbeat. In fact, the mermaid dies in the end and is turned into sea foam. She gains an immortal soul in the process, but at what price? It's basically a tragic ending to a sad story that got sadder still. Ron felt it was a little too hopeless an ending, so the challenge was to find a more upbeat ending that remained true to the spirit of the fairy tale—that love involves sacrifice. So even in our happy ending we tried for a bittersweet quality that would retain the character of Andersen's story."

Mermaids make a brief appearance in *PETER PAN*,

# Mermaid

the fairy tale by Hans Christian Anderson.

exposing a fair amount of flesh for the time in which the film was made. Musker was a bit reluctant to discuss the delicate matter of Ariel's cleavage, even though he has a comical picture of a very topless Ariel in his office. "Even I never thought her character could go topless throughout the picture," he joked. "The audience's eye would want to go to her chest—I know mine would. We did at one point make her more like Fred Moore's mermaids in PETER PAN, without straps around her body, but even that, we thought, would be distracting, since everyone would probably be wondering how the shells managed to stay on. So we gave her a thin strap to connect her seashell bra, so you'd stop worrying about gravity and all that. Given our total druthers, I would have preferred to eliminate the straps, but we sort of got forced into it."

THE LITTLE MERMAID is one of the studio's biggest animated undertakings to date. More than 400 artists lent their talents to the film: 40 full-time animators (almost double the usual amount) plus 70 assistants and in-betweeners; and 11 background artists (the average feature employs about



The costume became an issue: Ariel, the little mermaid, with her undersea friends.

six), who produced some 1,100 background paintings, the largest of which was a 72-inch long plate for the "grotto sequence," which depicts Ariel's secret underwater hideaway full of human artifacts she has collected. The multiplane camera is being brought out of retirement for approximately six different establishing shots in the film, and slightly over four minutes—425 feet—of computer animation is also being prepared.

Ambitious, too, are the film's special effects. A effects supervisor Mark Dindal noted,

"It's our responsibility to animate anything that moves other than the characters. In this film we have a fire, a shipwreck, a storm at sea, the surf rolling up on shore, and the usual related ripples and reflections—not to mention tons of bubbles.

"Seventy to 85% of the film has some kind of effect in it," Dindal continued. "In general, 60% might be more typical. By the time we're finished, about 24 people—including animators and their assistants—will have contributed to the special effects. John says it has the most effects of any animated Disney feature since FANTASIA. Looking back at it, I'd have to agree. Not since that stretch of time in the '40s has the studio put so much emphasis on effects. For the shipwreck sequence alone, we spent eight or nine months to get about two minutes of film."

PINOCCHIO was a major source of inspiration for Dindal and his crew in creating this sequence. "We looked at the Monstro the Whale sequence quite a bit before we did our storm sequence. The [PINOCCHIO animators] really caught

the feeling of the mass of the ocean in terms of scale and the power and weight of the landing of a wave. It really comes down to the fact that you have to have strong drawing and accurate timing for these things to look the way they should. But effects will never save a film if there isn't a story."

As co-art director with Mike Peraza, Donald Towns makes sure that the layouts and backgrounds have a coordinated look, that all the various style and color elements are maintained in terms of continuity throughout the picture. PINOCCHIO also influenced Towns' work on THE LITTLE MERMAID.

"John and Ron wanted a PINOCCHIO kind of look in terms of the medium that was used, which was watercolor," Towns explained. "They felt that PINOCCHIO was in essence a fairy tale, and they wanted to adopt its painting style for this picture. I came up with a semi-watercolor style—there are places where we used opaque painting here and there—that gave the impression of being predominantly watercolor yet was still a quick study for the artists. As for the color, they wanted a muted look—not overbearing like the color you see on Saturday morning cartoon shows. They wanted limited palettes—you'll find sequences in the film that are rendered in a monochromatic style: predominantly green, red or blue."

All in all, the collaboration between Musker and Clements transpired with few fireworks, Musker said. They took the gentlemanly, democratic route, dividing the film into sequences and bartering with one another over which they would direct. Offered Musker, "It wasn't un-

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Ursula, the evil sea witch steals Ariel's voice, but Disney makes the ending upbeat.



# THE ABYSS

**James Cameron's magnum opus, a mature work, splendid to behold.**

By Thomas  
Doherty

The aqua epic cannot claim a shimmering cinematic lineage. Excepting Walt Disney's wondrous 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA (1954) and Jackie Bisset's buoyant wet T-shirt in THE DEEP (1977), the undersea spectacle has sunk under the weight of blurry photography, gurgling dialogue, and narrative bathos. The authentic ones turn into National Geographic travelogues ("abandoning Philippe on the coral reef, the *Calypso* motors happily out to sea . . ."). The inauthentic ones look for new ways to entangle bikinied babes in tentacles.

Hence, the trouble accounting for a major motion picture abalone, I mean, *anomaly*: the odd spate of glub glub films. With the two-star DEEP STAR SIX, the lumbering LEVIATHAN, and the deservingly submerged THE BIG BLUE, THE ABYSS is the fourth—and, at a reported 50 million clams, by far the costliest—of a wave of major releases. Rhetorical water sports aside, the submariner subgenre must express the contemporary disquiet over oceanic pollution. The sea—the great symbol of fecundity, beauty, and conti-



Cameron and producer Gale Anne Hurd, whose real life divorce drama energizes the film's tale of marital reconciliation and spiritual rebirth.

nity—suddenly seems toxic, gross, and fragile. The medical waste, sewage, and random foul affluvia of 1988's summer "beach dumpster" scene put the fear of God, or Neptune, into lots of landlocked litterers. As a source of dystopian anxiety, ecological catastrophe has all but displaced nuclear winter; the earth ends not with a bang or a whimper, but a hissing stench.

James Cameron takes on all of the above down below, but in doing so the esteemed writer/director—science fiction

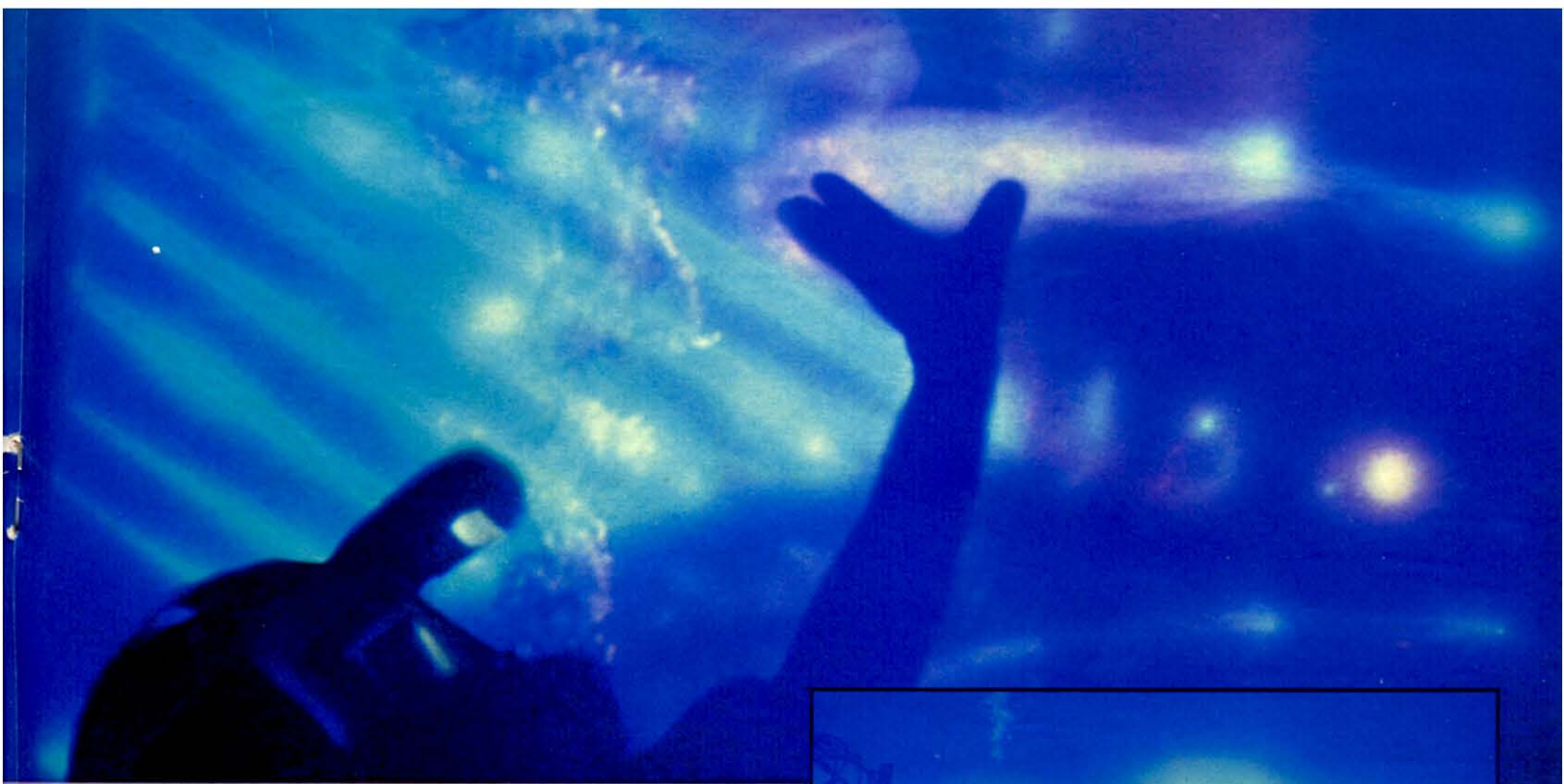
doesn't get any better than THE TERMINATOR and ALIENS—puts himself at a disadvantage. His specialty is the fast-paced rollercoaster ride, the non-stop hand-off from chase to combat, chase to combat. Moving up one state in matter density, scuttling across the floors of silent seas, he's putting the brakes to the talent that made him famous. Halfway into THE ABYSS, you get the sinking feeling that Cameron is just not up to speed.

There are surely no problems with the take-off blast, a pressure-cooker sequence depicting a nuclear submarine getting crushed like an egg (a baby boomer with a sponge memory, Cameron probably had the 1963 sinking of the *Thresher* in mind). After the sub's mysterious keel-hauling, a topside storm and narrative necessity demands that a civilian oil rig crew, led by stalwart foreman Bud Brigman (Ed Harris, in his best John Glenn manner), investigate. This pisses off Lindsey (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio), the rig's designer and boss, who barks orders and insults at the crew. "I hate that bitch," snarls Bud. "Then I guess you shouldn't have married her," remarks a buddy. Killer cyborgs and acid-blood-

ed demons make way for a more horrifying prospect: a troubled marriage.

It's always dangerous to read too much auteurist autobiography into a film—the widely publicized breakup of Cameron with his collaborator/spouse Gale Anne Hurd and his subsequent marriage to Kathryn Bigelow (NEAR DARK)—but the real life/reel life undertow in THE ABYSS is unavoidable. Both THE TERMINATOR and ALIENS were movies about running away, getting up and outta here; THE ABYSS is about diving down into, leaping into commitment and starting over. Throughout, rebirth and resuscitation—going back to the womb and awakening to a





fresh start—are the dominant motifs. It's as if Cameron wants to breathe new life into male/female relationships, to jump-start a failing marriage.

When Bud impulsively tosses his wedding ring down the toilet—only to reach down into the bowl a second later to retrieve it—the impact of the gesture comes from the back story of the estranged filmmakers, not their fictional counterparts. And in the end, with the final clinch and reconciliation between the battling Brigmans, the romantic closure seems less the cynical calculation of a Hollywood happy ending than Cameron's desperate faith in the capacity of fantasy to improve on bitter reality.

Cameron's **CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND** underwater. Lindsey (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) glimpses the aliens' glowing manta ship when she goes outside to survey the damage to Deepcore. The alien ship, recalling the imagery of Spielberg's earlier film, was designed and built by Dream Quest.



Symbolically, husband and wife each get a rebirth scene. For sheer gripping intensity, the death throes of the wife put the husband to shame. During an extended fourth act *longueur*, with the action clogged up and the story dragging, an extraordinary show-stopper jolts the film alive like an electric eel. In a scene of gripping suspense and total originality, Lindsey chooses to drown, trusting that Bud can return her to the rig and post-mortem resurrection. The horror of

drowning has never been more throat-catchingly rendered and the desperation of the gambit—literally to cheat death—is wrenching. Frustratingly, though, after this astonishing hook, Cameron lets the revival scene get away. The attempts at revival go on interminably, Harris gets hysterical, and Cameron relies on a clinched overhead point of view shot right out of Shirley MacLaine. What is this, **UNSOLVED MYSTERIES?**

The film looks terrific. As

they say in the biz, every penny is “up on the screen.” Cameron establishes a new standard for underwater verisimilitude and just pure oceanic spectacle—after **THE ABYSS**, any backtracking is going to look like **SEA HUNT**. The choreography of undersea vessels, swimmers, and automatic devices is breathtaking, the more so when you triple the complexity and imagine how the film crew is working inside a tank. The scale of the vessels and the functional inventiveness of the



Lindsey and Bud (Ed Harris) watch as the alien's water tentacle (below) takes the form of Bud's face. ILM provided the show-stopping computer graphics.



# THE ABYSS

## UNHAPPY ENDING

*Fox demanded cuts, but what possessed Cameron to take an axe to his grand finale?*

By Thomas Doherty

If the final section of THE ABYSS seems a bit ragged, there's a reason: James Cameron sliced a climactic sequence off the last two reels of his film. Cameron's contract with 20th Century-Fox reportedly called for a film of no more than two hours and 15 minutes. Cameron's "director's cut" clocked in at two hours and 50 minutes. Fox demanded cuts. Rather than go through the entire film and trim every scene—a meticulous process that might have damaged the pace and momentum of the drama—Cameron decided to excise an entire sequence, an elaborate effects showcase depicting a huge tidal wave threatening the earth's coastal ports. The deletion brought the film in at two hours and 16 minutes, close enough for Hollywood work.

The paperback novelization of THE ABYSS, by science fiction writer Orson Scott Card from Cameron's original screenplay, indicates some of the pictorial and thematic dimensions of the missing section. After Bud (Ed Harris) is taken into custody and put in the undersea pool/ship by the undersea aliens (benevolent female "builders") in the abyss, he is shown television images of the havoc the builders are



The aliens generate a colossal tsunami which threatens to engulf the world. ILM effects in an extensive sequence Cameron axed from the film.

wreaking topside. In order to teach humans a lesson in nuclear disarmament, the wet ones have concocted a giant wave, a tsunami, that threatens to engulf earth's seaport cities.

At the last minute, the aliens stop the wave and hold it suspended in mid-crest. Card describes the scene as follows: "Twenty-five hundred feet high, the wall of water had come to a halt. Held up by invisible, unguessable forces, it loomed all along the coastlines of the world, ready to come crashing down, ready to destroy ..."

Then, figuring the huge audio-visual aid has communicated the anti-nuke message to even the dimmest flack for the military-industrial complex, the builders retract the whole schmeer.

The "invisible forces" responsible for shooting this gigantic curl are not so "unguessable." The folks at Industrial Light and Magic, who fabricated the film's show-stopping water tentacle sequence, labored long, hard, and to the tune of anywhere from \$3-to-5 million on the climactic tidal wave sequence. It is, by all accounts, a doozy. At the cast and crew screening of THE ABYSS, Cameron reportedly stood up and apologized to the ILM effects crew for deep-sixing their work.

By insisting that Cameron stick to the letter of his contract, Fox indicated a lack of pre-release faith in its expensive and high-profile project. The studio declined to comment on the cuts. But even if Fox was within its rights in demanding cuts, Cameron's motives for waving bye-bye to the tsunami can only be guessed at—maybe it looked hokey, maybe the accompanying preaching was unbearable, maybe he just got pissed off and decided to spite Fox, himself, and the audience. Given the wonderful delight inspired by ILM's water tentacle sequence, however, it's good news that THE ABYSS's lost wave will not be a permanent wipe out—Fox is said to have agreed to release Cameron's full version when the film comes out on videotape. □

devices—these are not miniatures or mattes—is awesome. The necessary control of the simulated environment has, however, one major flaw: the ocean floor is free of sea life—no fish, crustaceans, mollusks, plants. This is a dead sea stroll.

More damaging than the fish shortage is the low threat quotient. THE TERMINATOR and ALIENS were energized by terrifying, relentless creatures. Not only did the action sequences explode, but every moment, even expository pauses between chase and combat, was fraught with suspense. THE ABYSS lacks any sense of danger—no giant squids, sharks, electric eels, manta rays, rock lobsters. Imagine DAS BOOT without depth charges. What we do get is Michael Biehn as a freaked-out SEAL lieutenant. In keeping with Cameron's anti-military bias, the balmy SEAL wants to explode a nuclear device, mainly because that's just the way guys in uniform are. Biehn, so sturdy a control freak in the two previous Cameron films, is totally miscast as the wacko. With bulging eyes, trembling hands, and rivers of sweat pouring down his forehead, he is the kind of obvious flake the Navy would not let near a swimming pool.

As the third in a line of Cameronian Amazonians, Mastrantonio is a nice dish (and vaguely evocative of Gale Anne Hurd), but she doesn't measure up to the more-than-mortal-man-deserves standards of Linda Hamilton and Sigourney Weaver. Cast as the "queen bitch of the universe,"

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A 20th Century-Fox release. 8/19, 140 minutes. In Dolby & color. Director, James Cameron. Producer, Gale Anne Hurd. Director of photography, Mikael Salomon. Editor, Joel Goodman. Production designer, Leslie Dilley. Conceptual designer, Ron Cobb. Art director, Peter Childs. Visual effects supervisors: John Burno, Hoyt Yeatman, Dennis Muren, Robert Skotak, Gene Warren, Jr. Underwater supervisor, Al Giddings. Special visual effects: Dream Quest Images, ILM, Fantasy II Film Effects. Set designers: Andrew Precht, Tom Wilkins, Gershon Ginsburg. Set decorator, Anne Kuljian. Costume designer, Deborah Everton. Music, Alan Silvestri. Sound, Leo Orloff. Production manager, Charles Skouras. Stunt coordinator, Dick Warlock. Screenplay by James Cameron.

Bud Brigman	Ed Harris
Lindsey	Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio
L. Coffey	Michael Biehn
Catfish	Leo Burmeister
Hippy	Todd Graff
Jammer	John Bedford Lloyd
Sonny	J. C. Quinn
One Night	Kimberly Scott
Low Finler	Capt. Kidd Brewer Jr.

# THE ABYSS

## BEHIND THE SCENES

*Rumored to have risked upwards of \$60 million, Fox's high stakes gamble on director James Cameron didn't pay off.*

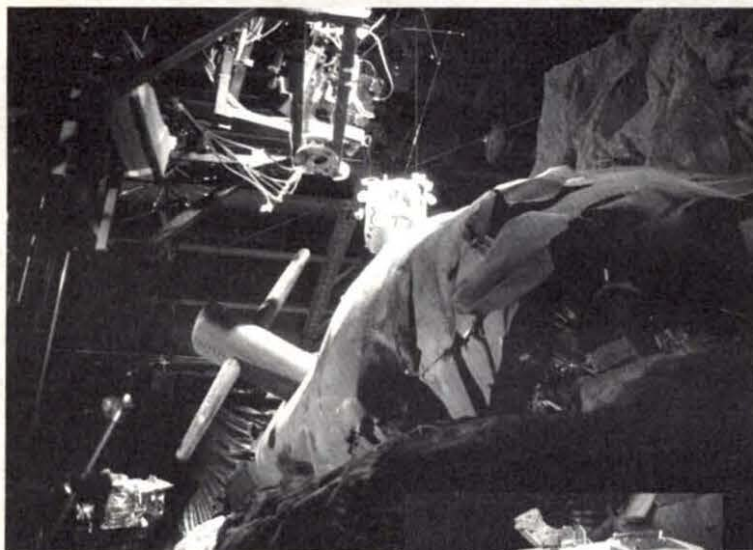
By Frederick  
S. Clarke

To paraphrase 20th Century-Fox's ad campaign, "There are boxoffice hits, and then there's THE ABYSS."

Fox has claimed the film cost \$43 million to make, with an additional \$7 million spent to market it for its release in 1,500 theatres on August 9. But estimates by sources who worked on the movie put the overall cost to Fox for the film as high as \$60 million. "Nobody's ever going to admit what it really cost," said one crew member who worked on the troubled production.

Martin Kasindorf, writing about the film's debut last August for the *L.A. Times* likened Fox to a "drowning guest ignored at a raucous pool-side party" in seeing the release of its boxoffice great wet hope for the summer postponed from June and July, while other studios were raking in boxoffice dollars from their hits at a new record pace. Fox had dropped all their boxoffice hopes for the season into director James Cameron's ABYSS, relying on Cameron to deliver a film that would top both of his earlier films, THE TERMINATOR and ALIENS, and deliver it on time. Fox's gamble proved wrong on both counts.

Cameron was originally to deliver his film to Fox in April, allowing for plenty of



Filming the downed U.S.S. Montana at Dream Quest, using a motion control gantry system to manipulate mini-submersibles on wires (inset). The stunningly seamless effects work supervised by Hoyt Yeibman and Eric Brevig is sure to garner Oscar nods.

time to market it for a June opening. Cameron missed that delivery date by more than two months, as Fox watched the premium summer playing time slip away. Those who worked on the production pegged the delays to a variety of sources. "The shoot was as disorganized as hell," said one effects supervisor. Modelmakers sat idle, twiddling their thumbs because the production failed to generate blueprints. Effects filming in California repeatedly ground to a halt because Cameron got tied-up in South Carolina when principal photography took longer than expected.

Though THE ABYSS cer-



tainly suffered more than its share of unforeseen problems, due to its logistical complexity and the daring scope of its technological filmmaking innovations, many of Cameron's fellow filmmakers attributed the film's high cost and long delays to Cameron's own perfectionism and insistence on hands-on control of nearly every facet of the filmmaking process.

Cameron's insistence on putting his stamp on all the work and his *de facto* inability to do so repeatedly resulted in friction with co-workers over delays and lost time. Workers at Dream Quest reportedly hoisted two paper plates in protest over the com-

pany's screening room door, painted like clocks, marked "real time" and "James Cameron time" to denote how the director was, in the words of one Dream Quest employee "at least two hours late for everything." A running gag at the effects facility to come up with a new title for the project when public recognition and understanding of the word "abyss" was called into question, netted monikers like "60 MILLION DOLLARS UNDER THE SEA," a barometer of the ill feelings.

Cameron reportedly alienated co-workers both in front and behind the camera with his working methods. Delays caused when filming in South Carolina ran five weeks over schedule rankled some actors, including star Ed Harris, who vowed never to talk about the film. Though Harris later relented and helped promote THE ABYSS, Cameron was openly contemptuous of his actors' complaints about his disorganized shoot, calling them "poor babies" in the *L.A. Times*.

What's the bottom line for Fox? Writing about boxoffice bombs in the *L.A. Times*, Pat Broeske reported at the end of October that after 12 weeks the film had ticket sales of only \$53.9 million. Wrote Broeske, "[That] doesn't even cover the budget." Industry observers estimate Fox's break-even point on the film at \$100 million. □

# After Midnight

**Scripters Jim and Ken Wheat, inspired by the classic DEAD OF NIGHT, turn to directing.**

By Frederick  
C. Szebin

In 1945, the Ealing Studios of Great Britain broke past jittery war-time censors and released *DEAD OF NIGHT*, a groundbreaking anthology chiller that came to be recognized as *the* classic of the form.

Sibling partners Jim and Kent Wheat, whose impressive list of genre credits include screenwriting chores for *THE FLY II* and *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET IV*, as well as directing the second Ewok TV movie *BATTLE FOR ENDOR*, took inspiration from the British film and devised *AFTER MIDNIGHT*, a \$3.5 million thriller scheduled for release by MGM in October.

Following *DEAD OF NIGHT*'s structure closely—a group of people whose stories come to life as a real-life horror erupts around them—*AFTER MIDNIGHT* showcases three separate stories as well as its wraparound tale. “The object of *AFTER MIDNIGHT* is to do a real scary movie that isn't literally a horror film,” said Jim Wheat. “It's got horrific elements, but its scares come out of suspense and tension, more than blood and gore.”

It has been acknowledged in the industry that, aside from a



The brothers Wheat, prolific horror scripters, chose directing as a way to protect their work.

few notable exceptions, such as Amicus' *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* or Romero's *CREEPSHOW*, anthologies just don't sell. This attitude initially kept *AFTER MIDNIGHT* off any studio's production boards for over a year. But the Wheat brothers' previous hits, which include the slasher film *SILENT SCREAM*, coaxed MGM officials into putting the modestly budgeted thriller on their roster.

In the film, a college professor, played by stage actor Ramy Zada, is forced to take his *Psychology of Fear* class off campus when his methods of showing how easy it is to scare someone humiliates a student.

In private sessions, his students tell stories, which serve as the film's auxiliary tales, while Russ, the embarrassed pupil, plots revenge. The stories include a young couple in an old, dark house; four girls terrorized by a bum's wild dogs; and an answering service operator who disconnects a harassing caller, only to have him deliver his message—personally.

In the year it took to sell *AFTER MIDNIGHT*, making the studio rounds led the Wheat brothers to script assignments on two of their most notable collaborations, *THE FLY II* and *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET IV*—THE

*DREAM MASTER*. At 20th Century-Fox, *AFTER MIDNIGHT* wasn't considered a big enough project to take on, but Fox executives wanted a rewrite of Mick Garris' screenplay for *THE FLY II* and the Wheat brothers seemed to be the answer.

“That was an instantaneous deal,” said Ken. “We got a call and were working on it three days later. They wanted to go in a different direction than Mick's script was heading. Our script was very different from his, although the basic elements were similar. His was broader in the telling of the story. Unfortunately, we felt it got broad again in our final version.

We were trying to keep it simple and faithful to the first film, but we were under a bizarre combination of pressures because the studio was really rushing it. We were getting notes from eight different people that were, in some cases, totally contradictory.”

The Wheat brothers wrote a dark script that was more character oriented than the effects-laden tale that wound up on the screen. They applaud director Chris Walas for his efforts, but cite studio-induced confusion for the picture's weaknesses. The brothers found similar headaches at New Line Cinema when they walked into the “totally chaotic situation” of *A*



Joan (Nadine Van der Gelde), wearing a disguise as a practical joke, gets hatcheted to death when the humor backfires.

#### NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET IV.

New Line was committed to release the finished film in just six months when the Wheats were called in to write the script. "[Producer] Bob Shaye and the others at New Line had a pretty clear idea of what they wanted," said Jim. "Our job was to come up with a structure that would make the various pieces fit together, and to come up with Freddy nightmare gags that would mesh with what the studio had in mind."

"As opposed to *THE FLY II* at Fox," added Ken, "where we were getting a lot of input, our version of *A NIGHT-*

*MARE ON ELM STREET IV* was pretty much our own. We locked ourselves away and whipped it out. The people at New Line were pretty easy to deal with. Renny Harlin did a great job directorially, considering the way it was rushed through. It is an extremely ambitious movie to make with the scheduling New Line imposed."

Halfway into the second draft, the infamous writers strike hit and the Wheats had to sit back while their screenplay was finished by "unnamed hands." Efforts to see a rough cut of the picture fell on deaf ears. To compound their worry, word began to trickle in that

the film wasn't turning out well, so the brothers used the pseudonym Scott Pierce on the credits to save potential embarrassment. "It was the opposite on *THE FLY II*," said Ken. "We left our names on that one and it didn't turn out to be one we're proudest of."

"In the Hollywood system, the writer is the most mistreated and underrated person in the process. The easiest solution for producers is to throw more writers at a project, which isn't always the best thing to do. I'm sure that Mick [Garris], had he been given adequate time to start with, could have written as good or better a script than what ended up happening. It's the weirdness of writing in this business, where you've got so many hands involved in the writing process. The reason we really wanted to do *AFTER MIDNIGHT* was we're co-producing, co-directing, and we're the only writers involved. If it works, we'll take all the credit. If it doesn't work, we'll take all the blame."

As in *DEAD OF NIGHT*, the stories in *AFTER MIDNIGHT* although intended to chill, do not rank as horror. The origin of each tale is rooted in reality. "There is a whole section in the UCLA library

that has journals of American folklore," said Ken. "A lot of them contain whole theses about urban myths and supposedly true scary stories, along the lines of the lovers lane story about the guy with the hook, the traditional stories you would hear in high school and you could almost believe."

"The film *WHEN A STRANGER CALLS* evolved from a famous urban myth," added Jim, citing Fred Walton's chilling tale of a babysitter menaced by a psycho. "We read all those journals and talked about the types of stories that become twice-told tales and tried to come up with stories in that mold—things that are believable, but have a sense of being a little outrageous."

Devising a list of popular fears, the Wheats created a series of their own urban myths with the thought that what could actually happen is far more frightening than any supernatural horror. To cover the more nightmarish aspects of their tales, the Wheats enlisted makeup artist Lance Anderson to create a flesh-burnt, articulated skeleton that emerges from a fire carrying an axe and a grudge. Anderson's undead hacker is brought to life through stop-

Professor Derek (Ramy Zada) and one of his students (Ed Monaghan) conduct a bizarre experiment during the teacher's unorthodox class in the *Psychology of Fear*.



motion, as well by Doug Beswick, who performed a similar resurrection on Freddy Krueger's remains in *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET III*. Pete Kuran added illusion to the old dark house story. The structure, situated in the middle of Los Angeles, is optically transported to the shore via mattes and modeling.

One effects highpoint involves a severed head with a little life left to it. "That shot totally blew away the guys at MGM, including some of the old timers there who had been looking at movies for over 40 years," said Ken with pride. "It's part of a nightmare sequence where a severed head rolls down the stairs, lands at the feet of our heroine and looks up at her. We originally devised the effect for *FRIGHT NIGHT 2*, which we were set to do at Columbia before David Puttnam came in and decided not to do 'mindless summer movies.' The shot is only on screen for five seconds. Too bad it can't be a minute-long shot. People could look at it and still wouldn't know how it was done." (Psst!—they did it with split screens.)

To visualize their tales, the brothers Wheat had to live up to the film's title by spending six of the production's eight-week shooting schedule filming 6:00 p.m. to 5:00a.m. Alert

**Coeds Jillian McWhirter and Pamela Segall confront their worst nightmares in the anthology film's linking story.**



## AUTHORS TO AUTEURS

**“In the Hollywood system the writer is the most mistreated and underrated person in the filmmaking process. That’s why we’ve chosen to co-produce and co-direct our own stuff.”**



The Wheats behind the camera, sharing the creative and business tasks of filming.

at the crack of 3:00 in the afternoon from April to early June, cast and crew would gather in downtown Los Angeles to work the graveyard shift and get as much filming done as the quick spring nights would allow.

"We made the mistake of writing a story in which the bulk takes place after midnight," said Jim. "There were a lot of cracks by the crew about why we didn't write a script called *AFTER NOON*. The biggest problem on this film was just trying to make the day's shooting. When you only have 3½ hours before lunch and 3½ hours after, and you're shooting night exteriors in summertime, you end up realizing that you can't do it quite as involved and complex as you'd like. We'd be sitting there at a quarter to five in the morning, just watching the sky turn blue while trying to figure out how to get the last few shots of the night."

The Wheats acknowledge the deadly canines episode as the most difficult to shoot. No matter how well-trained an animal is, it is always difficult to get them to do what is needed, and generally impos-

sible to get what is needed without numerous retakes. The actors were filmed separately from the dogs. Interaction between human and animal, except for a handful of shots, will be suggested through editing, with actual contact handled by stunt personnel.

By heavily storyboarding the segment, the brothers knew what they wanted and how to incorporate the dog footage with film of the actors to suggest danger. Unfortunately, all the storyboarding in the world doesn't make things easier at 3:00 a.m. when the dogs have their own ideas.

"The problem is when you have more than one dog together," said Jim. "We had three dogs that are supposed to be ferocious. You can't have three of them together at the same time or they'll fight. For the shots where the dogs are running, our second unit director Bob Evenger would use one male and two females. And, of course, there would be the problem where you would have shots of these dogs running down an alley and they'd stop in the middle of the take and start humping. That created some comic outtakes, but

it doesn't exactly work for the film. And for shots of them snarling, Bob would have to shoot them individually or would risk them tearing each other's throats out."

"That sequence also had cars crashing and all sorts of stunts," continued Ken. "That stuff is always harder to do than, say, the telephone operator story, which simply involved sitting on the set and shooting the actor. While we were filming the dog story, we would muse on how nice it was on that beautiful little set of the office with one actor and a telephone."

Where one director might buckle under the pressure of a tough shoot at night and uncooperative four-legged co-stars, Jim and Ken Wheat acknowledge that their system of partner cooperation offers more strength to a production than confusion. "When we work," said Jim, "it's not like having two directors. A lot of the directing we do goes on while we're writing the script, storyboarding, and planning how to shoot things. When we actually get on a set and are working with actors and a crew, we're constantly trying to figure out how to accomplish what we envisioned."

"In low-budget filmmaking, it's always a struggle to get everything you hoped for. There are times when one of us becomes more of a producer looking out for the deadlines, while the other focuses on the more creative end. There is a give and take. It really maximizes the effort. I can't imagine how an individual director copes with the pressure. Having two of us allows us to cover all the bases, but not kill ourselves doing it."

While waiting for reaction to this film, the Wheats hope to dip into their surplus of stories developed for *AFTER MIDNIGHT* to produce a sequel. They are pleased with their current effort, a sentiment shared by their crew. "One of the biggest compliments we had was at the wrap party," said Ken. "I was talking to some of the teamsters and they were saying how impressed they were with our efficiency and cool under fire." Or as Jim put it, "Our lack of panic." □

# Dead of Night

**The great-granddaddy of horror anthologies, never equaled, often imitated.**

By Frederick C. Szabin

Nearly 45 years after its release, *DEAD OF NIGHT* (1945) remains in a class by itself as it continues to inspire filmmakers seeking the ultimate chill. Made by Britain's Ealing Studios at the close of World War II, the film is a horror classic that has often been copied, never duplicated.

In the film, six people gather at a country estate and are fascinated by architect Mr. Craig (Mervyn Johns), whose recurring dream seems to have prophesied how the evening will

progress. Craig's dream becomes the target of psychologist Dr. Van Straaten (Frederick Valk), who seems to have an Id-inspired answer for everything. To test the doctor, each visitor relates an experience seemingly beyond the realm of explanation. The five stories succeed on varying levels, but none is a total failure. Directors Basil Dearden, Charles Chrichton, Robert Hamer, and Alberto Cavalcanti imbue the film with a storybook quality, not unlike a dream.

The highpoint of the film is the largely underrated tale of a haunted mirror, directed by Hamer. The antique mirror, a

gift of bride Googie Withers to her fiancée Ralph Michael, once belonged to a jealous nobleman who killed his wife. A rich musical score by Georges Auric triggers frequent goosebumps as Michael becomes obsessed with the other world seen in the glass.

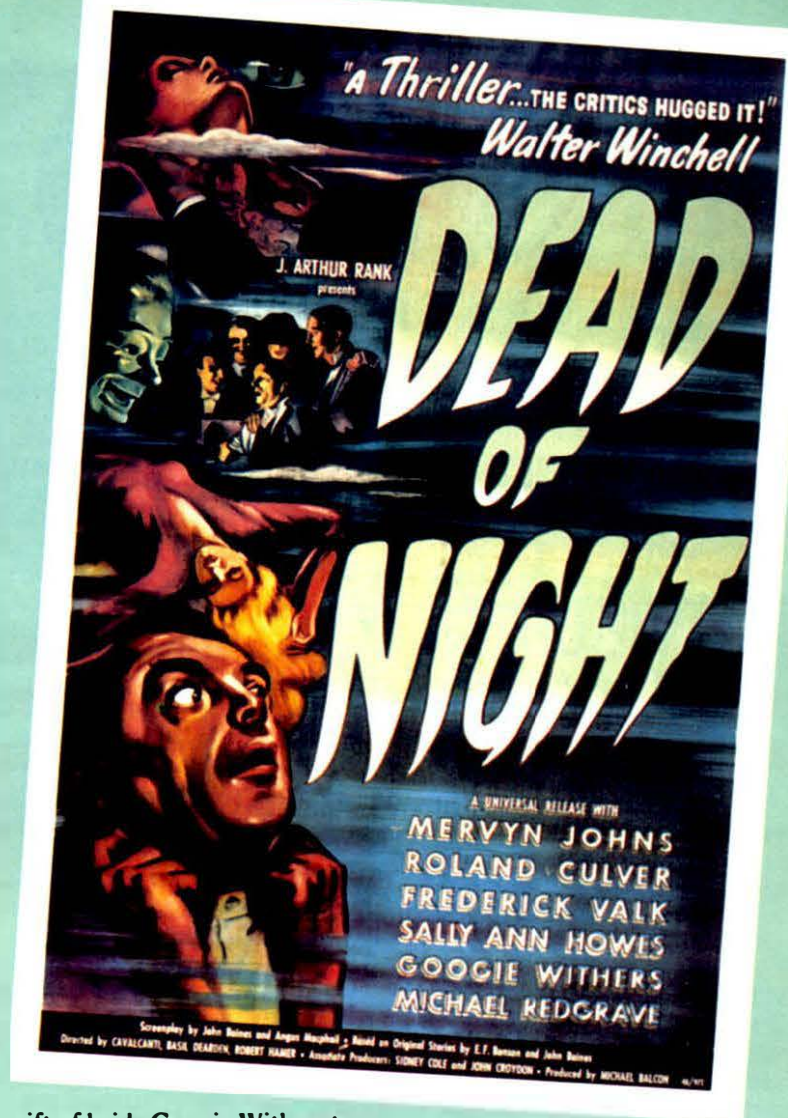
The best remembered tale of the film is Cavalcanti's ventriloquist story starring Michael Redgrave as Maxwell Frere, an insane cabaret performer pushed to attempted murder when his dummy Hugo, seeming to take on a life of his own, threatens to close down the act and go to another performer. Redgrave is nothing short of brilliant, pushing Frere from insanity to catatonia in a frighteningly effective transformation.

*DEAD OF NIGHT*'s wrap-around story comes to a startling round-robin conclusion. Directed by Dearden, who also helmed the anthology's shortest tale of a war veteran's life-saving precognition, the visions of Craig's nightmare

are startling, almost Daliesque in their surrealism. Images from each tale come to haunt Craig as he tries to escape after strangling Van Straaten. Struggling in the ventriloquist's cell as Hugo attacks him, Craig wakes up in his home with a phone call to come to a country estate to look over a building for possible renovation. The film closes as it opened, with Craig entering the house. The film's "loop" structure has become something of a cliché, often copied, but never equaled.

*DEAD OF NIGHT* succeeds and endures because of the craft of its storytellers. Only one visualeffect is evident in the film, and the point could have been made without it. A film like *DEAD OF NIGHT* doesn't need opticals or prosthetics to induce scares. It has made a reputation by creating thrills and suspense with as little as a trick of the lights and placement of the camera.

Imagine that. □



Michael Redgrave (right) is suspicious when ventriloquist colleague Hartley Power (left) sits in on his nightclub act and strikes up a friendship with his dummy, Hugo.



# COMMUNION

THE FILM OF WHITLEY STRIEBER'S BEST SELLER DEPICTS HIS TRUE-LIFE STORY OF A CLOSE ENCOUNTER.

NOW STRIEBER GOES BEHIND THE SCENES.

By Bill Florence

What would it be like to watch yourself and your most terrifying experience portrayed on the screen?

For Whitley Strieber, author of the book *Communion*. "It was a nightmare. I nearly went bananas because of it."

*Communion*, the controversial best seller about an allegedly real encounter with non-human beings, is now a major motion picture produced independently by Strieber and director Philippe Mora, starring Christopher Walken as the author and Lindsay Crouse as Mrs. Anne Strieber, released by New Line Cinema in October. The nightmare for the couple was not so much in re-living the events of their contact with intelligent alien life, but rather in the uncertainty they experienced regarding the intent of the filmmakers.

"My wife and I had a hell of a time going through the dailies; it drove us crazy," said Strieber, who also wrote the screenplay for the picture. "We were absolutely desperate because we couldn't tell exactly which way the actors and the director were taking it. Were they being true to the script? Were they being melodramatic? Were they lampooning us? It was impossible to tell, and it was very, very difficult to see. It was one of the most difficult things I've ever done. But I wouldn't trade it for the world; it was quite an adventure. The writing of the screenplay was a breeze compared to watching the film being made. That was very hard, emotionally."

Strieber, author of such noted genre works as *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger*, explained that he and director Mora each own 50% of *Communion*. "We had an understanding that I would write the screenplay and he would direct the picture. When it came time for that change of authority to take place, there was a lot of friction, especially because my wife and I had such a stake in these characters. But eventually I accepted that Chris Walken and Lindsay Crouse and Philippe had a movie to make, and it was time for the writer to step back.

"It became important to everybody, including us, to not be around when they were trying to act, but to be around for them so that they could use us as mirrors in a way, to soak up material from us," said Strieber. "I really wanted to step in many times, and say, 'Hey, no, this was this way and that was that way.' But I managed to

restrain myself for the most part, because it would definitely not have been healthy for their creativity. I mean, it was *not* a place for us to be." Strieber explained that he and his wife did visit the COMMUNION set, but primarily during lunch breaks or to see the dailies. "We kept our distance, appropriately. We let *them* make the film."

Not being in control, Strieber said, was "terrifying! That and the fact that we never had quite enough money. It was frustrating. There were many compromises we had to make during the course of shooting. But, you know you're doing an independent production, you've got a couple of investors and a bank behind you, you've got no big studio, you've got *nothing*. There's no money!" The film was completed on a budget of \$7 million.

The unprecedented best-selling success of *Communion*, the book, was not projected by Strieber, who said he doesn't concern himself with such matters. "I don't care about that kind of thing." *Communion's* success, he said, is "not something I think about. It struck a chord with a lot of people, because this happens to a lot of people. It is probably one of the more common unacknowledged experiences, and the chance to read about it and to allow oneself to believe that it was not simply some sort of a mental aberration was welcomed by certain people. That's probably why they read it. Also, I think there's a lot of curiosity on the part of people who haven't had the experience, of what it would be like and whether or not it was real."

Strieber met Mora in London in 1968 through their mutual friend, Eric Clapton (who, incidentally, was chosen to provide the musical score for the film). "I used to hang out at Clapton's apartment and so did Philippe; we met each other there," said Strieber. The decision to transform his book into a movie was a mutual one. "I never discussed it with anyone else," he said.

Although primarily a novelist, Strieber had tried his hand at screenwriting prior to COMMUNION. "I'd done a couple of other first drafts, but this is the first one that went as far as actually going on the screen," said Strieber. "It was an interesting writing experience. It was particularly difficult for me to bring the characters to life, in that it was me and my family. I had a tendency to want to hide things. That was a



Christopher Walken as Strieber has his mind examined by the aliens using a strange device. Inset: Novelist and screenwriter Whitley Strieber visits the set.





# U N I O N



"The Visitors," a strange, humanoid life form encountered by author Whitley Strieber at his cabin in Malne, fabricated for the film from Strieber's eyewitness account by the Michael McCracken Studio of Van Nuys.

bit of a pain in the neck. For the most part, though, I looked upon it as a rather straightforward screenplay in the sense that I wanted it to be a good story about what happened to these people.

"I'm not very much interested in special effects," Strieber continued. "I didn't make this a special effects film; although it has some special effects in it, they are not the center of the film." Strieber's lack of interest in effects is one reason why *COMMUNION* was produced independently.

"I wouldn't have sold it to a studio," said Strieber. "I think the studios would have made it into a horror film, with a very heavy emphasis on special effects, and I'm not interested in that. It bores me to tears. I've seen *ALIEN*; I've seen all the horror pictures about science fiction things. The second I sit down in these at one of those films, if it's not too noisy, it's a chance to take a nap."

There had been a report from the set during shooting that some crew members had little respect for Strieber and cracked jokes about the nature of his "true life" story. Strieber's remarks on the matter are short and to the point. "Some people who work on movies are nice people; some people who work on movies are jerks. We had the usual mix on this crew."

By now Strieber is used to being greeted with skepticism, but he feels the film is true to the spirit of his book. "The film is extraordinarily true to the emotional content of the experience," he said. "It is more true to it than the script was, frankly, because the script backs off a little bit, emotionally. I could not face reliving the experience again. But [the filmmakers] cut through that."

"I think the film is totally unique," Strieber said. "It is not a science fiction film; it doesn't follow any conventions of any genre at all. But it is very true to itself. . . . I think it is as honest a piece of filmmaking as I've ever seen. It could have gone a lot of different ways, but they really respected the material."

*Communion* in book form tends increasingly toward abstractness and philosophical discourse as it nears the end, an aspect of Strieber's experience that he feels is definitely present in the film. "The ambiguity of the experience, the subtlety of it, the indeterministic quality, whether I was seeing it or not, all of that is handled in the film in a uniquely

visual manner and style which belongs completely to Philippe," said Strieber. "It is very much Philippe's style. It is a success. You will not have seen anything like it."

For example, Strieber feels that what he saw of the "visitors" (his term for the non-human beings he encountered) was not their true appearance, but rather an appearance they felt he wanted to see. "I don't think that is something we can state with certainty, but that is what I feel," said Strieber. "It's handled beautifully in the film. But I don't know what reality is with regard to this experience. It's very simple to say they are visitors from another planet, but if you look at the experience in depth and with a lot of care, and with a certain amount of intellectual objectivity, it is not so simple as that."

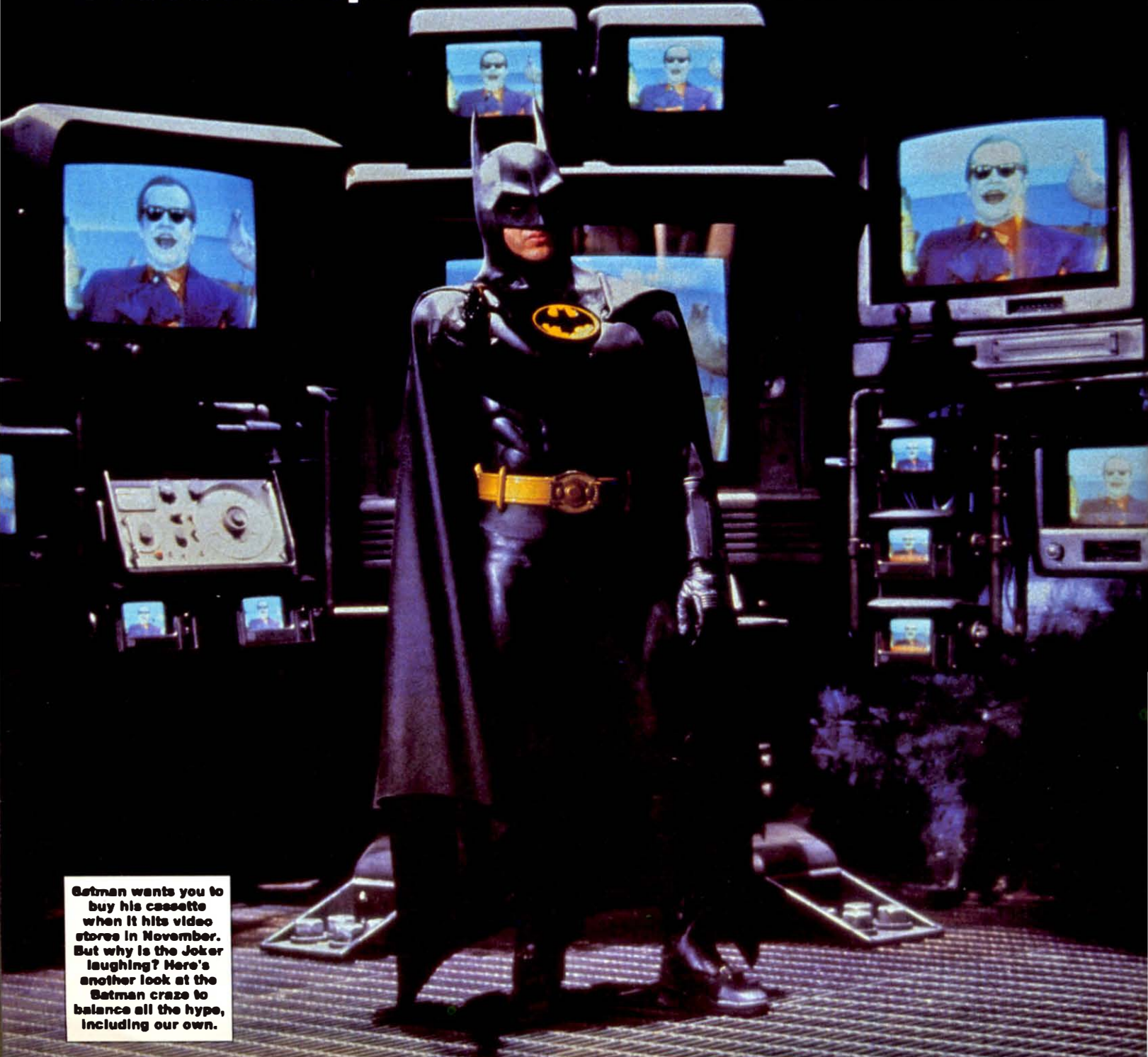
Still, Strieber asserted that he was positive that "The Visitors" were not hallucinations, or his mind playing tricks, even though he is at a loss to explain them. "The coming of the visitors completely changed my life," said Strieber. "I don't think the world is what it seems to be at all." □

"The Blue Boys," helpers of "The Visitors," as envisioned by Strieber after his real-life encounter, created for the film by the Michael McCracken Studio.



# BATMAN

**Tempted to buy the "movie of the decade?"  
A second opinion for undecided Batfans.**



**Batman wants you to buy his cassette when it hits video stores in November. But why is the Joker laughing? Here's another look at the Batman craze to balance all the hype, including our own.**

By Thomas Doherty

It's hard to argue against the second highest money-maker of all time, but even if its final take should eradicate the trade deficit, **BATMAN** would still not fly as a sleek and stylish action adventure. When it comes to thwarted expectations, the winged beast this fowl creature conjures is a waddling **HOWARD THE DUCK**. The word of mouth on the most hyped film of the millennium was pretty well unanimous: terrific visuals, lousy story. From this vantage, the evaluation is too kind by half in what is ostensibly its singular virtue—its look—**BATMAN** is muddy, murky, and unsightly.

But first to the lousy story. Everyone outside of Teheran knows the opening chapters, so it's best to move on to the innovations of wunderkind director Tim Burton (**PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE**, **BEETLEJUICE**) and screenwriters Sam Hamm and Warren Skaaren. Following recent comic book adjustment, "young ward" Robin has flown, the victim of bloodthirsty readers and homoerotic undertones. Millionaire Bruce Wayne (Michael Keaton) and his Brit butler Alfred (Michael Gough) live in a Gothic mansion wired for video in a Gotham City stuck in time—any time. The urban setting is a random collage of '30s art deco, '40s fashion, '50s industrial sites, and '80s technology, of vintage newspaper offices, redolent of "scoops" and "extras," and ultramodern cable news networks. Angling for info on the mysterious "flying vigilante" is a leggy girl photographer Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger) and streetwise reporter Alexander Knox (Robert Wuhl). Angling for revenge and disruptive yuks is The Joker (Jack Nicholson), a sort of Al Capone with a Bozo makeover.

The characters are not well drawn. Compared to the movie, the DC comic has a level of psychological penetration and sophistication worthy of Henry James. Though the audacious casting of Keaton provides an off-center interest that Dolph Lundgren might not have brought to the project, the comic actor makes a poor comic book hero. He is inert, mannered, and unprepossessing. When Bruce confronts Vicki to confess his secret identity, Keaton's idea of nervous indecision is to stroke his chin. His unthreatening physique is supplemented by a bat suit by way of **ROBOCOP** which works against the human vulnerability that made Batman special among DC's super-powered lineup. Sheathed in armor, mechanical and emotional, the distracted Keaton ignites no sexual sparks with the sultry Basinger. (There's something amiss when Wuhl's

**“‘Lousy story, terrific visuals’ was the nearly unanimous word of mouth on the most hyped film of the millennium. From this vantage the evaluation is too kind at least by half.”**



**BATMAN** director Tim Burton, so explicit everywhere else, was a little too discreet with his sex scenes. Doesn't he know what the Batcave is a metaphor for?

lapdog crush on Vicki carries more weight than the big-star clinches).

In matters of the heart, Burton matches Keaton's clumsiness. So explicit elsewhere, he turns discreet with the sex scenes—a tipsy Vicki and Bruce kiss, cut to the next morning. Significantly, Burton's two previous (successful) outings were in the realm of childhood fantasy whereas **BATMAN** is the ultimate adolescent daydream—of erupting sexuality, nascent violence and rebellion. Doesn't he know what the Batcave is a metaphor for anyway?

The ace in the hole is, natch, Smilin' Jack's over-the-top turn as The Joker. Always a major hoot playing without a full deck, Nicholson is totally unleashed, spit-

ting out one-liners, arching his eyebrows, exuding mirth and menace. The Joker's full-blown pathology attracts the director far more than Wayne's minor psychological quirks. It also reveals something of Burton's own auteurist preoccupations. The film's central motif is horrid facial disfigurement—burning, scarring, mutilation. The Joker is scarred by chemicals and slashed by plastic surgery, he mutilates his girlfriend (Jerry Hall), pretty models and blow-dried anchorpeople die contorted and ugly, and Vicki herself barely escapes the acid test. Like The Joker, who gleefully defaces the portraits in a museum gallery, Burton wipes the grin off the viewer's face with the desecration of physical beauty.

In this, Burton is consistent. He seems also to take a perverse satisfaction in trashing the visual appeal of his own film. The promised pleasure of the gaze—the spectacle of soaring bat jets and imposing Gothic skyscrapers—pre-sold the film to the science fiction/fantasy crowd. But Burton offers precious little in the way of theatrical wonderment. His is a celluloid version of comic book aesthetics. That is, the grainy look and dull focus of the big screen **BATMAN** is meant to evoke the page-bound atmosphere of the comic book *Batman*. The unique pleasure of the film medium—high definition, deep focus, dynamic camera movement—are intentionally withheld to recreate the constricted, low-definition qualities of the paneled page. In contrast to the other big summer movies—**INDIANA JONES III**, **GHOSTBUSTERS II**, and **STAR TREK V**, all shot in crystal-clear Panavision, all of which, whatever their respective faults, make creative and able use of the theatrical qualities of cinema—**BATMAN** is strikingly non-cinematic. Burton went to great lengths to erase any associations with the despised, mid-'60s TV series. Ironically, the non-theatricality of his **BATMAN** seems suited up for videocassette release.

Or maybe not—the blankets of dark space and the lack of deep focus should not make for a good tele-visual experience either. Deep focus, as any smart aleck film student will tell you, clarifies figures in the deep space back of the frame. The camera lens improves on—and redirects—the eye. **BATMAN**'s *mise en scene* looks like it should be deep focus, but Burton presents the back space in a blurry, shallow focus—probably because the darkness permits little depth of field. Action back of frame—sometimes important action—is fuzzy, unclear. Burton's comic book aesthetics deny the medium's power to manipulate and clarify focus. The comic book reader—by bringing the page closer—can

continued on page 59

# THE DYBBUK

**This 1937 Polish/Yiddish story of possession was a forerunner of THE EXORCIST.**

By Daniel M. Kimmel

One of the greatest horror/fantasy films of the 1930's, the Polish/Yiddish production *THE DYBBUK*, has been restored to its original length and was shown in several U.S. cities last fall. Shot entirely in Yiddish in Poland in 1937, the film was released the following year, but in recent times has only been available in badly duplicated copies, often with key scenes missing.

Based on the play by S. Ansky, the film tells the story of two friends who live in distant towns, each expecting a child. They vow that their children should marry, but one friend dies in a storm before returning home.

Several years later, Leah (Lili Liliiana), the grown daughter of the friend who survived, meets Khonnon (Leon Liebgold), the son of the dead one. Neither is aware of the vow, and Leah's father has forgotten about it, hoping instead to make a great match for his daughter. Khonnon, however becomes obsessed with Leah, and begins to dabble in the mystical form of Judaism known as the Kabbalah. When he dies after summoning evil spirits to aid him in his plan for Leah, his spirit survives to possess Leah on her wedding day. The stricken family takes her to the Tsaddik of Miropole (Abraham Morewski), a saintly rabbi, to exorcise the spirit from Leah.

The film was considered the most ambitious Yiddish film of its day. Liebgold—married in real life to Liliiana and now living in retirement with her in New York—recalls it as “the



Ill-fated lovers Khonnon (Leon Liebgold) and Leah (Lili Liliiana) are visited by the Messenger (A. Shamberg), a supernatural being who appears in the blink of an eye.

highest budget Yiddish film that was ever filmed at that time.” Shot largely in Warsaw, the filmmakers were able to take advantage of a modern studio that had been recently built which Liebgold described as having—for 1937 Poland—“very advanced technical facilities.”

Indeed, the film has several tricks up its sleeve in relating its mystical story. One is the character of the Messenger who appears and disappears in the blink of an eye, presumably through the use of multiple exposures. His role is to warn the characters of the folly of their actions and remind them of the price they have to pay.

Ironically, the character, creepily played by A. Samberg, did not exist in the original version of Ansky's play. According to Sylvia Fuks Fried, who worked on the new English subtitles for the film with David Roskies, Ansky presented a version of the play to

the Russian director and acting teacher Stanislavski with a view toward a Russian production. Stanislavski never did stage the play, but he suggested the character of the messenger to Ansky, as a means of communicating the themes of the play more directly to the audience.

Ansky did add the character, but did not live to see the play performed. He died in November of 1920, and the play premiered a month later in a production given in his memory.

The movie version depicts several scenes only talked about in the play, including the drowning of Leah's father and Khonnon's summoning of the evil spirits, shown in the film with a good deal of light and smoke. In the play, Khonnon figures out through numerology that “Leah” equals “not God,” which he takes to mean that he must go in the other direction if he hopes to have her.

Another addition to the film is Leah's dance with “Death” at her wedding. In the Jewish “shtetls” (small villages) of the 19th century, a wealthy family celebrating a wedding would share their happiness with the poor people of the town. In the play, Leah leaves her wedding party to dance with some of the villagers celebrating outside her home, and then relates to her friends a vision she had of flying with spirits while she danced.

In the film, a character with a skeletal face and dressed in a shroud appears and dances with Leah, foreshadowing the deathlike coma she goes into when she is possessed by Khonnon's spirit. “Death” was played by Judith Berg, a famous folk dancer who worked for many years with her husband Felix Fibich.

The dramatic climax of the film occurs during the exorcism, where the Tsaddik forces Khonnon's spirit to leave Leah, but we learn that Leah would prefer to join Khonnon rather than go on living. As with other horror/fantasy films of the era, the story emphasizes effects for their dramatic impact rather than for their shock value, and certainly the exorcism seems no more than an exotic religious ceremony. The filmmakers and performers take it seriously, though, allowing us to feel the full tragedy of the tale.

In reconstructing *THE DYBBUK*, the National Center for Jewish Film, which is located at Brandeis University, had to go through five different prints of the movie, including one from Australia and another from the British Film Institute.



On the day of her wedding, Leah dances with Death (Judith Berg) in the streets of her village.

Their search began after discovering that two versions which were part of their original collection in 1976 were incomplete, with a whole reel missing, according to executive director Sharon Rivo, "as well as little bits and pieces."

The best print came from England, since it was 35mm and was not marred by the inferior subtitles of the old American version. The problem was that the print was not only missing two reels, but that it had been treated with a coating that caused the edges of the print to curl. If they attempted to duplicate it in that condition, they would get a picture that blurred around the edges.

A chemical process called "re-dimension" was considered, but the fear was that the chemical that removed the coating might injure the fragile nitrate print as well.

Eventually, at the suggestion of someone at the Library of Congress, they attempted to flatten the film by rewinding it between heavy "leader" or blank film, eventually pressing out the curl so that the film could be successfully duplicated and a new negative made.

The process restored the film to the original Polish version running time of 122 minutes, with the addition of a brief written prologue giving some background on the film. The

new subtitles were written with modern audiences in mind, especially those who aren't necessarily familiar with the Yiddish language.

Said Liebgold, "Nobody imagined at the time that the Yiddish language would disappear." The original English subtitles were often brief, assuming only Yiddish-speaking audiences would be interested in the film. The old subtitles appear briefly in the film, during a scene where Leah's aunt enters the synagogue and makes a plea to heaven. According to translator Fried, the only print that had a complete version of the scene was the one with the subtitles. In order to restore the film completely, they were forced to leave the old subtitles in.

There is an interesting postscript to the film, which underscores its story of fate and maintaining faith in the Almighty. A year after the release of *THE DYBBUK*, Liebgold and his wife were in New York with the theatre troupe they belonged to, performing on the Yiddish stage. Liebgold was approached by the great Yiddish actor Maurice Schwartz to appear in Schwartz' film of *TEVYE*, based on the same Sholem Alechem stories that later formed the basis for *FIDDLER ON*

*THE ROOF*. Liebgold agreed, explaining he could only film for ten days after which he had tickets to return to Poland.

Filming on Long Island, the production was repeatedly delayed by the buzzing of airplanes, and the ten days slipped past with Liebgold's part still unfinished. Schwartz made arrangements for Liebgold and his wife to take the next boat out, and the rest of the theatre company departed without them.

Liebgold never made the next boat. Two days later Germany invaded Poland, signaling the start of World War II. □

Seated to the right of the Tsaddik of Miropole (Abraham Morewski), the film's exorcist, are the parents of Leah and Khonnon, R. Lipman and G. Lemberger.



A Feniks production. 9/89 (1937 re-issue), 122 mins. Black and white. Director, Michael Wazynski. Director of photography, A. Wywerka. Editor, George Roland. Artistic director, Andrzej Marek. Set designer, Rotmil & Norris. Historical advisor, Majer Balaban. Photography, A. Arnold & L. Zajackowski. Music, H. Kon. Cantorial music, Gershon Sirota. Choreography, Judith Berg. Laboratory, Falanga. Historical advisor, Majer Balaban. Screenplay by Alter Kacyzne & Andrzej Marek, based on the original play by S. Ansky. Preservation and restoration funded by Justin and Kenneth Freed.

The Tsaddik of Miropole.... Abraham Morewski  
The Messenger ..... A. Samberg  
Sender ..... M. Lipman  
Leah, His Daughter ..... Lili Liliana  
Frayde, His Sister ..... Dina Halpern  
Nisn ..... G. Lemberger  
Khonnon, His Son ..... Leon Liebgold  
Note ..... M. Bozyk  
Zalmen ..... S. Landau  
Nakhmen ..... S. Bronnecki  
Nenashe, His Son ..... M. Messinger  
Reb Mendel, His Tutor ..... Z. Katz  
Mikhoel, The Gabbai ..... A. Kurtz  
Meyer, The Shammes ..... D. Lederman

# REVIEWS

## Jan Svankmajer elevates stop-motion magic to a high art

JAN SVANKMAJER:  
ALCHEMIST  
OF THE SURREAL

Distributed by International Film Exchange Ltd. 1964-1983, 99 mins. In color & black & white. Director, Jan Svankmajer. In Czechoslovakian, with English subtitles. Program: THE LAST TRICK (1964); PUNCH AND JUDY (1966); THE FLAT (1968); THE OSSUARY (1970); JABBERWOCKY (1971); THE HOUSE OF USHER (1981); DIMENSIONS OF A DIALOGUE (1982); DOWN TO THE CELLAR (1983).

by Dan Persons

In a sunlit playroom, a penknife dances upon a lace tablecloth, tearing holes with each pirouette, stabbing itself at the finale. In a dingy, one-room flat, a tenant sits down to dinner, only to find the bread hollowed out by a mouse, the soup spoon riddled with holes, and a brimming mug of beer shrinking to thimble-size as it is raised to the lips. In the darkness of an apartment building's cellar, a man proffers candy, and invites a young girl to bed down in a crib lined with coal. The images are strange, unsettling. They could be the musings of an imaginative, contrary child, one exploring, perhaps too closely, the darkest reaches of his own fears and passions. They are, in fact, the work of Jan Svankmajer, a Czechoslovakian animator whose short films have been gathered into a career-spanning anthology, called JAN SVANKMAJER: ALCHEMIST OF THE

SURREAL.

If an alchemist may be considered someone who can, by dint of science and magic, transform the commonplace, then Svankmajer qualifies as a genuine 20th century practitioner. His technique: stop-motion animation. His subjects: just about anything he can lay his hands on. The standard materials—puppets, clay, even pixilated humans—are all accounted for here, and manipulated with remarkable style and skill. When the standard materials aren't available, shoes and dolls, writing utensils and vegetables become the stars. God breathed life into clay. Jan Svankmajer can stir dust and have you believe it possessed of a soul.

So vivid and rich are Svankmajer's fantasies that it's almost impossible to review them—one wants to dwell on details, the bits and pieces so precisely conceived that the audience *en masse* sucks in its breath in recognition. In PUNCH AND JUDY (alternate title: COFFIN NAILS), he employs hand puppets and multiple exposures to depict the all-out war that develops when Punch and an acquisitive neighbor vie for possession of a huge, and supremely blase, guinea pig. THE HOUSE OF USHER uses an abandoned house and its surrounding forest to tell the tale of Poe's accursed

Political commentary in Svankmajer's THE EXTINCT WORLD OF GLOVES, one of the Czech animator's shorts missing from the current anthology.



The clay heads of Svankmajer's short DIMENSIONS OF DIALOGUE, a funny yet frightening examination of the myriad inadequacies of human communication.

protagonist, the walls and furnishings decaying before our eyes, the trees, plants, and leaf-littered ground (that at one point spells out a half-glimpsed "Madeline") moving like sentient beings. In DOWN TO THE CELLAR, a young girl travels to her building's basement to fetch potatoes, the chore becoming an odyssey in which shadowed corners and darkness-shrouded details activate her deepest fears. Old shoes snap like piranha at her feet, a cat grows into a predatory monster, men and women reach out, their pleas for companionship becoming reflections of the child's own sublimated sexuality.

Of the eight films presented during the show's New York run, three are clear stand-outs. DIMENSIONS OF A DIALOGUE is a funny/frightening examination of the myriad inadequacies of human communications—at one point heads composed individually of vegetables, kitchen utensils, and writing instruments set upon each other like warring animals, their conflict ending only after they have reduced each other to identical, clay-like visages. In THE FLAT, a man is sealed into an apartment where food, furnishings, and the walls themselves conspire to thwart his every desire—the products of Man's hand now inexplicably waging war on Man himself.

Another kind of war figures in JABBERWOCKY, where the imagination of a punished child

brings a playroom to vengeful life. As the portrait of a stern father-figure looks down in disapproval, toy soldiers destroy building-block castles, the penknife does its damaging ballet, and a doll house becomes a killing machine that pounds and processes figures into senselessness before dropping them out the front door and into a coffee grinder. (The image is more unsettling than a similar sequence in Pink Floyd's THE WALL, Svankmajer's rapid, off-handed violence doing what Alan Parker's real children and oversized grinder could not). Anger runs like a white-hot thread through these last two films (especially THE FLAT, which was made not long after Russia's invasion of Czechoslovakia), but it's a clean anger, free of self-pity. Svankmajer invites you to laugh, even as you feel the pain.

The program that ran at New York's Film Forum may vary from what appears in other parts of the country. Missing from Svankmajer's filmography were ET CETERA, A QUIET WEEK IN A HOUSE, LEONARDO'S DIARY, and THE PIT, THE PENDULUM, AND HOPE. Whatever the roster, this is one show not to be missed—especially if you believe there's more to animation than SMURFS and THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS. After 25 years of obscurity (as far as the United States is concerned), it is time to recognize Jan Svankmajer for the master he is. □

## Makes TV's kid-vid cartoon series look good

### GHOSTBUSTERS II

A Columbia Pictures Release, 6/89, 102 mins. In color & Dolby. Produced & directed by Ivan Reitman. Executive producers: Bernie Brillstein, Joe Medjuck, Michael C. Gross. Director of photography, Michael Chapman. Editors: Sheldon Kahn, Donn Cambern. Production designer, Bo Welch. Art director, Tom Duffield. Visual effects supervisor, Dennis Muren. Visual effects art director, Harley Jessup. Visual effects producer, Janet Mohler. Visual effects: ILM, Apogee, VCE Inc. Creature makeup designer, Tim Lawrence. Animation supervisor, Tom Bertino. Matte painting supervisor, Tom Sullivan. Set designers: Nick Navarro, Gregory Pappalà, Rich Heinrichs. Costume designer, Gloria Gresham. Music, Randy Edelman. Sound, Gene Cantamessa. Assistant director, Peter Giuliano. Screenplay by Harold Ramis & Dan Aykroyd, based on their characters.

Dr. Peter Venkman ..... Bill Murray  
 Dr. Raymond Stantz ..... Dan Aykroyd  
 Dana Barrett ..... Sigourney Weaver  
 Dr. Egon Spengler ..... Harold Ramis  
 Louis Tully ..... Rick Moranis  
 Winston Zeddemore ..... Ernie Hudson  
 Janosz Poha ..... Peter MacNicol  
 Vigo ..... Wilhelm Von Homberg

by Tim Vandehey

An open letter to Ivan Reitman, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis, and the rest of the GHOSTBUSTERS II production team, probably off sunning themselves on some isolated tropical island:

Gentlemen,

Hope you are well as you watch the profits roll in from your latest paranormal escapade. Since you couldn't have put out too much effort writing the script and plotting the action, you should be thoroughly decompressed by now and well on your way to savoring the sun, fun, and leisure afforded you by the unlimbered wallets of

the masses as they herded in to check out the flick, under the universal impression that they were getting something made with care and creative thought, like GHOSTBUSTERS.

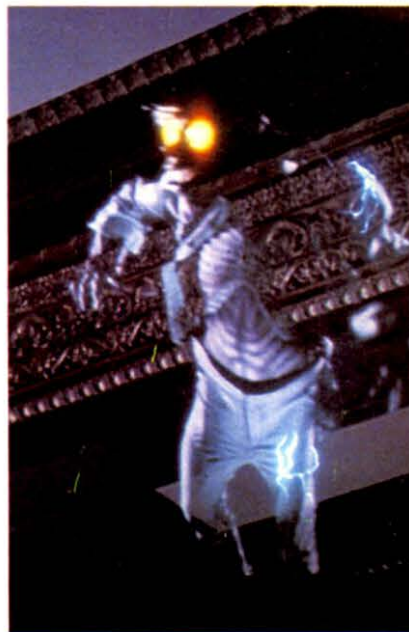
I hope you all get good tans. By the way, don't hurry back; your Saturday morning cartoon likenesses are a lot more entertaining than you are, anyway.

Yours in slime,  
 The Moviegoing Public

The cast and crew of GHOSTBUSTERS II are probably home by now, hard at work on other projects. But while they were vacationing, let's hope they had time to study one single, but very important word: verisimilitude. That's the appearance of reality in a book, a play, or a film. The ragged street people wandering to and fro in a downtown scene, the guttural East End London accent in a novel, the simple, logical progression of events that leads to a conclusion—that is verisimilitude, and it is vital to any good story. Certainly Reitman and Company realize this, but what they have done in GHOSTBUSTERS II is create a plot in which verisimilitude is sacrificed for the sake of moving the story along, where the plot devices go so far beyond the credible that the discerning filmgoer cocks one eyebrow and

sneers, "Oh, come on now." The film looks like a work in which the object was to get it in the can as soon as possible, so a script was thrown together in which all circumstances fit together with total convenience in order to move the plot along, no matter how that convenience may defy logic, sense, and good storytelling.

The film actually starts off with an inspired, intelligent supposition: that the team of paranormal investigators were sued by every New York authority over the damage caused by their adventure with Gozar the Gozarian, and a restraining order has been slapped on them to prevent them from acting as ghostbusters. So to make ends meet, Peter Venkman (Bill Murray) is hosting a hokey talk show on psychic phenomena, Ray Stantz (Aykroyd) is running an occult bookshop and teaming with Winston Zeddemore (Ernie Hudson) to entertain spoiled brats at parties, and Egon Spengler (Ramis) is back in a lab coat conducting research on emotions. All is proceeding normally until former cellist/Keymaster Dana Barrett (Sigourney Weaver) nearly loses her child Oscar (adorably played by William and Henry Deutchendorf) to a baby carriage that steers itself better than most commuters. She contacts the guys to look into this rather odd event,



An ILM ghost disrupts the courtroom trial of the Ghostbusters. If only the script were as believable as the effects.

and they soon discover a ghostly plot to (all together now) . . . take over the world.

Sadly, after this promising setup, the film chooses to propel its plot with ridiculously convenient devices. Despite having witnessed firsthand the Sta-Puft man and all the hauntings that took place during the last film, all of New York for some reason thinks the Ghostbusters are frauds. Convenient. All paranormal activity seems to

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## Coaxing a performance from the spooks of GHOSTBUSTERS II



The Frog Ghost, axed when the live-action subway footage didn't work.

Makeup effects creator Rick Lazzarini and his Van Nuys-based company, The Creature Shop, supplied one of GHOSTBUSTERS II's most impressive monsters, the "Theatre Ghost." Occupying only five seconds of screen time, the six-eyed, four-armed, winged creature (complete with stinger)—which chased hordes of panic-stricken New Yorkers from a movie house and then zoomed hungrily toward the camera—required approximately 14 different articulated parts! Rather than use multiple operators, each working a couple of servo mechanisms, Lazzarini, who spent a year at Boss Film and was an apprentice to Stan Winston, eschewed standard practice and used his

self-taught mechanical know-how to develop a device which allows a single operator to control up to 16 channels of movement.

Dubbed the "Facial Waldo," Lazzarini's device consists of a cap-like rig which attaches to a puppeteer's head and face complete with a chin cup, plastic and Velcro tabs which serve as sensors. These sensors register

the puppeteer's facial movements and send an electrical signal that the servo interprets and duplicates on the creature's face. "If I moved one eyebrow, all six brows on the ghost's face would frown!" said Lazzarini. "At the same time, my hands were free to control the wings, while other puppeteers operated the arms and stinger." Lazzarini stood directly behind

the "Theatre Ghost," using the Waldo to control nine separate movements, while supporting the creature with his body. Draped in black velvet, Lazzarini was matted-out of the shot during postproduction.

Lazzarini also used his "Waldo" device for a second delightful demon titled the "Frog Ghost" (eventually edited out). □

Lazzarini (r) with the Facial Waldo and Theatre Ghost.



Charm, supplied in great Technicolored gobs

EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY

A Vestron release of an Earth Girls Are Easy Production. 9/88, 100 mins. In color. Director, Julien Temple. Producer, Tony Garnett. Director of photography, Oliver Stapleton. Production designer, Dennis Gasner. Editor, Richard Halsey. Special effects, Dream Quest Images. Sound, Anna Behlmer. Music, Nile Rodgers. Screenplay by Julie Brown, Charley Coffey, Terrence E. McNally.

Valerie..... Geena Davis  
Mac..... Jeff Goldblum  
Candy..... Julie Brown  
Wiploc..... Jim Carrey  
Zeebo..... Damon Wayans  
Ted..... Charles Rocket  
Pool Boy..... Michael McKean

by Charles Leayman

Charm is sorely absent from most contemporary movies (including the animated ones), but charm is precisely what EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY supplies in great, big Technicolored gobs. The fanciful plot, about three furry aliens who crash their ship into a San Fernando Valley girl's swimming pool, may be short on substance, but it's crammed with wonderfully post-mod L.A. kitsch and graced with several sweetly hip performances. British director Julien Temple, whose underrated ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS proved his talent for teasing emotion from Hollywood-derived artifice, finds something crazily beautiful in California's urban sprawl and stoned, self-promoting mindset. Indeed, the movie's central joke is that extraterrestrials would have little trouble in blending with the frenetic natives.

The motivating force behind EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY was MTV's ditz-and-dish goddess Julie Brown (not to be confused with Club MTV's "Downtown" namesake), who co-authored the script with Charley Coffey and Terrence E. McNally. Anyone who's seen JUST JULIE on the tube or heard "Trapped in the Body of a White Girl" will instantly recognize the tone of camp satire and Valley wisdom. Brown appears in the film as Candy Pink, owner of the Curl Up and Dye beauty parlor where the aliens are brought for a makeover by Valerie (THE FLY's Geena Davis), who works there as a manicurist.

The aliens, red-furred Wiploc (Jim Carrey), yellow-furred Zeebo (Damon Wayans), and blue-furred Mac (THE FLY himself, Jeff Goldblum) suggest primary-colored yeti from F.A.O. Schwartz. Val introduces them to the wonders of television, freeways, smog,



Jeff Goldblum as the alien leader, Mac, in makeup designed by Jeffrey Judd.

and attitude. Their visit to the beauty salon transforms them from shaggy Wookies to bitchin' California dudes thanks to Candy's shears and body-shop wizardry, while Val comes to realize that Mac is the "man" for her.

EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY bursts with visual throwaways and dialogue bits that make repeat viewing both a must and a joy. First glimpsing the "hairless" Valerie, Wiploc responds by singing (in his native Jhazzalan) "Bald Thing, I think I love you!" Exploring her house, Zeebo swallows the contents of a lava lamp, and Mac unleashes his "love touch" on the cat, turning it into a prismatic ball of contentment.

Perfect mimics, the aliens raptly absorb TV's endless stream of disconnected sights and sounds (among them THE NUTTY PROFESSOR and a Reagan/chimp analogy), leading to Wiploc's hilarious recreation of James Dean's REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE anguish. Interestingly, a refurbished Griffith Park Observatory, where pivotal scenes of the influential '50s movie took place, serves as the location for the film's nightclub, called Deca Dance, an inspired choice melding outer space, eroticism, and REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE.

Temple's vision knowingly blends comic books and pulp magazines, '50s science fiction imagery and classic fantasy, as well as Eisenhower naivete and Reagan-

era cool. The animated credits sequence unrolls a panorama of shambling robots, bug-eyed monsters, and sexy fire-maidens; it's an adult child's view of life seen through American pop culture. Even better is Valerie's nightmare after having sex with Mac: an eerily gray and white potpourri of EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS, Robby the Robot, LA BELLE ET LA BETE, THE OUTER LIMITS, and a clanking Tin Man familiar from back issues of Famous Monsters. The lovely clips from Cocteau's masterpiece are especially telling. As Josette Day offers water and her supine body to Jean Marais' magnificent Beast, Valerie feels the horror of Otherness in a way reminiscent of Candy Clark's revulsion with David Bowie's orgasmic body slime in THE MAN WHO FELL TO

EARTH.

Pumped with wall-to-wall music (everything from the B-52's and Depeche Mode to "Love Train" and "The Andy Griffith Theme," mostly produced with oomph! by Nile Rodgers), EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY often plays and sounds like a latter-day GREASE. The special effects by Dream Quest Images are relatively modest but much fun, perfectly proportioned to the script's playful silliness.

If the movie more or less runs out of steam at the point where Wiploc and Zeebo go for a freeway joyride, it rallies for a happy ending that unites Valerie and Mac in cosmic bliss. Perhaps Geena Davis and Jeff Goldblum's being real-life lovers lends their onscreen characters an especially comfortable intimacy. Whatever the reason, their literally star-crossed relationship in Julien Temple's postmodern fairy tale comprises a unique, celebratory instance of *l'amour fou*.

Postscript: If Vestron Pictures neglects to release EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY in a letterbox video format, they are mutilating one of the finest recent examples of the widescreen format. On the preview print I saw, subtitled "Jhazzalan" dialogue was simply missing in part, and Temple's adventurous compositions were hopelessly castrated. See the film if you can; otherwise write to Vestron and complain. □

EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY Development Wasn't

By Sheldon Teitelbaum

Earth girls may be easy, but making a movie about them can be a bitch. For Julie Brown, co-writer and co-star of EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY, the project's interminable haul from concept to can came close to making her pine for the nightmare days of writing an Olivia Newton-John special for Alan (GROWING PAINS) Thicke, the Canadian producer she has since christened "a psycho from hell." The science fiction comedy/musical became a sleeper hit when Vestron opened it theatrically last March.

The Earth Girls saga began six years ago with a song. In 1983, the now 29 year-old Van Nuys native released "Homecoming Queen's Got A Gun," which she wrote with long-time partners Charlie Coffey and Terrance McNally, and which quickly became a cult hit. This led to an EP released in 1984 on the Rhino label called Goddess in Progress, a compendium of satirical tunes with titles like "I Like 'Em Big and Stupid" and "Trapped in the Body of a White Girl," which contained the title song of the Vestron movie.

Nibbling a salad at Jerry's Deli in Sherman Oaks, the pert yet strapping hyphenate recalled that she and her partners were quick to recognize the song's pervasive filmic qualities. Brown had begun her career as an actress—she studied drama at Valley College and completed a stint at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. As a consequence of this training, Brown's lyrics grew out of character sketches and theatrical situations. "Earth Girls," she realized soon after writing it, contained a cinematic pearl at its core. And she envisioned herself as its star.

Brown was performing in nightclubs when Warner Bros casting agent Wall Nicita caught her act and asked her if she had anything in the way of a movie to pitch. They took a meeting, Brown acted out the entire movie she had in mind, and Warners optioned her record and commissioned her and her partners to write a script "for as little as they could pay."

After two relatively painless drafts, Warners set about locating a director. They settled on Julien Temple, a graduate of England's





Geena Davis and the Technicolor aliens of *EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY* board their spaceship afloat in her backyard pool.

National Film School who, before directing the feature film musical *ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS*, had directed videos for the likes of Neil Young, Billy Idol, Janet Jackson, Sade, Iggy Pop, the Rolling Stones, and many other big name groups and singers.

Temple's arrival in Los Angeles heralded incessant demands from Warners for rewrites, some of which drove Brown to tears. During the ensuing 18 months, Brown turned in some 15 rewrites, most of which were commissioned, she now believes, "just to keep us busy while they tried to decide if they really wanted to make this movie." Brown noted that her marriage to co-writer McNally suffered grievously largely as a consequence.

Warners dropped its first bombshell on her when it

informed her that she was simply not famous enough to carry the movie as its star. What was needed, she learned, was someone with the stature of Madonna, a Cindy Lauper, or a Molly Ringwald—all three of whom were seriously considered for the role of the Valley manicurist with an infestation of furry, multi-colored aliens in her pool.

Brown didn't think Ringwald was a good idea—"she's the wrong age. This woman is doing desperate things to make her relationship work, and I didn't think 20 year-old women act like that." Eventually, however, Geena Davis was chosen for the starring role—a choice Brown approved of—and Brown was instructed to write herself a co-starring role, which she did.

As if this weren't bad enough,

however, Warners then released *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS* and decided it couldn't chance another science fiction musical/comedy. *EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY* went into turnaround. The picture was subsequently picked up by DEG but then DEG went under. Finally, Vestron moved behind the production and Brown began to suspect that *EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY* might actually get released.

Brown noted that she and Temple got on well together, but that with the exception of a get-acquainted tour through the San Fernando Valley, he rarely sought her input. She was deeply disturbed by this at first, and the first week of shooting possessed a nightmarish quality as she realized that Temple was straying from the visions she had so painstakingly produced.

"But that weekend I decided that this movie had tortured me enough—if I was going to ruin the experience of performing in it, I would be an idiot. So I let go. Once I realized that I could not control the director, I had a blast."

Brown did not grow particularly close to either Geena Davis or her husband and co-star Jeff Goldblum during the production. The two kept mostly to themselves while on the set. "I mostly hung out with the crew—they were wonderful," she said.

Brown is moderately pleased with the finished product,

although she expressed some consternation with the studios, which she said bleached out some of the quirkier elements which had initially informed the story.

"One of the things that bugs me about *EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY* when I watch it now is that there is no more darkness left in it. Everytime we tried to write something in Warners made us take it out. Warners was terrified of anything negative."

Among the items Warners nixed was a proposed musical number set in a supermarket in which such advertising icons as the Pillsbury Doughboy and Aunt Jemima spring to life. Brown noted that this scene was removed in part because of the enormous effects requirements and because of the expenses of merely acquiring the rights to the characters.

Some of the scenes in the film, said Brown, emerged pretty much as she had envisioned them, such as the beauty parlor sequence in which Brown, as Candy, engineers Davis' metamorphosis from drab manicurist to hot Valley vamp. Brown was also satisfied with her number in "Cause I'm a Blonde." Mostly, however, *EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY* embodied Temple's vision, and Brown believes that is

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Julie Brown, songsstress, co-star, and screenwriter who saw her pet project take the long route to the screen.



British director Julien Temple on the spaceship set with Zeebo (Damon Wayans).

## A textbook example of why sequels falter

### FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2

A New Century/Vista release of a Vista Organization film. 9/88, 101 mins. In color. Director, Tommy Lee Wallace. Produced by Herb Jaffe & Mort Engelberg. Director of photography, Mark Irwin. Editor, Jay Lash Cassidy. Production designer, Dean Tschetter. Visual effects coordinator, Gene Warren, Jr. Special effects, Rich Josephson. Costume designer, Joseph Porro. Music, Brad Fiedel. Screenplay by Tim Metcalfe, Miguel Tejada-Flores & Tommy Lee Wallace, based on characters created by Tom Holland.

Peter Vincent.....	Roddy McDowall
Charley Brewster.....	William Ragsdale
Alex.....	Traci Lin
Regine.....	Julie Carmen
Belle.....	Russell Clark
Bozworth.....	Brian Thompson
Louie.....	Jonathan Grieg
Dr. Harrison.....	Ernie Sabella
Ritchie.....	Merritt Butrick

by Harry McCracken

When at the end of *FRIGHT NIGHT*, Charley Brewster (William Ragsdale), having vanquished his vampire neighbor Jerry Dandrige exuberantly fools around with his girlfriend, it seems a perfectly natural thing to do. The vampire is dead; as far as Charley knows, the threat is over.

When *FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2* concludes in almost precisely the same manner (albeit with a different girlfriend), it serves only to point out how artificial the world of the movie sequel is. Charley has just faced down a much worse vampire attack than the first one; logically, it should be as clear to him as it is to us that he will not be safe from vampires as long as the *FRIGHT NIGHT* series is profitable. This is a sequel, though—and *FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2* is above all else a textbook example of why sequels are so rarely satisfying movies.

After the prerequisite synopsis of earlier

events played under the opening credits, the movie begins as Charley's psychiatrist falls a little short of convincing him that his bout with vampire Dandrige was the result of mass hypnotism. (Charley still keeps an arsenal of garlic, crosses, and other anti-vampire ammunition in his college dorm room.) Whatever illusions he had that he hallucinated the first film's events dissolve slowly—very slowly—when Dandrige's beautiful vampire sister, Regine (Julie Carmen), moves into town with a pack of quasi-vampire creatures to exact revenge on him for her brother's death. Charley is drawn into an adventure which closely parallels his first one, dragging along girlfriend Alex (Traci Lin) and Peter Vincent (Roddy McDowall), the TV monster-movie host who was his vampire-destroying partner in the first film.

Like a lot of sequels, *FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2* gets hopelessly bogged down in recapitulating previous plot points and other references to the first film in the series; it's hardly coherent as an independent story. In particular, it makes no sense at all that more than half of the film goes by before Charley and Peter are convinced that their vampire trouble is back. (Curiously, in the first film Charley's conviction that Jerry Dandrige was a vampire was immediate and unshakable.)

On those occasions when the movie's plot ventures very far from the conventions established by Charley and Peter's earlier excursion into terror, it's usually into dead-end scenes that do nothing to advance the plot. These



Roddy McDowall, has-been horror host on his show.

## Vampire shocks for *FRIGHT NIGHT 2* by Fantasy II Effects

By Steve Jongeward

For *FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2*, the job of creating special makeup and visual effects that would equal or surpass those featured in its predecessor, fell to Fantasy II. Bart Mixon (*ROBOCOP*, *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 2*) headed up Fantasy II's 12-member team, which Mixon described as "... the equivalent of 'the creature shop' at ILM or Boss Film."

For the "bat creature" two puppets—one radio controlled—were constructed from foam latex and fiberglass, with one refitted for stop-motion in postproduction.

One of the first effects filmed was used in an early sequence in the film where Regine feeds from a shaving cut on Charley's neck. "We made a special set of hollow fangs with a blood tube that runs inside the gums and down the fang," Mixon explained.

"The blood tube ran off the blind side of the actor's mouth. It's basically the same effect used with a hollow knife, although this was on such a tiny scale—the hardest part was getting it that small.

"For Charley's neck we originally made foam latex cuts, used in progression, then it was decided those wouldn't be used. We ended up doing a build-up effect on his neck, made with plastic and wax. We applied it in a layered manner, which allowed Regine to stick her fang in it and drag the cut open."

In many instances both Fantasy II's makeup and optical departments combined their talents in order to produce the desired effect. "For the scene where Belle (Russell Clark) dies—he gets trapped in some holy cloth—we made a series of glowing heads," Mixon said. "For inserts we made a fiberglass skull with gelatin skin which was backlit to begin the

glow and then we had a wax skull to melt down. Opticalcs were used over those shots to complete the effect."

Mixon described one of the more elaborate effects near the climax of *FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2*. "The scene where Regine gets hit with sunlight, we did quite a few last-minute additions for that effect. On the pit set, Jim McLoughlin and I did a gelatin build-up—in post we came up with a dummy head from a life cast. For two shots we pumped the dummy head full of trichloroethane, which causes swelling. We inflated the head a third time and set fire to it, to match when the sunlight hits Regine."

Fantasy II spent two months of postproduction fine-tuning their work and their diligence is the high-point of an uninspired sequel. □



Effects supervisor Bart Mixon and his Regine makeup. Inset: An early design by Brian Wade.

## Science fiction star vehicle just laughable

### MURDER BY MOONLIGHT

A CBS-TV presentation. 5/89, 120 mins. In color. A joint production of Tamara Asseyev, London Weekend TV, and Viacom. Director, Michael Lindsay-Hogg. Executive producer, Tamara Asseyev. Co-producer, Ron Carr. Director of photography, David Watkin. Music, Trevor Jones. Screenplay by Carla Jean Wagner.

Lt. Maggie Bartok ..... Brigitte Nielsen  
Major Stefan Kirilenki ..... Julian Sands  
Asst. Manager Louise Mackey ..... Jane Lapotaine  
Manager Dennis Huff ..... Gerald McRaney

by Christopher Martin

If, heaven help us, *MURDER BY MOONLIGHT* is ever considered for the home video market, the only tape format that would do it justice is duct tape. Nothing else would suit a production that managed, in spite of its science fiction trappings and the striking presence of Brigitte Nielsen, to be so mechanical and mundane. The lackluster TV movie aired on CBS last May.

As the title might suggest, the setting for the story is the moon. The time is the near future. Things start to go wrong at Cruz-McKinney No. 3, a U.S. mining base operating on special lease inside Soviet lunar territory. The body of base security chief Jake Elazar is dumped down a mine shaft and N.A.S.A. sends Lt. Maggie Bartok (Nielsen) to help find the litterbug. Before long, she is bumping heads, and lower parts, with Soviet investigator Stefan Kirilenki (Julian Sands).

The sexual content in this TV movie is certainly more hard-core than its science. Elazar's corpse shows no effect of its exposure to a near vacuum. The moon has only one-sixth the gravity of the Earth's, yet everyone inside the

range from the fairly clever (Charley's psychiatrist turns out to be a guilt-ridden vampire) to the inexplicably mundane (a scene in which Charley's girlfriend Alex and one of the creatures attend a Mahler concert together). The two plot threads that might have done the most to differentiate this movie's story from the earlier one—Charley's romantic attraction to Regine and his own eventual, brief case of vampirism—are so vaguely delineated as to have almost no impact whatsoever.

Director Tommy Lee Wallace (*HALLOWEEN III*), accompanied by Brad Fiedel's thump-thumping score, occasionally falls into the rhythms of a slasher movie, especially when coeds are attacked at Charley's college. Wallace's direction, and the thuddingly wooden dialogue of his, Tim Metcalfe's, and Miguel Tejada-Flores' screenplay, make it painfully clear that *FRIGHT NIGHT* screenwriter/director Tom Holland's Hitchcockian aspirations were among the key ingredients in the first movie's success.

Another reason was William Ragsdale's endearingly goofy por-

base walks around normally. Is their gravity imported? When the killer blows an external hatch in the base library, it takes minutes for that tiny room to lose its atmosphere instead of seconds. Even worse, there is no loss of internal heat. That base must have a climate control system that boggles the mind.

The only thing in short supply in this facility is logic. Considering the hazardous working conditions of the lunar base, why doesn't the terrorist at work make each killing look like an accident instead of blatant homicide? Are the murders just a hobby that got out of hand? The story material is hardly redeemed by the special effects—which are minimal in every sense of the word. Model work could easily be credited to Matchbox Toys.

Nothing in the cast's efforts can cover the defects in the script and special effects. Any Brigitte Nielsen fans concerned about missing her most riveting performance can sleep through this one. Nielsen can't carry her role without dropping it once in a while. Julian Sands compensates by being overly serious, serious to the point of being brittle. He is everything you expect in a movie Russian and little else. The only time these two generate any sparks is when they are rubbed together. The rest of the cast turned in their performances and went home. Any additional energy they invested in their characters was an act of sheer generosity. No one, however, hung around for the story's ending. The closing lines were delivered by a N.A.S.A. computer named "Uncle Albert." Honest. □

trayal of the film's teenaged protagonist; this time his modest charm is spread thin. Charley is just as thick-witted a guy as ever, and we in the audience are likely to be almost as impatient with him as Peter, Alex, and even vampire Regine are. As Peter Vincent, Roddy McDowall is a fine actor seriously underchallenged by his role. Peter is a good idea—a timid, third-rate TV personality who becomes a real-life vampire hunter against his will—that still hasn't been fleshed out into a believable

human being. Of the new characters, most notable are Jonathan Gries as a bumbling werewolf member of Regine's gang, and Traci Lin as Charley's aspiring-psychiatrist girlfriend Alex, who never seems entirely sure of his sanity. Julie Carmen, who as Regine is in theory the lead vampire, has little to do except stand around and look gorgeous. (She succeeds.)

As in *FRIGHT NIGHT*, the film's climactic sequence involves Charley and his friends doing

away with their monstrous foes, who each expire in a different, visually bizarre way; as before, it's an unabashed showcase for elaborate, excellent effects work, especially in the case of one fellow who bursts at the seams under the pressure of an internal explosion of worms. The makeup for Regine and her underlings (who switch back and forth from human visages to horrible ones with no particular logic) is imaginative, and like her brother before her, Regine turns into a delightfully grotesque vampire bat whose swooping flights live up to what is a rather unsuspenseful suspense film.

Despite everything, Charley and Peter remain two of the more appealing characters on the horror-movie scene, and it would be nice to believe that a third *FRIGHT NIGHT* might give them an adventure more worthy of their skills. But you'd have to be even more obtuse than Charley to think a third chapter could be a substantial improvement over *FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2*; once a film series starts down the road of bad sequels like this one, there's usually no turning back. □



Brigitte Nielsen as lunar investigator Lt. Bartok.

William Ragsdale and Julie Carmen, failing to explore vampirism's erotic allure.



## Queasy mixture of humor and horror hits too close to home

### THE HORROR SHOW

An MGM/UA Distribution release from United Artists Pictures of a Sean S. Cunningham production. Director, James Isaac. Producer, Sean Cunningham. 4/89, 95 mins. In color & Dolby. Director of photography, Mac Ahlberg. Editor, Edward Anton. Design consultant, Stewart Campbell. Special photographic effects, VCE/ Peter Kuran. Special makeup effects, Krutzman, Nicotero, Berger EFX Group. Stunt coordinator, Kane Hodder. Music, Harry Manfredini. Sound, Hans Roland. Screenplay by Alan Smithee & Leslie Bohem.

Lucas McCarthy ..... Lance Henriksen  
Max Jenke ..... Brian James  
Donna McCarthy ..... Rita Taggart  
Bonnie McCarthy ..... Dedee Pfeiffer  
Scott McCarthy ..... Aron Eisenberg  
Peter Campbell ..... Thom Bray  
Dr. Tower ..... Matt Clark

by Daniel Schweiger

Unlike Freddy Krueger or Jason Vorhees, Max Jenke, THE HORROR SHOW's contestant in the psycho hall of fame, is a little too close to the real life variety. Stocky, pock-marked, and giggling like a lewd cartoon character, Max's weapon of choice is the meat cleaver, his greatest inspirations, chopping off limbs or putting someone's head in a boiling pot. There really isn't much to distinguish him from a TV news serial killer, and therein lies the movie's problem. Despite its gee-whiz special effects, THE HORROR SHOW's uneasy base in reality is too shocking for much enjoyment.

One can giggle as Max turns

Brian James as killer Max Jenke, who bears striking similarities to the psycho in Wes Craven's current SHOCKER.



into a talk show host or a Thanksgiving turkey, but his thrills are queasy, the kind that make one feel like a brutal accomplice. That's just part of producer Sean Cunningham's tense design, taking us to new lengths of sadomasochistic escapism as each attack tops the other for sheer ugliness.

Lance Henriksen (ALIENS, NEAR DARK, PUMPKINHEAD) stars as the police detective who is determined to bring Jenke to justice, even from beyond the grave. As Jenke's energies leap out to torment the detective's nuclear family, THE HORROR SHOW becomes a demented cross between A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET and LEAVE IT TO BEAVER. Lucas can't control his daughter's sexuality or his son's headphone addiction, so Jenke does the favor by chopping up her boyfriend and glueing receivers on the brat's ears. Then the killer really goes too far, knocking up the girl in a MANITOU-inspired sequence and dragging the wife into his electrical dimension. Lucas' only recourse is to jump into the hellish furnace, so he can bring Jenke back into the real world and blow him away.

What elevates THE HORROR SHOW from its stalk-slash obviousness is the casting coup of Henriksen and James, two actors whose intensity could stare down Leatherface. The scowling Henriksen never seems like a family man, and sure doesn't behave like one as Jenke drives him to near-insanity. It's the kind of white-knuckle performance Henriksen excels at, but it's James who gets best revenge for stereotyped casting. As his quintessential maniac in a long line of them, Jenke's complete repulsiveness guarantees no further sequels. There's a get-under-your-skin threat to him that few cinema crazies have, and even less viewers are capable of taking.

No matter how incredible the characters' supernatural battle of wits becomes, THE HORROR SHOW remains cruddy and barely lit. First-time director Isaac is visibly nervous with the sleazy material, substituting creepiness with endless shots of people blundering about. It's almost welcome when Jenke springs out with a cleaver. □



Lance Henriksen (l) as Detective Lucas McCarthy, haunted by Jenke's handiwork.

## THE HORROR SHOW How directors, too, got the axe

By Lowell Goldman

THE HORROR SHOW marks the directorial debut of James Isaac, a special effects makeup expert who trained under the likes of Oscar-winners Phil Tippett and Chris Walas. The Sean S. Cunningham production was written by Leslie Bohem, a gold-record-winning country and western songwriter who also served as a member of the rock 'n' roll band Sparks and a group called Bates Motel. Bohem's script—his first to be produced—was rewritten by Isaac and possibly one or both of the directors who preceded him on the project. The script is credited to Bohem and "Alan Smithee," a director's guild pseudonym that usually is the sign of a troubled production. Isaac declined to reveal Smithee's identity or discuss the genesis of the script, which closely parallels Wes Craven's long-in-preparation Universal release SHOCKER, but named Fred Walton (WHEN A STRANGER CALLS) and David Blyth (DEATH WARMED UP) as the film's earlier directors.

"[Producer] Sean [Cunningham] didn't hit it off with [Walton]," said Isaac of THE HORROR SHOW's first director. "I'm still not sure why. Fred wanted the film to go one way while Sean wanted the film to go another way." Six weeks before the film's start date Cunningham hired Blyth to direct, but fired him after a week and a half of filming.

"At that point, the original script was not being shot," explained Isaac. "Then one

Friday night Sean called me into his office and told me that he had to let David go. I must admit it was a real shock. Sean wasn't happy with the dailies. He wanted me to start shooting on Monday. Obviously there were some problems with the script. But there was no extra time to work things out. The original script had a lot more humor in it. Things off-the-wall. It had some wacky stuff."

Isaac pegged the script difficulties to the speed with which distributor MGM/UA greenlighted the project. "The studio wanted to start shooting the film immediately," said Isaac. Cunningham had developed THE HORROR SHOW after scrapping plans to film HOUSE III when HOUSE II proved lackluster at the boxoffice, steering the script away from the surreal comedy of the HOUSE



## VIDEOPHILE

by Bill Kelley

## Curtis Harrington on Video, Surveying a Genre Stylist

series toward straight horror. Isaac had been effects supervisor on *HOUSE II* and at the time was working on the effects for Cunningham's *DEEPSTAR SIX*. Isaac liked Bohem's script and had asked Cunningham on two earlier occasions for the chance to direct it, but Cunningham had demurred because he felt bankroller MGM/UA would not settle for a first-time director.

"My background is in theatre," said Isaac. "I had no idea that I would direct films." Isaac grew up in the creative climate of Marin County, California. In high school and college, he was involved in the technical side of theatre. He designed sets and directed plays. *HOUSE II* director Ethan Wiley and Fred Dekker (*THE MONSTER SQUAD*) were friends of his. "We did our own shows," said Isaac. "Fred and Ethan eventually studied film at UCLA. I started making my own shorts."

Isaac's first real break was landing a job at Lucasfilm Ltd., working on the postproduction of *RETURN OF THE JEDI*. Isaac was a production assistant in the creature department, where he worked with Wiley under Phil Tippett. When Chris Walas (*THE FLY II*) left Lucasfilm to start his own shop, Isaac went with him. Their first big project was Joe Dante's *GREMLINS*.

"I ended up working with Chris for about six and a half years," said Isaac. "GREMLINS was a big break for him. He had a staff of about ten. We worked for something like 14 months on GREMLINS. We were getting paid practically nothing. But it was a great experience. We really learned how to set up shots and were very involved in the filmmaking process."

continued on page 20

Effects expert-turned-director James Isaac (r) watches as makeup artist Bob Arrollo prepares a prop for a scene involving Jenke's idea of a joke (below).



Unlike many of his contemporaries in the horror-directing field, and even more of his successors, director Curtis Harrington was never content merely to plunder the works of the great masters of the genre, in the never-ending search for ideas. Although James Whale was a friend and, to a degree, professional mentor of Harrington's during the years before Whale's death in 1957 (months before the TV revival of *FRANKENSTEIN* that refocused attention on Whale's career), Harrington was equally influenced by such disparate filmmakers as Josef Von Sternberg and producer Val Lewton. When, in the '60s, it came time for Harrington, one of the first film school-educated directors, to make his own first features, he did so by synthesizing the influence of the legendary auteurs, with an already acknowledged talent for experimentation that had earned him a reputation on the festival circuit.

The problem for film buffs who admire Harrington's work—which generally combines the elegant and the primitive, with an undeniable affection for the occasional, perverse *frisson*—is that, until video, his films were all but impossible to find. His most admired early film (indeed, his first feature), 1960's *NIGHT TIDE*, has rarely been shown on TV because it is in black-and-white; later films, such as 1972's *WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HELEN?*, are shown on TV, albeit with their violence excised by broadcast censors.

Harrington and the star (and co-producer) of the latter film, Debbie Reynolds, are currently seeking a distributor for the movie on home video. And Harrington told me that, encouraged by the restoration of *FRANKENSTEIN* by MCA Home Video, he hopes to persuade the company to issue 1967's *GAMES* (his first major studio feature, starring James Caan) on video.

Meanwhile, several Harrington features are available on cassette. *NIGHT TIDE* (Sinister Cinema), Harrington's marvelous homage to Lewton, stars Dennis Hopper (who calls it one of his favorite movies) as a sailor who falls in love with a "mermaid" (Linda Lawson)



Actors Cameron (l) and Dennis Hopper with director Curtis Harrington (r) during the filming of *NIGHT TIDE* in 1960, now available on video.

on exhibit at the Venice, California pier. *QUEEN OF BLOOD* (distributed under its TV title, *PLANET OF BLOOD*, by Star classics) is the best of several patchwork features bankrolled by Roger Corman in order to utilize effects footage from the Soviet space opera, *PLANET OF STORMS*—Basil Rathbone stars.

Harrington isn't any happier with the LP-speed, budget transfer of *PLANET OF BLOOD* than he is with the similarly murky dupe of one of his best TV movies, 1975's *THE DEAD DON'T DIE* (Goodtimes), which, transfer shortcomings aside, remains one of the best made-for-TV horror outings of the '70s. (Goodtimes' source print of this Robert Bloch-scripted, *Weird Tales*-style opus is the cut version, with Ray Milland's death-on-a-meathook slightly abridged by network censors one week before its premiere!)

*WHO SLEW AUNTIE ROO?* (Vestron) is Harrington's marvelous, full-blooded updating of the Hansel-and-Gretel fairy tale, with Shelley Winters in the 1971 film's title role, with a ripsnorter of a script by Hammer veteran Jimmy Sangster. Lending in Britain enabled Harrington to employ Sir Ralph Richardson, Hugh Griffith and Lionel Jeffries in the cast of this unjustly neglected mini-gothic.

(You can skip Vestron's other

Harrington title, *DEVIL DOG: THE HOUND OF HELL*, a 1978 CBS-TV movie that suffers from bargain basement effects depicting the demonic canine pet. The same goes for *RUBY*—issued in budget versions by both Congress and United Video—because it's the truncated, network TV edition of Harrington's already compromised 1977 possession melodrama. All the gore has been removed, and several minutes of padding were shot by another director; Harrington successfully petitioned the Directors' Guild to delete his name and append its generic *nom de film*, "Allen Smithee."

Harrington's last theatrical venture into the genre, 1974's *THE KILLING KIND* (American Video/Powersports), received only a cursory release by indie distributor Media Cinema.

For genre buffs who have only heard of it, the movie has been worth the wait. John Savage is a sexually dysfunctional, ex-con rapist and Ann Sothorn is his dotty mom.

While we wait for Harrington to arrange financing of *CRANIUM*, his ultimate mad scientist shocker, other "lost" movies—even more elusive than his—are surfacing on video. Magnum Entertainment's major video release for late '89 is the uncut edition of Dario Argento's *SUSPIRIA*. In fact, Magnum has issued the film in three versions: the R-rated, 92-minute print released in 1977 by 20th Century-Fox's "International Classics" subsidiary, the unrated, 97-minute director's cut; and a "Collector's Edition" of the 97-minute version, which restores this landmark shocker to its widescreen dimensions via a letterbox format. All versions are in stereo. *SUSPIRIA* is the first entry in a mesmerizing yet-to-be-completed trilogy that constitutes the apex of post-Mario Bava Italian splatter (the other entry is *INFERNO*—available from Key Video).

Finally, fans of HBO's *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* may want to check out the earlier British features produced by Amicus, *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* (Prism Video) and *THE VAULT OF HORROR* (Nostalgia Merchant), pricey at \$59.95, but worth a rental at your local video store. □

# FILM RATINGS

## ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN

Directed by Don Bluth. Universal, 11/89. Voices: Burt Reynolds, Dom DeLuise, Vic Tayback, Melba Moore, Loni Anderson.

Don Bluth's latest cartoon feature, a Damon Runyon-esque tale of dogs, crime, and retribution set in New Orleans circa 1939, is saddled with a story and characters that are utterly unappealing, and songs (by Charles Strouse and T.J. Kuenster) that are largely forgettable. There is still some first-rate animation on view, but an intense dream sequence set in a lava-consumed Hell was expected to be trimmed for the kiddies. Unfortunately, the brilliant moments are too few and far between.

• Kyle Counts

## APPOINTMENT WITH FEAR

Directed by Ramzi Thomas. Cinemax, 12/88, 100 mins. With: Michele Little, Michael Wyle, Kerry Rensen, Douglas Rowe.

This strangely executed 1985 fantasy film had no theatrical distribution but showed up on cable TV last December. The slim plot concerns a comatose man who thinks he's a god and is convinced he must kill his infant son in order to achieve immortality. As in 1975's *PSYCHIC KILLER*, he can project his astral body and use it to commit perfect murders. He stabs his wife who, with her dying breath, commits the care of her baby to a passing mime.

In the end, a bunch of girls at a pajama party manage to stop the killer by stabbing his astral body with a flag pole. Immediately, he turns into a tree. With a cast of primarily mime performers, frequent continuity gaffes, and long stretches of pointless roving camerawork, this one isn't worth figuring out, if that's even possible.

• Judith P. Harris

## CHERRY 2000

Directed by Steve De Jarnatt. Orion Video, 3/89, 99 mins. With: Melanie Griffith, David Andrews, Ben Johnson, Tim Thomerson.

Sex in the future has become so impersonal that a one night stand requires a contract. Sam Treadwell (David Andrews) has avoided such personal relations by falling in love with his robot, a Cherry 2000. An accident disables the unit so Sam hires E. Johnson, played by Melanie Griffith in short, blazing red hair, to journey into the dangerous Nevada wastelands to get a replacement. The film is a pleasant science fiction action adventure that had a

FILM TITLE	●●●●		●●●		●●		●		○	
	MUST SEE		EXCELLENT		GOOD		MEDIocre		POOR	
	SB	VJB	FSC	DG	JPH	BK	DS			
<b>THE ABYSS</b> /James Cameron 20th Century-Fox, 8/89, 140 mins.	●●	●●●	●●●	●●	●	●	●●			
<b>ALIEN NATION</b> /Kenneth Johnson Fox-TV, Fall '89, 60 mins.	●	●●			●●●	●				
<b>BATMAN</b> Tim Burton Warner Bros., 6/89, 126 mins.	●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●	●●●			
<b>EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY</b> /Julien Temple Vestron, 9/88, 100 mins.		●	●●	●	●●	●	●●			
<b>FIELD OF DREAMS</b> /Phil Alden Robinson Universal, 4/89, 106 mins.	●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●			●●●			●●
<b>FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VIII</b> /Rob Hedden Paramount, 7/89, 100 mins.	●	○	●	○	○		●			●
<b>FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2</b> /Tommy Lee Wallace New Century-Vista, 9/88, 101 mins.	●		●●		●●		●			
<b>GHOSTBUSTERS II</b> /Ivan Reitman Columbia, 6/89, 102 mins.	●●	●●	●	●	●●	●	●●			●●
<b>HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS</b> Buena Vista, 6/89, 86 mins.	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●			●●●
<b>THE HORROR SHOW</b> /James Isaac MGM/UA, 4/89, 95 mins.			○	○			●			
<b>HOW TO GET AHEAD IN ADVERTISING</b> Bruce Robinson, Warner Bros., 3/89, 95 mins.	●●	●●	●●●		●●●	●●	●			●
<b>INDIANA JONES &amp; THE LAST CRUSADE</b> Steven Spielberg, Paramount, 5/89, 127 mins.	●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●			●●●
<b>LICENCE TO KILL</b> /John Glen MGM/UA, 7/89, 133 mins.	●●	●●●	●	●●			●●●			●●●
<b>MILLENIUM</b> /Lewis Gilbert 20th Century-Fox, 8/89, 108 mins.	●●	●	●●	○	●	○	●			●
<b>MIRACLE MILE</b> /Steve DeJarnatt Tri-Star, 9/88, 87 mins.	●●	●●	●●●●	●●			●●			
<b>THE NAVIGATOR</b> /Vincent Ward Circle Films, 5/89, 93 mins.	●●●	●●	●●				●			●
<b>NICK KNIGHT</b> /Bary Weitz & Roberta Ziegler CBS-TV, 8/89, 120 mins.	●	●			●	●	●			●
<b>THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR</b> /Wes Craven CBS-TV, 9/89, 30 mins.	●	○			●	●	●			
<b>PET SEMATARY</b> /Mary Lambert Paramount, 4/89, 102 mins.	●●	●	●●	●	●	●	●●			●●
<b>PETER PAN</b> /Walt Disney Buena Vista, 7/89 (1952 re-issue), 76 mins.	●●●		●●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●			●●●●
<b>QUANTUM LEAP</b> /Donald P. Bellisario NBC-TV, Fall '89, 60 mins.		●			●	●	●●			
<b>RETURN OF THE SWAMP THING</b> Jim Wynorski, Miramax, 4/89, 88 mins.	○	●●	○		●	○	●●●			
<b>STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER</b> William Shatner, Paramount, 6/89, 106 mins.	●●	●	●	●	●●	●	●			●
<b>TALES FROM THE CRYPT</b> /Richard Donner HBO, Fall '89, 30 mins.	●		●●	●●	○	●	●			●
<b>VAMPIRE'S KISS</b> /Robert Bierman Hemdale, 9/88, 103 mins.	●●	●		○	●●	●	●●			●●
<b>YOUNG EINSTEIN</b> /Yahoo Serious Warner Bros., 8/89, 89 mins.			●	●		○				

SB/Steve Biodrowski VJB/Vincent J. Bossone FSC/Frederick S. Clarke DG/Dann Gire  
JPH/Judith P. Harris BK/Bill Kelley DS/Dan Scapperotti

surprisingly dismal theatrical mini-release. The picture boasts a fast pace, pleasant characters, and a stunning stunt sequence. Even villain Tim Thomerson is likable as the maniacal leader of a marauding band of desert pirates. Well worth renting.

• Dan Scapperotti

## CRIME ZONE

Directed by Luis Llosa. Concorde, 1/89, 93 mins. With: David Carradine, Peter Nelson, Sheryllyn Fenn.

This futuristic tale sketches a

fascist governing body which creates its own criminals to justify the existence of a police force in an apathetic society. Action, unfortunately, takes a back seat to the cautionary message, making this more of a symposium than a cinematic experience. Associate producer David Carradine gets star billing in what amounts to a supporting role. His reunion with former employer Roger Corman has none of the comic book charm or satiric punch of their New World cult item

DEATH RACE 2000 or, for that matter, even DEATHSPORT. Indeed, Corman's Concorde has failed to fly high since its inception.

• Vincent J. Bossone

## DR. ALIEN

Directed by Dave DeCoteau. Phantom Video/Paramount, 2/89, 90 mins. With: Judy Landers, Billy Jacoby, Olivia Barash.

This is actually I WAS A TEENAGE SEX MUTANT, originally set for release by Empire Pictures. No matter what the title, this is just

another teen-oriented sex comedy with fantastic overtones. The "inspirations" seem to have been THE NUTTY PROFESSOR and ZAPPED!, with a bit of BRAIN DAMAGE thrown in. Judy Landers is a curvaceous alien whose experiments turn college nerd Billy Jacoby into a sexually irresistible stud. There are only one or two laughs in the first hour, as lame witticisms, vulgar language, and stilted dialogue hold the floor. Surprisingly, the last third of the film is mildly enjoyable, with faster pacing, some adequate effects (including makeup by Greg Cannom), and slightly better dialogue and acting. The whole is still largely a sophomore effort, but it doesn't leave the viewer as flat as some of DeCoteau's other work. There's hope for everyone.

• David Wilt

## FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VIII: JASON TAKES MANHATTAN

Directed by Rob Hedden. Paramount, 8/89, 100 mins. With: Kane Hodder, Jensen Daggett, Scott Reeves.

Judging from the reactions of a disgruntled opening night Times Square audience, this latest entry in the slasher series *should* have been subtitled "Manhattan Gets Taken." A revived Jason terrorizes high schoolers aboard a cruise ship, formulaically dispatching his victims with an arsenal that includes a harpoon, a shard of glass, and a guitar. Unintentional comic relief is provided by a deck hand/Greek chorus who intones warnings like, "This voyage is doomed!" Jason fares less well upon arriving in the Big Apple; though he survives a ride on New York's subway system, toxic waste in the sewers stops him dead... at least until next time. Who knows? With New Line reportedly snubbing a Paramount bid to pit Jason against Mr. Krueger, the studio may settle for a match just across the river with Tromaville, N.J.'s own Toxic Avenger.

• Vincent J. Bossone

## FRIENDSHIP'S DEATH

Directed by Peter Wollen. British Film Institute, 1/89, 74 mins. With: Bill Paterson, Tilda Swinton, Patrick Bauchau, Ruby Baker.

Political film theorist Peter Wollen has gone back to the social science fiction of the '60s, and his own experiences as a journalist in the Middle East, to give us this quietly philosophical film about a stranger in a strange land.

# FILM RATINGS



Burt Reynolds and Dom DeLuise in **ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN**.

Sullivan (Bill Paterson) is a reporter covering the Black September months of Amman, Jordan, 1970. There he has a close encounter with Friendship (Tilda Swinton), an android sent by computers from the distant planet Procyon as a peace envoy. A gross malfunction lands her in war-torn Jordan of all places where she begins to identify with the suffering Palestinians. They are a people, like her, wanting a secure home and a sturdier future.

Within the closed and claustrophobic environment of a hotel room, akin to a one-act play, Wollen explores issues such as the degree of detachment reporters feel from the outside events they must cover. Friendship understands the people and their plight, while Sullivan merely reports the cause and effect of ensuing events without editorializing.

Friendship records her thoughts and emotions onto a strange glowing plastic which she gives Sullivan as a parting gift. The primitive computer graphics, coupled with Barrington Pheloung's mesmerizing synthesizer, conclude the proceedings with a soothing, hypnotic effect that is virtually like filmed poetry.

● ● Les Paul Robley

## FROM THE DEAD OF NIGHT

Directed by Paul Wendkos. NBC-TV, 2/89, 4 hours. With: Lindsay Wagner, Bruce Boxleitner, Robin Thomas, Robert Prosky.

Based on the novel *Walkers* by Gary Brandner, who wrote *The Howling*, this telefilm was padded over an excruciating two-day, four-hour miniseries. Teleplay writer William Bleich discarded Brandner's book to tell his own, less satisfying tale. Lindsay Wagner plays a successful fashion designer who nearly dies by drowning, and experiences the classic death tunnel with a bright light at the end of it. As she returns to her body, she sees six figures who

clutch at her. For no reason the film bothers to explain, the figures are able to inhabit the bodies of recently dead people in order to try to kill her. However, if they are killed again, violently, they stay dead. Hospitals call these reanimated bodies "walkers" because they have two causes and times of death on their autopsy reports, which are dismissed as clerical errors.

Directed by the usually reliable Paul Wendkos, the walkers proved not especially scary, and each is dispatched easily, with a minimum of effort and a complete lack of visual flair.

● Judith P. Harris

## LITTLE MONSTERS

Directed by Richard Greenberg. United Artists/Vestron, 7/89, 101 mins. With: Howie Mandel, Fred Savage, Rick Ducommun, Frank Whaley.

A mischievous demon (Howie Mandel) invites a young boy (Fred Savage) into his corps of juvenile troublemakers in this horror/fantasy/comedy, a film with the most severe identity crisis since *SYBIL*. Although director Richard Greenberg creates a visually intriguing underworld/hangout for his little monsters, and delivers appealing performances from his cast (especially Frank Whaley as the spoiled-rotten overseer, Boy), the film is so desperate to be something for everyone—sensitive coming-of-age tale, Sendakian adventure, teen raunch-fest—that it winds up being nothing for nobody. Never boring, but not wholly satisfying either.

● Dan Persons

## MOONTRAP

Directed by Robert Dyke. Shapiro Glickenhau Entertainment, 9/89, 95 mins. With: Walter Koenig, Bruce Campbell, Leigh Lombardi.

Slow pacing, weak structure, no exposition—all this might have been forgiven if the robots had been exciting, but they just stand there while the Earthmen shoot at them. The

film's low point is the love scene between astronaut Walter Koenig and moon maid Leigh Lombardi, which takes place in an allegedly air-tight tent on the surface of the moon. Needless to say, at that point in the story, sex is the last thing the characters would have on their minds, but the filmmakers weren't going to let logic prevent them from having their leading lady take her clothes off, especially since she serves no other function in the movie. After all those years on *STAR TREK*, Koenig deserved a better script than this for his first leading role.

● Steve Biodrowski

## NIGHTLIFE

Directed by Daniel Taplitz. USA Network, 8/89, 2 hours. With: Ben Cross, Maryam D'Abo, Keith Szarabajka.

This black comedy combines snappy dialogue with straight horror, done in questionable taste, including the idea of making vampirism an allegory for AIDS. ("A virus has no morals"). Ben Cross is appropriately sinister as the vampire leader pursuing femme-vampire Maryam D'Abo, but the comedy honors go to Camille Saviola as D'Abo's hard-boiled (although ethnically stereotyped) maid. Film was shot in Mexico City, probably for financial reasons, since there is no attempt to use the city's settings, folklore, or characters—the film could easily be set in L.A. There doesn't seem to be much new ground left to plow in the vampire genre.

● David Wilt

## A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET V: THE DREAM CHILD

Directed by Stephen Hopkins. New Line Cinema, 8/89, 89 mins. With: Robert Englund, Lisa Wilcox, Danny Hassel, Kelly Jo Minter.

The fifth film in the series tries to give you everything you'd want in a Freddy Krueger and less. Despite the story involvement of ace splatter-

punks John Skip & Craig Spector, this segment has fewer deaths, less gore and less imagination. Freddy wants to come back via Lisa Wilcox's unborn child, but wait, he's already back and murderous via the fetus's dreams. Once more the adults are ineffectual and teen friends get trapped in the nightmare. Leslie Bohem's script lacks the wit needed for a "death and a joke" character like Freddy and will be certain to disappoint fans of the series.

● Dennis K. Fischer

## PETER PAN

Produced by Walt Disney. Buena Vista, 7/89 (1953), 76½ mins. Voices: Bobby Driscoll, Kathryn Beaumont, Hans Conried.

Conceived by Disney as far back as 1935 to be an ideal animated adaptation of the James Barrie play, production did not begin until 15 years later at the then grand budget of \$4 million. It went on to become one of Walt's most cohesive animated features. Disney did away with many conventional techniques used in the play and earlier 1925 film version: a boy did the voice of Pan (the late Bobby Driscoll of "Song of the South" fame) whereas, typically, the part was played by a girl. Nana the dog, Tinker Bell the pixie, and Captain Hook's "alarming" nemesis, the crocodile, were finally envisioned as their real selves (not actors in makeup or spots of light on the stage; though some critics took offense at Tink's voluptuously endowed physique *a la* live-action model, Marilyn Monroe). And the stage play's gimmick of galvanizing audience solidarity with some pretentious wishing-will-make-it-so philosophizing (prompting viewers to clap hands to prove their belief in faeries) was wisely excised.

● ● ● ● Les Paul Robley

## PETER PAN

Directed by Vincent J. Donehue. Choreographed and adapted by Jerome Robbins. NBC-TV, 3/89 (1960), 120 mins. With: Mary Martin, Cyril Ritchard, Sondra Lee.

Leigh Lombardi and the less than dynamic robot of **MOONTRAP**.



Rick Lazzarini as Freddy in **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 5**, in Lazzarini's womb effect.

The wires can clearly be seen during the flying sequences. Tinkerbell is a spotlight with an electric fan in front. On top of that, NBC appears to have done a bit of ill-concealed trimming, just so we can have multiple opportunities to watch three year-olds mispronounce Oshkosh B'gosh. Though legal wrangling has kept this gem off the air for 16 years, and for every glitch that reveals the show's middle-age (this version was taped in 1960), there are many more reasons to welcome its return—including Jerome Robbins' choreography, unforgettable songs like "Neverland" and "I'm Flying," and Cyril Ritchard's poisoned creampuff of a Captain Hook. Most of all, there's Mary Martin, who's about as convincing in her boy-who-never-grew-up drag as I'd be in a dinner gown, but who charms when she acts, entrances when she sings, and very nearly has us believing that, yes, it is possible to retain, or regain, our youth. Now that the lawyers are happy (and so, presumably, is NBC, since the show captured its time period in the Nielsens), maybe this can become the yearly tradition it always should have been (and while you're at it, NBC, please restore those cuts).

● ● ● ● Dan Persons

## RELENTLESS

Directed by William Lustig. CineTel Films, 8/89, 92 mins. With: Judd Nelson, Robert Loggia, Meg Foster.

Not scary enough to count as horror, too unintentionally funny to rate as suspense, and not even enough gore to qualify as a slasher film, this scrapes the bottom of the septic tank. Judd Nelson plays a psycho



Vlad (Brendon Hughes) plants a kiss of death on Kate (Sydney Walsh) in **TO DIE FOR**.

who chooses his victims from a phone book. The logic behind the slayings is never really established. The slicing and dicing started because Nelson was rejected from the police academy, but why pick victims from the Yellow Pages, why not start taking potshots at cops? When the only bit of originality on view is the staging of a death by corkscrew, one realizes how lame this all is. From William Lustig, the director of **MANIAC**. That explains everything.

o Paul T. Riddell

## REMOTE CONTROL

Directed by Jeff Lieberman. Vista, 3/89, 88 mins. With: Kevin Dillon, Deborah Goodrich, Christopher Wynne, Frank Beddor.

Aliens from Polaris are trying to take over Earth by means of the pseudo-'50s science fiction film of the title which, in a way that is never explained, first hypnotizes viewers and then transports them into the film, where they commit violent murders. Too bad those who might appreciate such a premise—those who consider themselves bastions of public morals and hold that horror movies inspire audiences to violence—probably wouldn't be caught dead renting this Vista direct-to-video release.

Kevin Dillon plays Cosmo, the video store clerk who is blamed for the first of the murders and spends the rest of the film trying to find out what's going on. The film's potentially interesting comic premise was done better and more briefly in the first Monty Python film, **AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT**, as the killer joke sketch. Writer-director Jeff Lieberman (best known

for **SQUIRM**) leaves too many holes in his script. Cosmo and the girl he saves (Deborah Goodrich) wear outlandish, lame outfits for no better reason than to point up the parallels to the '50s film-within-a-film which is supposed to take place in the '80s, when people have machines to brush their teeth and vacuum their faces. That film ultimately looks far more interesting than the one Lieberman ended up making.

o Judith P. Harris

## SHOCK! SHOCK! SHOCK!

Directed by Todd Rutt & Arn McConnell. Rhino Video, 8/88, 60 mins. With: Brad Isaac, Cyndy McCrossen, Allen Rickman, Brian Fuorry.

Fans who love to laugh at bad movies, *a la PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE*, ought to get a big kick out of this home video release from Rhino. The independent 60-minute black-and-white feature, filmed in Brooklyn in 1987, starts out with all the seeming incompetence of a grade-Z remake, but eventually manages to take on a peculiar charm of its own. The film is intentionally campy and hammy, revelling in its own imbecilic scripting, horrendous pacing, and incompetent acting, in chronicling a psycho slasher-killer who escapes from a mental hospital and becomes involved with a mysterious woman and bizarre gangsters who prove to be dangerous Stigmatons from Outer Space. In a curiously effective plot twist, the slasher discovers the truth about himself and achieves glory as the incarnation of Space Man, a campy super-hero who saves the day, planet, and galaxy. There are a couple of notable special effects including a genuinely neat stop-motion creature, the Fangodon (design credited to co-director Arn McConnell), an elephant-sized, spike-toothed beast which the alien leader's cat transforms into in order to battle Space Man.

"Weird Al" Yankovic parodies Spielberg's *Indiana Jones* in **UHF**.



The picture also benefits from a nice rock score by Bruce Gordon & the Cyphers, which recalls an odd mixture of new-wave Ventures and Louis & Bebe Barron.

o Randall Larson

## STEEL DAWN

Directed by Lance Hool. Silver Lion/Vestron (Video), 1987, 102 mins. With: Patrick Swayze, Brian James, Anthony Zerbe, Christopher Neame.

There seems very little reason to subject us to yet another **ROAD WARRIOR** variation, but that's just what we get in this highly derivative, and eminently forgettable, little time waster. The opportunity to cash-in on hearthrob Patrick Swayze's sudden popularity was apparently too much for Vestron, (who produced Swayze's **DIRTY DANCING**), so they gave this regrettable turkey a major push that put it in virtually every video store in the country.

Instead of smooth mambo moves, Swayze uses his athletic prowess to portray a sword-wielding hero of the post-apocalyptic desert. Swayze's character is a quiet, sullen sort who never looks for trouble but always seems in the midst of it. In short, he's just like every other hero of this overdone sub-genre. The plot, stranger helps struggling farmers defeat vicious landowner (Anthony Zerbe) and his hired killer (Christopher Neame), hasn't been original since Alan Ladd introduced **SHANE** into movie lore. And, the film doesn't deliver the goods in its action sequences. Instead, there is just a lot of wandering and talking in the desert. o John Thonen

## TO DIE FOR

Directed by Deran Sarafian. Skouras, 4/89, 90 mins. With: Brendon Hughes, Sydney Walsh, Amanda Wynn.

This romantic vampire tale would deserve a higher rating if not for the intrusive and unnecessary makeup effects. The film's strength lies not in overt



Yahoo Serious as **YOUNG EINSTEIN**, humor's Mr. Wizard.

horror, but in the emotion and passion the characters ignite. Obviously written not by a fan of old horror movies, but by someone with an insight for how real people think and feel and react.

o Steve Biodrowski

## UHF

Directed by Jay Levey. Orion/Cinecorp, 7/89, 96 mins. With: Weird Al Yankovic, Victoria Jackson, Kevin McCarthy.

"Television as it was meant to be seen—in a movie theatre," is the catchy, nonsensical tagline for "Weird Al" Yankovic's first assault on the big screen. The Alfred E. Newman of pop music, Yankovic specializes in goofball parodies of the disposable effluvia of American life—rock videos, sitcoms, game shows, and heterosexual relationships. This is less a fully realized satire than a series of slapdash vignettes sending up the kind of TV broadcast filler that is already Beyond Derision. The plot dumps Weird Al at the helm of a financially and creatively bankrupt UHF station. By programming weirdest-common-denominator programs—stuff like "Wheel of Fish" and Stanley Spadowski's Playhouse—he out-Neilsens nefarious network affiliate owner Kevin McCarthy.

Cheap adolescent yuks abound: imagine your fifth grade class clown let loose in a soundstage and you'll get a good idea of the maturity level of Yankovic's sophisticated, nuanced social satire. Weird Al is not really weird, of course: he's basically a good-humored mensch, the kind of teenager who brandished water balloons, not switch-blades. His so-dumb-it's-funny take on pop culture is sometimes hilarious—for juvenile chuckles, the chop socky trailer for **GHANDI II** ("He's back—and he's angry!") is funnier than anything in **THE NAKED GUN**.

o Thomas Doherty

## THE WIZARD OF SPEED AND TIME

Directed by Mike Jittlov. Shapiro Entertainment, 2/88, 95 mins. With: Mike Jittlov, Richard Kaye, Lucky Straker, Paige Moor.

This is a fantasy film about a real filmmaker who has real problems with unions and unscrupulous producers. Writer-director-actor-editor and low-budget effects man extraordinaire Mike Jittlov occasionally dazzles with his quick cuts, gentle humor, and flashy effects. The story revolves around Mike providing effects for a TV show while two producers bet each other whether under the difficulties he can produce anything usable, and one stoops to sabotage. It's more fun than it sounds; the film is filled with the possibilities of truly inventive filmmaking.

o Dennis Fischer

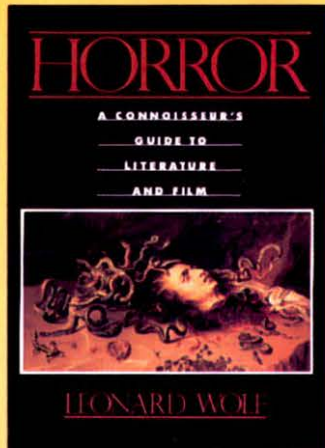
## YOUNG EINSTEIN

Directed by Yahoo Serious. Warner Bros, 8/89, 89 mins. With: Yahoo Serious, Odile Le Clezio, John Howard, Pee Wee Wilson.

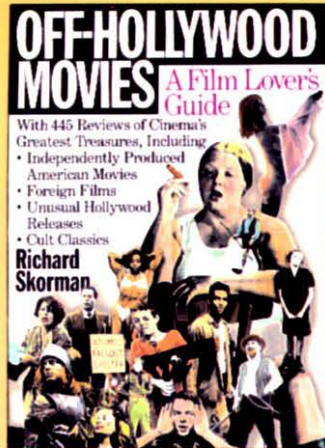
He invented the nuclear bomb and the theory of relativity, but betcha' didn't know old Albert was science's first surfing bird, "roll and rock" star, and beer-foamer. Australia's director/star Yahoo Serious posits these amusing axioms, but has no idea how to create a hilarious chain reaction. Destined for better things than Tasmanian apple farming, the native genius does a Crocodile Dundee number as he tries to make it in the big city. While blowing it as an accountant and romancing Marie Curie, Albert finds that his prized hypothesis will do far more than split beer atoms. Though likably energetic and a terrific visualist, Yahoo turns into the Mr. Wizard of comedy by explaining his gags to death. Highlights include the dodo-haired Einstein doing an electrified Watusi and hitting the waves, with the funniest bit involving a cat pie.

o Daniel Schweiger





The author surveys more than 400 examples of what he terms the "horror arts," from Shelley to FRIDAY THE 13TH, and details how art combines with horror and offers lessons in appreciation. A fascinating guide through the roots and nature of horror, as envisioned by literary masters and genre filmmakers. Cloth, 8 1/4 x 11 1/2, 262 pp. \$27.95



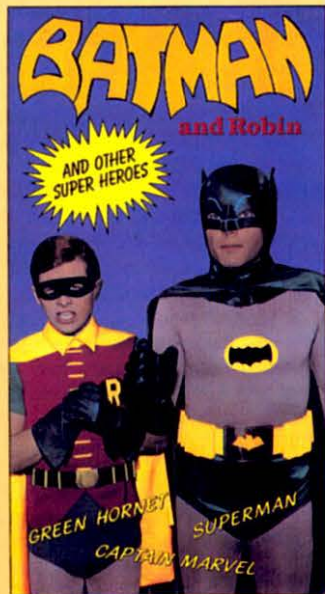
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## CRYPT COMICS

continued from page 18

and *Saddle Justice*. But it was his horror comics which endured.

Gaines had grown up with an abiding love for the horror genre nurtured largely by the Universal horror classics, pulp magazines and radio serial broadcasts of the '30s. In 1950, relying mainly on Craig and Feldstein, he launched his most famous and enduring titles: *The Haunt of Fear*, *Tales From the Crypt*, and *The Vault of Horror*.

The EC line inspired hordes of imitators, each of which appeared bent upon exceeding the ghastly excesses found in the original template. There was, however, little truly original to the template or even the use of the anthology format as a vehicle for horror. Gaines himself freely acknowledges that he and his colleagues shamelessly ransacked every conceivable source for their material, lifting plots in their entirety from the horror pulps, the science fiction magazines, radio, and, of course, the movies.

He recalls, for instance, receiving a letter from Ray Bradbury, from whom he had unabashedly pilfered entire stories, informing him that he had likely "overlooked" paying Bradbury for the use of his material. Gaines paid the man gladly, if not a great deal, but he insists that combining two of Bradbury's stories into one, as Gaines once felt impelled to do, actually improved them both.

The backlash that developed against EC and its brazen imitators reached a crescendo in 1954, when a Bellevue psychiatrist, Frederick Wertham, published a book called *The Seduction of the Innocent*, in which he implied that comics were a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. Congress later convened a "Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency," before which Gaines attempted, largely unsuccessfully, to convey the sense of the sublime contained in the horror genre.

The result of these hearings was a self-imposed bureau of standards within the industry called the Comics Code Authority, which had the immediate effect of putting an end—for a few decades, anyway—to horror as a distinct subgenre of comics. Gaines said that since then he hasn't kept in touch with the genre as much as one might expect. "I don't even bother looking at it," he said of today's horror film industry, which often makes EC's excesses look tame. "I was so immersed in the stuff during the '50s, but I've just had it, personally. What I do happen upon, though, scares the hell out of me." □

## CRYPT EFFECTS

continued from page 22

reveal a hidden staircase which, again, is a miniature shot using a 65mm snorkel camera with motion control. At the end of the staircase there is a wood door with iron fittings that swings open to reveal the full-size crypt set.

The construction and shooting of the miniature haunted house on the hill was supervised by Boss Film's Neil Krepela. The entire sequence, which took some eight weeks to shoot and involved every department in Edlund's shop, is seamless. And it cost every cent, Edlund said, that he received from Silver. "The budget was very tight," he noted, "so we deferred any profit in the hope that the series takes off."

Edlund is looking forward to working on the effects of future episodes. "TALES FROM THE CRYPT has an inflection of the bizarre that is very much its own thing," he reflected. "It is certainly better than most of the anthological shows that have been on TV, such as AMAZING STORIES or (the most recent) TWILIGHT ZONE. It is definitely a departure for TV, and it may, we hope, usher in a new era for cable programming." □

## BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

continued from page 9

being on the Fall schedule, the June 2nd season-ender ranked only 58th for the week. CBS was not impressed.

Somewhat more encouraging has been the response to *Of Love and Hope*. Perlman's record of poems and love sonnets by Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, and Frost. Released by Capitol Records in May, the album sold 200,000 copies in one month. That's the kind of figure to make a CBS executive sit up and take notice. Mobs of adoring fans turned out at the two Sam Goody record stores where Perlman signed copies of the album, which he describes as a "throwback to chivalry and common decency." His appearance at the Manhattan store sparked the biggest turnout in the store's history. The 90-minute session stretched to three hours. Many of the fans, mostly women, showed up with gifts and roses. At the Beverly Hills appearance, 1,500 fans started lining up at 11 a.m. for a 2 p.m. signing.

"I thought I'd be sitting there by myself," Perlman said. "I don't have that much contact with the outside world, so the reaction from the fans was really surprising. It took me by surprise that a record company would do it in the first place. I know we have loyal

fans. I get about a thousand pieces of mail a week. But you never know how that loyalty will translate when you try something like this."

What is it about the Vincent character that inspires such loyalty? Wiltse said the tragic figure of Vincent brings out "the romantic and maternal feelings in a woman... The show is a fantasy, but in that fantasy is a metaphor where people find a lot of truth. Fantasy shows like THE TWILIGHT ZONE and STAR TREK have always had the freedom to address topics of substance. People who don't watch them tend to think they're just silly fantasy shows, but they're more real than you might think."

Perlman has his own ideas about the program's appeal: "Vincent is a throwback to qualities not celebrated in our culture anymore—truth, compassion, learning, selflessness. There's a huge number of people out there who want that type of character. You can't have classic tragedy without a character with a tragic flaw. Vincent, in a metaphoric way, is a tragic prince in this Swiftian kingdom."

The *Of Love and Hope* album was inspired by the response to the poems Vincent has recited on BEAUTY AND THE BEAST. And, of course, it's Vincent's picture on the album cover. That's all right, Perlman says, there's "plenty of time for the mask to come off" when the series is over.

That could be sooner than he thinks. Suspicious fans wonder if BEAUTY AND THE BEAST will make a quick exit after it replaces a failed series in midseason. Perhaps CBS is waiting for the fan clamor to die down. LeMasters denied this. He said BEAUTY AND THE BEAST was a close call for the CBS Fall lineup.

"The scheduling process is always chaotic," LeMasters said. "Shows that are on the fence, the ones that have not been performing to the levels you want them to perform at, are always in jeopardy. It's always a nervous time. The producers really believe in what they're doing. The stars believe in what they're doing. And we make some difficult choices. And I think there were times that BEAUTY AND THE BEAST was on our schedule, off our schedule. Those rumors get out and float around, and it does create anxiety. Unfortunately, it's what we must do."

Though some fans are skeptical of the changes being planned for the show, others are optimistic. "I think we have to trust Ron Kollow," Berenyi said. "He seems to know what we want before we do."

Perlman thinks that's a wise approach. "All the taboos are broken in these episodes," he said. "All the fence posts are smashed. We're going from an episodic show and individual stories to one continuous storyline that will take us through all 12 episodes. If nothing else, being dropped from the schedule has allowed us to apply ourselves to this epic, larger-than-life approach to a mythic character. We've definitely used this time to our advantage."

No matter what happens to **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**, Perlman will take nothing but good feelings from the experience. "My disappointment with CBS is balanced by the realization that we've been on borrowed time since the pilot got picked up," the actor said. "This is not a great medium for ideas as unconventional as **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**. The fact that we got on the air at all is miraculous. The fact that we're doing a third season is awe-inspiring. I've been allowed to do this character 44 times. Now I get 12 more chances. That's still 56 more times than I expected." □

## THE LITTLE MERMAID

continued from page 31

til the point where we put the storyboards onto reels that we started negotiating which songs we would each get to do—we knew they would be our favorite part of the movie. We're both agreeable, low-key midwestern types, so we haggled it out with a minimum of friction."

Both Musker and Clements sat in on all production meetings, and both were involved in working with the key animators in the early experimental character animation stages. "We were in agreement in terms of the basic direction we wanted to go, so it was a matter of putting our heads together for the storyboarding and casting and character design and recording sessions," said Musker. "We both looked at the film as it came back each day, so we knew what the other was doing at any given moment. But even though we were working on the same characters from sequence to sequence—Ron with his animators, me with mine—we pretty much agreed in terms of the overall picture. We'd kibbitz with each other if we felt something was wrong. If an impasse was reached we would turn to a third party, or one of us would have to concede—in this case Howard [Ashman] was involved too, so we would bounce things off him."

With such an exciting line-up of cartoon features in the works, one might say that a renaissance in animation is taking place at the



Peter MacNicol, once the swashbuckling hero of **DRAGONSLAYER**, steals the show in **GHOSTBUSTERS II** as the lecherous Janosz Poha, possessed by Vigo's painting.

house that Walt built—a dream factory that began with a mouse. Considering the inspired way in which the studio has reclaimed its place as a major force in the entertainment industry, Mickey could teach Leo the Lion a thing or two about the art of roaring. □

## GHOSTBUSTERS II

continued from page 47

have strangely ceased since they went out of business, making them easy targets for such accusations and setting them up for a triumphant comeback. Convenient. Spook villain Vigo needs an infant so he can be reborn; Dana has one on hand. Again, convenient. And wouldn't you know it, just as the guys are about to be sentenced as mischievous pains in the ass for resuming their ghostbusting practice, two vengeful ghosts show up, enabling them to clear their names. All far too convenient, wouldn't you say? This film has the look of a movie its creators didn't want to make at all, so they rushed through the odious task and took the quickest route to the bank.

There are pleasurable parts to **GHOSTBUSTERS II**, and the cast is delightful: Murray's sarcastic and cynical, Aykroyd is full of childlike wonder, Ramis looks like Eraserhead and talks like Mr. Spock, and Hudson is solid and reassuring. Weaver is as charming as before, and Peter MacNicol as Janosz Poha, the bizarre, geographically untraceable art restorer who lusts after Dana and ends up the slave of Vigo, steals the film in much the same way that Bronson Pinchot's Serge stole **BEVERLY HILLS COP**. But the structure of film around them is flimsy and contrived.

Nearly all sequels, of course, suffer in comparison with the original. But this one falls so short of the brilliant originality of its parent that it might have been made by a different team. Its villain, Vigo, is hardly threatening enough to make us worry about the safety of baby Oscar, much less our

intrepid heroes. Much of the film is wasted on the relationship between Dana and Peter, when frankly, who cares? If we wanted romance, we'd see **DANGEROUS LIASONS**! And the contrived fling between Janine Melnitz (Annie Potts) and Louis (Rick Moranis) provides a good opportunity to hit the snack bar.

This may be a film of the totally fantastical, but fantasy needs a strong base in reality to work, and **GHOSTBUSTERS II** plays too many games with reality to be effective. □

## BATMAN

continued from page 43

somehow control and adjust pictorial clarity. The filmgoer depends on the director for crispness of image and visual "direction." If all this seems a bit far afield, recall the scene of Bruce and Vicki across a wide expanse of tabletop—a clear nod to the dinnertable compositions in **CITIZEN KANE**, the *locus classicus* of deep focus aesthetics. On the other hand, a more practical reason for the murky visuals could be the inability of the effects and set departments to withstand up-close, prolonged scrutiny. Gotham City is a cluttered, *tech noir*—emphasis on the *noir*—urban block whose signature set constructions are passed with alarming frequency. It is a Pinewood backlot, not the self-contained universe of **BLADE RUNNER**.

The bat gimmicks are okay, considering their presence arises for commercial, not organic, reasons. Burton conserves them wisely, pacing the introduction of the Batmobile, Batwing, and bat gadgets. Even without a decent stereo system, the Batmobile is a New York drivers' dream: invulnerable to vandalism, parkable anywhere, and retrievable on signal. The Batwing, however, is a lemon. After it expends all its firepower, The Joker blasts it out of the air with a single gunshot. And speaking of lemons, the soundtrack by

Prince is the lamest comic book-rock soundtrack since Queen's **FLASH GORDON** album. His skills and stature would have been better used had he been cast as Robin.

**BATMAN**'s initial quick kill at the boxoffice was an all-time Hollywood record, an impressive testimony to the power of sophisticated market research and the mass dissemination of an optical illusory logo that adorned the nation's subway walls, movie lobbies, and T-shirts. Or maybe it was just mass hypnosis induced by rays from a Warners Telecommunication satellite. Whatever—we can surely expect a sequel that will retread the bat baggage and link its exploitation to another colorful actor in a scenery-chewing performance—Robin Williams as The Riddler? Sigourney Weaver as Catwoman? Brando as The Penguin? If Burton's **BATMAN** sets the standard, your own contribution to the word of mouth had best be, "No, but I read the comic book." □

## BACK TO THE FUTURE 2

continued from page 18

further about the accident on instructions from her attorney. Besides, she said, "I liked working for Amblin and I don't want to cause them any trouble."

Amblin's publicity shyness about the incident may be due to the fact that Wheeler-Dixon's accident will be on full view when the film opens in November. According to a source on the production, Amblin didn't refilm the stunt and plans to use a master shot of Wheeler-Dixon crashing into the pillar and falling out of frame by cutting to shots of the other stunt performers crashing through the glass. Maybe they suspect that audiences might not enjoy the scene so much knowing that Wheeler-Dixon cracked her skull and eye socket like a neggand pulverized her cheek in the process.

After the incident, Kleven and Scott reportedly went on to work on **BACK TO THE FUTURE 3**, which was due to wrap on its Hill Valley as wild, wild west location in Sonora, California in November. An interesting item about the filming appeared in the October 3 issue of the *National Enquirer*. According to the tabloid, Fox, filming a scene in which he is about to be lynched by a gang headed by Biff Tannen's ancestor was almost hanged for real when his stunt harness broke and the crew member holding the rope around his neck couldn't see him thrashing because he had to be out of camera range.

Filmmaking sure can be a risky business, especially, it seems, if you work for Amblin. □

## LEATHERFACE

continued from page 15

LEATHERFACE returns to the isolated, rural setting of the first film, and surrounded its title character with a new, bizarre family, including a mother, daughter, and two older brothers (one of whose names was shortened to "Tink" from Tinkerbelle, to avoid the possibility of any Disney lawsuit). The new film also attempts to recreate the limited time frame and relentless pacing of the original. "It's sort of a semi-satire on family life," said Burr. "We're trying to expand on that a little bit and still make it my own movie, which is very difficult, because this is number three. But in a way, everyone almost admits number two was from another planet. That's why I tried to get Gunnar Hansen back—that didn't work out, but I wish it had, because then it would make [this one] the *real* sequel."

Though Burr and New Line decided to soft-peddle the blood and gore this time, Burr assures that there's still more than enough for the blood-thirsty. "I think we've done a few things nobody's seen before," he said. "There will be a couple of scenes where people go 'My God, did they really do that?,' but I don't think we've pushed beyond the R. Thematically, we have. If censors thought with their brains instead of their eyes, I think we might get an X. It's nowhere near the second one [in gore], but I think this film will be more unsettling by far."

In late August the film wrapped six weeks of shooting nights on location in the deserted hills behind the Magic Mountain amusement park in Valencia. The short summer nights contributed to the already hectic schedule, followed by a brief three weeks for editing, in order to meet the film's November 3rd release date. Unlike Stephen Hopkins, who underwent similar hardships on *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET V: THE DREAM CHILD*, Burr took little solace in the fact that at least he knows his film will get a major release. "It's comforting in a way, but it's still nuts," he said. "The irony is . . . the film I'm probably least proud of, just because I didn't have time, is the film that most people will see."

Burr suspects that New Line Cinema will invest heavily in an attempt to market the Leatherface character into a new horror franchise. "By rights, Leatherface is dead in this one, but we all know the ultimate god is the boxoffice," said Burr. "If the distributor deems they can make money, they'll bring him back no matter how ludicrous." Burr should

know, having revived the titular psycho killer in *STEPFATHER II*.

New Line denied any conscious attempt at perpetuating a series. "We never think about those things deliberately," said DeLuca. "If the film is a success, I think we can come up with another film as good or better. But since these films don't play off an anti-hero or a comedic edge, I don't think they're going to be like the fun-filled roller coaster that the *NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* films have become." □

## CRYPT-KEEPER

continued from page 25

Loney, Tony Rupprecht, Van Snowden, Michael Trcic, and Brock Winkless. Three of these worked the electronically-controlled face while the others worked the body. Most of the facial expressions were directed via radio control: one puppeteer worked the eyes while another had the head mechanism hooked up to his jaw so that when he opened his the Crypt-Keeper would correspond with his own.

The puppet's bodily movements were managed with muppet-type rods. Yagher maintained that this provided the puppet with a versatility he didn't believe was possible with cable-control. In some instances, such as during the Santa Claus bumper, however, a midget was used for the closeup. Yagher wasn't thrilled about having to do that, but the money wasn't there to provide him with a choice.

For the Crypt-Keeper's voice, Yagher wanted something distinctly witch-like. He had seven people read for the part, one of whom was Charles Fleischer, the voice of Roger Rabbit. "The trouble was we were only paying scale-plus-10, and I just couldn't cut a deal with him." Yagher also heard readings from Michael Winslow, the sound wizard who has appeared in the *POLICE ACADEMY* movies, and by Rick Overton, from the film *WILLOW*. In the

end, however, Yagher cast John Cascer for the part.

Yagher recalled that Bob Zemeckis had designed the first bumper, and was slated to direct it—Yagher would then take over direction for the rest. The original shot Zemeckis planned had the camera panning around the Crypt-Keeper's sanctum, which was quite an elaborate set. The camera would then creep up to the coffin, which would slowly open but reveal itself to be bare. The Crypt-Keeper would then pop up from elsewhere. The next shot was to show him sitting with his legs crossed, and there would be holes in his pants with rotting flesh and bone poking through.

But Zemeckis found himself forced to high-tail it back to the *BACK TO THE FUTURE II* shoot a tad prematurely, and Yagher was put in charge of the filming. "I have to admit that I was a little spooked when I started," he said. But Yagher overcame his initial stage fright within moments and delivered his scenes as planned.

Yagher is only partially happy with the results—if the series gets picked up, he has plans to soup up his Crypt-Keeper, to "make him more like Chucky in the wider shots." Yagher would like to cover him in slime in one episode, or have him pop up in a tank of water in another. The permutations, he assured me, remain legion. □

## THE HORROR SHOW

continued from page 53

After *GREMLINS*, Isaac worked on *ENEMY MINE*, *ROMANCING THE STONE*, and *THE FLY*. When Wiley got the job to direct *HOUSE II*, after supervising the effects for *HOUSE*, he asked Isaac to be his effects supervisor, and introduced him to Cunningham.

Isaac recalled that the mood on the set of *THE HORROR SHOW* was tense as he took charge of the directing. The cast and crew, he felt, were unsure of him. "I felt especially bad for the actors," he

said. "They were trying very hard to make this movie more than just another slasher film. They also had some input in the script. Of course, I had been involved in the script before they started shooting. But, the actors didn't know that."

*THE HORROR SHOW* was shot non-union in seven weeks in Los Angeles on a budget of \$4 million. "I'd have to get in a certain amount of set-ups a day," said Isaac. "I'd average 25 to 30 set-ups." After shooting for a few weeks, Isaac was happy with the footage. "Sean was pleased too," said Isaac. "Yet, I knew when it came time to edit the film, we were going to have some problems. There had been some suggestion of electricity that would bring [killer] Max Jenke [Brion James] back to life. But since it was a rush job, there wasn't enough time to make it clear."

In the director's first cut, the film was pretty dark. Isaac took about 20 minutes out of the film that didn't work. "We were left with a film that had some major gaps in it," said Isaac. "Of course, Sean was well aware of the situation. I asked him if I could add some new scenes and have an extra week of shooting. Sean tried to get some money from UA. That didn't quite work out. He said we'd do it anyway."

Isaac spent about two weeks writing new scenes for the film. "We needed to see that Max Jenke is a wacky guy," said Isaac. "For example, the scene where Max appears in the turkey at the family dinner. Lucas [Lance Henriksen] picks up the carving knife and starts to stab the turkey. The family needed to see that Lucas was going off the deep end."

Greg Nicotero, Robert Kurzman, and Howard Berger supervised the special effects. Kurzman handled Max Jenke's electrocution make-up. They used a dummy head that split open for the scene. The effects were designed to make Max unique. "He's not Freddy and he's not Jason," said Isaac. "His facial burns are unlike Freddy's hideous scars. When Max is electrocuted, he's fried to a crisp. There's smoke and sparks all over the place."

The MPAA demanded cuts if they were to give the picture its coveted R rating. "I didn't want to play games with them," said Isaac. "We didn't have the time. In Jenke's execution scene, there's an over-the-top quality to it. But cutting it too short, it almost made the scene too violent. In the original cut, it was a lot longer. It was wild. It was more of a show. That's really what *THE HORROR SHOW* is all about. It's simply 'The Max Jenke Show.'" □

Crypt-Keeper designer Kevin Yagher's effects crew puppeteers the Crypt-Keeper on set, Tony Rupprecht (left), Van Snowden (hands-on) and Charles Lutkus III (above).



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## EARTH GIRLS DEVELOPMENT HELL

continued from page 49

how it should have been—at least since she herself couldn't have helmed the picture.

Brown was also gratified that many of the favorable reviews garnered by **EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY** pointed to her performance as the film's standout. By the time a shooting script had been produced, she noted, she had become rather pleased with the part of Candy, and maintained no bitterness for being passed over either toward Davis or, for that matter, toward Warners.

On the other hand, Julie Brown has no intention of letting this kind of thing happen to her again. And if the only way to exercise control over one's artistic vision means becoming a director, then that, she said, is what she'll have to do.

"It's not that I ever had any great desire to direct," she explained. "It's that you create these things, they're so specific in your mind, and then you turn them over to someone else and realize that even if they do good things with them, it's not what you visualized.

"Making a movie is hard. I've finally accepted that. You have to compromise and fight. There are just so many factors affecting your success and failure that are out of your control that it's a miracle anyone can do a well-received movie. I have a lot of respect for people who pull off a good movie and survive the business bullshit and the insanity. It's an amazing feat. I may hate it, but I would like to try it.

"What I've learned, though, is that a movie is not worth wrecking your life over. I let one ruin my life, and that was wrong."

For now, Brown is primarily involved in her frenetically scatterbrained MTV weekly show, **JUST**

**SAY JULIE.** Soon, however, she hopes to direct short films for cable, perhaps even music videos, and from there, who knows? For that day, Brown and her partners are writing another fantasy, **TOTALLY WITCHIN'**, and it is, she said, far darker than anything she has done to date.

"I am just so bored with things being so fucking cute I'm even thinking of leaving the Valley." □

## THE ABYSS

continued from page 34

she has to move from career woman juggernaut to wifely submission, to get in touch with her feminine side, to show emotion, to cry, to accept the appellation "Mrs. Brigman." Mastrantonio just doesn't deliver the powerhouse performance the film demands. Not that she gets much assistance from the script, which requires her to confess her feelings for hubble via microphone. As he makes his *abyssmal* descent, she makes hers.

With the sole exception of a white rat, the supporting players are blank screens. Compared to the vividly drawn ensemble in **ALIENS**—Jenette Goldstein's Latino bodybuilder Valdez, Bill Paxton's panicky grunt dude, and Lance Henriksen's calmly efficient android—this crew leaves not so much as a vapor trail. The one character actor who scores is the topside naval officer played by Chris Elliot, the weird regular on **LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN**. At a packed preview screening, he got an immediate hoot of recognition—an interruption that served as an unintentional distancing device at the very point the film should be immersing the audience into its alternate reality.

An extended family reunion (husband and wife), **THE ABYSS** is the flip side of **ALIENS** (mother and child), with the monster queen of the latter becoming a nurturing sea mother in the former. In **ALIENS**, the good mother Ripley defeats the bad mother Alien. Likewise, in **THE ABYSS**, the hard-edged female protagonist softens and accepts maternity, but here the aliens are kindred spirits. Looking something like luminous fetal jellyfish, the watery creatures are alternately squishy maternal and childishly playful. In the gorgeous special effects showcase, a long uterine waterspout assumes the face of first Lindsey (Mom) and then Bud (Dad). "He looks like me," gushes Bud with paternal pride.

Undertaking really intense primal therapy, Bud re-enacts his own birth trauma in the schematic return-to-the-womb sequence that concludes the film. Breathing oxygen in liquid form ("We all breathe liquid for nine months," he's told, "Your body will remember.") he freefalls down, down, down into the abyss. The closure recalls the Jupiter and Beyond section of 2001 (the reflections on his face mask, the lit chamber, the space suit). As in Kubrick's odyssey, the voyager father is reborn—and so, implies the finale, is all mankind.

E.T. in a fish tank? Not quite—though 30 minutes too long and too leisurely by half, this is a mature work about adult humans, splendid to behold, and crafted with precision. Even out of his native waters, James Cameron jumps in with both feet and stays afloat. It's a daring plunge and if he doesn't make the Olympic grade of the last two outings, he makes the qualifying heats. □

## CRYPT SERIES

continued from page 29

bont has scripted "The Ventriloquist's Dummy," and Joe (**AFTER HOURS**, **VAMPIRE'S KISS**) Minion, who turned in a teleplay on "Loved to Death," based on Jack Kamen's August 1951 strip from *Tales from the Crypt* #25, about a man who employs a love potion with unexpected results. Scott Alexander has adapted "The Trap," and Kevin Yagher is now negotiating to direct an episode in addition to keeping his responsibilities as the *Crypt-Keeper's* puppet master.

Budgets for each of the episodes should remain in the half-million dollar range, depending, said Teitler, on the actual demands of each script. "We don't call anyone a second-stringer, and we have never budgeted these things based upon the quality of the director," he said. "Our decisions are based entirely on the physical requirements of each episode."

Teitler does anticipate investing more money in improving the mechanics of Yagher's creepmeister *Crypt-Keeper*, but does not share Yagher's desire to stage more elaborate *Crypt-Keeper* scenes. "Our feeling was that the most successful segments were the simple ones, that the character and the dialogue are more important. If anything, I'd be inclined to simplify the shooting," he said.

Apart from maintaining an overall fidelity to the original material (he intends to continue consulting with Bill Gaines in New York), Teitler refused to adopt any hard and fast house rules for the series. I have no favorite episodes," he said somewhat diplomatically. "The thing I like best about them is that they are all so different from each other." □

# LETTERS

## BIFF! BOP! OW!

Despite Alan Jones' prurient interest in the "rather large cod-piece" incorporated into Batman's costume, and Tim Burton's pop-psychological defense of it [BATMAN, 20:1/2:48], there is a much more convincing (and prosaic) explanation. Any vigilante-by-night who expects to tangle single-handedly, unarmed, with gangs of desperadoes might sensibly include a robust protective groin cup in his suit of body armor. I know I would, and appearances be damned.

Michael J. Dunn  
Auburn, WA 98001

## BILL & TED'S CHRIS & ED

In his review of BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE [20:1/2:106], methinks Thomas Doherty doth take the auteur

theory to a most egregiously extreme.

While I heartily agree with Doherty's very positive appraisal of this delightful fantasy—and with all due respect to Stephen Herek, its talented director—I find it passing strange that no mention whatsoever is made of the movie's creators and writers in the body of the review.

Although Doherty claims that Herek "has come up with an innovative sci-fi hybrid," it was writers Chris Matheson and Ed Solomon who invented the dynamic duo (five years ago, no less!) and all those smart and funny lines of dialogue so enthusiastically quoted by your critic.

And although the cliché may be painful by now—especially where screenwriters are concerned—let's give credit where credit is due, dudes. It's not only "Herek's film" that is "Most triumphant," but

Matheson and Solomon's as well!

Michael Singer  
Los Angeles, CA 90046

## WHY NOT KILL 'EM BOTH?

In his review of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION [20:1/2:102], Peter S. Perakos seems to be a member of the "Kill Crusher" Crusade. Gee, here is an intelligent teenaged character who doesn't, for once, look like a nerd, and everyone dumps all over him, while the nation embraces quasimoron like Mike Scaver (Kirk Cameron) of GROWING PAINS. Ain't America beautiful?

Willie Holmes  
Chicago, IL 60617

## MAYBE HE'LL GROW OUT OF IT?

Now that racism and sexism are no

longer acceptable, would-be wits such as Peter Perakos have to resort to age-ism. First he calls Patrick Stewart "decrepit," and then he goes on for pages about how much he loathes Wil Wheaton, though the only fault he ascribes to the actor is his youth.

Do I recall any good guest actors on STAR TREK—THE NEXT GENERATION? Lots of them. Particularly outstanding were the actor who played the dying genius who transfers his mind to Data's body; the mute negotiator—and his chorus, the Klingon captain and first officer—in "A Matter of Honor;" the advocate and the computer scientist in "The Measure of a Man," among others.

Your reviewer indulges in overkill, and does not even mention the outstanding scripts by Melinda Snodgrass and others. Like the

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first STAR TREK, the new STAR TREK has had its share of bad episodes—though even the worst. “The Outrageous Okona” and “Shades of Gray,” were not as bad as the old STAR TREK’s first season howler “The Alternate Factor.” The best, “A Matter of Honor,” “Q-Who,” and “The Measure of a Man” were on a par with “City on the Edge of Forever” and “Mirror, Mirror,” only with better special effects.

Rick Norwood  
Mountain Home, TN 37684

## HBO'S INITIAL, UNSUNG CRYPT ADAPTATIONS

After your article on HBO'S TALES FROM THE CRYPT [19:5:15], you might be interested to know that this was not the first time HBO adapted EC comic book stories. Back in 1983, the first three episodes of THE HITCHHIKER were based, without credit, on three EC stories. “Shattered Vows” was based on “Busted Marriage” from *Tales from the Crypt* #35. “When Morning Comes” was based on *Shock Suspenstories* #9's “Came the Dawn.” The third HITCHHIKER story “Split Decision” was based on “Split Personality,” from *Vault of Horror* #30. The similarity goes as far as the same names in some cases and the same plot in all. After the first three episodes aired there was a lapse of time before the next, and no more similarity to EC stories.

Bill Hansen  
Youngstown, OH 44507

[According to the *Crypt-Keeper* himself, EC publisher William Gaines, HBO's use of the material was authorized, but Gaines insisted on removing EC's credit because he didn't like the HBO adaptations.]

## SEEN ONE, YOU'VE SEEN THEM ALL

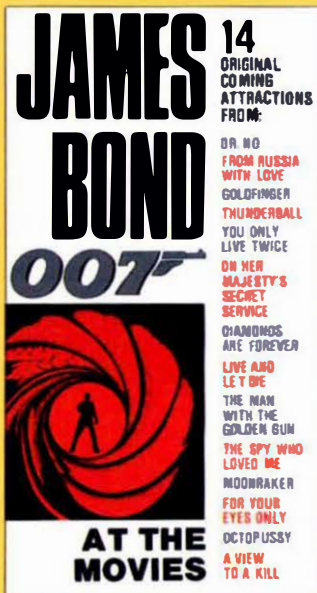
Having labored long in the snake, alligator, mosquito, fly, and wild boar-infested marshes along the coast of my native South Carolina on the 1982 feature SWAMP THING, imagine my surprise when Dan Scapperotti's article informed me the film had really been made in Florida [SWAMP THING 2, 19:3:20].

James Scott  
Columbia, SC

[Scapperotti, and anyone who has read our own production article on the making of SWAMP THING (12:2/3:74) knows it was filmed in South Carolina. The reference to Florida was an editorial indiscretion. We should have looked it up!]

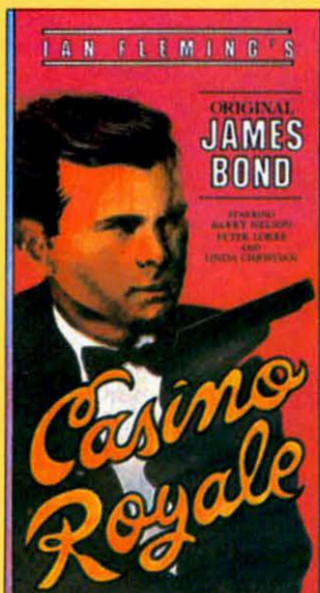
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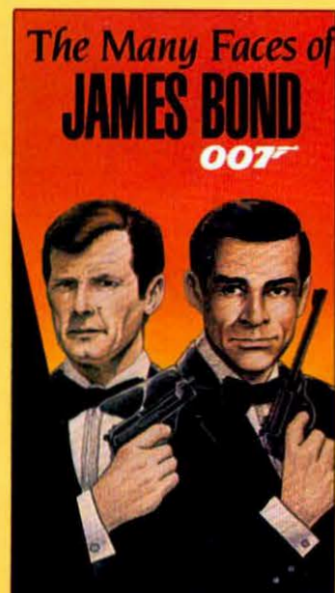
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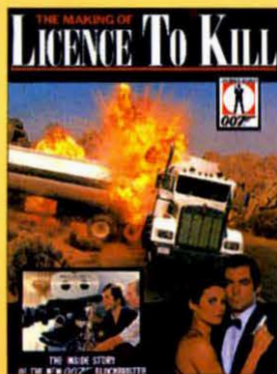
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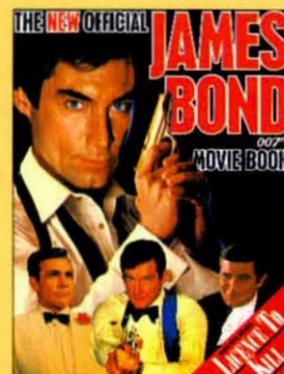
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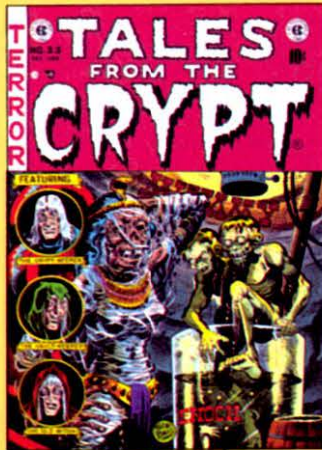
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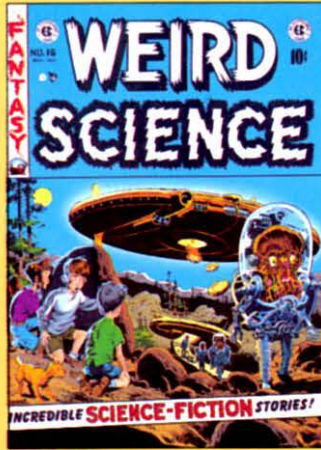
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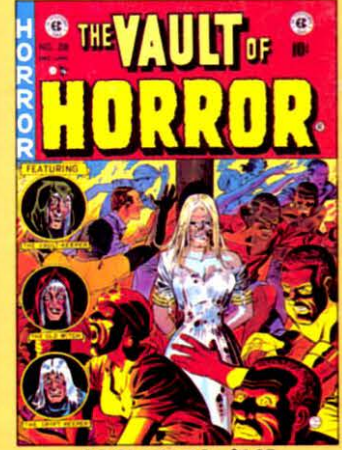
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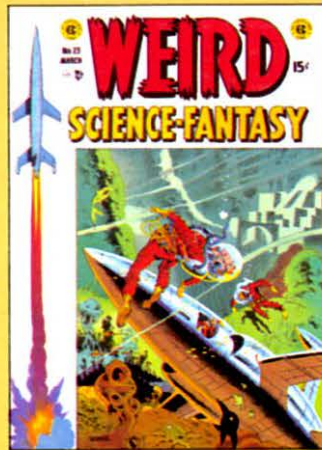
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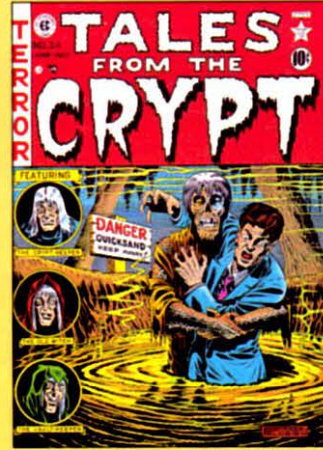
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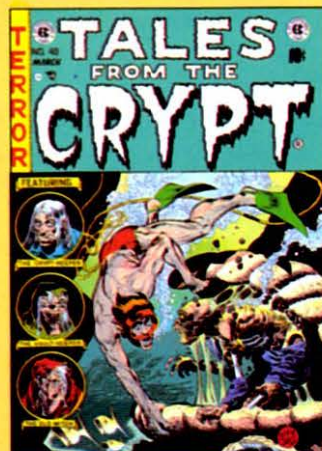
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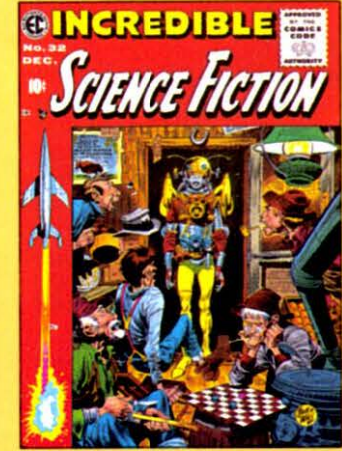
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