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HULKING OUT (June 9)
Green to comic book movies. French filmmaker Louis Leterrier savors his Incredible opportunity.
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Conventions, film

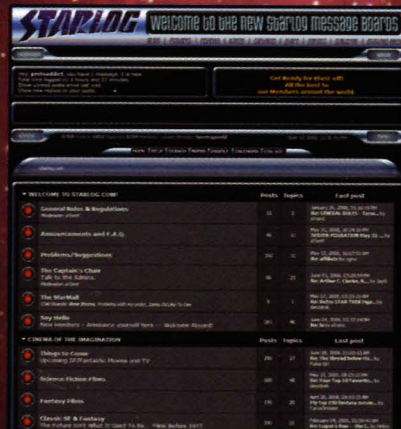
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Clap for *Coraline* alongside the Other Father, director Henry Selick (page 28) and star Dakota Fanning (page 24).

STARLOG

- 16 SINS OF THE SON**
Joshua Jackson knows not what he has done
- 20 THE PUSH TO DIRECT**
Paul McGuigan deals with psychic youth
- 24 DAKOTA FANNING SPEAKS...**
And she has *two* genre films to talk about!
- 28 CRAFTING CORALINE**
Henry Selick fashions a film from the novel
- 32 NEW MAN ON WITCH MOUNTAIN**
Dwayne Johnson returns for fantasy action
- 51 MONSTERS VS. ALIENS!**
Can Earth's unwanted save us from 3-D doom?
- 56 THE ANIMATED AMAZON**
Wonder Woman battles on in a new DVD war
- 60 HULK'S ALL-STAR, DOUBLE BRAWL**
He fights Wolverine & the Mighty Thor, too

- 64 BUNNY TOSSING & OTHER EVENTS**
Open Season 2 promises more toonish antics
- 69 IN BRENDAN FRASER'S VIEW**
It almost always involves greenscreen
- 75 LIFE IN THE ELEVENTH HOUR**
Rufus Sewell looks to science for answers
- 78 STRANGE ADVENTURES IN TIME & COMICS**
Murphy Anderson drew them & *Buck Rogers*

WATCHMEN TALES #2



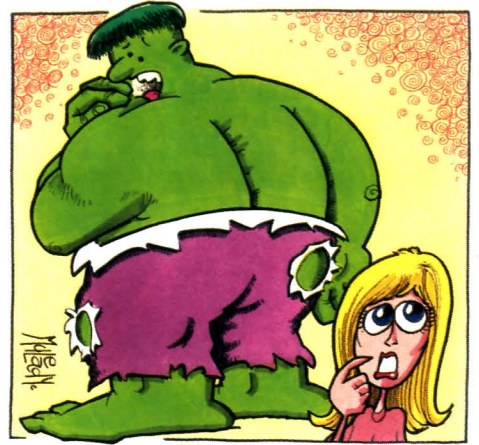
- 36 A SILKEN LEGACY**
Carla Gugino explains her heroic past & present
- 39 KISS OF THE SILK SPECTRE**
Malin Akerman just loves the family business
- 42 LOOK ON MY WORKS, YE MIGHTY...**
Designer Alex McDowell envisions the world
- 46 THE ABYSS GAZES ALSO**
Director Zack Snyder makes it all a reality



"P" FOR PANDETTA

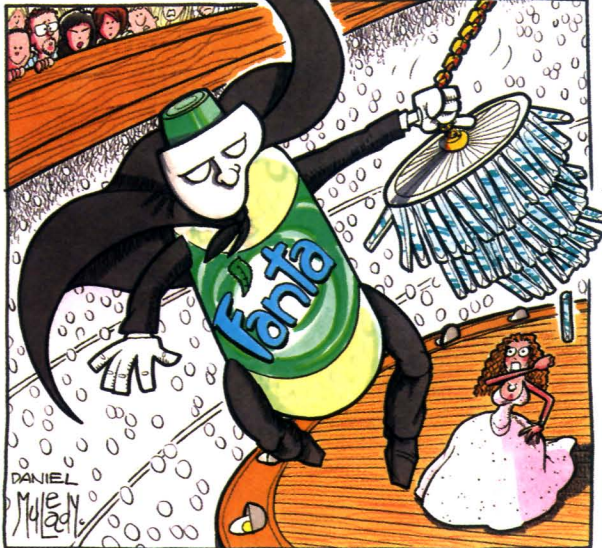
BOB TOONS

All Art: Bob Muleady



"DO THESE PANTS MAKE HULK'S BUTT LOOK BIG?"

Gag: Daniel Muleady

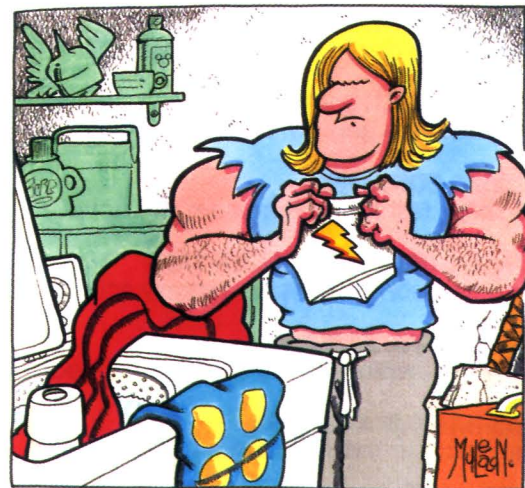
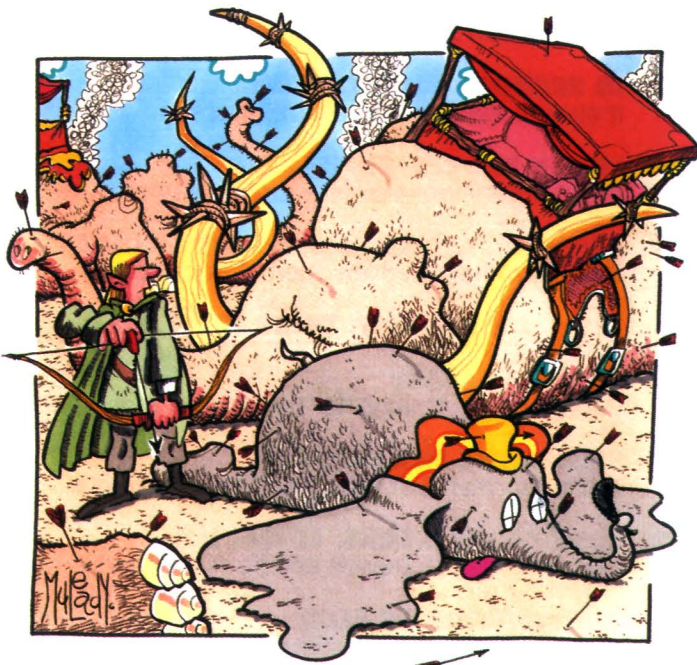


FANTA OF THE OPERA



Gosh, Mr. Iron Man. All of our compasses point to you!

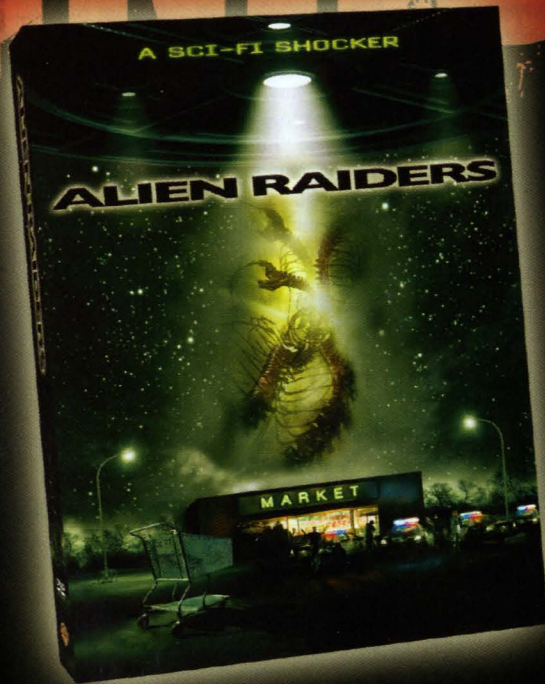
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LOGLINES

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

B.O.B.: "What do people scream whenever they see you coming?"

Susan: "Susan!"

—*Monsters vs. Aliens*

STUPID DECISION OF THE MONTH

Disney. For saying farewell to *The Chronicles of Narnia*. With what fantasy film saga is the Mouse House going to replace *Narnia*?

WHERE TO BE...

...February 6. In a theater to see *Coraline*. We saw the whole film already—it's haunting, charming and simply terrific.

...March 6. In a multiplex, if it's released as scheduled, to watch the year's most eagerly awaited genre movie, *Watchmen*. We've already seen 25 minutes of it, and they were mesmerizing.

...And March 27. Wearing your 3-D glasses in another theater to experience *Monsters vs. Aliens*. We've seen 25 minutes of it, too—and we loved those sequences. That's why it's on this issue's cover.

CORRECTIONS!

We discovered for ourselves (because nobody wanted to tell us?) that we inadvertently misidentified a *Torchwood* guest star. *Twice!* That isn't *Doctor Who*'s Freema Agyeman pictured in two different stories (#366, page 70; #369, page 79), but Nikki Amuka-Bird. Both actresses can be seen in the new *Survivors* (previewed in #373). STARLOG regrets the errors.

Legendary comic book writer-editor Roy Thomas, a noted comics historian who edits *Alter Ego* (the wonderful magazine chronicling the field's past) and has contributed to STARLOG, wrote in to clarify three points in Will Murray's interview with the late DC Comics editor Jack Schiff in #369.

Thomas notes: "(1) Black Bat could hardly have been an influence on Batman (unless there was 'industrial spying' going on), since both debuted at virtually the same time in

BOOK OF NOTE

We have to recommend *The Spirit: The Movie Visual Companion* by STARLOG pal Mark Cotta Vaz (Titan, hc, \$30). It's an insider's look at the making of the recent film, based on Will Eisner's fabled character, complete with an introduction by writer-director Frank Miller and lotsa production art and storyboards. But here's the real lowdown—it's *better* (we're sorry to say) than the movie.



1939." Murray replies: "I think there's some confusion here. The Bat was the character who influenced Batman. I'm pretty sure I was clear in the piece. However, a technical point: after the Black Bat began sporting fins on his gauntlets, Batman suddenly sprouted identical equipment. So there *was* an influence."

Thomas says: "(2) DC purchased the All-American line in full from M.C. Gaines in 1945, not 1946. The books that had been the AA line all started sporting DC logos again in issues that came out in fall 1945, after roughly eight months behind an AA symbol." Murray agrees: "I don't know where I looked that up, but apparently my source was in error."

Thomas reports: "(3) The team-up of Superman and Batman in *World's Finest* did occur in '54, of course, but *WF* was being cut not from '52 to 48' pages but from a larger size (I forget—either 64 or 72) to 32. Other DC comics at that time were cut from 52 to 32, except for a few interim issues of *Superman* and *Batman* that came in at 40." Murray states: "I stand corrected. But the few *Batmans* I own from that era were 40 pages. I got them back in the 1960s, so the page count really impressed me."

ARE YOU LISTENING?

We know that people are watching the Fox TV series *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, but if you're also a fan of the show's score, then you should take notice of the soundtrack from La-La Land Records. It not only features the original score by Bear (Battlestar Galactica) McCreary, but includes the track "Samson and Delilah," performed by Season Two star and Garbage lead singer Shirley Manson. For more info, see the website (www.lalalandrecords.com).

THE LAST FAREWELLS

The science fiction universe sadly salutes these fantastic talents who have died. It has

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been tough times indeed for people we loved.

Arthur A. Ross (November 2008) The "last man standing" from the behind-the-scenes credits of *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), which he co-wrote (and which his son Gary is currently planning to remake). Ross also penned the second Gill Man sequel *The Creature Walks Among Us*, Lou Costello's final film *The 30-Foot Bride of Candy Rock*, the Ray Harryhausen FX fest *The 3 Worlds of Gulliver* and the telemovie *Satan's School for Girls*. (STARLOG #250)

Donald E. Westlake (December) The prolific mystery writer of many pseudonyms who penned comedic heist novels under his own name (both *The Hot Rock* and *Bank Shot* were filmed) and as "Richard Stark" crafted the Parker mysteries (the first famously shot as *Point Blank*, later remade as *Payback*). Named a Grand Master of the Mystery Writers of America. He wrote some minor SF.

Beverly Garland (December) The feistiest female monster-fighter during the 1950s' Monster Boom, she "gave 'em what for" in such drive-in faves as *It Conquered the World* (vs. a teepee-shaped Venusian invader), *Not of This Earth* (a vampire from space) and *Curucu, Beast of the Amazon* (a feathered-and-taloned jungle beastie). Also found on her genre-heavy movie/TV résumé: *The Neanderthal Man*, *The Rocket Man*, *The Alligator People*, *Twice-Told Tales*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Thriller*, *The Wild Wild West*, TV's *Planet of the Apes* and *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (recurring as Teri Hatcher's mother). (FANGORIA #50)

Bettie Page (December) The quintessential, sometimes semi-clad pin-up model from the 1950s. Her life was chronicled in the film *The Notorious Bettie Page* (where she was portrayed by Gretchen Mol). She was an inspiration for Dave Stevens' *Rocketeer* comic

book leading lady (Jenny, Jennifer Connelly in the movie version).

Eartha Kitt (December) The sultry-voiced singer ("Santa Baby") and actress. Best known to us for playing a purr-fect Catwoman to Adam West's Batman and voicing the flamboyant villainess Yzma in Disney's *The Emperor's New Groove* and its TV spin-off prequel *The Emperor's New School* (winning two Daytime Emmys for the role).

Majel Barrett Roddenberry (December) "The First Lady of *Star Trek*." The much-loved actress and wife of *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry. She was Number One in the first *Trek* pilot, Nurse (later Dr.) Christine Chapel in the Classic and animated *Trek* series (and a few films) and the outrageous Auntie Mame of outer space, Lwaxana Troi (mother of Deanna), in *Next Generation* and *DS9*. She voiced the *Enterprise* computer (and other Federation computers) in all of the *Trek* TV series and at least six of the films (including the upcoming one). She was also seen in *Westworld* and her husband's TV movie/unsold pilots (*Genesis II*, *Planet Earth*, *The Questor Tapes*, *Spectre*) and heard as Anna Watson in the 1990s' *Spider-Man* toon. And she served as executive producer of *Earth: Final Conflict* (in which she played Julianna Belman, a recurring character) and *Andromeda*. A warm and wonderful presence at hundreds of *Star Trek* cons. (STARLOG #108, #116, #210)

James Cawthorn (December) The fan-turned-pro-artist-writer noted for his love of the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard and Michael Moorcock. He did the covers for several of Moorcock's paperbacks.

Edd Cartier (December) One of the all-time greatest pulp magazine illustrators. He was legendary for his work on John W. Campbell's seminal magazines *Unknown* (fantasy) and *Astounding Stories* (SF, later retitled *Analog*). He drew some 800 illustrations for *The Shadow* as well as numerous illos for other Street & Smith pulps (*Doc Savage*, *The Whisperer*, *Detective Story*). Later, he contributed his talents to Fantasy Press and Gnome Press. A hero in real life (like those whose adventures he envisioned), he served in WWII and was wounded at the Battle of the Bulge, earning a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. (STARLOG #252)

Forrest J Ackerman (December) The longtime Editor of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, the influential genre publication that helped to spur Steven Spielberg, Stephen King, Joe Dante, John Landis, Rick Baker and many other young readers on to careers in "imagi-movie" making. He was also credited with coining the term "sci-fi" to identify science fiction. As a fan in the 1930s, the multi-nicknamed "4SJ" was the first to dress up in costume (as Buck Rogers) at the initial World

SF Convention, beginning that fandom tradition. In the '40s and '50s, "4E" worked primarily as an agent (for Ray Bradbury, A.E. van Vogt and others) before Warren Publications introduced *Famous Monsters* in 1958. Then, "Forry" reigned as a sort of "pun-tastic" piper of SF/fantasy/horror fandom, also producing other short-lived titles (*Spacemen*, *Monster World*) and co-creating *Vampirella* for Warren. His home(s) in Hollywood (or as he called it, "Horrorwood, Karloffornia"), the "Ackermansion," became a shrine filled with movie props, memorabilia, stills, books and magazines—a massive collection which he always hoped would spawn a real museum (though it didn't).

In the 1970s, "the Ackermmonster" brought the German SF phenomenon *Perry Rhodan* to the USA as an ongoing paperback series for Ace (which he edited, the stories translated by his wife Wendayne). He exited *Famous Monsters* (where he worked with W.R. Mohalley, later of STARLOG) shortly before its 1983 demise, editing for a time a similar magazine (*Monsterland*, to which young Tony Timpone, later of FANGORIA, sold a few of his first stories) before returning to *FM* in the 1990s for yet another publisher (a stint that sadly ended in a fandom-dividing split and acrimonious lawsuits). He was interviewed in STARLOG (#13), contributed to it (#94) and was proud to be named one of STARLOG's 100 Most Important People in SF & Fantasy (#100). A beloved (if sometimes controversial) figure, "Uncle Forry" might be the first to admit that he never grew up. Without him, there would be no STARLOG or FANGORIA—and certainly fewer folks may have pursued their careers in imaginative arts.

FILM FANTASY CALENDAR

Release dates are extremely subject to change and may shift without notice.

February: *Coraline* (2/6), *Push* (2/6), *Fanboys* (2/6), *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun Li* (2/27).

March: *Watchmen* (3/6), *Race to Witch Mountain* (3/13), *Knowing* (3/20), *Monsters vs. Aliens* (3/27).

April: *Dragonball Evolution* (4/8).

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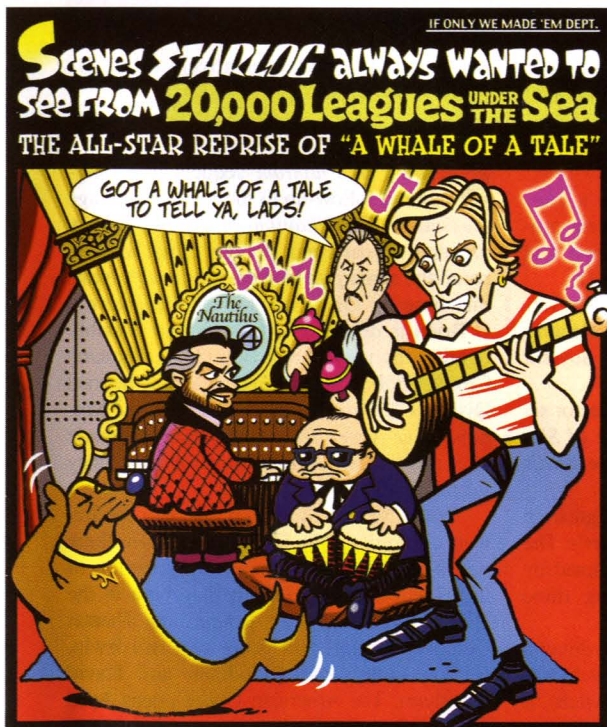
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UPDATES

This is unexpected. The judge in the 20th Century Fox-Warner Bros. lawsuit involving rights to distribute the upcoming *Watchmen* movie ruled, on Christmas Eve, in Fox's favor. What does this mean? Well, a trial may have started January 20 unless, as the judge suggested, the two studios reached a settlement before then. Warner Bros. has stated that the film will still be released March 6. Fox has countered that they want it delayed. At presstime (with this issue's 16-page *Watchmen Tales* #2 STARLOG Signature Section already at the printer), no agreement had been reached. Only time will tell what happens. Keep watching for *Watchmen*, but it would be wise to not hold your breath.

Whenever *Watchman* gets released, it's scheduled to be accompanied by a direct-to-DVD animated version of the pirate comic seen within the original graphic novel, *Tales of the Black Freighter* (tentatively due March 11). And Gerard Butler (the star of Zach Snyder's *300*) voices *Black Freighter*'s pirate protagonist.

Disney has, surprisingly, opted not to cofinance, co-produce and distribute the next *Chronicles of Narnia* film, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Why? Apparently, because although *Prince Caspian* made money, it didn't earn as much as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Walden Media, which still intends to make the movie, is shopping for a new distributor. And, ironically, that might end up being Fox (which severed its deal with Walden last year).

DreamWorks Animation's *Monsters vs. Aliens* characters will enliven the Super Bowl February 1 on NBC in two 3-D commercials (broadcast at the second quarter's end). First, they'll star in a movie trailer (3-D animated using Intel Corporation's processing technologies). Immediately following that ad, they'll guest in a SoBe Lifewater commercial alongside the SoBe Lizards and noted athletes in a dance interpretation of *Swan Lake*. Yes, *Swan Lake*. So that audiences can see them in all their 3-D glory, PepsiCo is distributing more than 125 million pairs of 3-D glasses free through SoBe displays in 25,000 supermarkets, drugstores and other venues. NBC will urge viewers to hold onto those glasses to watch the 3-D *Chuck* episode airing the very next night, February 2.

The Library of Congress has named three genre classics to its National Film Registry: *The Invisible Man* (1933), *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* and *Terminator*.

CHARACTER CASTINGS

Matt (*The History Boys*) Smith, as revealed by the BBC, will be the Eleventh Doctor. The young actor was also seen in *The Ruby in the Smoke* and *The Shadow in the North* TV movies. He'll debut in *Doctor Who* in 2010. First, though, David Tennant will appear in four more *Who* stories this year. Smith, by the way, triumphed in a field of Doctor candidates who reportedly included Paterson Joseph, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Bill Nighy and Catherine Zeta-Jones.



Terry Pratchett, the much-loved British author who created Discworld, has been knighted.

Jim Carrey narrates *Under the Sea*, an IMAX 3D celebration of marine life due out next month.

COMICS SCENE

Frank Miller may write and direct a new film version of the classic SF hero *Buck Rogers* (who originated as a comic strip before serial and TV series incarnations). It's for Odd Lot Entertainment (for whom Miller did *The Spirit*). However, since *The Spirit* wasn't a moneymaker, there may yet be no bucks, no *Buck Rogers*.

Stephen Chow won't direct the film version of *The Green Hornet* after all. He'll still play Kato in the movie, though.

Jimmy (*Horton Hears a Who!*) Hayward will make his live-action debut directing Josh

(1944), *Burn, Witch, Burn!* (1962) and *Witches' Brew* (1980).

GENRE TV

ABC is doing a pilot based on Bill Willingham's DC/Vertigo comic *Fables*. Stu Zicherman and Raven Metzner are scripting. David Semel will direct the pilot.

Showtime is considering a new SF series *Syns* (short for synthetic organisms). John (*Jericho*) McNamara and Sera (*Supernatural*) Gamble are developing the project.

PREQUELS/SEQUELS

Chris (*The Golden Compass*) Weitz got the nod. He'll replace Catherine Hardwicke in the director's seat for the next *Twilight* flick, *New Moon*.

Yes, Virginia, there will be another *Madagascar* movie. It's targeted for 2012.

McG is putting the finishing touches on *Terminator Salvation* (due out May 22). Should it come as a surprise that he just signed up to do another *Terminator* sequel?

That long-planned *TRON* sequel, now to be helmed by Joseph Kosinski, will star Olivia Wilde, Beau Garrett and the original's Jeff Bridges. *TR2N* (as it's provisionally known) is targeting a 2011 release.

A sequel to 1996's *The Phantom* is being mulled. Actually, it's really a new version



HEARTS AT WAR

It's the battle of the sexes when morning show producer Abby Richter (*Roswell's* Katherine Heigl) is teamed up with Mike Chadway (*300's* Gerard Butler), a hardcore TV personality who promises to spill *The Ugly Truth* as to what makes men and women tick. The romantic comedy unspools April 3.

Brolin as *Jonah Hex*. He replaces previous directors Mark Neveldine & Brian Taylor of *Crank* fame, who scripted.

THE REMAKE GAME

They're remaking John Carpenter's *They Live*. But why? Strike Entertainment produces for Universal release (the two last teamed on the *Dawn of the Dead* redux).

Daniel McDermott is scripting a new version of *Romancing the Stone* for 20th Century Fox. McDermott is also writing a *Soylent Green* remake for Warner Bros.

Adam Shankman is the newest director set to captain Sony's *The Eighth Voyage of Sinbad*. He's also going to do a *Bye Bye Birdie* remake.

Stephen (*Blade*) Norrington has signed up to do another take on James O'Barr's *The Crow* (which, fans will recall, was filmed by *Dark City*'s Alex Proyas, spawning three sequels and a TV series spin-off).

Billy (*Breach*) Ray will adapt and direct a new version of Fritz Leiber's 1943 novel *Conjure Wife* (about a man who weds a witch). It was previously filmed as *Weird Woman*

(with no cast repeats) tentatively titled *The Ghost Who Walks*.

BROADWAY RHYTHM

Speaking of *Phantom* sequels, the long-rumored follow-up to the worldwide stage musical hit *The Phantom of the Opera* may premiere at year's end. Andrew Lloyd Webber, naturally, again provides the music with lyrics this time by Glen Slater. Jack (*Hairspray*) O'Brien is directing with sets (and possibly lighting) by triple threat Bob (*Mary Poppins*) Crowley (who's also a director, having helmed Disney's *Tarzan* Broadway musical). *Phantom: Love Never Dies* takes place a decade after the earlier musical and is set in—Coney Island. Really.

While Sir Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart are *Waiting for Godot* in London, there will be another, simultaneous production of the classic Samuel Beckett play here in the U.S. on Broadway. This Roundabout Theater Company *Godot* stars genre vets Bill Irwin, Nathan Lane, John Goodman and David Straithairn. The American *Godot* opens April 30. Wait for either!



Salute! *American Dad* will be back in service for a fifth season—all the better to protect Fox from fifth columnists.

AMERICAN DAD

Airs Sundays on Fox. The network has renewed it for a fifth season (to debut this fall).

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

New episodes of its fourth (and final) 22-episode season air Fridays on SCI FI. A two-hour standalone prequel TV movie (*Battlestar Galactica: The Plan*) will later follow the series' end.

THE CASTLE

New borderline genre show stars *Firefly*'s Nathan Fillion as a mystery novelist whose fictional murders are emulated by a real-life killer. The writer teams with a NYPD detective (*The Spirit*'s Stana Katic) to solve them. Aired Mondays, 10 p.m. on ABC. Debuts 3/2.

CHUCK

Airs Mondays on NBC. Ratings continue to be disappointing. Returns 2/2 with a special 3-D episode.

THE CLEVELAND SHOW

New animated series, a *Family Guy* spin-off, has been delayed to premiere this fall (instead of mid-season). Fox has also ordered nine more episodes.

CUPID

New revival of the short-lived 1990s fantasy-flavored series debuts 3/24, airing Tuesdays, 10 p.m. on ABC. The network has slashed the episode order from 13 shows to nine.

DOLLHOUSE

Fox has ordered seven episodes of the new Joss Whedon-created show starring Eliza Dushku. Premieres 2/13, airing Fridays, 9 p.m.

ELEVENTH HOUR

Airs Thursdays on CBS. Renewed for five more episodes. Rufus Sewell debriefs on page 75.

FRINGE

Airs Tuesdays on Fox. New episodes return 1/20. It's a hit. Renewed for the rest of the season. Joshua Jackson chats on page 16.

GHOST WHISPERER

Airs Fridays on CBS. Ratings are great. Look for a Jennifer Love Hewitt interview next issue.

HEROES

Airs Mondays on NBC. Ratings continue to decline. Returns 2/2 with the first episode of the "Fugitives" chapter. With *Pushing Daisies* over, Bryan Fuller has rejoined *Heroes* as a script consultant.

KING OF THE HILL

Airs Sundays on Fox. The network has decided not to renew it after the current 13-episode season. ABC may pick up the show. No decision yet.

KINGS

New fantasy-flavored mini-series debuts 3/19 on NBC, airing Thursdays, 10 p.m. Ian McShane, Susanna Thompson & Chris Egan star. It's a modern retelling of the David & Goliath stories.

KNIGHT RIDER

New series revival airs Wednesdays on NBC.

The network has slashed the episode order from 22 shows to 17. Virtually certain to be cancelled.

KYLE XY

Third season now airs Mondays, 9 p.m. on ABC Family.

LIFE ON MARS

Airs Wednesdays, 10 p.m. (new time slot as of 1/28) on ABC.

LOST

The series returned to ABC with new episodes 1/21. It'll regularly air Wednesdays, 9 p.m.

MEDIUM

Returns to NBC 2/2, airing in its old time slot (Mondays, 10 p.m.)

MERLIN

New 13-episode series to debut on NBC mid-season. Stars Colin Morgan as young Merlin, Bradley James as Prince Arthur, John Hurt and Anthony Head. Internationally made, the series has already aired to good reviews and ratings overseas. It did so well that a sec-

ond season has *already* been commissioned (and *if* it's a hit here, NBC would presumably also air the second year's shows).

PUSHING DAISIES

Effectively (though *not* officially) cancelled by ABC. A couple of unaired episodes may be broadcast this summer. Otherwise, it's over. Nothing to see here. Move along.

REAPER

Renewed for a second 13-episode season by the CW, debuting 3/17 and airing in its old time slot (Tuesdays, 9 p.m.).

SANCTUARY

Airs Fridays, 10 p.m. on SCI FI. Renewed for a 13-episode second season.

SCARE TACTICS

Renewed by SCI FI for nine more episodes.

SMALLVILLE

Airs Thursdays on the CW. It's still too early to tell if this is its last season.

STARGATE ATLANTIS

Last new (and 100th) episode aired in January. Show's over. A direct-to-DVD movie and spin-off TV series follow.

STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS

New CG-animated series airs Fridays on Cartoon Network. Ratings are great.

SUPERNATURAL

Airs Thursdays on the CW. Ratings are good. Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles chat about their new *Friday the 13th* and *My Bloody Valentine 3D* movies in FANGORIA #280 (now on sale).

SURVIVORS

Aired on BBC One in the UK in November and December. No exact premiere date for the U.S. yet.

TERMINATOR: THE SARAH CONNOR CHRONICLES

Airs Mondays now on Fox. As of 2/3, it moves to Fridays, 8 p.m. Despite disappointing ratings, it has been renewed for the rest of the season, but remains in danger of cancellation.

TRUE BLOOD

HBO series renewed for a second, 12-episode season that begins shooting this month for summer 2009 airing. Anna Camp is joining the cast as Sarah. *The Bold & the Beautiful*'s Ashley Jones will guest for a six-episode arc.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

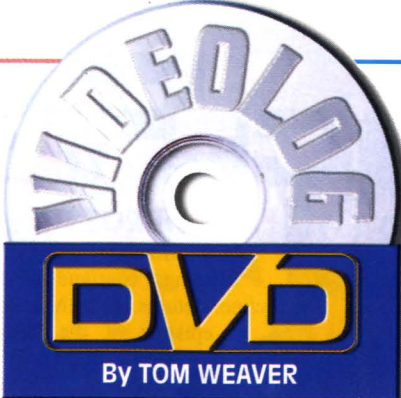
Hats off to the dedicated monster fighters who keep our planet safe, whether it be the high school student battling the evil Chiropterans (ravenous shapeshifting creatures) in Sony Pictures' Japanned *Blood+: Volume Four* (\$24.96); the band of renegade fighters confronting extraterrestrials in human form in *Alien Raiders* (Warner Home Video, \$24.98); a one-time prisoner (James Vallo) of alien terrorists in Ariztical's comedy *Spaced Out* (\$29.95); or Steven Seagal as an ex-military vigilante (stretch—not!) in his first horror flick, *Against the Dark* (Sony, \$24.96). According to that movie's press release, our only hope in a world decimated by vampires is the "venerated" (sacred) action hero Seagal. I Am Legend...in my own mind!

A group of U.S. soldiers in the Middle East learns the hard way that spirits take no prisoners when they use an ancient stone statue for target practice and unleash a deadly supernatural force in the psychological horror film *Red Sands* (Sony, \$24.96). Made in Morocco and Afghanistan, it comes with director and writer commentary, a "Making of" and deleted scenes. It's Vengeful Spirit Part Deux when B-movie horror icon Bruce Campbell parodies himself in the comedy *My Name is Bruce* (Image Entertainment, \$27.98), playing a hard-drinking, minimally talented actor asked to rescue teenage fans from a murderous demon—but who thinks the whole scenario is a publicity prank. The bonus materials include the "Making of" appropriately entitled "Heart of Dorkness" and commentary by director-star Campbell.

Call him Action Jackson: Samuel L. Jackson is back on the warpath (well, his voice is, anyway) in the anime movie *Afro Samurai: Resurrection* (Funimation, \$29.98), with Lucy Liu and Mark Hamill. It's also available in a five-bucks-more *Director's Cut*.

What happens when saving the folks around you becomes impossible because time has run out? Find out in the aptly named *When Time Ran Out...* (Warner, \$19.98) starring William Holden as the owner of a luxury hotel built next to a dormant volcano. Dormant? Not in a movie from Master of Disaster Irwin Allen! The 1980 feature's star-studded cast also includes Paul Newman, Burgess Meredith, Ernest Borgnine, Jacqueline Bisset, James Franciscus and Sheila Mathews Allen (Irwin's better half). Written, produced and directed by radio's legendary Arch Oboler, the 1951 "After the Bomb" film *Five* stars William Phipps as one of a quintet of survivors who find one another and congregate in a small house in the California wilderness to ponder why they've been spared (and, of course, to bicker bicker bicker). How's this for marketing? Sony is calling this look-ahead to a gloomy post-apocalyptic world a "Martini Movie" and releasing it alongside others such as the Cyndi Lauper-Jeff Goldblum *Vibes* and the Albert Finney crime comedy *Gumshoe! Five* is \$19.94; stirrers not included.

Noah Wyle saves the world yet again in director Jonathan Frakes' *The Librarian: The Curse of the Judas Chalice* (Sony, \$24.96). This third installment in the popular TV movie series co-stars Bob Newhart, Jane Curtin and Bruce Davison, and its twisty plot eventually leads to a decaying New Orleans crypt that may hold Count Vlad Dracula. The special features department delivers a behind-the-scenes featurette, visual FX deconstruction sequences and deleted scenes.



My Name is Bruce! STARLOG favorite Campbell kicks up the action and shoelaces the whimsy on DVD.

WONDER MEN (AND WOMAN)

Prepare for the clash of Marvel's mightiest heroes as Bruce Banner's alter-ego the Hulk takes on fan favorites Wolverine and Thor in the new animated films *Hulk vs. Wolverine* and *Hulk vs. Thor*. These two epic showdowns have been merged into one Lionsgate DVD release (simply titled *Hulk vs.*), complete with commentaries and multiple featurettes. The standard DVD is \$19.98, the *Special Edition* \$24.98.

The fourth DC Universe Animated Original Movie made for DVD, *Wonder Woman* chronicles the proud Amazon from her days as a princess on the mystical island of Themyscira to her relocation to civilization alongside Steve Trevor, the military fighter pilot who crashlands on the island, to her battles with Ares, the God of War, who plots a worldwide conflict. Warner is making it available in a special edition two-disc version (\$29.98) as well as a single disc (\$19.98). Director Lauren Montgomery discusses it all this issue on page 56.

Supernatural. Superhuman. *Superhero*. These words describe the intrepid Thai do-gooder *Mercury Man*. Formerly a firefighter, he was accidentally stabbed with an ancient Tibetan amulet and transformed into the indestructible crimestopper whose powers include the ability to concentrate and contain heat. The \$26.98 Magnolia Home Entertainment release comes in its original Thai and an English-dubbed version, and includes a behind-the-scenes documentary and director commentary. Also containing heat, and now boiling over, Mark Wahlberg is maverick cop *Max Payne*, the hero of this video game-based thriller "with the action played out like a graphic novel with neo-noir references reminiscent of *Sin City*" (press release). Right! The Fox Home Entertainment release (\$29.98 single disc, \$34.98 *Special Edition*) includes both the theatrical version and an unrated extended cut of the film, an animated graphic novel, "Making of" and filmmaker commentary.

Too good to be bad, Igor, the nice-guy lab assistant of a mad scientist, creates a Franken-monster who falls into the clutches of Dr. Schadenfreude and his shapeshifting girl friend. That's the way-out premise of *Igor*, an animated twist on the classic monster movies, featuring the voices of John Cusack, John Cleese, Molly Shannon, Eddie Izzard, Jennifer Coolidge, Steve Buscemi and Sean Hayes. It's new on DVD from MGM Home Entertainment (\$17.99).

TV ON DVD

Bad news for an already struggling Videolog columnist: A new Harris Poll shows that more than a third of Americans believe in UFOs, and a sizable number also think that witches and ghosts are real. If this trend continues and becomes the majority view, should series such as, say, *Bewitched*, continue to be covered in an *SF-fantasy* mag-



The *Futurama* saga comes to another (temporary?) end as the gallant cartoon crew heads off into the Wild Green Yonder.

Campbell Photo: Courtesy Image Entertainment

azine? The seventh season, 28 episodes in a \$39.95 four-disc boxed set, is new on vidstore shelves from Sony, possibly right alongside Paramount's three-disc *Sabrina the Teenage Witch: The Fifth Season* (\$39.98). Featuring similar plots of prestidigitation, *Wizards of Waverly Place: Volume Two: Supernaturally Stylin'* is \$19.99 from Walt Disney Video and features extras like star Selena Gomez and other cast members giving us "an exclusive look at their personal styles" and visiting the show's costume closets. Ooh, that sweater with the horizontal bar stripes is so slimming...may I borrow it? (Please?!)

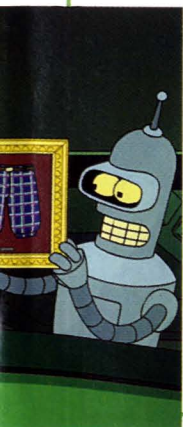
Life-after-death made its usual strong showing in the poll, so reap the rewards of getting your *Dead Like Me* updates here while you can: Dearly beloved, gathered here in the nine-disc *Dead Like Me: The Complete Collection* (MGM Home Entertainment, \$69.98) is every episode plus four featurettes, commenttracks with speakers like star Ellen Muth, deleted scenes, photo gallery and even the new direct-to-DVD film *Dead Like Me*, set two years after the series ended, and featuring Henry Ian Cusick as the undead Reapers' new boss. If you want the feature but not the pricey gift set, it will be available separately for \$26.98.

Series like *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* will always have a home in Videolog, since living skeletons, walking puppets, pregnant flowers plotting to hijack a nuclear reactor, etc. probably ranked low in the Harris Poll if they ranked at all. Just when Irwin Allen fans were starting to give up hope (*Season Three* was a 2007 release), *Season Four: Volume One* is surfacing along with bonus material (the series' re-cut unaired pilot, interviews with the unsinkable David Hedison, more). It's \$39.98 from Fox.

M.A.N.T.I.S.: The Complete Series (Image, \$49.98) is a four-disc box set of all the episodes from the 1994-95 TV series with Carl Lumbly as an inventor, paralyzed in a shooting, who cooks up a metal exoskeleton and abandons his wheelchair for a career in big-city crimefighting. But not all night stalkers do it in the interests of vigilante justice. Others have their own, more nefarious purposes, as in Paramount's *Tales from the Darkside: The First Season* (\$36.98) and *Friday the 13th: The Series: The Second Season* (\$49.99). (As an aside, 2009 is shaping up to be quite the year for *Friday the 13th* completists, with the first three flicks now available as special editions, along with the two-disc doc *His Name Was Jason*. Check out our sister magazine FANGORIA or their website www.fangoria.com for details.)

Thirteen uncensored episodes comprise *The Venture Bros.: Season Three* (Adult Swim, \$29.98), a send-up of 1960s action cartoon series such as *Jonny Quest*. The two-disc box set's bonus material includes deleted scenes and commentary. Speaking of spoofs and commentaries, *Mystery Science Theater 3000: XIV* (Shout!, \$53.98) finds Joel, Mike, Tom Servo and Crow T. Robot roasting *The Mad Monster* with George Zucco and Glenn Strange, *Soul-taker* with Joe Estevez, *Final Justice* with Joe Don Baker and *Man-hunt in Space* with Richard Crane as TV hero Rocky Jones, *Space Ranger*. And that series, incidentally, is one of many represented in Mill Creek Entertainment's *Classic Sci-Fi TV: 150 Episodes* (\$29.98), a 12-disc box set of episodes from such SF (and horror and fantasy) series as *Thriller*, *One Step Beyond*, *Tales of Tomorrow*, etc. Also included, despite the DVD's title, are the theatrical serials *The Phantom Empire*, *Undersea Kingdom* and the Rocket Man-starring *Radar Men from the Moon*.

Leading off the parade of new titles from the kingdom of cartoon-dom, *The All-New Super Friends Hour: Season One: Volume Two* (Warner, \$26.99) finds Batman, Robin, Superman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman and "Wonder Twins" Zan and Jayna reuniting to protect the world from galactic dangers. Make your neighbors green with envy by being the first to get *Futurama: Into the Wild Green Yonder* (Fox, \$29.98), the fourth and (supposedly) final feature-length offshoot of that animated SF-comedy series. Among the guest stars are illusionist Penn Jillette, hip-hop's Snoop Dogg, talk radio's Phil Hendrie and *Family Guy* creator Seth MacFarlane; the value-added material includes audio commentaries from Matt



Groening, David X. Cohen, John DiMaggio, Maurice LaMarche, Michael Rowe, Lee Supercinski, Patric M. Verrone and Peter Avanzino, a "Making of" mockumentary, deleted scenes, "Golden Stinkers: A Treasury of Deleted Scenes" and "How to Draw *Futurama* in 10 Very Difficult Steps." Also counted among other coming cartoon compilations are *Tom and Jerry Tales: Volume Six* (Warner, \$14.98), *SpongeBob SquarePants: SpongeBob vs. the Big One* (Nickelodeon, \$19.99), *Duckman: Seasons Three & Four* (Paramount, \$49.98) and, arriving eggs-actly in time for Groundhog Day, *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Mystery of the Easter Chipmunk* (Paramount, \$16.99).

OTHER REMOTE POSSIBILITIES

Mary Poppins (Disney, \$29.99): WDV gave us a *40th Anniversary Edition* of the film four years ago, and now, using Mouse House Math, they've decided it's time for a *45th Anniversary Special Edition*. Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke star, just like they did in the *40th Anniversary Edition* and, five (or four) years from now, will in the *50th*.

Oliver & Company: 20th Anniversary Edition (Disney, \$29.99): Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* gets tooned up with cats and dogs in this 1988 movie whose 20th anniversary was *last* year. *Mouse House?* It's a MAAAADHOUSE!! Buy a calendar!

The Gene Generation (Lionsgate, \$26.98): Gangsters and DNA hackers collide in a sexy futuristic cyber-thriller set in a city on the brink of destruction where death is just an upgrade. The cast includes Bai Ling, Alec (*Dune*) Newman, Parry Shen, Michael Shamus Wiles, Daniel Zacapa, Robert David Hall and Faye Dunaway... Faye Dunaway?!

Samson and the Seven Miracles of the World/Ali Baba and the Seven Saracens (Infinity Entertainment Group, \$19.98): Vintage sword-and-sandal fun with a pair of bodybuilder-actor-Gordons: Gordon Scott (starring in the former) and Gordon Mitchell (in the latter). "Super Muscle Trailers" are included.

The Wiz (Universal, \$14.98): Ease on down to the local video store for this modern (well, 1978) adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz* based on the Broadway hit and starring 30something Diana Ross as teenage Dorothy and Michael Jackson as the Scarecrow. Made in NY, where what is now Ground Zero was this movie's Emerald City.

Screamers: The Hunting (Sony, \$24.96): Inspired by the Philip K. Dick short story "Second Variety," this sequel is set on a supposedly abandoned planet where there are either human survivors or half-man/half-machine hybrids dedicated to the annihilation of the human race. With a title like *Screamers*, which possibility are you gonna bet on?

Chill (Lionsgate, \$26.98): The eerie H.P. Lovecraft yarn "Cool Air" becomes a standard horror-action item with a mad doctor (Shaun Kurtz) dividing his time between maintaining a Mr. Freeze-like lifestyle; roaming city streets alongside his Frankenstein-like henchman in search of victims—and running a grocery store! Remember, check this week's *Necronomicon* for money-saving coupons!

NEW IN BLU-RAY

This issue's new rundown of Blu-ray releases include DreamWorks' *Ghost Town* (\$39.99); Fox's *Stargate: The Ark of Truth*, *Donnie Darko*, *The Boondock Saints* (all \$34.99), *Max Payne* and *Futurama: Into the Wild Green Yonder* (both \$39.98); MGM's *The Pink Panther: Collector's Edition* (the 1964 Peter Sellers original, \$34.99) and *Igor* (\$39.99); Universal's *King Kong*, *Doom* and *Street Fighter: Extreme Edition* (all \$29.98); Lionsgate's *Repo!* *The Genetic Opera* and *Hulk vs.* (both \$29.99); Sony's *Groundhog Day* (\$28.95); Funimation's *Dragon Ball Z: Android Assault/Bojack Unbound* (\$34.98) and *Afro Samurai: Resurrection: Director's Cut* (\$39.98); Image's *My Name is Bruce* (\$35.98); Koch Vision's *Max Fleischer's Gulliver's Travels* (\$19.98); Adult Swim's *The Venture Bros.: Season Three* (\$44.98); and Warner's animated *Wonder Woman* (\$34.99), *not* starring Faye Dunaway.

This column showcases websites for SF, fantasy, comics & animation creators and their creations. Websites are listed for free entirely at STARLOG's discretion. Site operators may nominate their sites for inclusion by sending relevant info via e-mail only to allan.dart@starloggroup.com

WONDER WOMAN WEB PAGE

Why should guys have all the fun? Warner Home Video releases this direct-to-DVD movie starring DC's First Lady of the Comics. Wonder Woman faces off against Ares, the God of War, and fights with (and falls for) Steve Trevor in director Lauren Montgomery's new take on the superheroine's mythology. Amazon Women aren't on the Moon; they're at www.wonderwomanmovie.com

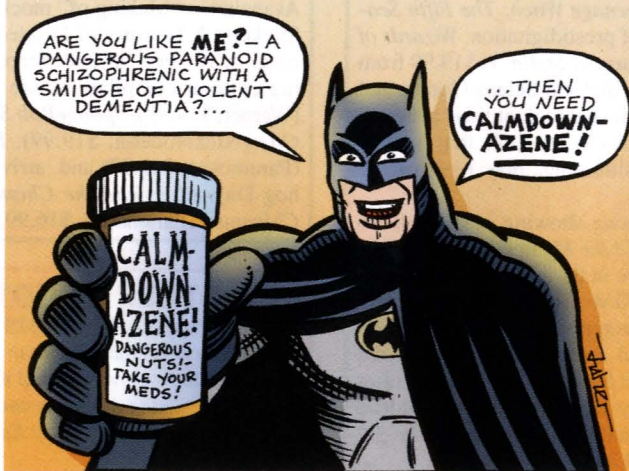
CARLA GUGINO WEB PAGE

We know they're called the WatchMEN, but don't forget about the female contingent of the superheroic team. Before there was Silk Spectre II, there was Sally Jupiter (Carla Gugino). The *Sin City* actress will soon be seen not only in *Watchmen*, but David Goyer's *The Unborn* and *Race to Witch Mountain*. www.carlaguginoonline.com

MALIN AKERMAN SITE

You know how some actors will Malin in a performance? Not this actress. Akerman made a splash in *The Heartbreak Kid* and *27 Dresses*, but her biggest role to date is as Silk Spectre II in Zack Snyder's cinematic adaptation of the seminal graphic novel *Watch-*

Wow! EVEN COMIC BOOK HEROES ARE BECOMING SPOKESPERSONS FOR PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES!...



men. Check out another Wonder Woman at www.malinakerman.net

CORALINE WEBSITE

Henry (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*) Selick directs this 3-D stop-motion-animated adaptation of Neil Gaiman's dark fantasy novel about a young girl who enters an alternate world. www.coraline.com

JOSHUA JACKSON WEB PAGE

This is your first source for everything related to the *Dawson's Creek* and *Fringe* star. The oldest and largest Joshua Jackson site online, this unofficial fan page features video clips, audio and other media to download as well as a comprehensive image gallery. www.josh-jackson.net

DAKOTA FANNING WEB PAGE

Audiences have been *Taken* by this young actress who has come of age in such genre films as *The*

Cat in the Hat, Hide and Seek and *War of the Worlds*. Learn more about *Push, Coraline* and her upcoming projects at this web page, which also contains hundreds of photos and the latest news and updates. www.dakota-fanning.org

MONSTERS VS. ALIENS SITE

When aliens attack, who ya gonna call? Why monsters, of course! Ginormica (voiced by Reese Witherspoon), Dr. Cockroach (Hugh Laurie), B.O.B. (Seth Rogen) and the Missing Link (Will Arnett) are the creatures out to save Earth in DreamWorks' CG-animated movie. www.monstersvsaliens.com

OPEN SEASON 2 WEB PAGE

Boog (now voiced by Mike Epps), Elliot (Joel McHale), Giselle (Jane Krakowski), Mr. Weenie (Cody Cameron) and McSquizzzy (Billy Connolly) are back in this direct-to DVD sequel. www.sonypictures.com/

familyzone/openseason2/index.php

BRENDAN FRASER SITE

This *Encino Man* cut his *School Ties* a long time ago and is now a genre fixture after appearing in *George of the Jungle, Gods and Monsters*, the *Mummy* films, *Dudley Do-Right, Bedazzled, Monkeybone, Looney Tunes: Back in Action, Journey to the Center of the Earth 3-D* and, most recently, *Inkheart*. And, this summer, he's going *Gung Ho* in *G.I. Joe: Rise of Cobra*. www.bffc.org

RUFUS SEWELL SITE

He was John Murdoch in *Dark City*. Ali Baba in *Arabian Nights*. Count Adhemar in *A Knight's Tale*. Angus in *She Creature*. Armand in *The Legend of Zorro*. And Crown Prince Leopold in *The Illusionist*. Now, Rufus Sewell is investigating dangerous scientific phenomena as Dr. Jacob Hood in the new TV series *Eleventh Hour*. www.aboutrufus.com

MISS FLICK CHICK WEB PAGE

Critic, lecturer and TV commentator Maitland McDonagh is the author of *Movie Lust, Filmmaking on the Fringe, The 50 Most Erotic Films of All Time* and the auteur study *Broken Mirrors/Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento*. The former Senior Movies Editor of *TV Guide*, she writes for *Time Out New York, Film Comment* and other magazines, and has spoken on film for NBC, Bravo and the BBC. McDonagh reviews new film and DVD releases on this site, and answers moviegoers' questions in her column *Ask FlickChick*. www.missflickchick.com

CONVENTIONS

Questions about cons? Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the con's address or visit their website. Do NOT contact STARLOG. Note: Listed guests may *not* appear and cons may be cancelled without any notice. Conventioneers: Send info (with phone number and e-mail address) no later than *three* months prior to the event to STARLOG Con Calendar, 250 West 49th Street, Suite 304, 3rd Flr, NY, NY 10019 or e-mail allan.dart@starloggroup.com This is a *free* service. STARLOG makes absolutely no guarantees, due to space limitations, that your con will be listed.

FEBRUARY XENA CON

January 30-February 1
LA Marriott at LAX
Los Angeles, CA
Creation Entertainment
1010 North Central, Suite 400
Glendale, CA 91202
(818) 409-0960
www.creationent.com
Guests: Robert Trebor, Jennifer Sky Band (Friday); Michael Hurst, Hudson Leick, Tony Todd (Saturday); Lucy Lawless, Renee O'Connor, Victoria Pratt (Sunday)

NY COMIC CON

February 6-8
Javits Center
NY, NY
www.nycomiccon.com
Guests: Joe Simon, Joe Sinnott, Herb Trimpe, Marv Wolfman, Len Wein, Neal Adams, Al Plastino, Bob Layton, George Pérez, Michael Golden, Dave Gibbons, Jim Lee, Grant Morrison, Geoff Johns, Brian Michael Bendis, Matt Fraction, J. Michael Straczynski, Michael Uslan, Seth Green, Joe, Adam & Andy Kubert, etc.

TWILIGHT SALUTE

February 20-22
Westin San Francisco Market St.
San Francisco, CA
Creation Entertainment
See earlier address
Guests: Peter Facinelli (Friday); Kellan Lutz (Saturday); Taylor Lautner, Ashley Greene (Sunday)

MEGACON

February 27-March 1
Orange County Convention Center, Hall D
Orlando, FL
www.megaconvention.com
Guests: Beau Bridges, James Callis, Herb Jefferson Jr., Anne Lockhart, Richard Hatch, Dirk Benedict, Lou Ferrigno, Margot Kidder, Jennifer Halley, George Pérez, Bill Stout, Chris Claremont, Darwyn Cooke, Mark Waid, etc.

MARCH FANGORIA'S WEEKEND OF HORRORS

March 6-8
Wyndham Chicago O'Hare
Chicago, IL
Creation Entertainment
See earlier address
Guests: George Romero, Doug Bradley, H.G. Lewis, Tobe Hooper, Tom Savini, Tony Timpone, etc.

SUPERNATURAL CON

March 6-8
Crown Plaza Cherry Hill
Cherry Hill, NJ
Creation Entertainment
See earlier address
Guests: Misha Collins (Saturday); Jared Padalecki (Sunday)

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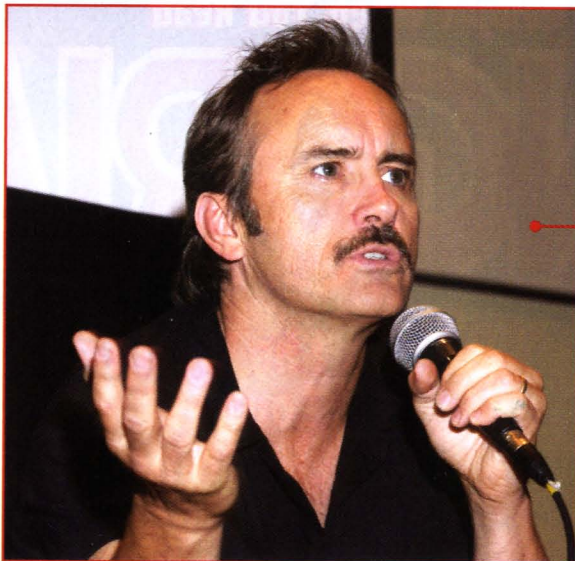
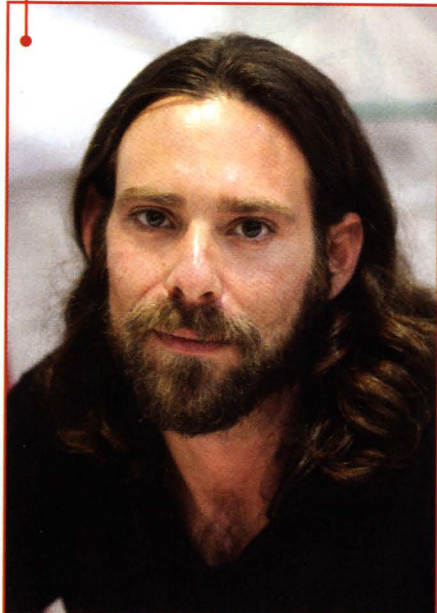
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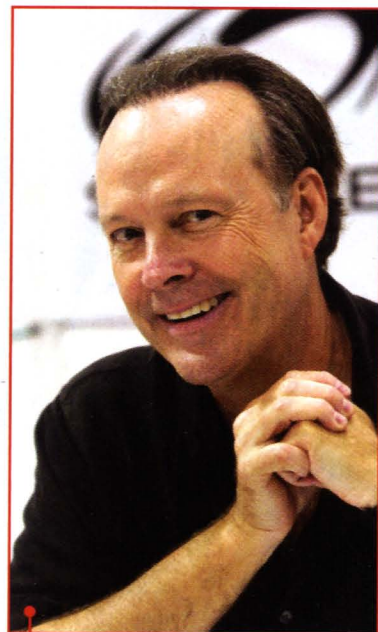
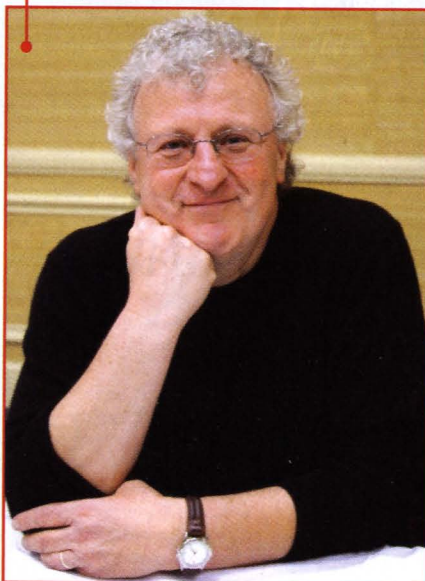
FUTURE *Life*

It's the final season for **James Callis'** Gaius Baltar and *Battlestar Galactica*. "Sometimes a Great Notion" just aired in January, marking the beginning of the end for the SCI FI series.

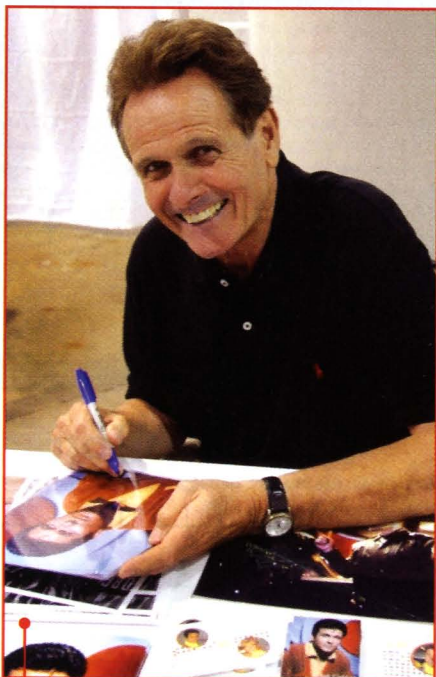


The always (re-)animated **Jeffrey Combs** has a slate of new genre projects: Another version of *The Dunwich Horror*, the horror flick *Dark House* and William Malone's *Parasomnia*.

He was Crom in *TRON*, Sid the Snitch on *Hill Street Blues* and a guest star on *3rd Rock from the Sun* and *Sliders*. But STARLOG readers know **Peter Jurasik** best as *Babylon 5's* Londo Mollari.



Dwight Schultz is on *The A-Team* when it comes to voiceover acting. The former "Howling Mad" Murdock and *Star Trek* vet does lots of video game and cartoon gigs. Currently, he can be heard as several characters on the TOON series *Chowder*.



Lost in Space's **Mark Goddard**, a STARLOG favorite, joins his fellow Men in Black (Shirts) at SF cons. He's happy to share stories about his stint in the Irwin Allen Universe.



Recognize this face, but can't recall his name? Character actor **Erick Avari's** credits include *Star Trek: TNG, DS9 & Enterprise*, the *Stargate* movie & *SG-1* series and *The Mummy*. He also had paternal roles, as Elektra's father in *Daredevil* and Mohinder's Dad in *Heroes*.

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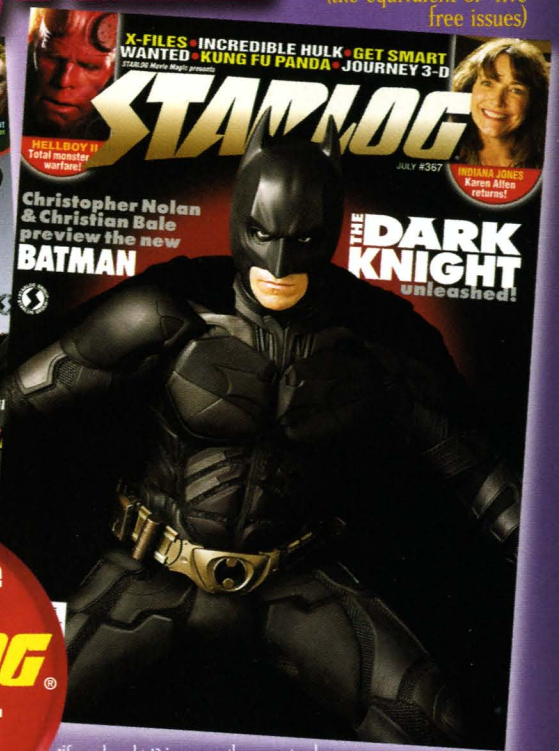
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Joshua Jackson
has enjoyed his
return to television
playing the smart
(and smart-ass)
Peter Bishop on
Fox's *Fringe*.

BY IAN SPELLING

FATHERS & SONS

Just like you, Joshua Jackson is still trying to figure out the mysteries of *Fringe*.

The only healthy way for an actor on a TV show to get through what could potentially be five or six years is to *not* think about it," says Joshua Jackson as he contemplates the notion of starring in *Fringe* on Fox until possibly 2013 or 2014.

"It would be good. I would love to be on this show [for a long while]. But if I start worrying about another 24 months of straight work at this pace, I'll have a nervous breakdown. Right now, I'm focused on getting

through the first season. I'm really happy with where we've gone storytelling-wise in the last four or five episodes. It would be great if we can continue doing these little mini-arcs inside the season instead of trying to make one-off episodes or single, grand, overarching episodes. You don't want the barrier of entry to a show to get so high that a casual fan can't watch it or come back to it.

"That's the *Lost* issue. *Lost* is brilliant, but unless you've been with it from the beginning, there's *no way* you can just drop in right now and go, 'Oh, I get it. This guy knows this guy. And there was a double-cross over here.' It's like you need to read the novel before you watch an episode. But if we can do three-, four- or five-episode arcs in the way we've finished Season One, we'll have a great show on our hands.

"The first six episodes had their own individual stories with a beginning, middle and end," Jackson continues. "There were larger ideas presented, but they weren't directly dealt



One of the developments that has pleased Jackson the most is Peter's relationship with his scientist father Dr. Walter Bishop (John Noble).



FBI Agent Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) is assigned to investigate the spread of unexplained phenomena, and enlists Peter and Dr. Bishop to help her.

with in the next episode. In the last four or five shows, each story has built upon the last one. The episodes still have a satisfying beginning, middle and end, but in particular, there are two characters who have been carried forward, and you realize that each one of these individual stories is actually building toward a larger goal, which is what our 10th episode, the cliffhanger, was about. That, to me, is much more satisfying, and as an audience member, that's the sort of story I like to see. So I'm really happy with where the show is right now."

Father Issues

Fringe isn't quite the blockbuster that many expected it to be, which is to say it isn't the second coming of *Lost*, co-creator J.J. Abrams' other show. However, *Fringe* started out respectably, its audience grew and it still performs well in the ratings (with bigger numbers expected now that it follows *American Idol*). And it continues to compel hardcore

All Other Photos: Ben Mark Holzberg

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He isn't a fan of the technobabble, but Jackson does like the mini-arc direction that *Fringe* has taken this season.



fans to study each and every detail about what's up there on the screen, whether it's obvious or obscure.

Such elements, though, are the window dressing for what's actually an intriguing character study. Walter Bishop (John Noble) is the quirky, brilliant, slightly mad scientist who's helping FBI Special Agent Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) solve increasingly complex cases that somehow seem to involve Walter as a common denominator. And then there's Jackson's character, Peter Bishop, Walter's smart, pissed-off, long-estranged son, who helps keep his Dad in check and, in the process, begins to form a bond with this man he never knew.

"What got me [into the story] is that Peter is limitless in his possibilities, because he has this nebulous backstory that is very slowly being shaded in," Jackson observes. "Peter also has an amorality that allows him to work

Canadian. You have two very dedicated actors, which is not always the case, and it has made the work experience incredibly pleasant in what could have been a very difficult launch. The expectations for our show were extremely high and everybody felt the pressure to deliver. If we had had less emotionally solid actors, we could have stumbled and crumbled out of

the gate. But we go to work every day, and everybody is excited and fired up to be here, which is a good thing. I know that sounds very basic, like I'm giving a coach at halftime speech, but you would be surprised how often that is *not* the case."

Asked about his favorite episodes this season, Jackson doesn't hesitate in detailing them. "'Safe' was our best one, by far," he states. "I really, really enjoyed that. And then the sequence of episodes that goes seven, eight, nine and then 'Safe,' taken as one viewing experience, was my favorite section of the season so far. 'The Arrival' is the coolest overarching mythology episode, but to me, 'Safe' is our best because it culminates the mini-arc within this season.

"From the moment that episode starts, you're already invested in [the storyline] because you've spent three weeks investigating other versions of it. And I think it's so gripping when that guy in the background comes to the fore and you go, 'Oh my God, they've been laying all these things in, and if I was paying attention...' That's what *Lost* does."

Son Daze

Season One's second half kicked off on January 20 with episode 11, "Bound," which featured Olivia escaping her captors, the first appearance of Olivia's sister Rachel (Ari

**"WHO IS THE
OBSERVER? WHAT IS
HIS BACKSTORY?
WHERE DOES HE
COME FROM?"**

outside of the confines that you would usually find in this sort of character, particularly on a TV show. The most pleasantly surprising thing to come up since we've been shooting this show is this dynamic between Peter and his father that has really come to the fore. You realize that the hook for Peter, the reason he stays in this world, is about as simple and basic and non-science fiction as can be, which is that this man wants to get to know his Dad. That was *very* surprising to me. I didn't think that was where this show was going to live, but there we are."

Most of Jackson's scenes, of course, involve Torv or Noble or both. "First off, it's the British Commonwealth Invasion," he quips, "because you have two Aussies and a



Every story builds upon the previous one, Jackson believes, creating the Pattern that is *Fringe*.

Fringe's trio returned with new episodes January 20, but Jackson is too busy working on the show to consider the possibility of a long run.

“WHO ARE WALTER AND PETER, REALLY?”

Graynor) and an epidemiologist's gruesome death. At the time of this interview, Jackson was lensing episode 12, “The No-Brainer,” in which Walter, Peter and Olivia consider the possibility that a computer virus is actually killing people.

“Olivia is abducted at the end of ‘Safe,’ and ‘Bound’ is about the rescue and understanding of why she was abducted,” Jackson says. “It also pits Jones [Jared Harris] against the Massive Dynamic world, so you now have these two competing power bases, and you aren't exactly sure *who* is good or bad. And it begins the end of John Scott [Mark Valley]. The conclusion of that storyline has been set up, and Olivia has to finally put him to bed. ‘Bound’ was the gooiest episode until ‘The No-Brainer.’ I spent yesterday draining liquefied brains out of a man!”

Contemplating the technobabble and mythology elicits a chuckle from Jackson. For the most part, he's able to steer clear of the technobabble. As for the mythology? Not so much, but he loves that stuff—at least the bigger-picture aspects of it—as opposed to the minutiae of where the Observer (Michael Cerveris) might be hiding in this episode or that one, or the teases embedded in certain shows that may be explained in future episodes.

“Thankfully, and once again, I have to tip my hat to John,” Jackson remarks. “That man

should be given an award for Most Earnest Delivery of Things That Don't Mean Anything, because he's the one who has the detailed, technically precise dialogue, and then I usually translate what he's saying for myself, Olivia and the audience. So I don't get stuck with too much technobabble.

“The little things, those are fun in a *Where's Waldo?* kind of way, but the mythology—Who is the Observer? What is his backstory? Where does he come from? Who are Walter and Peter, really? And what is Massive Dynamic up to?—all of those things, as we're slowly expanding *Fringe's* universe, are the reason why I wanted to be on a show in this



Jackson admits that he doesn't really know that much about his character. The writers keep him in the dark.

genre. I love this stuff. That's why I loved *The X-Files*. That's why I love *Lost*. If we do our jobs right, and we build this immersive world, people will enjoy spending an hour with us every week.”

Jackson swears that he knows “barely more” than the audience when it comes to *Fringe's* many secrets. He describes the set as a “knitting circle” where the cast spends hours hashing over conspiracy theories about what every tip of the hat might mean. “I would like to know who I am, what I am and where I'm from!” he laughs. “I have all kinds of questions about Peter. There were characters from his [shady] past in a recent episode, but I think it's better if we introduce just enough of Peter's history to understand *some* of the dimensions.

“Rather than revisiting the past, I would like to see Peter constantly surprise [the audi-

“AND WHAT IS MASSIVE DYNAMIC UP TO?”

ence] with the things that he knows or has the capability of doing based upon the experiences he has had in the past. Settling old scores is dull and not really part of our show. I would much rather he be the Johnny on the Spot.

“Much in the way that Walter's scientific brain is always accessing something pertinent on the show,” Joshua Jackson concludes, “I would love for Peter to be the one who realizes where to push or look based upon his prior experiences, the guy who always knows where the skeletons are buried.”



After directing such films as *The Acid House*, *Gangster No. 1* and *Lucky Number Slevin*, Paul McGuigan helmed his first genre effort with *Push*.

MIND GAMES

By KEITH OLEXA



Director **Paul McGuigan** makes his *Push* for a darker, grittier psychic action thriller.

Which scene from *Push* director Paul McGuigan's new psychic action thriller mesmerizes him the most? The telekinetic shootout? The force-field-flashing slugfest? Any of the psionic special FX segments, or even that one precognitive pinball stunt involving doors and a glass marble? No, the scene that sticks with him is quieter and more prosaic—and involves a common bathroom item.

"It's when the Sniffers first arrive in our hero Nick Gant's apartment," McGuigan explains. "One of them grabs Nick's toothbrush, and he has one of those crazy flashbacks because of the [psychic imprints on] the brush. That scene sums up the whole film for me. It's strange and off-center. You don't really know what's going on, and you want to know more. It isn't the biggest action scene, since there's really no action in it at all, but it sums up the movie for me."

Bowing February 6, *Push* mixes the edgy, thoughtful and offbeat with controlled doses of reality. The script by David Bourla offers plenty of action, as well as enough psychic shenanigans to satisfy the most devoted fan of *Scanners* or *The Fury*. So much, in fact, that even genre tyro McGuigan wondered why he was tapped for the project in the first place.

"I was the cheapest director available," he quips. "After reading the script, I was fascinated to know *why* they wanted me. I'm not really known for doing science fiction and fantasy. I knew some of the producers, and when I spoke to them, they said that they didn't want *Push* to be typical. They wanted to take a new approach to the genre. They said I should let my style work through the film. My visual, through-the-camera style. They felt that I could add something to this project. That happens a lot in this business, where people send a script out to directors and hope someone will react to it. I just really liked the screenplay, and I could see what I could bring to it."

Movers & Watchers

As *Push*'s intro voiceover summarizes, secret government programs implemented all over the world since before the Cold War have successfully produced legions of psychically gifted individuals. Most remain veritable prisoners within the confines of their respective government agencies, forced to endure horrific experiments, and worse if they ever try to escape. America's own agency, the Division, is as controlling as any, but even it can't keep track of all its empowered citizens. Fugitives slip through the cracks, usually dropping into the dark, anonymous depths of big foreign cities.

Push follows two such lost souls—a young man and a teenage girl—through the heart of Hong Kong as they resist gangs of glass- and eardrum-shattering psychic "Bleeders," dodge hound-like "Sniffers," make uneasy alliances with power-masking "Shadows" and healing "Stitchers" and prevail against the most dangerous psychics of all, "Pushers," who can implant into people's minds thoughts and memories so convincing that they can make their victims kill their friends—and even themselves.

This series of psychic sub-types belies one aspect of the film's sophistication—and to some extent its learning curve. McGuigan had no intention of making *Push* an overly technical geek-fest, but instead strove to preserve its credibility and believability. "It's about motive, atmosphere and creating a sense that this world is real," he explains. "Especially since the subject matter is about the government controlling people's minds and using those minds for their own gain.

"*Push* plays on those [conspiracy] fears, so I wanted to set the film in a real environment and have it occur in our time in order to make it credible. I asked myself, 'What if these select people had developed these skills through some sort of government experiment?' The story does go off into fantastical areas and moments, but not too extensively. It isn't Superman flying through the air. I tried to make the rest as real as possible, so that the characters and environment are believable."

Nick (Chris Evans) is a "Mover," a telekinetic who, lacking the Division's training, can barely summon enough spoon-bending mojo to cheat at dice. That visit from the Division's Sniffers rings Nick's warning bell once he chances upon young precognitive "Watcher" Cassie Holmes (Dakota Fanning, see page 24). Her erratic predictive powers only serve to embroil the reluctant Nick in a conspiracy that leads them both unwaveringly toward the same fate: certain death. Along the way, the duo



When *Push* comes to shove, Nick (Chris Evans) and Cassie (Dakota Fanning) pair up to escape the government agency that is pursuing them both.



As Johnny Storm, Evans is used to dealing with fire hazards, but in this film, his on-the-run character tries to avoid getting soaked by exploding fish tanks.

gather a ragtag team of psychics from Hong Kong's seedy underbelly, outwit ruthless Division agent Henry Carver (Djimon Hounsou) and finally discover what pivotal role Nick's Pusher girl friend Kira (Camilla Belle) plays in the Division's shadowy schemes.

As Nick, Evans is the film's predominant figure—and its most abused. Evans weathers everything from exploding fish tanks to fatal forecasts, and manages to look good doing it. But sex appeal and fortitude alone weren't why McGuigan cast the actor. "I saw Chris in *Sunshine*," he says. "[Director] Danny Boyle told me that Chris has the acting chops, and he certainly does. I didn't want simply an action hero; I wanted someone who could *act*. Chris questions his character's motivations, and he's a smart and funny guy. He brings charm, too, and doesn't take himself too seriously. That was something that I instilled in everybody while filming: When you go to work on one of these movies, it's such fun that you can't get too caught up in it.

"Chris did many of the stunts himself," says McGuigan of the actor who also played *Fantastic Four's* Human Torch. "He was getting thrown around and beat up. And Hong Kong is a difficult place to shoot. Chris would get up each morning, go to work and have a different [challenge every day]. He would go home exhausted, but he seemed to like that!"

Fanning wasn't challenged with the same psionic slings and arrows as Evans, but she relished her role no less thoroughly. "She looked forward to playing drunk in one scene—and to swearing," McGuigan chuckles. "She was excited about the action as well, and she embraced the softer parts. She understood it all. Dakota looks so good on camera, too. She's just incredibly smart and talented.

"Great actors, when they come on the set, tend to be very focused and quiet because they understand what they have to do, as opposed to someone who's asking questions because they didn't work it out beforehand. Dakota hardly asked any questions; she simply hit it. I

would ask *her* questions. I would ask her to do something this way or that, and she would say, 'Sure.' I would ask her, 'Could you cry a bit more?' and she would do it."

Most of Fanning's screen time was spent with Evans. "Chris and Dakota worked well together," says McGuigan. "My favorite part of the film is their relationship. It shines through—this kind of brother/sister dynamic that is born out of an understanding of each other's past, and what they've gone through. Nick sees Cassie as the way he was when he was a kid. Chris is very cynical, and I mean that in a good way. He understood his role really well. And Dakota's very sophisticated, and not just for her age. She has a lovely spirit. I think all of that comes through."



McGuigan didn't want an action hero for *Push's* male lead. He wanted someone who could act—and *Sunshine's* Evans fit the bill.

Evans may have had it easier than Fanning in one respect: Cinematically, moving objects with your mind is more easily simulated than fortune-telling. "In *Push*, the future is *always* changing. We keep repeating that in the movie," McGuigan explains. "This film is complex. I did not want to spoon-feed the audience or make them feel like we're telling them *exactly* where we are in the film, and why we're there. That was complicated, especially when you approach how you're going to shoot an element [like seeing the future]. With Cassie, it's quite clear that she isn't good at it. Her powers, like Nick's, aren't well-harnessed. It isn't until they become emotionally involved that they can see

through the clouds and be more effective.

"My intent was to make Cassie a little erratic, a bit vague in what she sees. I shot her visions in 16mm and then jump-cut to normal stock. I wanted to make the way Cassie sees things feel very particular. I also brought in the whole thing about her drawing her visions in a book. I realized that if we had a visual element that she could show the other characters, then we could match that when we show the audience her visions.

"I like that Cassie draws in this crazy, almost savant-like way," McGuigan adds. "She's drawing this sensation of feeling, but it's abstract. I didn't want it to be too clear, but rather have it changing all of the time. When Cassie gets the feeling that something is wrong, like someone is going to die, it's still unclear to her. It's the same way I feel every time I go on a plane!"

Pushers & Shadows

Carver is the Division's best agent, and he relentlessly dogs the pair. He's also a Pusher, and ruthlessly uses his powers on friends as well as foes. Carver shares a past with Nick—he kills Nick's father in the film's opening—and possibly with Cassie (through her imprisoned Watcher mother).

"I could spend days with Djimon and listen to his stories about his past, heritage and country," McGuigan says of the Benin-born actor. "Djimon came to see me a couple of times before filming began, and very much like [his character in] *Push*, there are many things he understands about the world. What interested Djimon about Carver and *Push*, I gathered from talking to him, was the power of the mind. Also, Djimon is the most amazing man to photograph; he has a great presence and body language. When you first see him in the movie, he's coming down this corridor, and it's such a cool opening for his character. Djimon sums up the movie for me. He has that edginess.

"Djimon has never really played a baddie

before,” the director asserts, “and I didn’t want him to play a bad guy. I don’t see Carver as a villain. The world is ‘heightened’ to Carver because of his powers, and he doesn’t feel that what he’s doing is bad. He’s simply using these powers for his own ends.”

Nick, Cassie and Carver all dance around the pivotal figure of the Pusher Kira. As the sole surviving subject of an experiment to augment psychic power—and a successful escapee with a connection to Nick—Kira is both a highly valuable and dangerous variable to all parties involved. Add to that, the very experiment that expanded her powers is also slowly killing her.

“Kira doesn’t have very much to say, because she’s sick most of the time,” McGuigan notes. “It was a hard role for Camilla, and I love how her face expresses so much. I like Camilla’s quietness. She has a lot going on, and when I looked at some of her work, I admired her stillness. There’s a strength to Camilla. We could have gone for someone a bit more teen idolish, but that’s not my style. I want people who can act, and Camilla can do that.”

Push’s other major character is the setting itself, Hong Kong. McGuigan loves the city, and used its qualities to serve the film. “Hong

Camilla (10,000 B.C.) Belle plays Nick’s Pusher girl friend. She’s dangerous when beautiful.



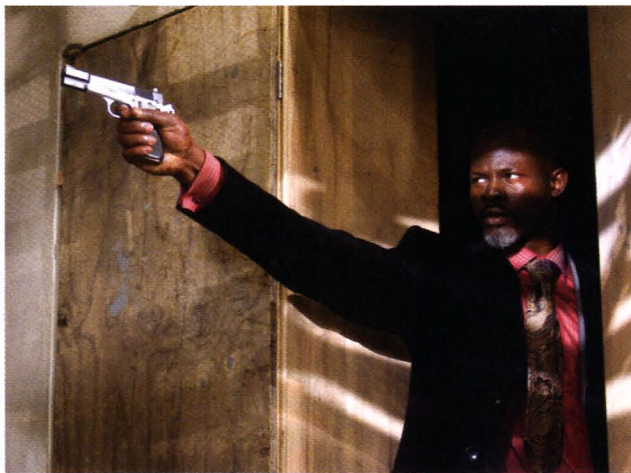
Kong is visually intriguing and spectacular, such that I didn’t have to worry so much about putting the characters in front of a greenscreen,” he observes. “[As a director], I’m as concerned about the movie’s visual elements as the performances. So if you can find the right location, the whole thing doesn’t have to be shot before a greenscreen. Besides, I wouldn’t be the right director for that kind of movie.

“Shooting in Hong Kong was challenging. I didn’t want to block off the streets, because there are millions of people out there, so why attempt to re-create that? Instead, we hid five cameras that covered every angle, and we filmed the actors out in the street without any control. So in moments such as when Dakota is wandering [through the city], that *really* is her out there on her own.”

That’s not to say that McGuigan disdains choreographed action or flashy FX. “I felt like I was a child [at play],” he beams. “I would go to work and have conversations about fighting, fight choreography and throwing people from one end of the room to the other on wires, and I would think, ‘I’m getting paid for this?’ It was like being in a fantasy world.”

A fight scene involving Nick, Carver’s Division agents and the local Bleeder gang “was logistically a nightmare,” McGuigan recalls. “[We shot that in] this building with a bamboo framework. It was fun, but very hard

Henry Carver (Djimon Hounsou) works for the shadowy Division. He too is a lethal weapon.



Evans learned that when you’re in a Paul McGuigan movie, you’re gonna have to pack heat.

to achieve, especially since we didn’t have much money.”

Bleeders & Stitches

Push features a diverse ensemble of actors hailing from countries ranging from England and Germany to Japan and New Zealand. “The world has opened up with the Internet and other methods of communication,” McGuigan comments. “However, the idea of using psychic powers for espionage is an old-fashioned one. The movie starts at a time when governments were experimenting with psychic powers for their own ends. A time when people didn’t trust each other, and the world was closed. You had China, which nobody from the West knew anything about. You had the Soviet Union, which at the time was a menace to the West. And you had America, which was incredibly powerful. They didn’t know or trust each other, and yet every nation, every superpower, was looking into psychic abilities.

“So when we were casting, it simply made sense that, as time went by, there would be this new generation who had these powers, and they would logically come from all over the world. Djimon is African, Cliff Curtis [who plays Hook] is a New Zealander and then there’s the Hong Kong cast. I wanted to make *Push* international.”

In this age of remakes, sequels and trilogies, *Push*’s ending hints at a potential follow-up. Is a *Push 2* in the works? “I don’t know,” McGuigan replies. “We had a test screening where the ending didn’t really resolve anything, and the audience said that they loved the film up until that point. So we’ve changed the ending. It’s now like *Casino Royale*. That didn’t really end, did it? *Quantum of Solace* was born out of *Casino Royale*.”

McGuigan’s next film, *Capa*, “is my passion project. It’s about Robert Capa, the famous war photographer who took pictures of the D-Day landings that Steven Spielberg used as inspiration for *Saving Private Ryan*.”

Push is McGuigan’s first foray into the genre, but the Bellshill, Scotland-born director has been making movies now for a decade, including *The Acid House*, *Gangster No. 1* and *Lucky Number Slevin*. “I used to be a photographer, then I was in marketing and then I was offered a short film,” he says. “I turned down [the short] a few times, but I finally did it and it won a few awards. After that, I did more [shorts] and became more interested in filmmaking.

“So I wasn’t into directing until about 10 years ago,” Paul McGuigan notes. “After I shot that first short, I thought, ‘Oh, this is fun.’ But it’s also very challenging. Even if you want to make a shit movie, it’s still challenging!”

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OUR GENRE PRINCESS

By KEITH OLEXA



It's double-bill *déjà vu* for **Dakota Fanning**, who stars in the same-day debuts of *Push* and *Coraline*.

Dakota Fanning is one busy young woman. Like any typical 14-year-old, Fanning engages in normal teenage activities: family, friends, hobbies and homework. But as a world-renowned actress, Fanning's already full schedule must also accommodate her busy career. Especially now, as she has not one, but two films slated to bow in February—the *same day* in February (the 6th). So it wouldn't be at all surprising then to find the teenager too rushed and distracted for even the most terse and perfunctory conversation.

That doesn't seem to be Fanning's personality at all. From her bright "thank you"s when being complimented on performances past and present to her ardent assurances that there's plenty of time for questions, she conveys only enthusiasm.

Fanning first made ripples in the science fiction universe (at age eight) as the scarily sophisticated alien hybrid Allie Keys in the 2002 mini-series *Taken* (which she discussed in STARLOG #307), and more recently as the alien-fleeing Rachel Ferrier in Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (with an interview in STARLOG #338). She asserts that she only chooses roles that intrigue and challenge her dramatically, but she never shies away from genre work, as these two latest films demonstrate. And while they're devoid of anything extraterrestrial, they're no less compelling and otherworldly.

And dark, too. For teenage clairvoyant drifter Cassie Holmes in the psychic action-thriller *Push*, and the titular heroine trapped within a parallel world by evil doubles in the stop-motion-animated *Coraline*, life isn't about sweetness and light.

In fact, Fanning is passionate about playing roles that stretch her as an actress. "I absolutely loved the part in *Push*!" she exclaims. "I had a meeting with the director, Paul McGuigan, and the producer, Bill Vince, and I loved what I saw and heard. I got to play such a different character in *Push*, and in a different genre than I've done before. I really enjoyed getting to develop Cassie as this sarcastic, independent person. I also loved getting to work in Hong Kong, which is so big and colorful, and working with Djimon Hounsou and all of the other actors."

Secret Psychic

Cassie is a "Watcher," or clairvoyant, one of a number of psychics bred by a secret government agency known as the Division. Psychics have become commonplace all over the world, and while many of them are still forcibly indentured to the governments that spawned them, others, like Cassie, have managed to break free, though they live secretly, striving to vanish into the melting pots of large foreign cities.

However, Cassie must resurface, as her visions of the future—which she compulsively draws in a small journal—appear to point unerringly to her death. A slim chance at survival exists if she can convince a fellow psychic drifter, Nick Gant (Chris Evans), and other roguish mentalists living in Hong Kong's seedy underbelly to keep the mind-controlling "Pusher" Kira (Camilla Belle) from falling into the hands of the Division's most ruthless agent (and fellow Pusher) Henry Carver (Hounsou).

Cassie struck a chord with Fanning, who—via Cassie's multi-colored hair, gamine looks and sharp one-liners—got to play anything but the typical good girl. Cassie's fear over her own death cracks her cool facade on several occasions, and Fanning tears up in those moments—and to good effect. That isn't anything new to the actress, who was happy to learn that her psychic powers would also involve some fun acting moments. One of her favorites was getting to play drunk—all in the interest of seeing things more clearly, ironically.

"Cassie's Mom is a Watcher, too," Fanning explains, "and she's the best Watcher in the world. Cassie's mother drinks alcohol when she needs to see things more clearly. And because Cassie doesn't always see things well, at one point, she does the same thing."

This genre princess has grown up over the years. In 2005, Dakota Fanning witnessed the *War of the Worlds* (far left, bottom). Now, four years later, she plays a troubled, psychic teen in *Push* (left) and gives an animated performance as *Coraline*.

There were perks to playing a character who can see the future, but Cassie's past—her abandonment, isolation and the necessity of living by her wits in a strange city—was just as compelling to Fanning. "Cassie is a normal girl," she explains. "She's a girl's girl, ex-

Cassie's on-screen adversary in *Push* is Agent Carver. But off-screen, Fanning loved working with Djimon Hounsou, one of her favorite actors.



ments put together in the film was really cool.” There were few if any scenes—from Cassie having to wander the streets of Hong Kong essentially on her own (albeit with hidden cameras strategically placed) to racing through markets as fish tanks explode around her—that Fanning didn’t relish. “It was great to do an action movie,” she asserts. “I loved it.”

Part of that adoration came from working with her castmates, specifically Evans and Hounsou. Nick and Cassie become inseparable partners as the film progresses, mostly due to Cassie’s dire predictions about their conjoined fates. Fanning, however, found her time with Evans anything but deadly. “I worked with Chris pretty much every single day,” she says. “We became close friends, and we consistently and closely worked together on our characters. It was great.”

Fanning also waxes enthusiastic about working with Hounsou, although Cassie and Carver hardly cross paths. “No, we didn’t have much screen time together, but that one scene outside of the restaurant is incredibly powerful,” she comments. “Djimon is amazing, and it was wonderful to work with him. He’s one of my favorite actors.”

cept that she’s burdened with these powers that she doesn’t know how to control. But because she’s so young and untrained, she can’t handle her abilities. She’s finding her way through life. These are her teenage years, and she’s alone. Cassie has much more to deal with than most people.”

Acting out Cassie’s foresight was another one of Fanning’s challenges. While Nick is a telekinetic “Mover” who has the ability to hoist guns with only a thought, and Kira and Carver are both Pushers who, with a wide-eyed stare, can make people shoot their own allies and even themselves, Cassie has the subtle power of precognition, which isn’t so easy to play.

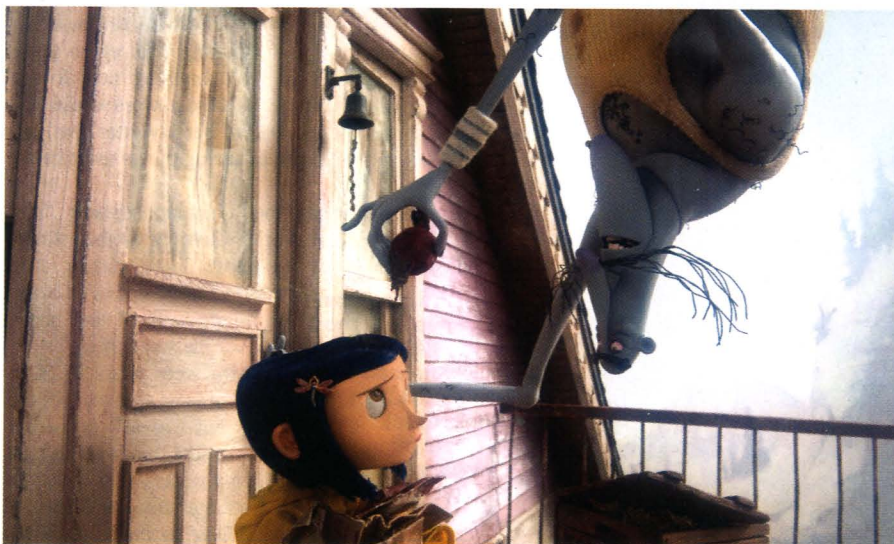
“When you’re acting as if you can see the future, you don’t really have anything to go on [visually], because that’s added in later,” she explains. “So it was a challenge, but that was also the fun part of it. Seeing all of those ele-



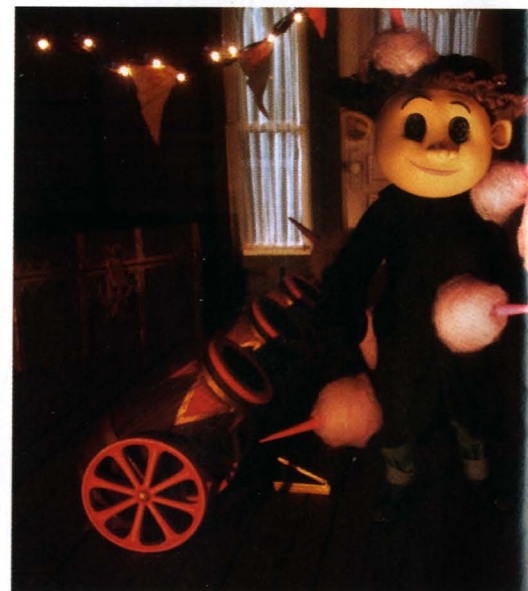
Fanning didn’t have that many questions for director Paul McGuigan, who speaks highly of the actress this issue (page 20).

She also offers up praise for her most unlikely of co-stars. “I love Hong Kong,” she says, “and I love how in *Push* that the city is almost a character of its own. Hong Kong is such a large, different and crowded place. It was terrific to work there.”

Fanning clearly enjoyed making *Push*, and she hopes that SF fans will cleave to the film’s offbeat spirit. “*Push* brings more to the genre because it’s unfamiliar; it’s different. [And the characters’ supernatural powers] add to that notion of otherworldliness. I like that the movie has action, and I loved



When Fanning originally signed on for the adaptation of Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline*, the movie was intended to be live action.



playing Cassie, because she's going through so much and she's so burdened. It was such a challenge for me, but one that I truly enjoyed.

"I didn't want it to end!" Fanning adds. "We filmed for a long time, and I just wanted it to go on. Everyone on the set added to that feeling. The cast, crew, our director...I loved working with all of them, and they made for a great experience. We had lots of fun together."

Animated Heroine

In keeping with Fanning's passion for great and different parts, she contrasts her disenfranchised seer-on-the-run performance with that of young Coraline, who runs afoul of dark doppelgangers when she enters their parallel world. *Coraline* is based on the 2002 Neil Gaiman novel that earned mixed responses from some readers who thought it was too scary to be a children's story.

"I read the book, and I'm a fan of it," Fanning remarks. "I've been working on this film for a long time, because stop-motion-animated movies take longer to make than live-action ones."

In the film, Coraline and her family have moved to an old house that has been turned into an apartment complex. Her parents (voiced by Teri Hatcher and John Hodgman) are too busy to give the precocious girl their time, so they leave her to discover the intricacies of their new home, as well as the other residents like Miss Spink (Dawn French) and Miss Forcible (Jennifer Saunders). Coraline's explorations lead her to a strange, small door, and when she crosses its threshold, she discovers a world that seems to be an exact duplicate of her own.

Well, almost. This parallel universe is more fantastical, and populated by more welcoming counterparts to her parents, neighbors and friends. At first, the most off-setting divergence in these changelings is their large button eyes, but Coraline soon unveils darker truths

The first stop-motion-animated movie made in 3-D (instead of retrofitted), *Coraline* is a frightening family film that offers up its share of good scares.



There are few actors who, at age 14, can say that they've worked with Denzel Washington, Robert De Niro and Tom Cruise (in *War of the Worlds*).

about this other world, her terrifying "Other Mother" and the dire fate that awaits her if she doesn't escape.

Like the plot itself, *Coraline* the film was stuck for a time between two realities, and Fanning was on hand during the transition. "I was attached to make a live-action version three years ago," she explains, "but then they decided that they were going to make a stop-motion movie."

If Fanning had any doubts about the change, seeing some finished footage allayed her fears. "I saw the 20-minute teaser, and I absolutely loved it," she raves. "I didn't want it to end, and when it did end, I was upset. I wanted it to go on forever. Now, I'm so excited to see the entire film."

Fanning has done voiceover roles before in *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Lilo & Stitch 2: Stitch Has a Glitch*. "*Coraline* isn't simply an animated movie; it's a 3-D stop-motion-animated movie, which is so cool," she points out. "It's different from anything that people have seen before."

A common perception about Gaiman's book, as noted by the author himself last issue, is that while kids embrace *Coraline* as nothing more than an exciting children's story, adults latch onto its more sinister elements and find it frightening. Perhaps because Fanning resides at the cusp, age-wise, between those two groups, her perspective is uniquely blended.

"It's still a scary movie," she says, "but at the same time, because it's 3-D, the scares are almost enjoyable. When you're being frightened, you'll also be fascinated and interested. Everybody is scared of something, teenagers, adults and kids alike, so everybody should enjoy *Coraline* and get a good fright out of it. That's what people go to scary movies for."

Fanning is an exceptional young talent who did not vanish from the scene as so many child stars do once their pre-teen adorableness makes way for adolescence. That might be because of Fanning's innate maturity, or it could be because of her choice in roles. While films like *The Secret Life of Bees* show how Fanning has grown as an actress, her genre outings certainly have been good to her in terms of keeping her in the public eye.

"They're fun to make, and everyone enjoys



Genre fans were first Taken by Fanning's talent when they saw her in the 10-hour 2002 SCI FI Channel mini-series.

science fiction and fantasy," Fanning relates. "They're for all ages, and that's one of the reasons why they're so popular. With *Push*, it was exciting for me to play a character whom I had never played before, as well as the action elements, story, characters, being in Hong Kong and filming in the streets with all those people. With *Coraline*, it's a voiceover movie, so there weren't the typical physical challenges. The biggest challenge in *Coraline* was having to portray everything with my voice."

Perhaps with prophetic Cassie acting as an inspiration, Dakota Fanning speculates on her future goals and forecasts what she might be doing a decade from now and beyond. "Only time will tell. I know that acting is the career path for me, and I'm lucky to have found it at this age. And I hope to enjoy it for many years. I'm getting older, so I'm looking forward to roles in films, in all genres, that open up to me as I get older. I don't want anything to be rushed, though. I'm just taking things as they come."

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SWEET CORALINE

By JOE NAZZARO



"Moving forward into the future," *Coraline* director Henry Selick declares, "I would want to shoot *all* of my stop-motion films in 3-D."

Henry Selick's new nightmare is the haunting stop-motion adaptation of a Neil Gaiman fantasy.



Selick (right) says he shares a "common sensibility" with Neil Gaiman (left). Shortly after this interview, Selick showed the final film to Gaiman for the first time.



It's late in the afternoon, only days before Christmas, and Henry Selick is nervous. In less than 24 hours, Selick—the visionary director behind such stop-motion animated classics as *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *James and the Giant Peach*—will be getting on a plane with a just-completed print of his latest project, *Coraline*, which he's about to show to Neil Gaiman, author of the original novel on which the film is based.

Written, produced and directed by Selick in partnership with LAIKA Entertainment, Focus Features and Bill Mechanic's new production company Pandemonium, *Coraline* is the first stop-motion feature to be shot in stereoscopic 3-D.

For those unfamiliar with the book, *Coraline* tells the story of rebellious 11-year-old Coraline Jones (voiced by Dakota Fanning, see page 24), who is reluctantly uprooted from her home and friends and moved to an old Victorian house in the Pacific Northwest. All but ignored by her writer parents, Coraline begins exploring her new home, where she meets upstairs neighbor Mr. Bobinski (Ian McShane), a Russian acrobat who's training a circus of mice; Miss Spink (Dawn French) and Miss Forcible (Jennifer Saunders), a pair of retired British stage actresses; annoying neighborhood boy Whybie (Robert Bailey Jr.); and a stray cat (Keith David).

Coraline also discovers a bricked-up door in the living room, and when the entrance is inexplicably opened one night, she travels through it into an alternate world identical to the real one, but more colorful, entertaining and beautiful than Coraline's drab surroundings. Even her "Other Parents" are friendlier and more fun, with the possible exception of the black buttons sewn over where their eyes should be. But when her Other Mother (Teri Hatcher) offers Coraline a chance to stay with them forever, the price may be too high to pay.

If Selick is feeling a bit of trepidation about showing the finished film to Gaiman, it may be because he has been involved with the project ever since the writer sent him a copy of the unpublished manuscript nearly a decade ago. "I just connected with the material," Selick recalls. "I wasn't that knowledgeable about Neil. I knew about *Sandman*, but he had written some other novels that I hadn't read. I just felt a common sensibility, like I have with Tim Burton in a different way. I don't like dishonest, sugared-up versions of childhood. A kid who believes there are monsters under their bed *truly* believes that, and Neil's novel deals with that childhood magic

in a refreshing, honest and imaginative way.

"In my mind, *Coraline* is sort of like *Alice in Wonderland* meets *Hansel and Gretel*. It's clever like *Alice in Wonderland*, but it's also similar to the classic *Grimm's Fairy Tales* that have lasted for hundreds of years. When I was a kid, I imagined that I had a different family. I just spent two days with my mother in New Jersey, and we sat in the kitchen and I told her about my other family and my other mother and father in Africa and my life there, and she said sometimes I was so convincing that she really wondered about it!

"Neil doesn't overexplain everything; it isn't overtly worked-out logic. The reader participates in the story and draws their own conclusions in certain areas. Neil is very poetic. I love the ghost children in the closet, which is a long sequence in the book that I had to trim



Coraline is "an inquisitive, stubborn, brave girl who faces very dark evil to rescue herself, her parents and the souls of lost children," says Selick.

"Childhood is a time of real magic and real terror," Selick asserts. Monsters may lurk under the bed, in the closet or even at the dinner table.



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All Images: Courtesy Focus Features

down. But it's still one of my favorite scenes. The greatest thing about doing this film was not only did I respond to the material and then learned along the way how to turn it into a movie, but I was also able to hold on to the things I wanted to. Things weren't sweetened or lessened in the adaptation."

The Other World

Selick's deep respect for the source material turned out to be a bit of a liability. His initial screenplay was simply too faithful to Gaiman's novel, and it wasn't until he was able to bring his own perspective to the project that *Coraline* began coming together. "When you're working with a writer as good as Neil, it was certainly intimidating at first, and I was too reverential," he concedes. "What it took was shutting off that communication. It was a positive thing, there wasn't any anger, but I needed to grow this into a movie on my own terms. This was a very different way to tell Neil's story, and pictorially, I was looking to build on the book's images while also coming up with my own."

"The film is beautiful at times, but it has some scary stuff that kids will love," Selick promises. Like the *Other Mother*.



Interestingly, Selick doesn't hire actors for their regular voices. "I have them use accents," he explains. "That way they have more fun. So, Ian McShane's character [Mr. Bobinski] is from Russia."



Pointing to *The Nightmare Before Christmas*' longevity, Selick notes, "You can't simply say that stop-motion is a quaint art form that only a handful of people enjoy."

"The scene in the garden is something I added on my own, as is the boy Whybie. And with the Other Whybie, there's this chilling moment that was necessary to the story. We also have the Other Mother literally transform, using replacement sculptures, into an eight-foot-tall version when she's angry. And then, in her final form, you see her for what she truly is: She isn't a mother. She's a monster."

"This movie does the talking for me. Along the way, it took on a life of its own, so I would just know, 'This is right for this film, and this isn't.' We actually came back to being very true to the book's spirit, and kept virtually all of the characters and most of the details. Much of the dialogue was lifted [from the novel], but the movie is another thing entirely."

With his screenplay in place, Selick recruited a voice cast that includes Fanning, Hatcher, John Hodgman (Coraline's real and otherworldly fathers), McShane, Bailey, David, Saunders and French. "I met with Dakota early on, and she wanted to play Coraline, so I knew that I had someone solid at the center," he says. "Teri was the next one we cast. I listened to a hundred actresses who

might have worked, and whose voices would work with Dakota's, and it came down to about five finalists. Teri was one of them, I met with her and we had our duo. John was someone I enjoyed from his appearances on *The Daily Show*, and I had seen Ian in a movie called *Sexy Beast*. He had a small but important role, and he was incredibly good in it. The cat was difficult, and we went through a few folks before getting to Keith, but I'm very happy with the result."

In addition to his three-pronged hat as the screenwriter, director and one of the producers, Selick also acted as *Coraline*'s production designer. He brought in concept artist Tadehiro Uesugi to create a unique look for the film, which was heavily influenced by late 1950s/early '60s advertising illustrations.

"When I hired Tadehiro to do concept illustrations, I never thought that they could be easily translated to 3-D, because 'graphic' means flat. It's like creating illustrations with strong shapes," Selick explains. "But what I liked about his illustrations were the beautiful patterns and color textures. Tadehiro always adds some kind of atmospheric element, whether it's

a reflection in water, a wisp of fog, a cloud or some ray of sunlight. There's always some small detail that breathes life into the whole image so that what could have been a pretty flat picture suddenly breathes. That's one of the key things I tried to achieve with *Coraline*: to make it a very atmospheric stop-motion film."

"[But we couldn't just settle on] what Tadehiro does; we had to go even further than that. We animated the trees and branches. We added fire and fog, moved the clouds and had lots of rain. I wanted to create a convincing world that would make people forget that these are models, toys and tabletops and give them depth and weight. But Tadehiro was the starting point. Even if the film barely looks like his beautiful artwork, our unattainable goal was to go for that."

Selick also made the conscious decision to change the size and depth of the "Real World" sets as opposed to the "Other World" realms. While they may at first glance seem the same, there are subtle—and sometimes not-so-subtle—differences. "It was hard to get my art directors and everybody else on board with what I was going for," he admits, "but if you

take the kitchen from the Real World, for example, I wanted this life that Coraline rejects to feel claustrophobic and shallow, and maybe bleed some color out and make it plain.

"But we were also shooting in 3-D, so we had what I call 'crushed space.' The kitchen [from the Real World] was a foreshortened room and a small set. It was only about a foot-and-a-half deep, and the walls had a super-steep raked angle, but [the audience] won't realize that because we don't show it off. We shot it straight-on, and with a very formal composition. In the Other World kitchen, all of the perspective lines matched up, but we built the space much deeper. We did the same thing with the living room, which was huge.

"We also made things a little larger in the Other World, because I wanted it to have this great scope to it. Through Coraline's eyes, it's like, 'I can breathe here!' It's comforting, so there is color and warmth and, even in the 2-D version of the film, you can still sense that. When the characters are in a cramped, little set or walking on a raked floor, they move in a different and more careful way. And then when the set is opened up and the floor is flatter, their movements are freer."

The Third Dimension

While *Coraline* was designed and executed as a more-or-less traditional stop-motion feature, it's the first such movie to be shot in stereoscopic 3-D. "I had some history with 3-D," Selick notes, "having worked with Lenny Lipton, the godfather of modern cinematic 3-D. I did a rock video with him over 20 years ago, and he pretty much created the current system with his Real D company. So I had some knowledge of 3-D, and bringing that to stop-motion seemed like a perfect fit. It's still real puppets and props and sets, but we certainly composited in things like the sky and some of the effects. There's something about 3-D that captures reality in a way that 2-D doesn't."

Regarding *Coraline*'s other technical advancements, Selick says, "I like doing full replacement faces for certain characters—Jack Skellington [in *Nightmare Before Christmas*] was a bunch of heads with different mouths and eye expressions. But we went much further with Coraline. While you don't see it in the finished film, we actually split her face, so there was a horizontal line going right through her nose. We wanted her to have a large range of expressions, so we had to use different mouths and eyebrows that popped on and off, and we painted out that line in post. Compared to a Jack Skellington, we've broadened the range of expressiveness a hundredfold with Coraline, her various mothers and Whybie. We also did partial replacements with Bobinski as well.

"So by using facial animation and replacements as opposed to pushing the faces around with little paddles underneath the rubber, we were able to bring that technique up several notches. I wouldn't say that we came up with many time-saving things, though. That simply isn't the nature of this work. But because it's handmade and takes such a long time, I think that's what gives [stop-motion] its long life

and beauty," Selick observes.

Maybe so, but even the most conventional stop-motion feature can still benefit from hi-tech advancements without losing the unique characteristics of the medium. "With a movie like this one, you're always looking to include some visual effects, like clouds or fire or rain," Selick says, "and early on, we were going to go with what has become the traditional method, which is to employ an outside company and have most of that done as CGI.

"We went to some people I know, but the bid was too expensive. So we said, 'How much of this can we do in-house? And how much can be done as practical effects?' I got this brilliant guy, Brian Van't Hul, who was a camera operator on *Nightmare Before Christmas* and has gone on to work with Peter Jackson on *Lord of the Rings* and *King Kong* and won an Academy Award [Best Achievement in Visual Effects for *King Kong*]. Brian told me, 'We'll do lots of the stuff practically, but we'll also use computers to bring things into the film.' Most of the film is handmade, but the CGI and digital added in post absolutely brought *Coraline* to a new level."

It's almost impossible to talk about *Coraline* without discussing the current state of stop-motion animation. "There's no discussion here without going back to *Nightmare Before Christmas*," declares Selick (who talked about that film in STARLOG #197 and *James and the Giant Peach* in COMICS SCENE #56). "You just can't get around it. *Nightmare* was initially released in 1993, and its afterlife has been incredible.

"Just in terms of the merchandising—Disney keeps putting out new things for *Nightmare*, and they've made a huge amount of money. Maybe *Nightmare* wasn't as huge of a success as some of the Pixar films, but you can still look at it as a financial model. If you have the patience and make something really good, a stop-motion movie can have a very long life.

"It also has to be something that will hold up over time," Selick adds. "If investors are looking to invest \$50 million, and they have to choose between a CG film and a smaller stop-motion film, most people are going to go with the CG project. Look at Pixar and DreamWorks, and while it's difficult to compete with those two entities, Blue Sky has certainly done some good films and had success. But if you're a little braver, it costs quite a bit



"Once *Coraline* is released, we'll see what happens," Selick observes. It's in theaters February 6, but please, cats, don't bring your own confections.

less to make stop-motion movies. It's more of a gamble, but there are always going to be people who want to take a risk and make something great.

"I know that Tim is going to oversee a [full-length] production of his old live-action short *Frankenweenie*, and that will be stop-motion. Wes Anderson is working on the stop-motion *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*. And Nick Park is unstoppable. He has a new half-hour *Wallace & Gromit* short coming out. So it seems like more stop-motion features are in production now than at any other time in history. Who knew?"

The New Universe

As to where *Coraline* fits into that range of films, Selick says that it's difficult to pigeon-hole his latest cinematic effort—or, for that matter, to tell moviegoers what they should expect. "I guess there are two answers to that," he comments. "One is for the people who don't know the book or Neil Gaiman: *Coraline* is a different sort of animated film. It isn't for little kids. I've been saying that it's for brave children from eight to 88, but I also don't want to market it to really young children, because it's too scary. It's an edgy PG, and some young children will be perfectly fine with that, but *Coraline* is a little frightening at points, especially in the third act.

"And secondly, people can expect a level of stop-motion animation that surpasses anything that they've ever seen. The range of expressiveness in the facial animation might make them forget after 10 minutes of watching *Coraline* that it's even an animated film."

While Selick prepares himself for the final verdict on *Coraline* (which premieres February 6), there are now a slew of new projects awaiting his attention. "My head story artist Chris Butler is a brilliant artist and a damn good writer, and he has an original script called *Paranorman*," Selick says. "It's good, funny and has zombies. Chris is going to co-direct it, and I'll act as creative producer. We have a small team working on that.

"Then there's a book by Philip Pullman called *Count Karlstein*, which he wrote before his *Golden Compass* days. A good friend of mine, Terry Castle [William Castle's daughter], and I developed a film story for it, so that's something I'll be writing a screenplay for. But none of these projects are 'Let's plunge right back into the boiling water with the other lobsters!' I'm easing back into things.

"Once *Coraline* is released, we'll see what happens," Henry Selick relates. "I don't do well with lots of time off, but I have a family, and I haven't seen much of them over the last few years. It will be nice to have more time, but I would also like to keep looking forward. At a certain point, *Coraline* will start to be a thing of the past, but right now it's a brand new baby girl that we're about to send out into the world. So I hope she doesn't get clubbed too hard!"

Dwayne Johnson is a realist. Especially when it comes to the fact that he'll never be able to get away from the name that made him famous in the first place.

"I'm always going to be 'The Rock' to people," he concedes. "I can't completely get away from that. I haven't gone by The Rock in years now, but what am I going to do when a bunch of kids come up to me and call me The Rock? All I can do is politely tell people that I now want to be known by my given name, Dwayne Johnson, and just hope that eventually it sticks in people's minds."

As if to emphasize the impossibility and, by association, humor of the situation, Johnson shrugs his massive shoulders and flashes a wide grin. "I recognize The Rock is a nickname and that I will always have it. That's just the way it is. And hey, when you think about it, it is a cool nickname."

Johnson is dealing with the name game during a conversation on the set of his latest movie, the Disney SF-action film *Race to Witch Mountain* (due out March 13). For the former pro-football-player-turned-pro-wrestler-turned-movie actor, *Race to Witch Mountain* is a return to the kind of action filmmaking he craves after recent sidesteps in the comedic *Get Smart* and *The Game Plan*.

"I was excited to come back to the action genre," he offers. "Especially with the way action is being done in mainstream Hollywood movies these days. I loved what they did in the *Bourne* films and the last James Bond. I wanted to make an action movie that could com-



By MARC SHAPIRO

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pete with those, and I think that's what we're doing. I've had the opportunity to play some really good roles in the past, but I've seen Will Smith having fun saving the world on several occasions, and that seemed like a pretty good gig, so I figured that I should give that a try!"

Name Games

Race to Witch Mountain is a reimagining of the 1975 Disney movie *Escape to Witch Mountain* (and its 1978 sequel *Return from Witch Mountain*), directed by *The Game Plan*'s Andy Fickman. Johnson stars as a Las Vegas cab driver caught up in an Indiana Jones-style adventure that includes children with extraordinary powers, the military, the CIA and space aliens. Co-starring are AnnaSophia (*Bridge to Terabithia*) Robb, Alexander (*The Seeker: The Dark is Rising*) Ludwig and Carla (*Watchmen*) Gugino (see page 36). Always one to play up the positive in enthusiastic tones, Johnson says that there's much to love about this picture.

"We're really pushing the envelope on the action side," he declares. "The action is high-speed and intense. I mean, just look at the stuff

we're shooting today. There are machine guns and bullets flying everywhere. And we're running up a ramp into an alien spaceship. If that's not action, I don't know what is!

"But this is really about the character I play, Jack Bruno," he continues. "I'm portraying the classic Everyman who has struggled his whole life and who has made lots of bad decisions. But because Jack is somebody who has always relied on his instincts, he now has the opportunity to touch greatness. So with all of that going on, I knew this was a definite opportunity to grow as an actor."

Johnson's budding professional football career as a member of the Buffalo Bills was cut short by an injury, but it wasn't long before he retrenched and re-emerged as a top draw on the wrestling scene under the stage name of The Rock. It's a period in his life that Johnson looks back upon fondly. "I loved what I was able to do in the world of professional wrestling," he recalls. "I had a blast creating

**HE MAY ALWAYS
BE THE ROCK,
BUT IT'S
DWAYNE JOHNSON
WHO'S THE STAR
OF RACE TO
WITCH MOUNTAIN.**

All Game Plan Photos:
Ron Phillips/Copyright 2007
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Carla Gugino, AnnaSophia Robb, Alexander Ludwig and Johnson embark on a *Race to Witch Mountain*, which marks the latter's return to action movies.

the character of The Rock. To say that it was my introduction to acting is an understatement."

During that period, Johnson did test the acting waters—albeit in a tentative, largely below-the-radar manner. In 1999, he did guest shots on the TV series *The Net* and *That '70s Show* and, the following year, he appeared on *Star Trek: Voyager*. Word got around that The Rock could actually act, and soon he was being offered progressively larger parts in bigger pictures. He briefly played the Scorpion King in *The Mummy Returns*, which was followed by his first lead role in the spin-off prequel *The Scorpion King* (which he discussed at the time in STARLOG #298).

"I learned a lot about how acting worked, and I liked what I was doing," Johnson

Dwayne Johnson had a *Game Plan* for his move into movies. Formerly known as The Rock, the ex-wrestler no longer goes by that name.

says. "The big thing for me was that it looked like it was something I *could* actually make a living doing."

It was enough to give Johnson confidence that he could make the next step once he decided to leave wrestling. "I officially retired from wrestling in 2003. When I had my last



Secret Agent Men. Johnson played Agent 23 to Steve Carell's Agent 99 in *Get Smart*.



Race to Witch Mountain is the second time Johnson has worked with director Andy Fickman (left). They also teamed up for Disney's *The Game Plan*.



Is that a UFO in the background? Besides action, *Race to Witch Mountain* also features aliens. Just as in the original '70s movies, the kids are extraterrestrials with special powers.

match, I just knew in my gut that was it. I thanked everybody who I wanted to thank and then just quietly walked away."

But not away from The Rock. In *The Rundown*, *Walking Tall*, *Doom* and *Be Cool*,

he continued to go by The Rock or, in the case of *Southland Tales* and *The Gridiron Gang*, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. "The name thing during that period was all done by choice and was a consideration as far back as *The Scorpion King*," he explains. "In that film, I only wanted to be known as Dwayne Johnson, but I felt that I needed two or three films with the other name to make an effective transition to movies in the public's eye. I knew that over time I would drop The Rock, and I probably could have forced it early on, but I don't think it would have felt right."

After a string of early successes, Johnson hit his first bump in the road when *Doom* dropped dead at the box office. "When I chose to do *Doom*, I thought I not only had a chance to cross over to the video game crowd, but to the science fiction and horror audiences as well," he observes. "But, for whatever reason, it didn't connect and it didn't work. The hardcore dudes went to see it, but nobody else did. That's how it goes sometimes. When you swing for the fences, sometimes you strike out. The main thing for me has always been

not to be afraid to step up to the plate and take that swing."

Game Plans

Given his background, Johnson agrees that his career could have become all action, all the time. "But the big thing and ultimate goal for me has always been to build a diverse foundation and to have the ability to go from genre to genre," he remarks.

Johnson took a big step in that direction by playing Agent 23 in *Get Smart*. Yes, there is action in the Steve Carell-starring comedy. But *Get Smart* is easily the most mainstream film Johnson has made to date. It was also the first time he dropped The Rock from his name and went solely by Dwayne Johnson.

"I wanted to make sure the transition was as seamless as possible," he reflects. "And I wanted to make sure it made sense. It was also a good time to do it. I've loved every film I've done, but *Get Smart* was a bigger budget, more of a studio movie with the emphasis largely on comedy. It felt like the *right* time for Dwayne Johnson to fully emerge."

Says Johnson, "I had a good experience with Disney on *The Game Plan*, and I loved the idea of partnering up with them when *Race to Witch Mountain* came up. With many of the movies I've done in the past, like *The Scorpion King* and *Doom*, the action is gritty and intense. The reason I went for *Race to Witch Mountain* was that I liked the idea of combining that gritty action with a great Disney movie—one that has heart and a sense of humor, and is for the whole family."

Johnson suggests that his recent choices in projects, including the upcoming *Tooth Fairy* and the *Captain Marvel/Shazam* film in which he may play Black Adam for his *Get Smart* director Peter Segal, are part and parcel of his growing interest in doing comedy within the context of other genres. "I've always had a love for comedy," he points out, "and I think it's a unique situation when you can laugh at yourself and make others laugh as well. Can you picture me turning into the Tooth Fairy? That's pretty funny stuff. And I love that, because I've always been drawn to self-deprecating humor. If I can poke fun at myself and it makes sense, I'll be there in a second. I mean, just look at me. You know the perception people have of me. So why *not* milk it for some laughs?"

The actor is being called back to the *Race to Witch Mountain* set. But before he departs, Johnson makes a spirited defense against the argument that he's just another former something-or-other trying to quickly cash in on acting before a fast retirement. "I'm sure lots of people *think* that way, but if it was true, you would think I would have made my money and gotten out by now," Dwayne Johnson comments.

"Trust me, I'm being smart about all this. I know what moves and motivates me. And what motivates me is to be as diverse as I can possibly be. I'm not afraid to try new things, and I'm not afraid to fail. And when something works, that's the best feeling in the world!"



Doom and gloom. Johnson wasn't happy with the video-game-based flick's box office, but that won't stop him from taking more risks and swinging for the fences.



His biggest film to date, *Get Smart* was also the first time that Johnson dropped "The Rock" from his screen credit.

Doom Photo: Copyright 2005 Universal Pictures

Design & Layout: Heiner Feil

I AM USED TO
GOING OUT AT
3AM AND DOING
SOMETHING
STUPID.

Fables #2

A STARLOG SIGNATURE SECTION



Who's watching the Watchmen? Hopefully, the answer as of the film's scheduled March premiere, will be millions of moviegoers around the world. And one of them will most definitely be Carla Gugino.

The actress is a STARLOG favorite whose many genre credits include *Quantum Leap*, *She Creature*, the *Spy Kids* trilogy, *Threshold* (which she discussed in issue #340), *Sin City*, *Rise*, *Night at the Museum* and *The Unborn* as well as next month's *Race to Witch Mountain*. She plays the small but pivotal role of Sally Jupiter/Silk Spectre I in *Watchmen*, director Zack Snyder's big-screen adaptation of the Alan Moore-Dave Gibbons graphic novel.

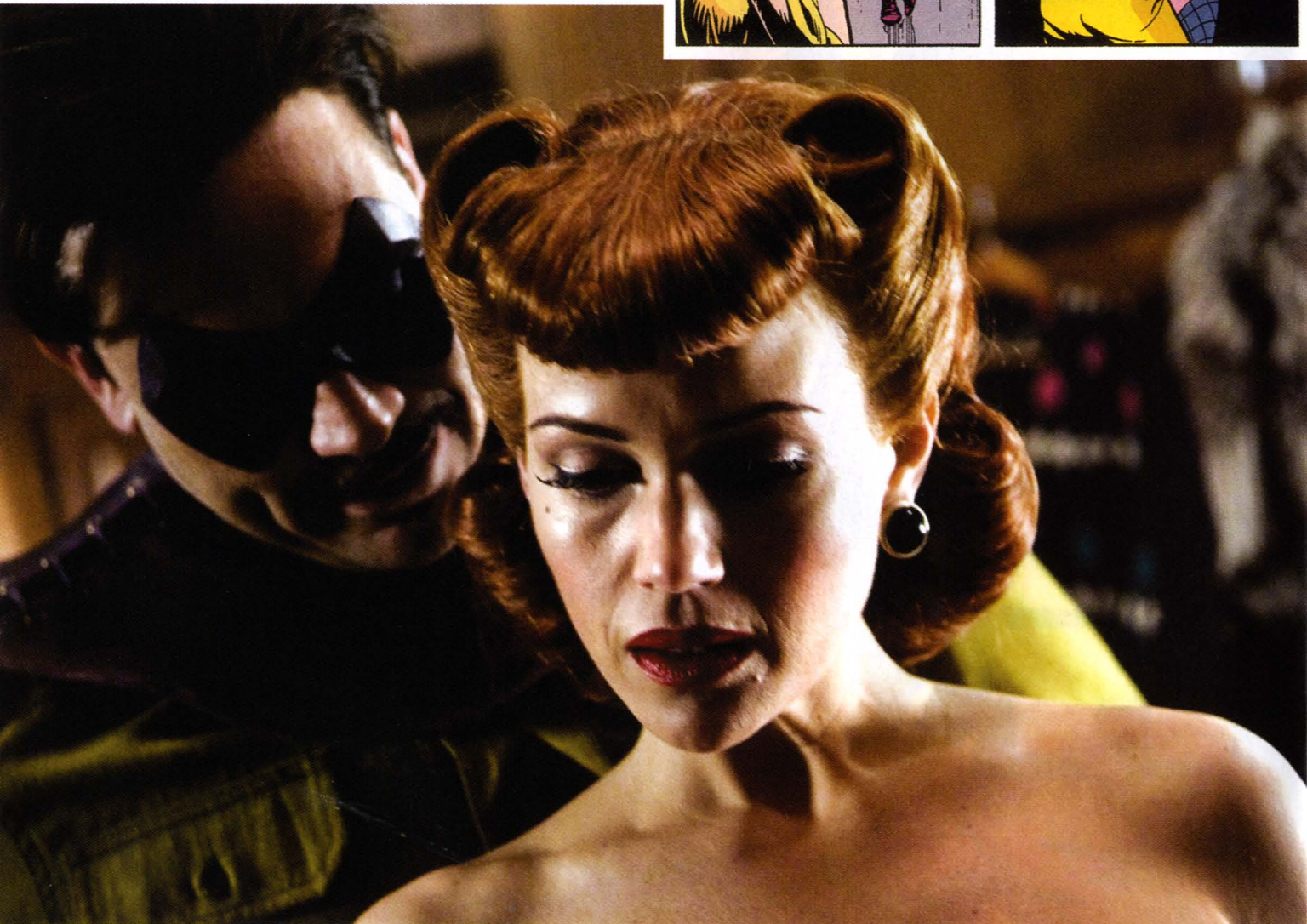
As the former vigilante superheroine, she's also the mother of current Watchmen team member Laurie Juspecky/Silk Spectre II (Malin Akerman, see page 39). Prior to joining the cast, Gugino says that she knew of the graphic novel, but considered herself less than an expert on it. "I was never really into [graphic novels] until I met Frank Miller [on *Sin City*]," she recalls. "That got me more engaged in that world, and I started reading some graphic novels. I had never read *Watchmen*, but I knew that it was considered the best graphic novel of all time. So when I was going up to Vancouver to meet Zack and [his wife/producer Deborah], I read the graphic novel along with the script, and I was blown away.

"I was also slightly confused, because in the graphic novel, Sally Jupiter is much older. There are a couple of flashbacks—to the rape and

Love and violence ensnarl the lives of Sally Juspecky a.k.a. Silk Spectre (Carla Gugino) and Edward Blake d.b.a. the Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan). It's a pivotal (and unpleasant) sequence in the Alan Moore-Dave Gibbons graphic novel rendered cinema-ugly in Zack Snyder's film adaptation.



Selected Photos: Clay Enos



Carla Gugino reflects on the loves & losses of Sally Jupiter.

By IAN SPELLING & PAT JANKIEWICZ

PIN-UP

a few other things. But I thought, 'Oh, it's interesting that Zack wants somebody so much younger than that.' And I knew the other people whom he was interested in [for the role] were also in their 30s. So I was thinking, 'Huh?' But literally within about five minutes of sitting down with Zack, I was completely in. I said to myself, 'I *have* to do this movie.'"

Glory Days

Being a member of the Watchmen "isn't like your typical superhero," Gugino laughs. "It's amazing to find such a complex and interesting character who just happens to be a crimefighter. These superheroes are manifestations of what's going on inside of them, and one of the perks of the job was conveying this search that they're all on."

"So often in [comic book movies] the outside visuals are all there is to it: 'This is cool being in a superhero costume. We're gonna kick ass!' and all that. *Watchmen* is a blast, but it's also very intricate with deep, emotional characters."



Photo: Pat Jankiewicz

With the aid of makeup magic, the 37-year-old actress played Sally at various ages in *Watchmen* (notably at 25 and 67).

GIRL



Silk Spectre (second from right) and The Comedian (kneeling) answered the call to action as members of the Minutemen. Moments after this group shot was snapped, their lives changed forever.

We first meet Sally as a young, perky superhero celebrity, and follow her to the end of her career, when her daughter picks up the torch. "Sally was such a fantastic character to play, because she's this exhibitionist, costumed crimefighter who loves attention," Gugino says. "She's also a film noir, 1940s Vargas pin-up girl. I've always loved and gravitated to that, so that was really fun on an aesthetic level."

Gugino also loves *Watchmen's* inventive and impressive title sequence. "Zack wanted to show Sally in her prime," she notes. "You see her when she was a crimefighter and super-hot. [It makes you realize] what she has lost, what she wasn't able to have for herself and why she wants to live through Laurie. Sally is pushing Laurie on against her will."

"When the flashbulb goes off, you see this intense act, this glimpse of light, and you see what Sally could have been if her life had taken a different turn. That, to me, is one of the things that makes *Watchmen* absolutely timeless. The rest of Sally's life is a struggle to regain that sense of light, and she tries to do that through her daughter."



These days, an aging Sally lives her life vicariously through the heroic exploits of her daughter Laurie, Silk Spectre II.

All Watchmen Comics Art: Trademark & Copyright 1985, 1986, 2008 DC Comics. All Rights Reserved.

All Watchmen Comics Art: Dave Gibbons/Colors: John Higgins



Gugino has two new movies out in March: *Watchmen* and *Race to Witch Mountain* (in which she co-stars with Dwayne Johnson, AnnaSophia Robb and Alexander Ludwig).



Unlike her *Sin City* role as Lucille, Gugino didn't have to spend much time in front of a greenscreen in *Watchmen*. "I didn't really work much with that," she says.

"I've never experienced portraying a 67-year-old alcoholic mother who is incredibly controlling and still wants to be the star. Sally is a really flawed and beautiful character. She's still living in her glory days, and she sees herself as if she's still in her prime. Sally is one of the most fascinating people I've ever played.

"Another amazing [aspect of portraying Sally] is that I got to be this 25-year-old in the late '30s/early '40s, in this completely crazy, Bettie Page-like number, and then I played her at 67 in the 1980s. I was in full prosthetics, which I had never done before."

Watchmen's Oscar-winning makeup man Todd Tucker has noted how impressed he was with Gugino's performance as the elderly Sally and how, through her movements and voice, she could suddenly turn into the 67-year-old ex-superheroine. "That was nice of him to say," Gugino smiles. "The makeup was an amazing process to go through, with the full cheek and neck pieces and [contacts for my] eyes. It took about four hours and involved several really long days. And it took about 90 minutes to remove."

If only she could have kept the costumes, prosthetics and wigs that helped transform her from a youthful 37-year-old woman into Sally at the various ages at which she's glimpsed in the movie. "I had four wigs!" Gugino declares. "That was the crazy thing—it tapped into my little-girl dress-up fantasies. And I also got to play a character who scared the crap out of me because of what I felt like I needed to accomplish in [relatively few] scenes. Sally has this massive arc, but there are so many things going on in the film, and she doesn't have lots of screen

time. There aren't any transition scenes for her, so her trajectory is very specifically laid out. Every scene is either a heightened moment or something really important happens. But it was a total dream."

Sad Nights

Perhaps no sequence better exemplifies Gugino's "heightened moment" comment than the vicious rape/attack that forever changes the lives of Sally, the Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), Laurie and everyone around them. Gugino considers the scene indispensable and reports that she and Morgan did everything possible to put across not only the horror of the assault, but its underlying implications as well.

"Jeffrey and I trusted each other implicitly," she notes. "I think the scene was much harder for him because he had to be so brutal. It was very important to Zack that that scene, as in the graphic novel, isn't titillating in any way, but truly *horrifying*. Also, there's the complexity that Sally is still in love with the Comedian. That's an irony that we wanted to explore, this brutal act, and yet somehow these two characters are oddly soulmates and connected.

If things had gone differently—if he had been able to express his affection differently, or if she had responded differently—they *might* have ended up together. That's what I find fascinating about human beings and what I love about acting—I get to go inside someone else's mind and experience that.

"This movie illuminates the human condition in so many different ways. We're the most complex creatures on the planet, and there's no such thing as black and white. Everything is grey, and anybody is capable of anything. I talked to Zack about [the Sally/Comedian relationship] the very first time that we sat down and discussed *Watchmen*. Sally has a soft spot for the Comedian. He's the love of her life.

"When Zack and I talked about the rape, he asked me, 'Are you gonna be OK with that, because I want it to be really brutal?' I said, 'Yes,' because that's the nature of the scene. The rape isn't sexy; it's an awful act. And while that alters [both characters], the fact is that Sally is actually OK with the Comedian later on."

Both Gugino and Snyder were intrigued by Sally's dichotomy. "Alan created that, and I find Sally's plight so interesting," Gugino says. "I've known people who've had hard knocks, and their view of the world is informed by that, like Sally." (Referring to the rape scene, Morgan admits, "There were a couple of shooting days with Carla that will stay with me for a long time.")

"I believe that in all creative endeavors, if you're doing something worthwhile and challenging, it should feel a little like you have no idea what you're doing, and that that you're trying everything to find that out," Gugino offers. "And part of that is the process of moving away from the storyboards and thinking, 'I have a new idea...'"

Hardcore *Watchmen* fans are anxious to judge Snyder's faithfulness to the source material. Expectations are high, and the pressure definitely is on. "I *know*," Gugino says. "I feel that way, too. I can't wait to see it. I saw three minutes of it at Comic-Con. We were in a big hall, and everyone got to see it at the same time, and every cast member was blown away. There's lots of pressure, but the cast—and certainly Zack—have a great deal of allegiance to the graphic novel. I don't think there's anyone who could be a better caretaker of the graphic novel, or a better person to bring it to the screen, than Zack.

"This is incredibly exciting, and nothing was taken lightly," Carla Gugino attests. "We had a phenomenal group of actors who dove into their characters, which is always inspiring. Even while we were filming, we would say, 'Ah, there's this one line in the graphic novel that's so interesting. Maybe we can find a way to...' There was this constant understanding and awareness of trying to make this film as rich and deep and full as possible, as opposed to simplifying it. And I just found that fantastic and so refreshing. *Watchmen* is one of the most special projects I've ever been a part of."



Slipping into tights, Malin Akerman examines Silk Spectre's heroic legacy.

The scene is Ossining Prison—better known as Sing Sing. A narrow corridor is open, cell doors ajar. A riot has taken place. Unrolled toilet paper hangs down from the tier above. Mounds of 1980s-era newspapers, books and magazines litter the floor—a few comic books too, including an issue of John Byrne's *Superman*. And why not? The greatest graphic novel of all time is being filmed: *Watchmen*!

The scene being shot today involves two of the movie's most colorful principals—Nite Owl II (Patrick Wilson) and Silk Spectre II (Malin Akerman). The former looks uncannily like the Batmanesque character designed by *Watchmen* artist Dave Gibbons. However, for this Warner Bros. production, Silk Spectre has been completely redesigned. The comic character's golden silk mini-skirt has given way to a black-and-yellow latex bodysuit augmented by high, black boots. Try to imagine a cross between a hardcore dominatrix and a yellowjacket wasp.

Assistants are making sure that Wilson's barn-owl brown cape is hanging straight, while a makeup person is freshening up Akerman's lips. Both actors retreat around a corner. A small fire is lit amid the floor trash. Director Zack Snyder calls, "Ready, guys. And action!"

The colorful duo charge back into view, pause, look down the corridor and clearly like what they see. As the camera moves in on their heroic faces, a look of pure joy passes between them. The moment suggests an alternate-universe version of Batman and Batgirl as played by Adam West and Yvonne Craig.

"Very good, very good," says Snyder after they cut. The grins on the actors' faces show that they thought so, too.

Next, the camera is set up on a reverse angle, and the stuntmen are brought in. They're dressed as convicts. After they once again exchange that look, Nite Owl and Silk Spectre tear into an oncoming knot of escaped prisoners. They go down the line, kicking, swirling, punching and making short work of half a dozen inmates. It's all perfectly choreographed.

That take over, Akerman turns to Wilson and says mockingly, "You big dork."

Spectre in Action

During the break, Akerman sits down to talk about her role as the modern version of Silk Spectre (as differentiated from the Silk Spectre of the 1940s' team the Minutemen). "First of all, it's amazing to be in an epic film," Akerman begins. "I didn't know about

Heir to a heroic tradition, Silk Spectre II (Malin Akerman) fights on for law and order. If you're a bad guy, you don't want to run into her in a dark alley.



SWEDISH VIKING IN LATEX

By WILL MURRAY

Being a *femme fatale* who kicks ass appeals to Akerman. She jokingly attributes her lethal aptitude to “the Swedish Viking” in her personality.



Selected Photos: Clay Enos

the *Watchmen* graphic novel before I read the script. But I read the screenplay and fell in love with it. The script was so well-written. Then I read the graphic novel. And then, when I went to Comic-Con, I realized what a big deal *Watchmen* was. The magnitude of it keeps growing and growing as we go along.”

She likes her character, too. “The great part of it is being a *femme fatale* and kicking ass!” Akerman enthuses. “It’s the Swedish Viking in me. Silk Spectre is such a strong part. I love [making this film], because it’s so different from anything else that I’ve done, as well as just a fantastic role. I talked to my husband on the phone today, and he asked, ‘What was your day like?’ ‘Well, today I’ve dismantled Beretta guy. Then I threw someone into a sink. And I pistol-whipped another guy.’ My husband isn’t messing with me anymore. ‘Do the dishes—now!’”

All day, Akerman has been filming in and around the soundstage cell block with Wilson and Jackie Earle Haley, who plays Walter Kovacs, a.k.a. Rorschach. “This is toward the film’s end,” she explains. “We’ve struggled with being these masked avengers—although I’m not masked, but my body is, I guess—and Rorschach is the only one who stuck with it. Rorschach has been put in jail, and we’re going to bust him out because he’s one of us. We were doing a good job [as the *Watchmen*], and now we have to save the world. So we’re trying to go back to doing what we love, because the world needs us. In this scene, we’re looking for Rorschach, to free him from the jail—but he’s already doing a good job of that himself. He doesn’t really *need* our help!”

Like it or not, playing a superheroine is primarily an exercise in physicality. “This, by far, has involved the most training-in-advance for a role,” Akerman acknowledges. “I once did a TV pilot for a *Charlie’s Angels* takeoff that never aired. We only did a week of training, but it was intense. I learned how to do wirework and a standing backflip. So it was cool stuff. But this has been a mix of real training, with Clay, who’s a drill sergeant. In the sweetest way, he’ll say, ‘No, you’re gonna do it.’ ‘No, I don’t want to do it.’ ‘Yeah, but you *are*, though.’ He’ll say it with a smile, and you really want to punch him. Poor guy. I’ve told him to screw off so many times!”

“So that has been the most intense part—the training, and the fight training. It’s a double whammy. I truly didn’t know how I was going to make it through the first week. I wanted to vomit, cry, laugh and pee my pants, all at the same time! But I got through it. And after a while, you go, ‘My God, I can jump up stairs instead of just dragging my feet.’ I feel great. So it’s well worth it. But that first week was *very* painful.”

“Also, my stunt double is awesome,” Akerman continues. “We’re going to intercut things, for sure. Sometimes, I look like a ballerina when I’m fighting, but there are a few moments when I look cool. But it’s hard to work with this hair. As soon as I twist, it slaps me in the face

and I can’t see. I’m blindly fighting. And simply trying to fight is hard enough.”

Silk in Costume

Silk Spectre’s latex costume is also a challenge. “When I see it in the mirror, I feel super,” Akerman admits. “I just go, ‘Wow!’ The costume is kickass, but the way it *feels* isn’t the same as it looks. I’m wearing a corset, which cinches in my waist an extra three inches and makes my shoulders appear bigger. If I drink or eat anything, it *stops* where the corset is cinched in. The latex feels like I have elastic around my whole body. It definitely isn’t the most comfortable thing.”

The best part of the outfit is *not* wearing the outfit. “There’s a special powder that I put all over my body [so I can slip into the costume],” she reveals. “We tried it with lubricant at first, which was really gross. But we found a powder that works much better. It takes about 45 minutes to get into [my outfit]. And then when I take it off, I’m singing Hallelujah. It’s a great feeling, like being born again!”

Silk Spectre is actually four distinct personalities. The original Silk Spectre (played by *Sin City*’s Carla Gugino in the film; see page 36) is burlesque dancer Sally Jupiter. Akerman is her daughter, Laurie Juspezyk, who inherits her mother’s mantle and becomes Silk Spectre II after Jupiter’s retirement. Akerman says that she’s playing Laurie and her inherited alter-ego in classic superhero style—as two people.

“Absolutely,” she affirms. “Laurie and Silk Spectre are the same person, but Silk Spectre brings out Laurie’s tough side. She has been training like a soldier. A fighter. And that cuts things off. Human beings have these moments, road rage or whatever, where they go into another mode that isn’t really them. I think that’s Laurie’s thing: When she goes into a rage, she knows what she has to get done, and that’s it. It’s still



Breathless! For years, Laurie Juspezyk has been the lover of Doctor Manhattan, keeping the god-like figure emotionally linked to his forgotten humanity.



All *Watchmen* Movie Images: Courtesy Warner Bros.

her, but it's *another* aspect of her.

"She carries most of the emotion in the movie, because she's the one and only female in the new *Watchmen* team. Silk Spectre goes through a breakup and starts this new relationship after having lived with someone who isn't human anymore. Silk Spectre is experiencing all of these emotions, and she brings a human element [to the story]."

"Silk Spectre is complex, because she isn't a normal human being. She grew up with a superhero mother and was trained to take after her. It has been an interesting journey creating this character and trying to make her real. Part of Silk Spectre has grown up tough. I'm still figuring her out as I go along. Every day, every scene, is collaborative. All of us actors talk about our characters: 'Why would they do this?' It's an unusual situation. Nobody is actually a real hero like that—except maybe firefighters."

Laurie in Love

Her love interests are Nite Owl and Doctor Manhattan (Billy Crudup). Jealousy, however, is only an on-camera activity. "Everybody likes each other," she says. "We've gotten together and done several cast dinners; we all love each other. Being on the set together is like hanging around with your friends. It couldn't be better. I'm so lucky."

As for her director, Akerman offers, "Zack is a wonderful man. We joke around most of the time, and he makes everyone feel comfortable, which is important on any set. He really knows the graphic novel, the script and the story, and he has a clear idea of what he wants. Zack gets you going, and it's nice to have someone who's so excited about a project. It's really cool."

Some well-known actors—Sigourney Weaver and Jude Law, among others—sought *Watchmen* roles, but Snyder decided to go with less-familiar faces. "Zack did an amazing job of casting this film," Akerman praises. "Everyone is perfect for their part. And when [I see them getting] into their costume and their character, I think, 'Oh my God, the comic book is coming alive!'"

Having a 400-plus-page graphic novel to work off of, notes Akerman, is like being handed a sophisticated set of storyboards. "Absolutely," she concurs. "It gives you the visual [aspect]. The characters' backstories are there between the pages. Silk Spectre's mother



Now, Laurie is embarking on a tentative, new romance—with another hero, Daniel Dreiberg a.k.a. Nite Owl II. It's a more human kind of love.

has a good deal of history in the graphic novel. [The source material] gives me an idea of *where* my character comes from. Much of the work was already done for me, and not only that, but the graphic novel provides inspiration. There's also the pressure of wanting to do it justice, because *Watchmen* is such a great graphic novel, and having that pressure makes me want to do an excellent job. There are ups and downs to it, for sure, but it's definitely an advantage."

Something that *isn't* working to Akerman's advantage is having to share scenes with Crudup when he's standing in for the 100-foot-tall CG Doctor Manhattan. "That's strange," she smiles. "That has been the toughest challenge—not imagining that he's bigger, but having to act serious when Billy has black dots on his face and is wearing this ridiculous suit with blue lights all over it. That was really hard during the first two days. Billy would just look at me, and I would start giggling. The whole crew would go, 'Oh, here we go again. She's off on her laughing fit.' I told them, 'I'm really sorry, but *you guys* try to look at him!' Imagining Billy as this massive blue man has been hard."

Silliness is something the entire cast and crew has battled throughout the shoot. "There are many silly moments," Akerman giggles.

"Like I said, this costume isn't the most comfortable thing, and in between takes, I'm picking [the outfit out of] my butt. And that *doesn't* feel very in-character! So we all have a laugh. Patrick will be dripping sweat, because his costume is so hot, and we'll look at each other and go, 'This is crazy.' But once I get geared up and start thinking about where I am and what I'm supposed to be doing, I get into it. Of course, once Zack calls, 'Cut,' I'll say, 'So...how are you doing, *Nite Owl*?' But it's all fun."

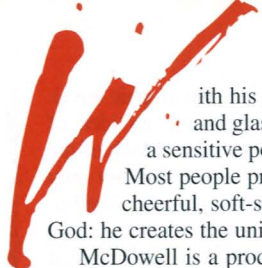
The actress understands that playing Silk Spectre could make her a 21st-century cultural icon—and she's prepared for that. "Bring it on!" Malin Akerman laughs. "I don't know what to expect. If that's what happens, then great. This is an amazing project, and the graphic novel and all these characters deserve to be put up on a pedestal and adored. I just hope that we do it justice."



Akerman is delighted to be part of the *Watchmen* cast. Watching her co-stars suit up, she says, is like seeing the comic book actually come alive.



Fighting in costume is uncomfortable. And after the camera cut, Akerman was happy to taunt Patrick Wilson, "So...how are you doing, *Nite Owl*?"

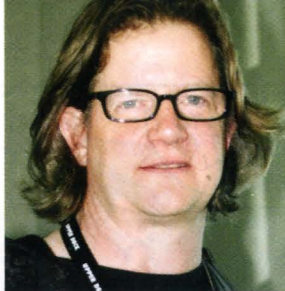


With his shoulder-length hair, blue eyes and glasses, Alex McDowell looks like a sensitive poet or even a busy grad student. Most people probably *wouldn't* guess that the cheerful, soft-spoken Brit has the same job as God: he creates the universe!

McDowell is a production designer, and his job is to devise an appropriate environment for the film on which he's working. "I have to come up with a world, and show *everything* about that world," he explains. "I need to think about where the characters live, how long they've lived there and how old they are, and make their environment reflect that."

His work includes the decaying Detroit of *The Crow*, the anarchic world of *Fight Club*, the future paradise seen in *Minority Report*, the twisted town visited by *The Cat in the Hat* and the afterlife on view in *Corpse Bride*. McDowell's most recent project had him depicting the frenzied alternate-Earth on the brink of nuclear annihilation in *Watchmen*, director Zack Snyder's adaptation of Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons' landmark graphic novel.

"We've kept *Watchmen's* iconic elements," McDowell promises. "Doctor Manhattan on Mars, the Comedian in Vietnam, even when Doctor Jonathan Osterman gets blasted in 1959 and disintegrates,



As a production designer, Alex McDowell creates worlds of wonder. He discussed his efforts on *The Cat in the Hat* and other films in STARLOG #319.

Photo: Pat Jankiewicz

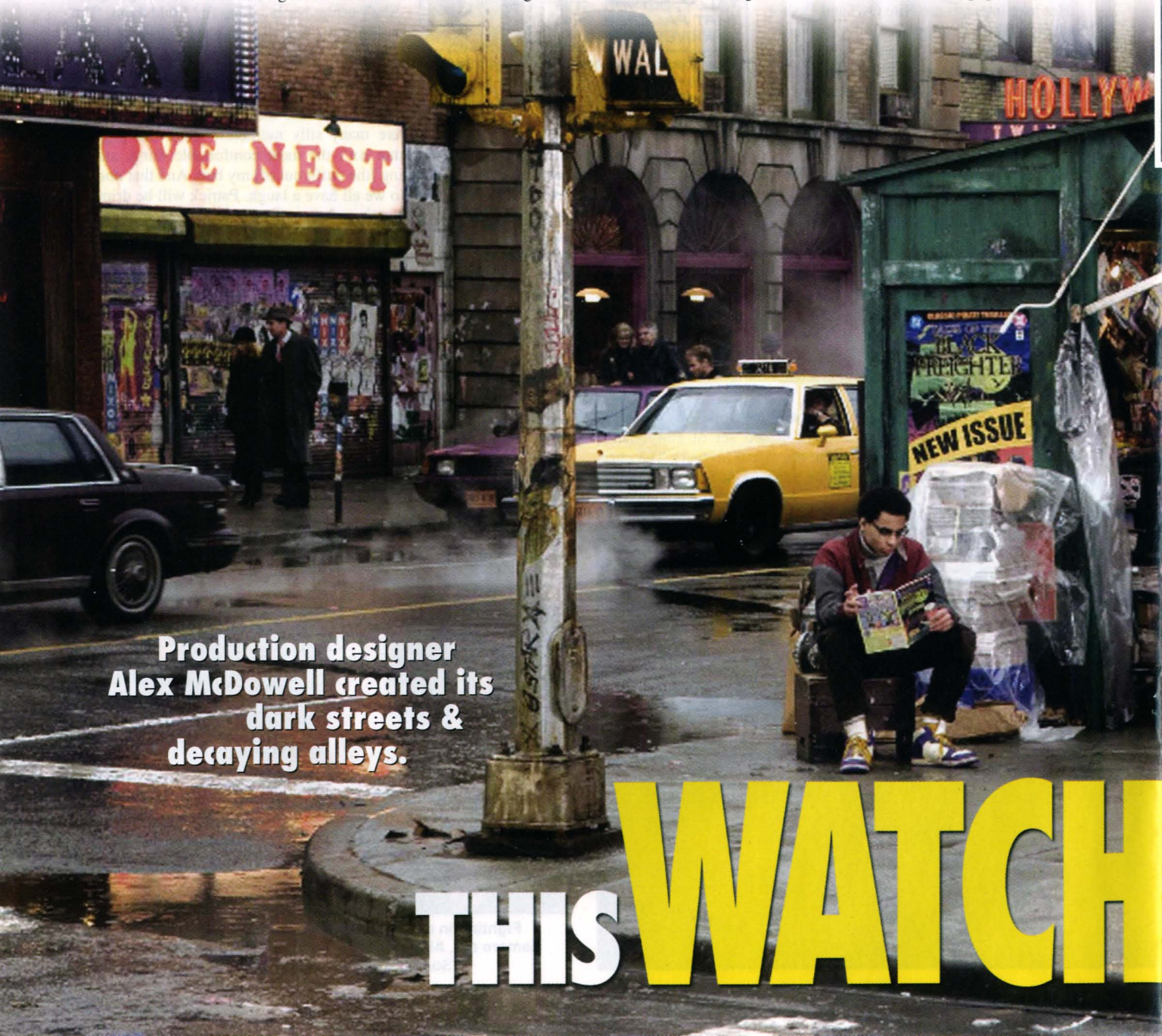
before he becomes Doctor Manhattan. We've done this as reality, but we also tried to build another level of logic into the structure, so the disintegration chamber might not look exactly the same as in the graphic novel, but many things do.

"The Owlship looks very similar to the one Nite Owl uses in the comic. We were building that up until filming began. We constructed a full-sized mock-up of the Owlship. That was an interesting vehicle to scale. If we made it too small, it would look like a toy, but if we make it too big, it would look like a science fiction object. We tried to make the Owlship the equivalent of a helicopter: It's functional and can plausibly make its way through narrow New York City streets, but it can also go underwater, just as it does in the comic."

The Dark Look

When McDowell designs a film, "One thing that comes through in all of my work is that I'm fascinated by social strata and how society works. *The Terminal* was a movie about a closed society, as was *Bee Movie*, which took place in a beehive. So I was excited to do *Watchmen*, because it's an iconic piece of literature and graphic art; it's a fantastic novel. I loved working with Zack, who is a master of pop culture, knew

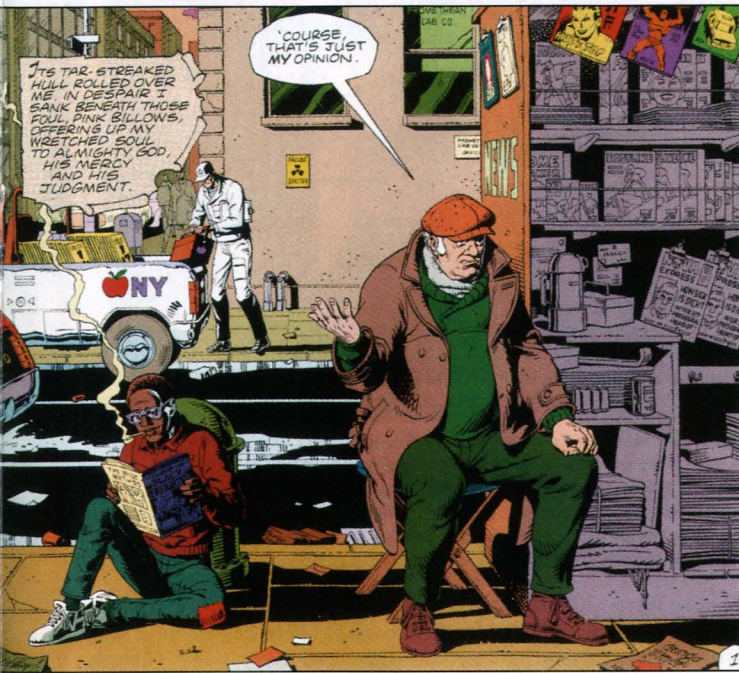
All Watchmen Comics Art: Trademark & Copyright 1985, 1986, 2008 DC Comics. All Rights Reserved.



Production designer Alex McDowell created its dark streets & decaying alleys.

THIS WATCH

In the *Watchmen* world, newsstands are a rendezvous point, where you might talk, fight or even die. The two Bernies can often be found here (as in the movie photo below)—the younger enjoying pirate comics like *Tales of the Black Freighter* while old Bernie runs the place and offers newsdealer wisdom. Hey, you gonna pay for that? This isn't a library!



MEN WORLD

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

exactly what to do with this material and fortified it with his own depth and knowledge of film.

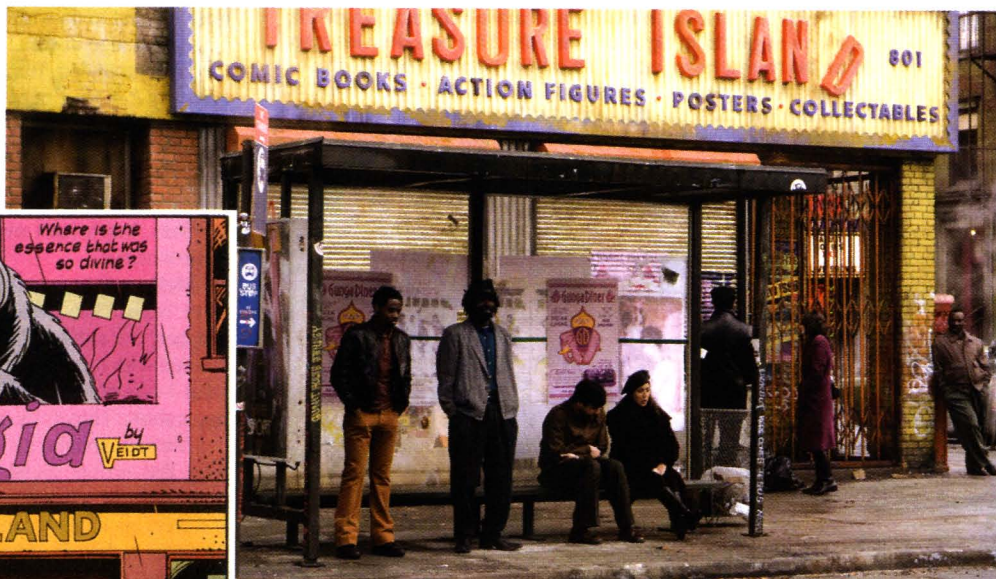
"We grounded *Watchmen* [in reality], just as in *The Crow* and *Minority Report*. I'm not so interested in simply increasing the scale of something. I hope this has scope to it, but I also want the audience to feel that this is a world they could live in. It's still New York, but it's a *Taxi Driver* kind of New York. It's more about texture than scale. *Watchmen* was a delicate balance, because it plays to superhero conventions, but it isn't over-clean or over-colored, like most superhero environments."

McDowell is grateful for the caliber of his directors over the years. "I've been really lucky to work with fantastic directors, like David Fincher," he extols. "*Fight Club* is quintessential Fincher, and to have worked with him on one of his best films—and a fantastic story—that's what I care about. Whatever happens after that sort of evolves into the pop culture. Hopefully, any film you make has that kind of life.

"Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal* was another great experience. Very few scripts spend that much time in one place or allow you to build such an enormous, functional set. The production used that set as if it were an actual location, and we lit it as if people went through there 24 hours a day. That was a huge machine, accommodating the extras and crew, and it could never have been done in a real airport."

Watchmen takes place on a pre-apocalyptic Earth. "It's a very polit-

ical, socially disintegrated setting,” McDowell explains. “We try to show the effect that the Watchmen have had on the last 20 years. In many ways, they’re living amongst what they themselves have created. I also wanted the world on screen to reflect that no one cares about themselves



Superheroes are *real* on this Earth, just part of contemporary history, so why would kids find any excitement in their comic book exploits? No, the thrills all lie with buccaneers, freebooters and swashbucklers. That’s why the comics shops of this world—like New York’s beloved Treasure Island—devote themselves to all things pirate.

anymore. Nuclear war is imminent, and everything is a bit decayed and falling apart. *Watchmen* is such a complex story that it’s hard to talk about, because every single thread leads to another thread.”

The British Eye

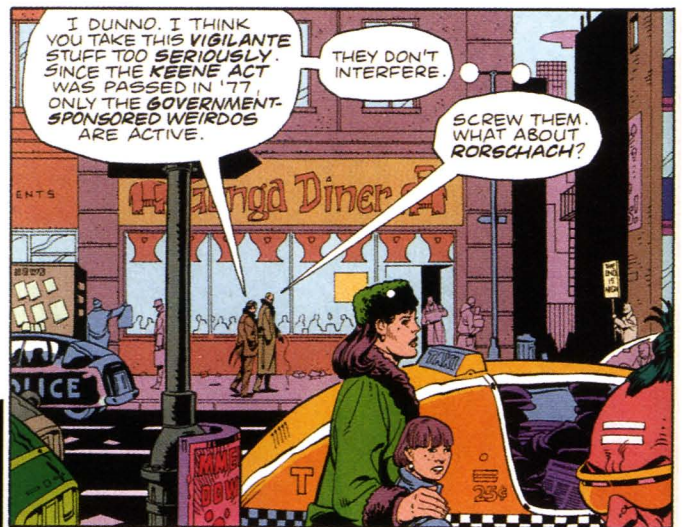
Of course, Gibbons’ *Watchmen* art was very influential. “[Costume designer] Michael Wilkinson developed all of the superheroes’ looks from Gibbons’ work,” McDowell points out. “*Everything* about the graphic novel influenced this film. But this wasn’t a 300 situation, where we actually took comic book frames and translated them to film. You wouldn’t want to copy Gibbons’ art, because it’s done in a graphic novel style. Still, the story demands that the characters exist in a ‘gritty realism.’ *Watchmen* is an undermining of the genre—the story is about what happens to these real superhero characters in the real world.

“Gibbons used photo-based lines, and drew real perspectives, architecture and proportions. It’s reality in the context of a graphic novel, with a highly-stylized color palette. So we had to take that into a film,

Gunga Diner—it’s the place (like Duffy’s Tavern) “where the elite meet to eat,” more or less. Walter Kovacs (a.k.a. Rorschach) dines here regularly, the better to watch his communications drop across the street while carefully reading the *New Frontiersman*. Dan Dreiberg and Laurie Juspezyk also enjoy what’s on the menu. You’ll like it here.

because that was the format we were working with. As I said, in terms of the way we portray the world, our visual references are more *Taxi Driver* than Gibbons’ art. But we referenced every single Gibbons drawing, and every piece of writing on a poster, sweets wrapper and sugar cube is in there.

“Zack knows the graphic novel intimately, and we all looked to it for inspiration. *Watchmen* is an amazing document because it’s so dense and loaded with Easter eggs and clues that layer the story. We’ve



tried to keep all of that. I wanted the film’s look to have Easter eggs, too, so that the audience sees something new every time they watch it.”

As an ’80s punk rocker—he designed shirts for the Sex Pistols—McDowell read *Watchmen* long before joining the film. “Oh yeah, when it first came out!” he smiles. “It was a big event in 1985, and it spoke to the sense of frustration that British culture had toward America. In England, it felt like the U.S. was using Britain as ‘Air Strip One’—putting nuclear bases in England as a front-line defense and those kinds of things. Alan



Four more years? Richard M. Nixon is America's President still—and perhaps forever. So naturally, this alternate-Earth is a dark and dangerous place even though the USA won the Vietnam War thanks to Doctor Manhattan. He's a god who's on our side. Yet the Doomsday Clock keeps ticking, the world edging ever closer to total Armageddon.

was reacting to that, and we were all upset about it, so *Watchmen* was a very relevant story."

McDowell also believes being British helped his work on *Watchmen*. "When a film is so much about American culture, and [the source material] was written from the perspective of two Brits, I understand the context that they were coming from," he says. "I have the same fascination with American culture. Although I don't think they were looking for a British production designer *per se*, being British was certainly helpful to me.

"Five years ago, I heard that *Watchmen* was going to be made into a film. I was into comic books and graphic novels, so I began tracking it and trying to get involved with it. It's great that everything worked out and they made it with the right director. I consider it an amazing privilege to work on this material. The timing is perfect. Having *Watchmen* come out now probably makes it an even stronger film than if it had been made 10 or 15 years ago. We have the benefit of distance from history. *Watchmen* is now a period piece; 1985 was a long time ago."

"You don't really think of 1985 as period, but when I analyzed it for this film, I realized that it *is*. There's nothing [being made today] that I could have used as a costume for 1985. There are dated cultural references in the movie, and when you watch *Watchmen*, you'll pick up on all those things from '80s life, film and music. What's interesting is that history is beginning to repeat itself. *Watchmen* has this parallel universe that's being echoed today. It has a Cold War and a corrupt President coming back for another term after he removed term limits—and that kind of plays off of modern events."

The Paranoid View

Some elements have been tweaked from page to screen. In the comic, for example, Ozymandias lived in a Fortress of Solitude-like enclave. "We changed that a bit," McDowell notes. "Now, it's a combination of different parts from the graphic novel, but we hung onto the Egyptian-themed architecture. He also has Bubastis [his genetically-altered cat/lynx hybrid]. I wasn't actively involved in the character design, but Zack and I worked with a great character designer named Neville [*Cloverfield*] Page."

As for his favorite *Watchmen*, McDowell replies, "It's a cliché to say, but Rorschach is an amazing and such a strong character. His mask is visually compelling, and he's a highly contrasted person with a black-and-white view of the world. I don't share his opinions, but he's the driving force of *Watchmen*. Rorschach provides this push-and-pull



morality. He's a twisted, psychotic person who is completely paranoid. I love when Dan Dreiberg says something about him being paranoid and Rorschach responds, "That's what they're saying about me now?"

Comics colorist John Higgins' orange, purple and green palette was a key contribution to the graphic novel's mood and style. "We had discussions about that," McDowell notes. "I worked with Michael Wilkinson,

and he paid more attention to that palette than I did, because I couldn't simplify the colors to the same extent that he could."

The film features the devastation of New York City. "It's in the story, and it's legitimate to stick with what Alan was talking about," McDowell says. "President Reagan spoke about fascism coming around [to bite us], and how that could lead to an apocalyptic attack on New York. That only adds more resonance to what really happened [on 9/11]. It speaks exactly to the heart of the story."

Before *Watchmen*, McDowell worked with Tim Burton on *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. "I decided to do it when Tim and I both agreed that we didn't like the original. I loved working with Tim because his vision is so clear. *Charlie* was a complicated, difficult film. We had to find a balance to the design and make a candy factory that had a dark edge and didn't look too saccharinely cute. The factory had to be a fantasy world that was a contrast to the grey reality of Charlie's world."

McDowell then jokingly adds, "I think I got to do *Charlie and Corpse Bride* because Helena [Bonham Carter, Burton's companion] put in a good word for me from *Fight Club!*"

While Alex McDowell has worked on some hard-edged films, "I've also done things like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Corpse Bride* and *Bee Movie*. I think I've been doing more child-based movies so I can show my family what I'm doing. But my kids aren't going anywhere near *Watchmen*. It's way too dark for them!"



Dedication to the source material ran deep. "Everyone on the crew had read the graphic novel," notes Snyder.



**THIS CITY IS AFRAID OF ME.
I'VE SEEN ITS TRUE FACE.**

"Superheroes are mythology. And when you can get at the *why* of your mythology, it's pretty cool," *Watchmen* director Zack Snyder remarks.

WHO DIRECTS THE

Zack Snyder finally brings the graphic novel epic to the big screen.

Despite his directorial reputation, first established with the successful 2004 *Dawn of the Dead* remake, and subsequently honed in bringing Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's *300* to the screen two years later, Zack Snyder didn't come to Warner Bros.' long-anticipated *Watchmen* project entirely of his own free will.

"I was certainly aware of it as a work," he acknowledges. "But when I was asked by the studio if I was interested in making it into a movie, I said, 'No.' I couldn't think of anything I wanted to do less—but only in the sense that it was epic and exhausting to think about. There's no version of *Watchmen* that ends in anything but tears."

Prophetic words, given the complexity of the undertaking, but also in light of the recent legal action taken by 20th Century Fox in suing Warners to prevent the R-rated *Watchmen* from reaching movie screens, owing to a rights situation arising from the project's convoluted 20-year history of bouncing from studio to studio.

"So it took me a little bit to come around to the idea of doing the film," Snyder continues. "'OK, if I don't do it, somebody else will do it. Right?' And then I went, 'Aw, shit! Fine.' And that's kind of how it started."

On the Watch

As Snyder speaks, it's nearing Halloween 2007, and the movie is deep into production. The scheduled release date isn't until March 6, 2009—17 months in the future—which should give you a clue as to how much post-production this monster will require. "It has been an amazing journey so far," Snyder muses. "Really, what I've done is take the scripts that existed and crushed the graphic novel back into them as much as I could."

With a cast of dozens ranging from superheroes to historical figures like Richard Nixon (who is still President in this alternate take on 1985) to media personalities such as Ted Koppel and John McLaughlin—plus a backstory that would flatten most films—this is a job for a car crusher, not a director.

Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley in the movie) makes a dramatic entrance in the story. "The filmic experience will be like the comic," Snyder asserts. "With the comic, you can read it, go back to it again and see another layer [of meaning]."

In a world where a blue-skinned nuclear giant named Doctor Manhattan (Billy Crudup) single-handedly won the Vietnam War for America, and superheroes—better known as "Masks"—have been outlawed, sinister events have compelled retired heroes Nite Owl II and Silk Spectre II (Patrick Wilson and Malin Akerman) to reassume their illegal identities. Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley)—who never retired—is investigating the death of their teammate, the Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan). Ozymandias (Matthew Goode), a commercial icon since leaving superheroics, faces an assassination plot. And meanwhile, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. lurch toward what appears to be unavoidable atomic Armageddon.

An estimated eight separate *Watchmen* drafts preceded Snyder rescuing the frequently stalled film from Development Hell. And according to reports, no two scripts were alike. "The original drafts were crazy," Snyder confesses. "In the very first one, Rorschach



Art: Courtesy DC Comics



WATCHMEN

By WILL MURRAY



Fans have their favorite characters. "And Doctor Manhattan [Billy Crudup] is mine," Snyder reveals. By the way, "It's not *Watchmen* without Richard Nixon."



There was no second unit on *Watchmen*. "I shot every shot in the movie," Snyder declares. The Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) takes his shots, too.

further away from his body, Martin. Higher. There you go. That's good. Like that."

Compared to *300* (which he discussed in STARLOG #355), the amount of greenscreen isn't as pervasive in *Watchmen*. "There's still plenty of it," says Snyder. "But it isn't practical for a movie of this size to have [lots of greenscreen]. With *300*, things were bigger and more landscaped. It costs more to landscape. If that movie had taken place within the castle's walls, I would have said, 'OK, more budget for the builder.' When we go to Mars and Antarctica, there's lots of bluescreen. But on the other hand, [*Watchmen* has lots of] hard sets and hard reality. The style is certainly different. What prison has a purple floor?"

Of the Freighter

Amazingly, the *Tales of the Black Freighter* comic (pirate yarns which entertain readers accustomed to real-life superheroes) that threads throughout the graphic novel hasn't been excised. "I was working on *Black Freighter* this weekend," Snyder reveals. "We're going to do *Black Freighter*. A version of the movie will exist that has *Black Freighter* built into it, whether it's in the theatrical edition or DVD or wherever it ends up. They did

has a love interest! And he doesn't kill the dogs. They become his sidekicks. Things like that."

Distilling the legendary 12-part 1986-87 comic book that was subsequently collected into a 400-plus-page graphic novel (and has been continuously in print ever since) wasn't easy. "It's a movie, so there are differences," Snyder asserts. "The stuff that you don't see is the [investigating detective] Steve Fine story. They're in the movie. It's just not their whole story. We tried like crazy to reference all of the texts in the graphic novel—in the background and everything. Also, the title sequence has lots of stuff from the texts, like *Under the Hood*. Of course, some of that had to be edited."

Snyder pauses in mid-interview to remotely direct a scene taking place a floor below. The set is a cellblock in Sing Sing Prison. A bald thug is lying on the comic book purple concrete floor; pale yellow cells frame the background. The inmate's forearms are dyed green to show where they've been cut off. This is to assist in the greenscreen process by which his traumatically amputated limbs will be subtracted.

First A.D. Martin Walters asks a question: "About his forearms? Because this doesn't exist, do we want our blood in there?"

Snyder responds without hesitation. "No. Have him put his left arm

a full-blown *Black Freighter* cover for us, which is pretty cool. The studio thought we were crazy. *Black Freighter* never existed in any prior script or proposed version of the movie." In fact, *Black Freighter* will be a standalone animated movie DVD directed by Mike Smith & Del Purgatorio, due to be released prior to *Watchmen*.

While *Watchmen* writer Alan Moore is once again sitting out another adaptation of his work—as he did on *V for Vendetta*, *From Hell* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*—artist Dave Gibbons is fully on board. "I showed him our shooting script," Snyder remarks. "Dave gave me some notes that were really helpful. Most of the time, when you give a script to someone, they tend to give you comments that are unusable. 'Oh, does it have to take place in New York?' or something crazy like that. Usually, it's a production unfriendly comment that makes you go, 'Oh, jeez.'"

"But Dave's remarks were right on the money, and he focused on the subtleties. 'Oh, Rorschach would never say this.' I think I followed every one of his comments—other than his note that they got the Italian wrong with Pagliacci in Rorschach's joke. Dave told me, 'We really wanted it to be this.' I said, 'Yeah, but I can't change that, because I would have to explain that every time. People would see the movie and

say, "That's wrong!" ' ' "

A hit parade of fallen directors preceded Snyder before *Watchmen* was finally greenlit, among them Terry Gilliam and Paul Greengrass. However, Snyder wasn't tempted to reach out to any of them for input or insight. "I would be interested to see what movie *they* would have made," he observes. "I read the last two scripts and said, 'OK, these are the things that have to be done.' I've worked on the screenplay a lot, and it's quite a process to say, 'Here's the shooting script.' "

Snyder picks up a binder-style notebook of scenes from the graphic novel. "This is the movie, right? So, we're in this area right now: Big Figure and the end of the prison sequence. This is the blood coming under the door." Clearly, the graphic novel is doubling as the film's storyboards.

It's time for the next scene to roll. Snyder calls, "And action!"

Nite Owl steps into the frame in his feathered cowl. He looks down at the hapless thug lying on the floor and says, "Yeah, he's alive."

Snyder gets excited. "Nice! Right away, one more. Don't cut! Wait a hair longer, guys. Let him get a little bigger. Action! Cut. Very nice!"

Production assistants look over the graphic novel to see how close the scene is to its source. All seems satisfactory. "I feel like there's *nothing* that we haven't struggled to get back that we haven't really gotten back," Snyder observes. "It's a long movie right now. I don't know how long. We talked about, if you do a shot-for-shot version, it's a five-hour affair, which is neither a mini-series nor a film."

In the Universe

One aspect of *Watchmen* that Snyder has specifically focused on is its multilayered and multilevel structure and storytelling. "The *Watchmen* world is different from other superhero movies, in that it doesn't really reference pop culture," he points out. "*Watchmen*, in some way, is pop culture feeding on itself. We had to, and *wanted* to, create that relationship between the world that we know—whether it be Richard Nixon or Vietnam—and also the way that world is different. And that takes a lot of media. It takes a lot of history. It takes a lot of newscasts. Anything you see—whether it be ads for Nostalgia or Meltdowns or whatever—helps that *Watchmen* world feel more three-dimensional.

"The *Watchmen* world is superimposed on top of our world, which makes the metaphors more apparent. Then there's the story itself, which takes place in 1985—the movie's present—and also in historical as well as remembered flashbacks. Doctor Manhattan's flashback is very precise, but Sally's is more memory. You have two kinds of ideas there. We did a great deal of work to try and make the reality layers dovetail into each other in a way that's coherent and cool, like in the book."

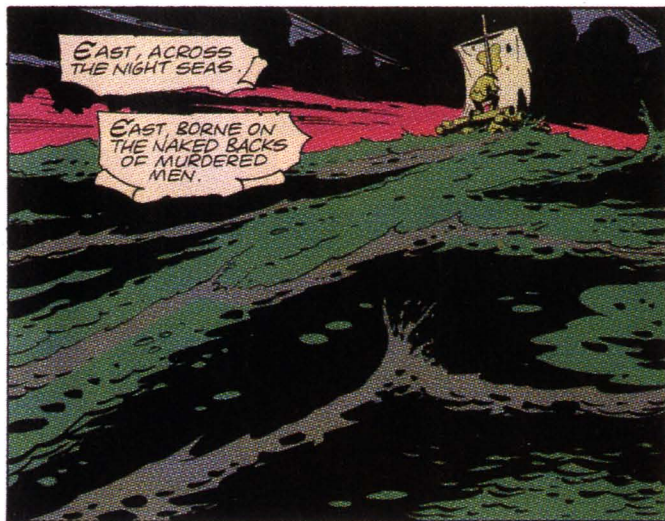
Snyder (who previously discussed *Watchmen* in STARLOG #359) has also tried to keep the graphic novel's storytelling devices intact. "There's a fair amount of Rorschach's journal," Snyder notes. "And there's lots of voiceover in the movie, with Rorschach and Manhattan. That's straight out of the book. 'An abattoir full of retarded children' and all that stuff. And, of course, the journal plays an important role at the film's end."

In Snyder's opinion, the challenge of helming *Watchmen* lies in those very details. "This movie is just so monstrously huge. It's epic,"



Snyder is unwilling to psychoanalyze graphic novelist Alan Moore's intentions: "I wouldn't try to make *any* assumptions about what Alan was trying to do."

Tales of the Black Freighter (the pirate comic animated) and *Under the Hood* (a mock documentary on the Masks, Earth's superheroes) will unspool on DVD. Snyder may "weave them into the movie's storyline" in a later DVD edition.



All Watchmen Comics Art: Dave Gibbons/Colors: John Higgins

he declares. "That's the biggest challenge, managing that scale. And remembering. 'That's right! We need a photo of Sally and her daughter in the background.' That part is *insane*. All the details. The story keeps going back in time. It's so rich, with the newspaper articles and all that stuff."

Some elements, though, are too subtle for film—not that Snyder hasn't tried to flesh them out. "There are a couple of little things, but I don't want to spoil them," he hints. "It's really innuendo more than anything. It's a few things, because the book is so dense. Just getting the stuff down that's in there is hard enough, let alone what's implied."

Expectations are hard to pin down. Die-hard fans of the Hugo Award-winning graphic novel want the entire experience on film. The general audience—who may or may not be aware of *Watchmen*—is impossible to predict. "It's challenging," Snyder allows. "Pop culture is pretty self-aware. And this movie, because it's self-aware, appeals to that. People know that it's about them. Most superhero films pretend that we don't exist—that the world doesn't exist. *Watchmen* is the opposite. Everyone wants this film to be cool. Not to be mean, but many of the superhero movies that have come out recently haven't been satisfying. Among a certain demographic and audience, the hope is that *Watchmen* will at least examine [its superhero archetypes]."

And the director isn't fazed by *Watchmen*'s self-referential comic book and superhero themes. "I think that's *good*," he insists. "That's awesome, and it's kind of the point. To the comic book culture, *Watchmen*'s iconography is obvious. 'Yeah, of course that's a version of Batman. Of course that's a version of Superman.' The cool thing about today is that mass culture has caught up with comic book heroes. My mother knows who Batman is, just as well as the craziest comic book geek. And, also, we're inundated with superhero culture: *X-Men*, *Fantastic Four*, *Heroes*... It's primetime now. It's crazy. And that's what is great about *Watchmen* coming out now."

As for the possibility that general audiences might not understand that these half-familiar figures are meant to evoke and deconstruct more commercial superheroes, Snyder replies, "This movie is very refreshing. There's little compromise in the material. And it will go over [some people's] heads. But I hope that the mass audience understands the irony and satire, as well as the drama. We've really tried to point a finger at mass culture with the war rooms. 'Look, it's you! This is about you. Yeah, it's about superheroes, but this is also your world.' That's the fun part. So we'll see."

"I guess for me," he adds, "the movie's job isn't to replace the graphic novel. The film is a *trailer* for the graphic novel. I hope that it makes people say, 'Gosh, I gotta check that out!'"

Not surprisingly, given Hollywood's ways, the *Watchmen* cast has been signed to a sequel. But to those who have read the graphic novel, a follow-up would appear impossible—and disastrous. "Yeah!" Zack Snyder laughs. "And I *won't* be around if there is one!"



Design & Layout: Heimer Feil

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WE WERE SUPPOSED
TO MAKE THE WORLD
A BETTER PLACE.

Fales



KEEP WATCHING FOR MORE NEXT ISSUE

A monster movie? With science fiction and aliens? This is crazy!" Such was DreamWorks Animation executive Jeffrey Katzenberg's reaction to director Conrad Vernon's proposal.

"It was so out of the realm of what he was used to hearing," Vernon recalls. "But I kept pounding at it, saying, 'This is going to be great. This is going to be great...' I believed in the idea, and because I believed in it, Jeffrey said, 'All right, fine. Let's see if this thing holds water.' It did, and I think that's why it was greenlit, that's why it went into production and that's why it's great now."

Vernon co-directed *Shrek 2*, which zoomed to fourth place in all-time U.S. box office in less than three months, currently topped only by *Titanic*, *The Dark Knight* and *Star Wars*. As *Shrek 2* premiered in Cannes in May 2004, Vernon was considering his options in both live-action and animation projects when DreamWorks offered him what eventually became *Monsters vs. Aliens*.

"At the time, it was called *Rex Havoc*, based on the comic book," Vernon says. "The script didn't really stick to the comic, and it didn't have a conceptualization that I could grab onto. But as soon as I found out that there were monsters in it, I thought that it would be a good idea to use old B-movie monsters and satirize Ed Wood films.

"People love watching those things because of their bad qualities. They became a style, and they make you laugh. Ed Wood's films are entertaining because you know the financial constraints he was under. You understand the shortcuts he had to take and how quickly he had to write the dialogue. It was all about getting the picture done. That was Ed Wood's schlocky B-movie style. I said, 'If we put that conceit into this script, I think we have a fantastic comedy on our hands.'"

Katzenberg gave the go-ahead to Vernon to develop the project. Meanwhile, *Monsters vs. Aliens* co-director Rob Letterman wanted to make a *Dirty Dozen*-type movie. "Jeffrey

paired us up," Vernon says, "and once Rob and I put our heads together about what he wanted to do—this *Dirty Dozen*-style template—and what I wanted to do, that's when this thing really gelled.

"Rob and I decided from Day One that we needed to be on the same page all the way through. We couldn't make our own films separate from each other, because if his vision didn't fit with mine or if my vision didn't fit with his, we would constantly be changing things. So we did everything attached at the hip. If there were any disagreements, we debated it out right there. And then it became like clockwork. There weren't any egos involved. There *couldn't* be. If one of us had an idea, and the other one disagreed, we almost immediately knew whose idea was stronger in that instance, and the other person would acquiesce. It went back and forth like that. So there's no telling who did what in the film, because it was a *total* team effort.

"We each have our own skill sets. Rob has

CONRAD VERNON & ROB LETTERMAN MASTERMIND EARTH'S MOST DESPERATE 3-D BATTLE, *MONSTERS VS. ALIENS*.

BY BOB MILLER



MONSTER MATCH

Attack of the (Almost) 50-Foot Woman! Susan Murphy (a.k.a. Ginormica) has a giant lead in the 3-D race to save San Francisco from destruction in this *Monsters vs. Aliens* melee.

been a writer for a long time, and I had lots of ideas that I would pitch to him, and he would put them into the script. Same thing with the storyboards. I was a storyboard artist for years and years, so when we went to storyboard pitches, I was able to visualize them and get our ideas across as a storyboard artist. So we boosted each other up if the other was lacking in something. But it was always a 50-50 opinion in everything we did."

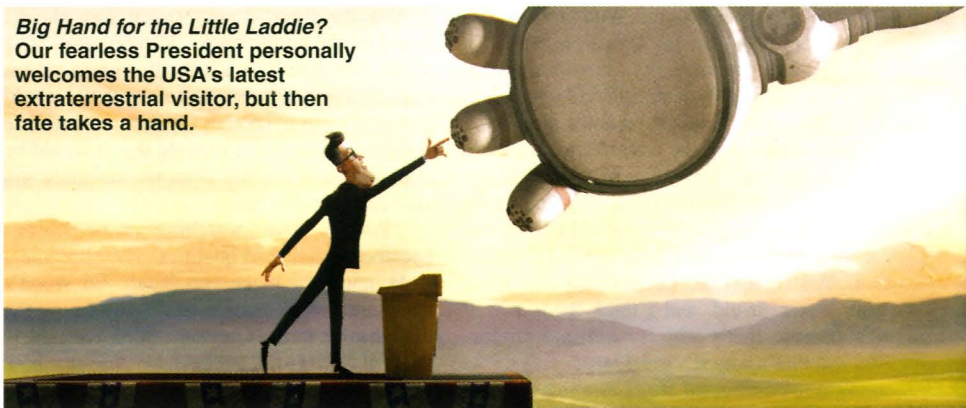
Alien Agenda

Both directors not only had to deal with the pressure of managing a multi-million-dollar project involving hundreds of artists and technicians, but it was also decided that *Monsters vs. Aliens* would be DreamWorks' first 3-D animated film. "There was a huge amount of stress," Letterman acknowledges. "The first movie I directed was *Shark Tale*, and that was right when DreamWorks was going public, so the whole IPO [Initial Public Offering] was on our backs, and I thought nothing could be more stressful than that. Then I joined *Monsters vs. Aliens*, and Jeffrey decided that this should be our first 3-D movie, so I was back in the same anxiety-filled situation as before!"

To add to the pressure, Katzenberg moved *Monsters vs. Aliens* from its original May 2009 release date to March 27 in order to avoid competing with James Cameron's 3-D live-action film *Avatar* (which subsequently shifted to December). "If you ask our line producer Jill Hopper, she'll say it gave her nose-bleeds and caused her to pull out her hair," Vernon chuckles. "It was kind of crazy for a little while—and we've been going crazy ever since!"

"We had these meetings where we would go into a room and there would be this spreadsheet that was 17 feet long with quarter-inch, multicolored boxes. We would look at it and say, 'If this isn't in on this date, then it isn't going to be in layout on this date.' It was mind-boggling. But they did a fantastic job of scheduling everything out. There was a great deal of stringent math involved to make sure that this movie came out on time. So [the release date change] did impact us. It put a fire under

Big Hand for the Little Laddie?
Our fearless President personally welcomes the USA's latest extraterrestrial visitor, but then fate takes a hand.



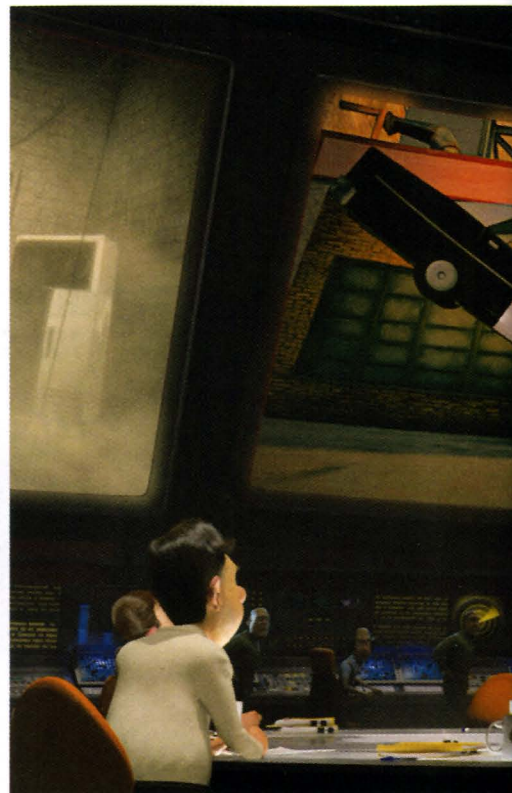
everyone's ass! But we worked it out, and I don't think it hindered the film at all."

Or to sum up the solution in a single word: overtime. "Yeah," Vernon laughs. "I should have just said that, but that wouldn't have been interesting. Plain ol' overtime. The faces of our crew will tell the story."

In STARLOG #371, *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* directors Eric Darnell & Tom McGrath pointed out that it takes enormous amounts of computer memory and processing time to pan across animated landscapes, but that technological advances have made that task much easier. In the case of *Monsters vs. Aliens*, the filmmakers faced an even more formidable obstacle: 3-D.

"It required new technology and elephant-sized processors," Vernon reveals. "We had to take everything from the studio, throw it into a room and hook it up—and we had a whole other room full of processors. The processing power behind this movie is insane. And that wasn't *only* for the 3-D. Panning was a problem. Jeffrey, Rob and I sat down and decided that this film would be very cinematic as far as the camera was concerned."

The directing duo used a new virtual reality tool, the InterSense camera, to determine pans during the previsualization stage before the animation was rendered in the computer. "It's like holding a small-screen TV," Vernon explains. "As you walk across the room, you're being tracked, like in motion-capture, and you can walk around the set, virtually.

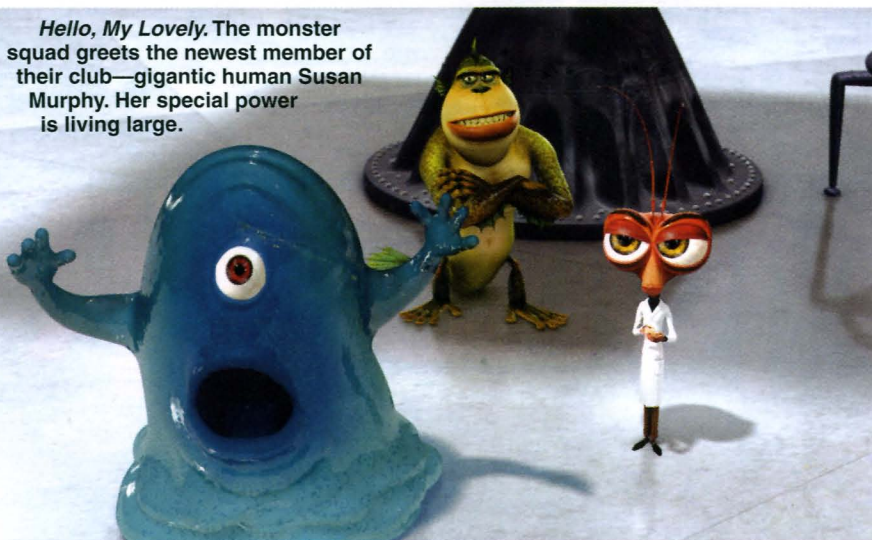


That takes lots of processing, but we wanted to be able to move the camera like you can in a live-action movie. We weren't only dealing with pans; we had handheld shots in some cases as well. The processing power was immense. And then you put 3-D on top of that and it's a *huge* step forward."

"One thing that we did from the very get-go is we said that we *weren't* doing 3-D as a gimmick," Letterman emphasizes. "If we were going to do this medium, we were going to embrace it and tell a story using the medium. So there was a learning process to figuring out what that meant and how we would aesthetically use 3-D, and it changed how we shot the film."

"The action sequences in this movie were pretty hairy," Vernon candidly adds. "The chase through San Francisco and the culmination of that chase on the Golden Gate Bridge were confusing, because we were dealing with a thousand different ideas. Part of it was in the storyboards. Part of it was in the previz. Things were constantly being rearranged and changed: 'Should this happen here? Or should


Hello, My Lovely. The monster squad greets the newest member of their club—gigantic human Susan Murphy. Her special power is living large.



it happen at the end? Is this too big of a bang?"

"When I was in the middle of that, I was saying to myself, 'Wow, it's quite an undertaking shooting one of these gigantic action scenes.' It was a problem trying to get my head wrapped around it. It was relentless, and by the end, I was exhausted and wanted to take a nap. Another issue was, 'How do we pace this film so we don't exhaust the audience in the first 20 minutes?' We had to figure out the proper pace, and the InterSense camera helped us with that, because we could see things instantly."

Essentially, shots from the storyboards were combined with shots using the InterSen-



The Amazing Dr. Cockroach. If you can't smash 'em, join 'em. Should anyone survive the end of the world, it may be him.

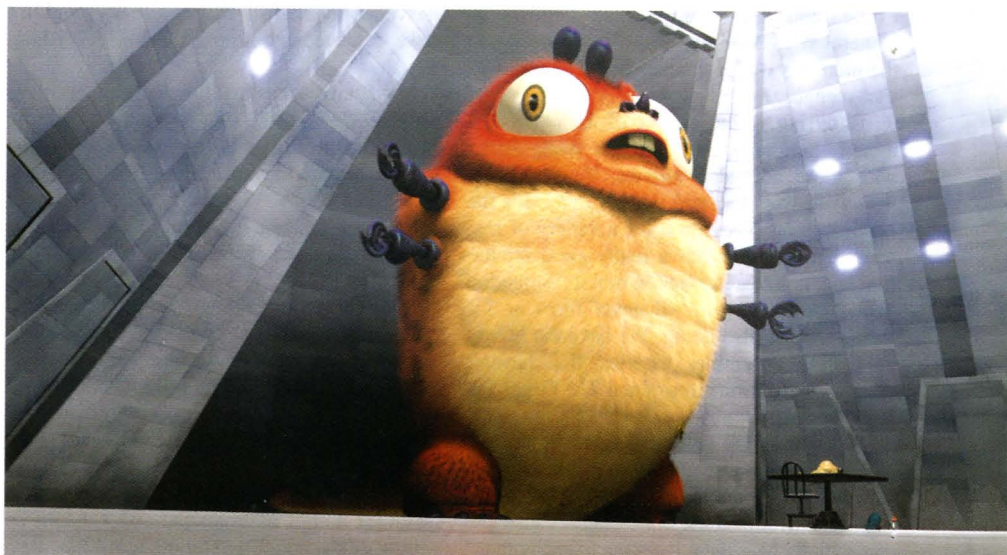


Monster Business. Salute America's home-grown grotesqueries—B.O.B., Ginormica and the Missing Link. They represent the thin monster line protecting Earth from animated alien evil.

se camera tool for the story reel. The directors then viewed the footage, determined what the problems were and edited and changed the story accordingly. "This [InterSense] tool was specifically designed for 3-D, but what we found out is that it's valuable no matter what," Vernon notes. "You can literally put on the glasses and walk around a virtual set in 3-D."

Monster Movie

Of course, this being a DreamWorks film, the cast is an A-list roster of celebrity talent. Reese Witherspoon voices Susan Murphy, who is struck by a meteor and grows to 49 feet, 11 inches and is dubbed "Ginormica." Paul Rudd plays her fiancé Derek, who calls off their marriage because of Susan's sudden enlargement. The U.S. Government quickly intervenes, and imprisons Susan along with their other captive "monsters": the gelatinous, brainless B.O.B. (Bicarbonate Ostylezene Benzoate, voiced by Seth Rogen), mad genius Dr. Cockroach (Hugh Laurie), feisty half-



The Live Bug. Wakey, wakey! The sleepy Insectosaurus, a 350-foot grub, stirs. Gaze in wonder at the mightiest of Earth's monstrous defenders.



Tour of the Gargantuas. San Francisco's beloved Golden Gate Bridge again separates the natives from the tourists, the monsters from the aliens.



Call Me Madman! It's hard to believe the fate of the free world rests in the hands of this American President. Recount!

ape/half-fish the Missing Link (Will Arnett) and the 300-foot Japanese grub Insectosaurus. Rainn Wilson voices Gallaxhar, the sinister alien invader who controls a 350-foot Robot Probe, and Kiefer Sutherland bellows as General W.R. Monger, who offers amnesty to the monsters if they can defeat the extraterrestrial menace.

Referring to the caliber of *Monsters'* actors, Letterman says, "You get really lucky with these animated movies. You basically have your wish list, and you *get* them. It's the craziest thing. They do it for a variety of reasons. DreamWorks has a really good reputation and, unlike a live-action movie, animation doesn't interfere with whatever films or TV shows they're also doing. We have the luxury of putting ensembles together that haven't been in live-action films since *The Great Escape*. It's incredible."

Usually, group recording sessions are out of the question because of the actors' busy schedules. "We prefer to have all of the actors in the same room at the same time because you can actually hear them listening to each other," Letterman remarks. "But it's hard to make that happen. We had a rare opportunity where Paul

was in town, and Reese knows him, so we brought Paul in. That scene where Derek breaks up with Ginormica is *their* performance. They just riffed back and forth, and it has an organic feel that we really couldn't have achieved by simply piecing everything together."

In a quirk of casting, Stephen Colbert plays the President of the United States, a role he briefly vied for in real life. "I swear to you, he got the idea to run for President from us!" Letterman laughs. "I actually called him on it during one session, and I told him that I was going to say that when I did press for this movie!"

For the work-in-progress story reels and temporary scratch tracks, the directors recorded themselves. "Conrad did *every* voice," Letterman says. "At our first storyboard screening, we put up an opening credit, 'All voices by Conrad Vernon.' He's amazing. Conrad does the Gingerbread Man's voice in the *Shrek* films. It's a true gift. We would be in editorial with a microphone, and I would be sitting on the couch and telling him, 'Say this,' and he did every single voice. Afterward, we gradually [replaced Vernon's scratch tracks]

with the actual actors. But we had lots of late-night fun in that editing room!"

Letterman wound up voicing three incidental parts in the movie. "I always play the nasally, annoying Jewish guy. That's the one thing that I do really well!" he jokes. "In the movie, I'm a Secret Service man: 'Yes, sir, Mr. President.' I'm also the Lieutenant who's flying the transport plane that's about to crash, and I whine the entire time as we're going down. And I'm a helicopter pilot in the monster prison. Susan accidentally hits my helicopter and, again, I'm whining as I crash and burn."

"Conrad voices Rita, Derek's Mom. He did the scratch voice, and we couldn't top it. And he plays one of the War Room advisors, the guy who says, 'What would Oprah do?' Conrad is all over the movie. He's basically in *every* DreamWorks film."

Golden Gate

Since part of the picture takes place in San Francisco, the studio sent a crew to the City by the Bay for research. This included the directors, visual FX supervisor Ken Bielenberg, production designer David James, layout supervisor Damon O'Beirne, producer Lisa Stewart and Hopper. "A 350-foot robot and a 300-foot grub fight each other over the Golden Gate Bridge," Vernon grins. "So we walked back and forth on the bridge and looked over the perilous edge and up at the towers. That gave us a good sense of what it was like to be on the bridge, so when we shot that scene, we knew where the camera should be to showcase the most exciting and precarious spots where these two giant things are fighting."

"Then we went up in a helicopter. That scared the crap out of some people! We raced over San Francisco and then headed toward the bridge. When we were going over the tower, looking down at Golden Gate Park and seeing how the ocean stretched out beyond the



Beware the B.O.B.! General W.R. Monger warns, this creature is insatiable, devouring any old thing! Nonetheless, there's *always* room for Jell-o!



bridge, David said, 'Can we see what this thing can do?' That's probably the *worst* thing you can say in a helicopter!

"The pilot was just waiting for that. He nosedived straight down to the ocean, pulled it back up, went sideways and we flew right underneath the Golden Gate Bridge—which I think is illegal, but I don't know! So we flew sideways under the bridge, and then we went straight up into the air, turned sideways again and flew between the towers and over the Marin side of the bridge. God, that was intense. It was certainly memorable. I would not recommend it unless you love rollercoasters and don't mind your lunch coming up!"

It's an aerial experience the filmmakers tried to translate to the screen. "We have some shots where it's like you're in a helicopter going around," Vernon says. "We don't necessarily nosedive the audience down to the water. There's no purpose for that in the story. But we did *try* to give the audience that feeling

of, 'OK, you're standing on one of the Golden Gate Bridge towers watching these two giant creatures go at it.'

"Our production designer took thousands of pictures, not only of the bridge, but all of San Francisco: Signs, bricks, sidewalks, the way the skyway goes across the clouds and the fog rolls in, everything. Lots of architectural stuff as well. [Visual development artist] Rachel Tiep-Daniels then took the bridge and adapted it to our design style. Rachel also figured out where [and how] the bridge would break. It would break down in sections. There would be some torque and twist. The cables would snap first. So they designed [the bridge's collapse] around that."

Although Vernon accepts the term "Wack Factor" to describe *Madagascar's* cartoony design, he suggests "stylization" for the approach they took in *Monsters vs. Aliens*. "It's slightly bending the bottom of a window and stretching the top of it out, but so that it's barely noticeable," Vernon explains. "It's a believable world, but with quite a fantastical edge to it."

Both directors already have their next projects lined up. Letterman will be directing *Gulliver's Travels* for 20th Century Fox, starring Jack Black as Jonathan Swift's legendary traveler. And Vernon is currently co-writing and developing *H.R. Pufnstuf*, based on the beloved Sid & Marty Krofft TV show, to direct for Sony Pictures. Both films are (tentatively) scheduled for 2011 release.

"As a filmmaker, you need to love the idea you're working on," Vernon stresses. "And you have to make sure that idea holds water before it ends up on the screen, because it's going to be tested, questioned and put through the wringer. Many ideas go by the wayside, but the strongest ones always float to the top. So you need to have your idea bucket full at all times, and that comes with loving what you do, and I *love* doing this."

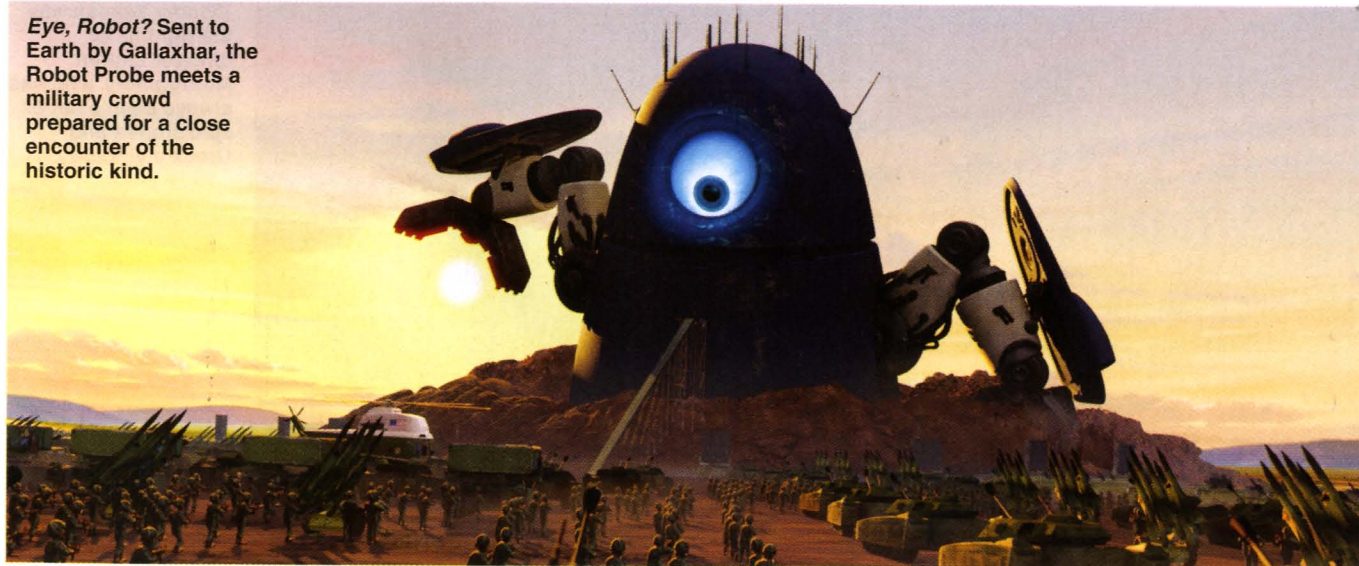
"The reason I make movies is because I like to entertain people. I want people to forget what's going on in the world when they walk into the theater. I just hope that everyone enjoys this film. If it's a cathartic experience for them, great. If it isn't, at the very least I hope they enjoyed themselves. That's all I'm looking for."

So when you're directing a "family film" like *Monsters vs. Aliens*, do you aim it more toward adults or kids? "You try to make an adult movie that's appropriate and accessible to kids," Letterman replies. "I find that children are much smarter than we give them credit for. And the worst family movies are the ones that pander to kids and don't give them any respect."

"Being appropriate is key," Rob Letterman concludes. "We didn't do anything inappropriate in this movie. *Monsters vs. Aliens* is visually accessible and lots of fun. The characters are rich, warm and likable, and this world has some fantastic places. But we also made this film for one other audience—us!"

Design & Layout: Heimer Fell

Eye, Robot? Sent to Earth by Gallaxhar, the Robot Probe meets a military crowd prepared for a close encounter of the historic kind.



YOUNG Wonder Woman

By WILL MURRAY

With golden lasso in hand, director
Lauren Montgomery unveils the newest animated Amazon.

On March 3, Warner Home Video releases the fourth of its DC Universe direct-to-video films. Designed and directed by Lauren Montgomery (who helmed one-third of *Superman: Doomsday*), *Wonder Woman* retells the amazing Amazon's origin story.

Although set in the contemporary era, *Wonder Woman* is steeped in the rich mythology from which the character sprang. "We start the story with the background of Wonder Woman's mother and the Amazons," relates Montgomery. "They battle the villainous Ares, and afterward they're given the island of Themyscira as a reward. Basically, they were enslaved by Ares after all of their loved ones were killed. That was the beginning of the all-women race. Before that, they had men and families, but Ares came along and wiped them all out.

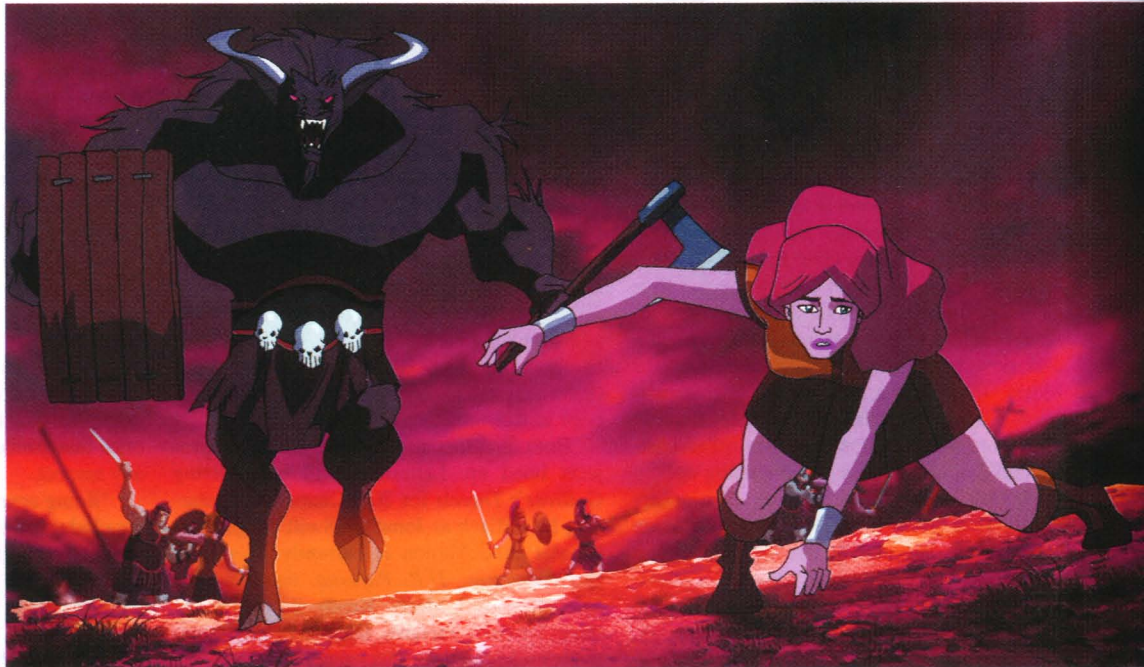
"So we spend some time on Themyscira, and we get to know Wonder Woman's mother and Artemis, who are the two main Amazons. And, of course, there's [the future Wonder Woman]

Diana, who was born on Themyscira. Steve Trevor eventually lands [on the isle], and we have the tournament that allows Diana to bring him back to New York."

Amazon Women

All does not remain quiet for long on the former Paradise Island. "After defeating him

in battle, the Amazons enslaved Ares on their island, but he escapes," Montgomery explains. "Now, Wonder Woman not only has to take Steve back to the mainland, but she must hunt down Ares. That's the main storyline: Diana and Steve searching for Ares in America in order to stop him. Ares is the God of War, and he's trying to stir stuff up. He gains his power



Wonder Woman was the right fit for director Lauren Montgomery, who has always been a fan of epic stories and Greek mythology.

Hippolyta (voiced by Virginia Madsen) is the Amazon Queen and mother of Diana (a.k.a. Wonder Woman).

from war, so he wants to make as big a battle as he can."

Montgomery was working at Nickelodeon when producer Bruce Timm called. "I've been working with Bruce on and off for the past few years," she says. "Bruce likes my work, he extended me the invitation and I was happy to accept. It's always a pleasure. Bruce has such a remarkable body of work [*Animaniacs*, *Batman*, *Superman*, *Justice League*]. Just to be able to learn from him is an incredible benefit to me."

She was familiar with the DC superheroine created in the 1940s by William Moulton Marston (as "Charles Moulton"). "I knew the broad strokes," Montgomery recounts. "I wasn't deeply familiar with the really fine details. But I had worked on *Justice League*, so I knew her background—that she was from Themyscira and an Amazon. Most people, when you tell them that Wonder Woman was made out of clay, they have no idea what you're talking about. So I'm proud I knew at least that much!"

One detail did take Montgomery by surprise. "Wonder Woman loses her powers when she's bound by a man. Wow! I had *no idea*. I knew about the invisible jet, the truth lasso and bracelets, but I had never heard about [that weakness]. Luckily, that isn't touched upon in our movie."

Serving as a designer as well, Montgomery had to rethink the character for storytelling purposes. "The Wonder Woman in *Justice League* was a full-fledged, veteran superhero," she notes. "But in this film, we're dealing with her origin story, so Wonder Woman had to be much younger and naïve. When I started designing her, I wanted Wonder Woman to look like she had just reached adulthood. I gave her longer hair, because younger girls usually have longer hair. She has the flat boots that she now wears in the comics, as opposed to the high heels she had in *Justice League*. I didn't give her earrings, because younger girls usually don't wear that much jewelry. So I used smaller details to hint at her youth, and that was pretty effective."

There were challenges, of course. "I had to make sure that Wonder Woman's style was different from the character seen in *Justice League*," says Montgomery. "Many people know the DC superheroes from Bruce, so we had to stand apart from that, yet we didn't want to go too far from the superhero archetype. It was a difficult task that didn't give us a whole lot of leeway. There aren't a world of

shapes to choose from for body types.

"As soon as you start changing the characters' shapes too much, they no longer look like superheroes. We had to get the tiny details [down right], especially with the Amazons, who are a bunch of women with basically the same Amazonian figure. We really had to play around with their facial features to get differ-

ent looks out of them."

That included their star. "We tried to give a Greek-inspired look to Wonder Woman," offers Montgomery. "The biggest change was probably her nose, as far as trying to give her something different. I was inspired by the design they used in Disney's *Hercules*, with the flatter nose. When that's drawn right, it looks great. There are a few shots, sadly, where [the nose is] a little wonky, and I wish they had drawn it better, but there are many shots where she looks quite beautiful."

Amazon Princess

For trademark reasons, a drastic costume change was out of the question. "There's only so much we could do, because we want her to be *recognizable* as Wonder Woman," Montgomery notes. "I've always liked her outfit—the skirt and low-cut pants vs. the high-cut pants. But she had a skirt in *New Frontier*, and she wore the low-cut pants in *Justice League*. I wanted to make her different, so I refer-



Warner Home Video's *Wonder Woman* begins on the mystical island of Themyscira, home to a proud and fierce race of warrior Amazons.



When it comes to animated characters, Montgomery prefers females because she believes they can express a wider range of emotions than men.

Ares (Alfred Molina) is the movie's main villain. Here, the Greek God of War stands by Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards Hades' gates.

“but she still sounds like a respectable woman. Keri doesn't sound tiny or high-pitched. Wonder Woman is six feet tall, and so we needed someone who sounded strong, but not deep, manly and old. Luckily, we got Keri, who is great in the role.”

“Since Steve Trevor is the main comic source in this movie—he has the best sense of humor—we have [*Firefly's*] Nathan Fillion, who has an incredible sense of comedic timing. He steals the show with some of his funny lines. Nathan is probably my favorite person to listen to, and he did an awesome job.”

“We also have Alfred Molina as Ares, and

enced the Adam Hughes version with the high-cut pants and wider boots. Wonder Woman has a pretty cool costume in this movie.”

A costume that, while distinctive, makes her look like Captain America's patriotic sister. “We came up with our own explanation for that,” Montgomery laughs. “Whether people will accept it or not, who knows? But we tried our best.”

Also present (but of course unseen) is Wonder Woman's invisible jet. “We don't explain where it came from, because that would have taken too much time away from the main story. But it does show up,” Montgomery states.

Although this incarnation of the Amazon princess comes equipped with the usual tools of Wonder Woman's trade—her magic lasso, bullet-deflecting bracelets and golden tiara—there is one major departure from the canon. “She *doesn't* fly in this movie,” reveals Montgomery. “It was a logical decision: If Wonder Woman has this flying jet, then why have her fly independently? It's redundant. We just needed a way for her to transport Steve [to New York] besides piggybacking him.”

Another character needed to be rethought as well. “Steve Trevor is more of a sexist,” Montgomery states. “He's a womanizer, so we put him against his polar opposite, Wonder Woman, who obviously has a great deal of feminism in her personality. They play off of and learn from each other. It's a great dynamic. There are some funny lines when he's on Themyscira, surrounded by these strong women who won't put up with what he's saying. I'm pretty happy with how Steve turned out.”

A striking voice cast was assembled for *Wonder Woman*, beginning with *Felicity's* Keri Russell in the title role. “She has a youthful quality to her voice,” observes Montgomery,



***Firefly* fans will appreciate the comedic timing that Nathan Fillion brings to the role of Air Force fighter pilot Steve Trevor.**

Looking for someone who shared Artemis' “strength and fire,” Montgomery cast Rosario Dawson as the hot-tempered Goddess of the Hunt.

he's another great actor to listen to,” continues Montgomery. “I didn't think of him at first, but [when I heard him] in the sound booth, it was a perfect match. He sounds like a suave and respectable villain. He isn't a Snidely Whiplash or some sleazebag. He's wise and yet threatening. Alfred gave Ares the presence that he needed in this film.”

Virginia Madsen plays Queen Hippolyta. “She did a fabulous job, too,” says Montgomery. “She sounds like a woman who has gained a great deal of wisdom. She doesn't sound old, but rather wise for her years.”

Rosario Dawson is Artemis, the firebrand



Amazon. "She has a strength and fire to her voice that was perfect for Artemis' character. Artemis is the strongest of all the Amazons—and she has the hottest temper. They were a perfect match."

Amazon Animation

Montgomery grew up on Disney cartoons, and while helming superhero movies wasn't something she intended to do, she relishes the opportunity nonetheless. "Superheroes lend themselves best to animation," she opines. "If you put them in live-action and the stuntwork or CGI isn't done right, it stands out that much worse. If the costume isn't done correctly—it's a guy in really bright spandex—it will look goofy. In cartoons, you can make a person fly and don't need a greenscreen or wires painted out. The action seems more natural when it's animated."

Not that *Wonder Woman* wasn't a huge challenge. "Pulling double duty was the toughest part—not only being in charge of the main design, but also directing it," she comments. "Either one of those jobs is difficult on



Montgomery credits the overseas animation studio's use of gradients, filters and diffusion for *Wonder Woman's* colorful look.



Surprisingly, Montgomery's interest in and fondness for comics and superheroes didn't really begin until she saw *Batman: The Animated Series*.

its own, so there were days when I wanted to pull my hair out. But now that it's all done, I'm really happy with the final film.

"Everything on Themyscira is beautiful and glowing, like a true paradise. The colors stand out, and the overseas animation studio used gradients, filters and diffusion to make everything look filmic. It's really impressive. New York isn't, quote, as lovely, but it still looks great. The background paintings are incredible. We had a tremendous artistic crew on this show.

"The score is absolutely beautiful," Montgomery adds. "There are times when I'm watching the movie that I get a little choked up, and it's mostly because of the incredible music. The score gives certain moments more emotional impact. And also the sound effects. It's a treat to listen to."

When *Wonder Woman* debuts in March, it will be simultaneously available for download, On Demand and Pay-Per-View. The two-disc special edition DVD contains more than three

hours of bonus features, including audio commentary by Montgomery, Timm and screenwriter Michael Jelenic, featurettes and a digital download of the film.

As for Montgomery, she has already shifted her focus to her next DC Universe project. "I don't know if I'm at liberty to say what it is," she allows. "DC is doing a series of direct-to-DVD films, and I've directed some of them. Hopefully, the fans will get to watch a good range of comics movies. And they'll have different directors, so if someone hates my work, they aren't screwed!"

Could that mean another shot at *Wonder Woman*? "Well, I would love to!" Lauren Montgomery concludes. "But I would also love to see another *Wonder Woman* story done in someone else's style. I think the more takes you have on a character, the more interesting they become. So I hope that *Wonder Woman* gets more time in the spotlight, because she hasn't really gotten enough."

Design & Layout: Heiner Feil



Running the show as the producer of the DC Universe films is *Batman's* Bruce Timm. Montgomery notes that Timm taught her lots of "little tricks" about camera moves and editing.

Marvel's two most misunderstood man-monsters have never really been done right outside the comic books. The Hulk isn't just green and angry; he's curious, confused and wondering why the whole world hates him. And X-Men's Wolverine doesn't look like Hugh Jackman; he's actually a short, angry and ill-tempered outcast with a berserker rage and a mask.

Now that Marvel is making their own animated movies, they intend to give both characters their due with *Hulk vs.*, in which the Incredible One first meets Wolverine and then confronts the Mighty Thor. To make sure that they pulled it off, the studio brought in expert superhero animator Frank Paur, whose credits boast *Batman: The Animated Series*, Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* and *The Invincible Iron Man*. The resulting warfare has just been unleashed on DVD by Lionsgate in regular (\$19.98), two-disc *Special Edition* (\$24.98) and Blu-ray (\$29.99) formats.

Monster & Mutants

"*Hulk vs. Wolverine* isn't a literal adaptation of *The Incredible Hulk* #180-81 [the issues where Wolverine made his debut]," Paur points out. "But the comic and the movie begin the same way, with the Hulk tearing through the Canadian wilderness and their government sending Wolverine to stop him.

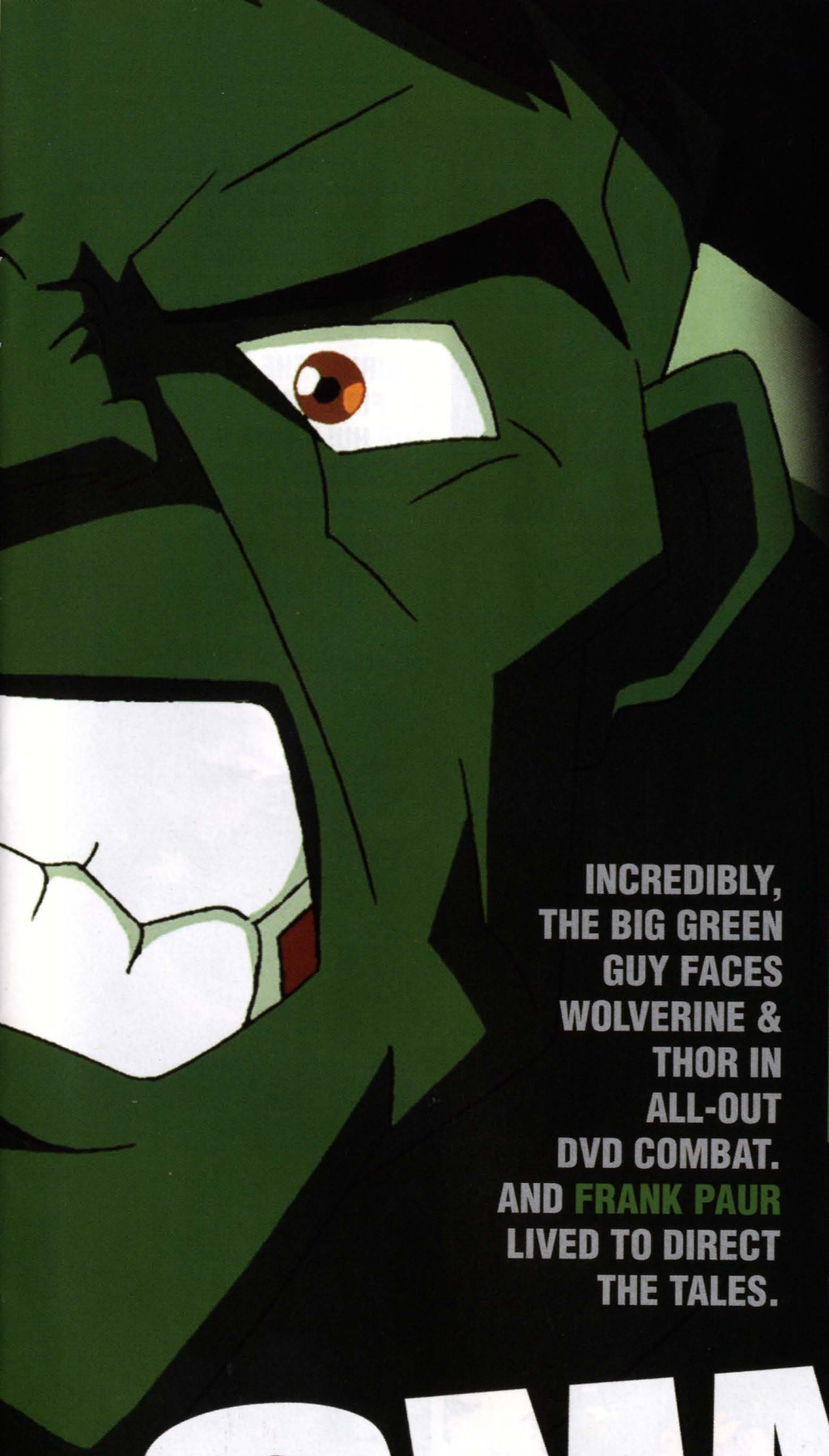
"I was the producer-director-annoyance on *Hulk vs.*," says Paur, billed as supervising director in the credits. He worked closely with supervising producer Craig Kyle and writer Chris Yost (who teamed to co-script each film) as well as veteran storyboard artists Kevin Altieri and Butch Lukic. "It's a double-feature. In one movie,

You wouldn't like him when he's angry, but you *will* like Hulk animated. Otherwise, Hulk smash!

Incredibly, the Hulk takes on two of Marvel's mightiest heroes in the new direct-to-DVD release.



the Hulk fights Wolverine, and in the second, he fights Thor. So it's two stories that have two different Hulk personas. During the 1970s, when he first met Wolverine, the Hulk was very childlike in his approach to people. We utilized that for *Hulk vs. Wolverine*, whereas in *Hulk vs. Thor*, he's more of a monster. We have the Hulk come



**INCREDIBLY,
THE BIG GREEN
GUY FACES
WOLVERINE &
THOR IN
ALL-OUT
DVD COMBAT.
AND FRANK PAUR
LIVED TO DIRECT
THE TALES.**

to Asgard! Fred Tatasciore does a great job of voicing the Hulk—he captures both sides of him really well.” Bryce Johnson voices Bruce Banner.

“This project had me very schizophrenic,” Paur confesses. “I was developing two shows about the Hulk at the same time. On the surface, they *may* seem the same, but they aren’t. They’re two completely different stories that required entirely different art direction. And I wanted both the Hulk and Wolverine to be recognizable.”

In *Hulk vs. Wolverine*, “The Hulk is being hunted, while in *Hulk vs. Thor*, he’s being utilized as a weapon of mass destruction by [Loki and the Enchantress], who don’t appreciate how truly dangerous he really is,” Paur says. “The Hulk doesn’t always deserve the fights he gets into, and the battle in Canada explodes beyond his conflict with Wolverine. We also brought more of Wolverine into that story, and there are some cool guest stars [Sabretooth, Deadpool, Lady Deathstrike]. This is for the fans who are sick of seeing a Wolverine who only slashes robots and doors! And he meets a Hulk who *doesn’t* hold back.”

The monster and the mutant have an impressive battle royale. “We use a couple of moments from Todd McFarlane’s *Incredible Hulk vs. Wolverine* and even from Damon Lindelof’s *The Ultimate Hulk vs. Wolverine*,” Paur notes. “If this were a comic book, think of it this way: *The Hulk vs. Wolverine* story would be about four



Animation veteran Frank Paur signed on to help create the latest Marvel movie adaptations.

Photo:
Pat Jankiewicz

issues—it’s very concentrated—and *Hulk vs. Thor* is like six issues of an eight-issue run. That’s the best way to put it.

“With *Hulk vs. Thor*, you don’t quite have the prologue, you don’t quite have the epilogue, but you have everything in between,” Paur adds. “It definitely has a

SMASH!

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Wolverine's savage origins are explored in this *Hulk vs.* entry as well as May's live-action movie with Hugh Jackman.

All Hulk Images: Courtesy Lionsgate



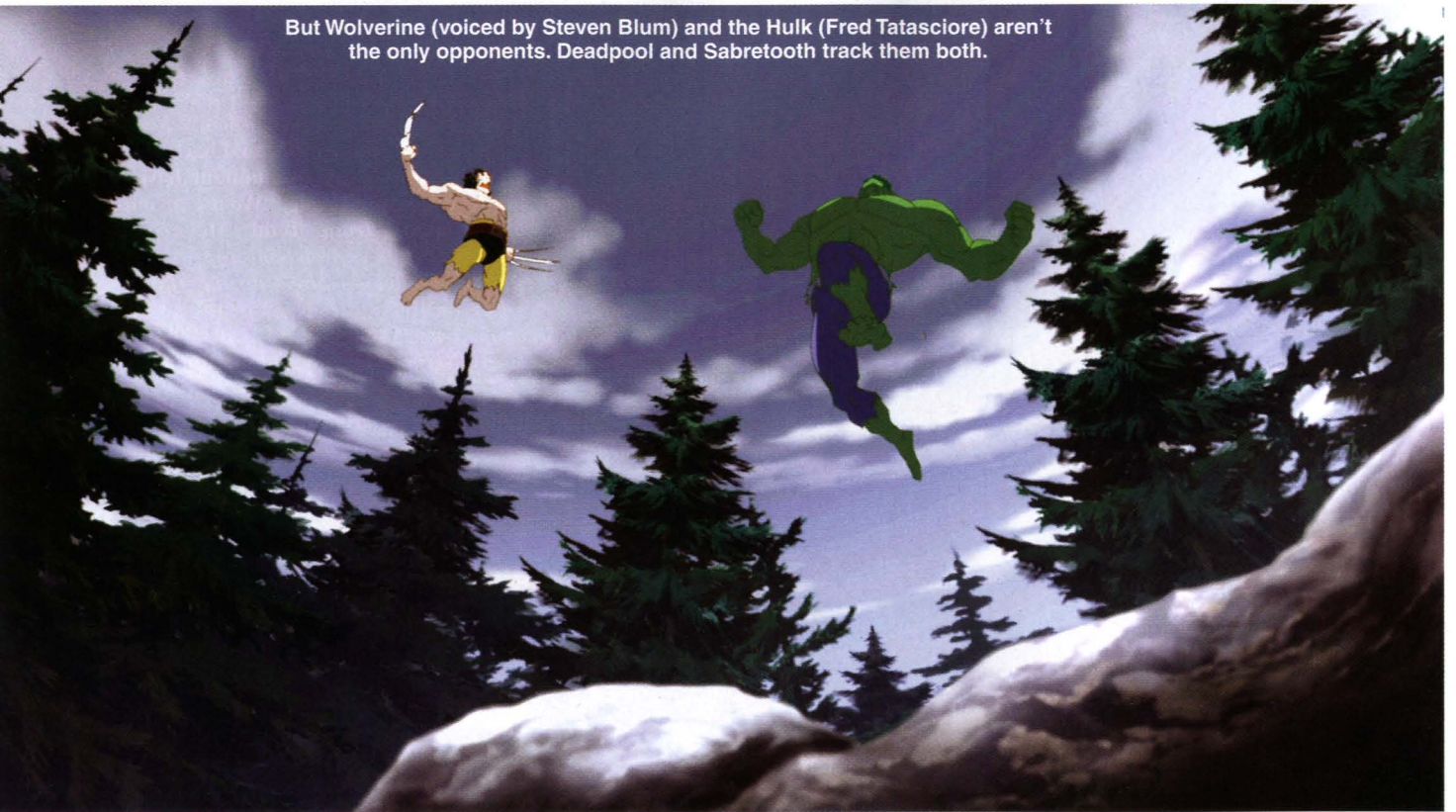
more feature-esque, filmic structure. There's a little more time to play with, more characters and bigger issues."

Monster & Gods

For Marvel's God of Thunder, Paur kept faith with Jack Kirby's visions of Asgard, home to Thor and the Norse Gods. "Jeff Matsuda came up with the design," he says. "When we were developing *Thor*, we explored many different styles: Kirby, John Buscema, Walt Simonson. I [relied on] those

"DURING THE 1970S, WHEN HE FIRST MET WOLVERINE, THE HULK WAS VERY CHILDLIKE IN HIS APPROACH TO PEOPLE."

But Wolverine (voiced by Steven Blum) and the Hulk (Fred Tatasciore) aren't the only opponents. Deadpool and Sabretooth track them both.



"This is Gonna Hurt," a DVD featurette, details just how the fight between mutant and monster began.



The DVD's extras include a peek at *Wolverine and the X-Men*, the new TV toon where Wolverine (not Cyclops) leads the mutant team.

Hulk, Wolverine, Thor & All Related Characters: Trademark & Copyright 2008 Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved.



Thor (Matt Wolf) is joined by familiar Asgard faces—Odin, Loki, Balder, Sif, Fandral, Hogun, Volstagg, even Hela.

people extensively because during the Golden Age of *Thor*, when Kirby was doing it, Thor was traveling through the galaxy, and most of the stories took place in Asgard.

“They were just so epic in tone, and those were the stories that riveted me as a child, when I was first introduced to these characters. And that was the spirit I tried to bring to this feature. But as I said, as far as the artists and the final style we decided upon, there were many influences. There’s definitely some Simonson in there. Another inspiration was Arnold Friberg, who is a very fine illustrator. He did lots of work for Cecil B. DeMille. I grew up as a kid loving his stuff.

“So there’s a touch of that, a touch of Simonson, and we tried to include the amazing Kirby and Buscema poses, those sort of iconic shots—and there’s a lot of me in it, too! I think it’s different. It’s a very graphic style, and it’s also iconic, which is what we wanted, because we were doing the Land of the Gods, so everything *had* to be larger than life.

“The color palette that James Peters, our colorist, came up with is simply breathtaking,” Paur adds. “But it’s something I would never attempt to do in [an animated] series, because it’s too complex. It truly is riveting, though, when you see the color range from sequence to sequence.”

This wasn’t Paur’s first encounter with the Hulk. “I did conceptual design work on the

“IN HULK VS. THOR, HE’S MORE OF A MONSTER.”

Hulk in [Marvel’s first direct-to-DVD animated movie] *Ultimate Avengers*,” he says. “At that time, I was a freelancer, but they liked my work on that and approached me to do *The Invincible Iron Man*.”

Years ago, Paur helped launch *Batman: The Animated Series*. So how does *Hulk vs.* compare to that? “Oh, this is much more fun!” he chuckles. “The important thing to me is that I wanted to tell this story by the comic book standards and with an unfettered approach. I wanted people to see Wolverine and the Hulk the way they are in the comics, unencumbered [by Standards & Practices].”

Besides DC and Marvel, Paur also worked on the Emmy-winning *Spawn* series that aired on HBO. “Todd McFarlane created *Spawn*, so that was his character and his show,” Paur explains. “He was *very* definite about what he



“Of Gods & Monsters” chronicles the making of Thor’s dramatic encounter with the Hulk.



Marvel’s God of Thunder returns this fall with *Tales of Asgard*, an animated rendition of the popular *Journey Into Mystery* feature.



This isn’t yet Ragnarok. Kenneth Branagh will direct a live-action *Thor* for July 2010 release.

wanted, and in a way, that made things easier. When you come onto a TV series, you’re there to work for *them*. The style and everything was already set, and [my job was to] make sure that Todd’s vision came across on screen.

“That’s pretty much the same thing with Marvel,” he adds. “Marvel knows who these

characters are. They’re all fans, they’re all very protective of the characters and they’re also very definitive about what they want.

“Fortunately,” Frank Paur grins, “Marvel likes the way that I handle the characters and how I work with the studios, so they trust me. I’m just grateful to be a part of these movies!”

Design & Layout: Heiner Feil

SEQUEL SEASON

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Director Matt O'Callaghan was *Open* to the idea of helming this animated escapade.

The familiar menagerie of wild animals who helped Boog the Bear adjust to the woods and avoid the hunters in 2006's *Open Season* is back, this time to lock horns—sometimes literally—with a whole new crew of domesticated critters in the direct-to-DVD animated fantasy *Open Season 2* (just released by Sony Home Entertainment).

Director-producer Matt (*Curious George*) O'Callaghan went into the wild in this sequel, which opens with Elliot the Mule Deer on the eve of his wedding to the beautiful Giselle. But Mr. Weenie—the dachshund who joined the woodland creatures in the original film—is kidnapped and taken back to “civilization,” and so they must launch a rescue mission into enemy territory to retrieve their friend from the world of pets.

O'Callaghan was asked to helm *Open Season 2* because he had just completed *Curious George* on a tight schedule. “They came to me and said, ‘We want to do an *Open Season* sequel, but it has to be done in even



GISELLE'S LOVE. She's ready to wed dear deer Elliot, but he keeps finding reasons to delay the happy event. Does he have cold hooves?



less time than *Curious George!*” he laughs. “I thought that would be great, because I enjoyed the first film very much. Even though I wasn't a part of the first *Open Season*, I figured that it would be a nice challenge to get to know the characters, create a new story and do it in a short amount of time.”

Dog Handler

There was already a completed script when O'Callaghan came on board. “It was in really



BOOG'S MISSION. The bear is back for *Open Season 2*. And this time, it's personal. He and Elliot must rescue their kidnapped friend Mr. Weenie and bring Elliot back alive for Giselle.

good shape," he recalls. "Whenever a screenplay is presented, though, the director always has their point-of-view—you read it and say, 'Hey it would be funnier if you did this.' The dogs had names like Fifi and Roberto, but they didn't really have defined characters, and they didn't have breeds attached to them. So there were some things that we were able to develop once we got the script in our hands and proceeded forward."

From there, choosing the appropriate voice

actors was the next big step. "Casting was huge in regard to the new characters played by Crispin Glover and Steve Schirripa," notes O'Callaghan. "That came out of our discussions, and I brought forward those actors because I thought they would be interesting—especially the Fifi character. We wanted a poodle, and it would have been very easy to go with a more feminine take on him, but I thought that it would be great to have a feminine-looking dog with a masculine voice and

personality. Crispin is an interesting actor, and I knew that he could bring a lot to Fifi—and he did!

"Steve was a natural choice, because the whole take on the dogs is that they're naïve and follow the strongest personality. The dogs don't necessarily fully believe what Fifi says about the wild animals being horrible creatures. But because they've been enclosed in their homes and RVs, they don't really get out very much, so they listen to him. At the film's



MR. WEENIE'S HOLIDAY. Restored to civilization from his days in the forest primeval, the plucky dachshund makes a splash at the Pet Paradiso enclave.

end, though, there's a shift: 'Hey, these guys are just like us! They have hearts. They aren't wild creatures that are going to take over our lives!' So they switch sides. I thought that Steve would be a good counterpoint [as Roberto], because he's an easygoing guy, and everybody knows him from *The Sopranos*. Steve has that laidback quality that's a great balance for Crispin's character."

While the actors had an impact in developing the characters, in this case the tail didn't necessarily wag the dog. "Obviously, they deserve lots of credit for what they brought to the roles," says O'Callaghan. "But the development and storyboard artists are the unsung heroes. They're the ones who crafted the scenes and sometimes created dialogue that didn't exist in the script. We worked on a great foundation for those characters together, so



FIFI'S REVENGE. The toy poodle's innocent, fuzzy facade conceals a truly nasty disposition. He's not a dog to be trifled with.

that when we went into the recording studio, we were very clear about what we wanted to do with them. Then, it was a matter of how the actors took the information that was provided. It was a true combination of the writers, storyboard artists and, ultimately, the voice performers."

For O'Callaghan, the biggest challenge was finding an approach that stayed true to the original. "The first film has these strong characters, and it was a nice story to kick off this franchise," he says. "We wanted the audience to know that these are familiar characters who are true to the original, but we didn't want to duplicate the first movie. We needed to create a new adventure and avoid doing the same thing. *Open Season* dealt with Boog and his journey from being a domesticated pet to going out into the wild and experiencing that. Shifting the point-of-view in this follow-up was the key to making the story unique. We made it Elliot's point-of-view—Elliot is a little twisted, so the adventure is quirkier. That's the major difference between the two films."

Deer Wrangler

Because *Open Season 2* was on the fast track, the studio "wanted to make sure that Boog, Elliot and Mr. Weenie were consistent with the first film," notes O'Callaghan. "They didn't want us to do anything dramatically different. That was the toughest criticism and questions we had to deal with: 'Would Elliot really do that? Would Mr. Weenie really do that?' Especially since we didn't work on the first one. So I would show people an idea and ask, 'Is this how the characters would act?' Except for Boog and Elliot, almost all of the supporting characters were the same voice actors [including Jane Krakowski as Giselle, Billy Connolly as the scene-stealing Scottish squirrel McSquizzzy and Cody Cameron as Mr. Weenie]. So that was always a good check. When we were in the recording studio, they would say stuff like, 'Bobbi [Georgia Engel as Mr. Weenie's human owner] wouldn't say that. She would probably say this.' That was how we worked things out."

O'Callaghan acknowledges that while there were both advantages and disadvantages to not being involved with the first *Open Season* (STARLOG #350), he wasn't too worried because he had such a solid staff. "Knowing that many of them had worked on the first film was comforting," he relates. "The co-director this time, Todd Wilderman, was

RABBITS' RUN. But they can't! They're woozy from a few rounds of bunny tossing at the paws of Boog and pals. Wild animals can be sooo vicious.



Boog's lead animator in the original. So having that support group of people gave me more freedom to try things that were 'outside the box' for the characters—little pieces of dialogue or business here and there that pushed the characters [in new directions]. Long story short, I wasn't that concerned."

One of the filmmakers' real challenges was how to handle the movie's domesticated animals—with particular consideration paid to their younger audience. "Jill Culton, who co-directed the first movie, didn't want to do a wild animals-vs.-humans story, so she and writer David Stern came up with the idea of the wild animals—our cast of characters—vs. domesticated animals," says O'Callaghan. "That was challenging: 'How can we have our wild animals go against the domesticated pets when all of the kids in the audience have cats and dogs?' We didn't want children hating their pets because they weren't treating our characters right!"



ELLIOT'S FOLLY? The better to infiltrate the human world, Elliot and Boog resort to masquerade. But that's kind of a drag, you know?



McSQUIZZY'S RAGE. The scene-stealing Scottish squirrel returns to give everyone a wee piece of his mind.

"That's when the shift became apparent: We had to have *one* bad dog who had bad experiences and blames the wild animals—even though they really didn't do anything. It's Fifi's perception of the wild animals, and his twisted character takes it over the top. These cats and dogs aren't bad; they're just following [the wrong] leader. Only Fifi is bad. And that was the fine line that we had to walk."

Stern wrote *Open Season 2* based on the characters created by John Carls, Culton, Anthony Stacchi and Steven Moore (creator of the *In the Bleachers* newspaper strip). Culton and Michelle Murdocca were the sequel's

executive producers with O'Callaghan and the first film's Kirk Bodyfelt as producers and Amy Jupiter as co-producer. With a small army of animators, they got *Open Season 2* made on time for its January 27 debut on DVD (\$28.95), Blu-ray (\$38.96) and PSP (\$24.94). The DVD extras include deleted scenes and the "Wacky Weenie Arcade" while the Blu-ray boasts an exclusive "Save Mr. Weenie!" game.

Bear Whisperer

Both of the lead characters were recast for *Open Season 2*, with Mike Epps stepping into Martin Lawrence's shoes as Boog, and *Talk Soup*'s Joel McHale taking over for Ashton Kutcher's Elliot. "Our casting person had to find actors with similar vocal qualities," comments O'Callaghan. "When we were recording, we told those two, 'Here's the character, but we want *your* voice.' I didn't want Mike to imitate Martin or Joel to imitate Ashton."

"I asked them to bring what they could to their characters, but also [remain faithful] to the first film. I think it was successful. People really love them, and don't question that they're different actors. When we recorded Mike and Joel, we talked about what was funny or how we should play a scene, as opposed to, 'You don't sound like Ashton.' We were very confident in our actors and their

voices, and it worked out really well."

As is often the case in animated productions, a crew member doing the scratch track for a character ended up in the final film. "Sean Mullen, a storyboard artist, put in this crazy cat, Roger, and he did the voice just to demonstrate how this feline has been hit by a few cars in his day," explains O'Callaghan. "Out of Sean's funny voice came this funny dialogue, and when we got to the animation, we gave Roger an off-balance walk, moving eyes, a tongue that hangs out and an overbite. [That character] was one of the biggest surprises. And Sean did such a great job with Roger that we ended up keeping him as the voice."

The animators faced the same problems as O'Callaghan and the rest of the unit, in that they had to turn out a complete film in less than a year and a half. "When you're working on a tight schedule, the challenge is to produce great animation in less time than you would normally have," he explains. "What really helped was that both Todd and I were character animators in the early stages of our careers, so when we were writing dialogue, recording stuff and in editorial, we were putting together things that *we* wanted to animate. And when we handed that to the animators and gave them direction on how to handle the scenes, I think they got excited, because they could see our enthusiasm. Plus, when they realized how fun these scenes could be, it gave them this momentum and energy to do it faster."

Besides the truncated, rushed deadlines, O'Callaghan doesn't see much in common between *Curious George* and *Open Season 2*. "Every film is different," he says. "I was collaborating with a whole new group of people, and that's always fun. It's hard to make these movies in four to six years, and it's [even harder] to make them in a year and a half, but what makes them easier is working with great people with positive attitudes. The Sony executives and my co-workers were simply terrific."

With Boog, Elliot, Mr. Weenie and pals beckoning consumers from DVD shelves now, Matt O'Callaghan is open to the possibility of an *Open Season 3*. "I've heard rumblings. There are usually huge expectations for sequels, but the people who have seen *Open Season 2* have found it very entertaining and were excited at how the story played out. So you never know—Elliot and Boog might be back for a number three!"

Design & Layout: Heiner Fell



ROBERTO'S DESPAIR. Their owners have teamed them together, but that doesn't mean the sleepy basset hound has to like total poodle domination.



MATT O'CALLAGHAN'S MOVIE. The sequel he directed opens January 27 on DVD, Blu-ray and PSP. Look for *Open Season 2* at a video store near you.

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EXCERPT FROM A
RECENT INTERVIEW WITH
BRUCE CAMPBELL

BRUCE CAMPBELL: *SUNDOWN: VAMPIRES IN RETREAT* is not really a great prize. It's a movie I made in 1988 in Moab, Utah. Moab, at the time, did not even have an ATM. Shit kickers made this. In 1988 it was the nothing capital of the world. I worked two days a week on the movie. The rest of the time I would take my car and drive it into the desert as far as I could go. So then I would take my bike out of the back of the car and ride it as far as I could go, then just leave it because who was there to steal it? And I would walk for like a day. If the insurance company knew what I was doing when I was not working on *SUNDOWN*, they would have shut the movie down. At one point I ran out of water. I had no water bottle. Then I didn't know that deserts and water didn't really go together. Now I do. I was trapped on top of a mesa with no water and I almost died.

DEBBIE ROCHON: *Tony just laughed at that, Bruce!*

BRUCE: It's *FANGORIA* - death is funny. Death is entertainment. But I almost died making *SUNDOWN* and no one cared because no one knew I almost died. So that is the story of *SUNDOWN*. It was my near death experience making a mediocre movie.

TONY TIMPONE: *Did you get to party with David Carradine at least?*


BRUCE: David Carradine at that time had his... what shall we call that... "*His special coffee.*" He would be on set and say "Where is my coffee?" and someone would run over to him with coffee and he would say "No, no, no. My special coffee."

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PHOTO BY MIKE KOSTEL



Making another *Mummy* movie led Brendan Fraser to the *Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (now on DVD).

By JOE NAZZARO

The Storyteller in Action!

Brendan Fraser is always ready for greenscreen adventure.

If ever an actor was well-suited for a role, it would be Brendan Fraser as Mortimer “Mo” Folchart—a mild-mannered book-binder with the power to literally read characters out of books and into the real world—in the new fantasy action-adventure *Inkheart*, based on the bestselling children’s book by Cornelia Funke.

What made Fraser the perfect choice to bring this particular character to life is the fact that Funke actually had the actor in mind as she was writing the original book. “Cornelia sent me a copy of the novel, and inscribed it,” he recalls. “She wrote something like, ‘Thanks for inspiring this character,’ which was very flattering, but I thought, ‘Is this a prank or something?’ I wasn’t quite sure, but she also said, ‘I hope you get to read this to your kids aloud one day. Thanks very much, Cornelia Funke.’ So then I knew that it was for real.

“But I wasn’t aware of who she was—that she was this award-winning children’s book writer. Then I happened to be in Hamburg, or somewhere close to it, on a press tour, so I hopped a flight over and met her and her son, daughter and [since-deceased] husband and they were wonderful. Cornelia eventually moved to California, because she was pursuing making this film with a producing partner and looking for screenwriters and directors, and so we kept in touch.

“I read the audio version of one of her books, *Dragon Rider*, and later did a recording

for *Inkspell*, which is the second installment in the *Inkheart* trilogy. There’s always a big difference between a novel and a screenplay, and the screenplay is what you finally see on the big screen, but this *Inkheart* adaptation was in such good hands with Iain Softley, the director. And on top of that, the ensemble they put together was very strong.”

However, it wasn’t until much later that Fraser discovered the reason why Funke had him in mind for the character of Mo. “She told me that she was writing and writing and watching *The Mummy* over and over again,” he recalls. “I think she was writing about a man who had a voice that people listened to and believed, and then she just said, ‘You are Mo.’ That’s all she told me, so I’ll take it!”

Father Figure

In *Inkheart*, Fraser’s character discovers that he has the ability to literally bring characters out of books when he’s reading a copy of the medieval fantasy *Inkheart* to his young daughter Meggie. Not only does he inadvertently summon up the evil Capricorn (Andy Serkis) and his villainous henchmen, as well as the fire juggler Dustfinger (Paul Bettany), but his newfound power also sends his wife Resa (Sienna Guillory) into the book.

A decade later, Mo and his now-teenage daughter (Eliza Hope Bennett) are haunting second-hand bookshops across Europe hoping to find another copy of *Inkheart* to bring Resa

Photo: Jasin Boland

back. But with Capricorn trying to use Mo's abilities to import other fantasy characters into the world, the reluctant storyteller turns to a group of newfound allies: his eccentric aunt Elinor (Dame Helen Mirren); Fenoglio (Jim Broadbent), author of *Inkheart*; and Farid (Rafi Gavron), a boy accidentally read out of *The Arabian Nights*.

According to Fraser, "The film is an intersection between the reality of the world that we live in, and the creative one that Iain came up with by making it timeless. It also has a very subtle message of promoting literacy and

literature without really rubbing your nose in it. If you read the book, each chapter is introduced by a great quote that Cornelia found, the greatest hits from children's books that you should read if you haven't read them already. As I was reading it, I thought, 'There's a book I didn't read as a kid. Maybe I'll pick it up!' That's why I believe this series has become so successful."

On the subject of kids, Fraser is particularly happy about his on-screen chemistry with Bennett. "Everyone adored her, and she's so talented. As Paul said, 'She's all right...if you like talent!'" Fraser laughs. "When we were in Italy or France or wherever we were, and the cast went out for dinner and we were misbehaving, she would be sitting in the hotel lobby going through her script for the next day's work. We would come back all sheepish and say, 'Where's the room key?' Eliza is the real thing: honest and sweet. It was a delight to see her and Helen work together.

"I'll never forget this: Helen won her Oscar [for *The Queen*] while she was making this movie, so she was shuttling back and forth to L.A. And when she came back with the Oscar, they were shooting a flashback sequence that day involving this medieval festival, so they did this dance number for Helen and gave her a cake, and she said, 'Thank you so much!' Helen was sincere—she had tears in her eyes, and then she let everyone take turns holding her Oscar.

"For some reason or another, we had to return to base camp, and Eliza wound up with Helen's Oscar in her lap in the golf cart as we were being zoomed away, and I have to tell you, it looked pretty comfortable there! Then the Oscar wound up in the parking lot with the drivers, and they were all taking pictures of each other holding [the statue], and Helen said, 'Just bring it back when you're done, darlings!'"

If there's a note of paternalism in Fraser's attitude toward Bennett, it may be because of the increasing importance of fatherhood in his own life as he turns 40. Small wonder that he plays a father in both *Inkheart* and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, as well as a *de facto* father figure to his on-screen nephew in *Journey to the Center of the Earth 3-D*.



When "Silvertongue" Mo Folchart (Fraser) reads, books come alive. That's the power of literacy! Reading is fundamental!

"I am playing Dads, aren't I?" he muses in a sudden moment of self-realization. "It's tricky being a father. It isn't easy, and it does not get explored that often. Learning from a child about how to do your job is a theme I would like to pursue."

That job is one he pursues off-camera as well, thanks to his three children—ages two, four and six—who still aren't ready to see most of Dad's movies. "The four-year-old has not really put it together yet," Fraser admits, "but he'll say, 'Are you going to work?' I'll say yes, and he'll reply, 'Are you going to defeat some bad guys?' 'Yes, that's right.' 'OK, I'll see you later!' I haven't sat down with them to watch some of my movies yet; it would freak them out!"

Visual Veteran

Fraser's childlike imagination has helped him be successful in high-profile genre films where visual FX play such a big part. "It's helpful if you were sent out of the classroom to the principal's office for misbehaving. I don't know *who* that would be..." the actor mischievously grins, "but I would agree that it *is* helpful.

"Also, you must pay attention to anything that's given to you from the art department. Material is always available to actors, [and you can use that] to hydrate your imagination and make sure that you know where you are in the story. And sometimes it's simply a matter of hitting your mark, looking in a certain direction and then letting the magic of CGI take over."

Fraser could probably teach his own course on greenscreen acting when one considers how many of his big-screen co-stars have been created from a collection of pixels. Whether it's the stable of Warner Bros. animated characters vying for attention in *Looney Tunes: Back in Action* or the virtual armies of the undead in the three *Mummy* films, Fraser has always been able to reinforce the air of believability needed for such productions.

"It's interesting, because things have changed so much in the last 15 years," says Fraser (who discussed his past career in STARLOG #270). "When I came on the scene, it was with a picture called *School Ties*,



The secret of acting with unseen special FX, Fraser reveals, is to believe what you're doing.



Working with things that aren't there on the set doesn't worry Fraser. He's used to it. Just ask his *Looney Tunes* co-stars Elmer Fudd, Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck.



It's a long way from *Encino Man* to *Journey to the Center of the Earth 3-D*—whether that distance is measured in miles or meters.



which was a drama that had a message of tolerance behind it. Then I followed that up with *Encino Man*. I went to Comic-Con this past summer, and people were yelling 'Encino Man!' at me, so I guess the movie defined a generation or something like that.

"*Encino Man* was a Disney film and a teen picture, and they don't make movies that way any longer. There wasn't one process shot of any type in that movie. They didn't have the budget, and they didn't have the need. It was simply the camera, screenplay, actors, Pauly Shore and me with a squirrel tacked to my head! The point is, one of the reasons I used to



Impressed with the talents of young Eliza Hope Bennett, Fraser was proud to play her father in *Inkheart*.



Fraser hopes *Inkheart* is enough of a hit to get the trilogy's other chapters (*Inkspell*, *Inkdeath*) filmed.



What's in the future for Fraser? Action certainly. Dancing maybe. But *absolutely no* singing.

go see movies was because they had some sort of visual effect. That was the draw for me, and the technology kept getting better and better. You saw fewer of the dotted lines around some of the elements and the homework that went into making those effects, and today we're at a point in cinema where anything is possible in three dimensions.

"I'm not saying that audiences have grown blasé about it, but since that generation has come of age, they take it [for granted] that that's the way films are and that's just the standard. But what it comes down to, beyond all of this stereo instruction talk, is that you need to find actors and direct them so that they *believe* what they're doing—as absurd as that may seem. Because if the actors don't believe it, the guys in the intermediate step, the CGI artists, won't be able to [convincingly] put in their elements. And if those two aren't fused together right, then the audience won't believe it. So as long as the actors believe it, the audience will, too. There's really no secret to it beyond that. I guess it comes down to having actors who have the talent to be able to do that."

Still, Fraser insists that there's no substitute for the genuine article in terms of generating creativity. "You can never replace the real thing, and I'll give you an example: When I was doing *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, Walden Pictures said, 'We don't want to pay to send you to Iceland!' But because I had the executive producer's stripe, I got on the phone and talked to the person making that budgeting call and said, 'So let me get this straight: You want us to walk around in a room full of blue cloth and go "Brrr!?" There wasn't any answer, so I said, 'OK, you think about it and get back to us.'

"Needless to say, we went to Iceland, and it was affordable and it was the real thing, so that was perfect," he continues. "That's where the story takes place, so I was trying to make a point there. You can pretend that it's freezing cold and you're in Iceland as much as you want, but then again, who knows what the center of the Earth looks like? So we did spend lots of time running around in big blue rooms,

ducking cubes and elements, which later turned out to be giant fossilized mushrooms and those sorts of things. It looks pretty breathtaking, but again, it comes down to absolutely buying into the movie's reality, no matter what it is. And sometimes it's easier when you're able to interact with objects or creatures or other atmospheric elements."

Action Actor

Considering that Fraser has been a part of so many A-list films over the years, he remains remarkably stress-free about working in the industry, but that's because of a simple rule he tries to follow as far as show business is concerned: "Stay out of it!" he declares. "I pay for a ticket to go to the circus, not to be in one.

"I'm happy to be working," he adds, "but I don't live in Hollywood, for one thing, so that helps a lot. I take my job seriously enough to think I'm always going to learn something from it, and whether or not a film is a box office success doesn't necessarily mean it's a successful film. Whether you like or dislike the story, [sometimes] it doesn't matter. In the end, you may have met someone or garnered some information or gone somewhere... So I try to pay attention along the way.

"I also have much more respect for the

people who are younger than me who are in the industry now, because having been one of them, I know how they feel and what they're thinking. And if they stay in the game, they're going to keep evolving and changing along the way. It's nice to see the next generation coming up."

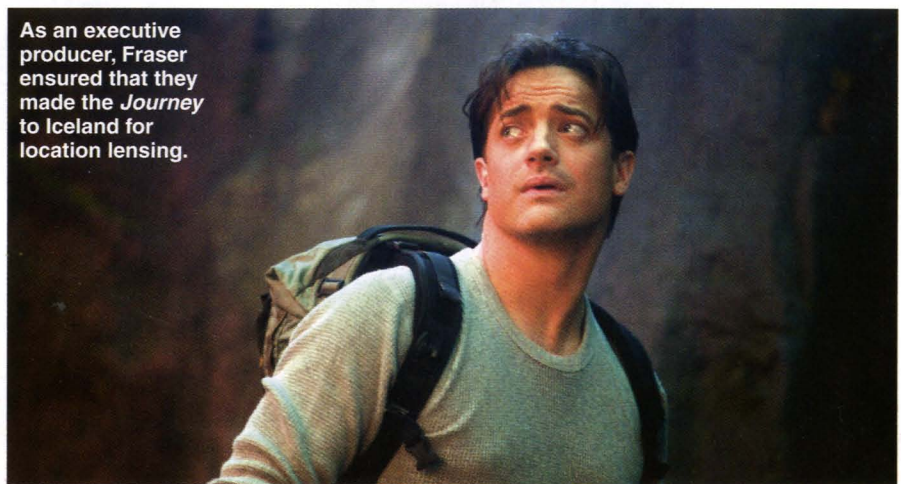
Looking ahead, should *Inkheart* be a hit, Fraser hopes to take on its sequel, *Inkspell*, and, in an ideal world, the third and final installment, *Inkdeath*. "If you've read the second book, you know that my character takes on far more significance," Fraser offers. "He's called Blue Jay and becomes—I don't want say Robin Hood—but the leader of a renegade, rag-tag band that goes up against this very dark guy called the Adder Head. Mo is a humble bookbinder in the first one, but in the second, he must rise to the occasion. So stay tuned on that; we'll have to see if we get to make another movie or not."

As for future projects, Fraser isn't sure where the next phase of his career will take him. His wish list includes collaborations with filmmakers who will push him as an actor, and maybe even a possible return to the theater at some point. Just don't ask him to sing. "Call Hugh Jackman for that!"

"I'm looking for something that is closer to my heart," he says. "I've already earned my stripes working with first-time writers and directors in remote locations. [Things like being] more comfortable and physically closer to the kids—more and more I'm taking all of that into consideration.

"Also, I want to make films that people are going to see. I don't know anyone who sets out to make a dud. There are movies that have a certain demographic, that can reach an audience more broad in scope without being patronizing to them, and that's important. I guess you call them 'family films,' something that's appropriate for people age five to 85. I believe that *Inkheart* is one of those movies, but there are some dark things in it, like the Shadow at the end, which is pretty frightening.

"I can remember being a kid and thinking, 'I want to see the movie that the grown-up kids are seeing!'" Brendan Fraser smiles. "You want to look into that dark closet to see what's there, and I think that *Inkheart* is one of those films that succeeds in treading that line." ★

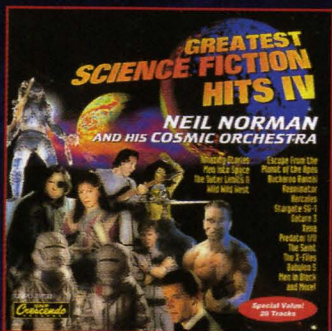


As an executive producer, Fraser ensured that they made the *Journey to Iceland* for location lensing.

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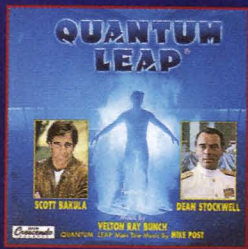
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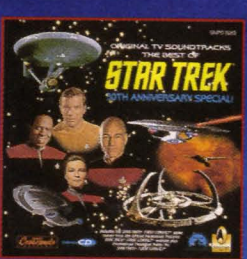
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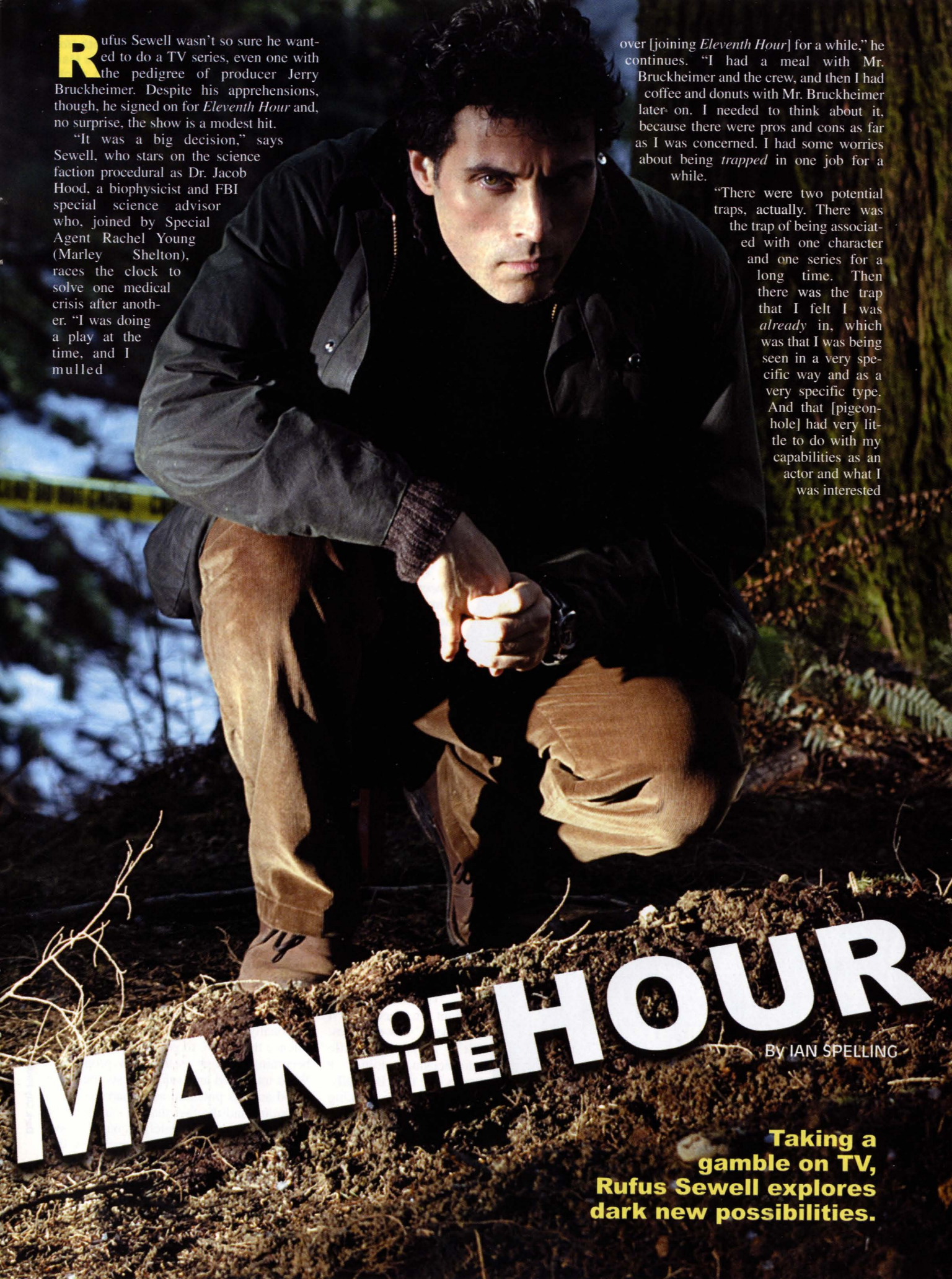
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Rufus Sewell wasn't so sure he wanted to do a TV series, even one with the pedigree of producer Jerry Bruckheimer. Despite his apprehensions, though, he signed on for *Eleventh Hour* and, no surprise, the show is a modest hit.

"It was a big decision," says Sewell, who stars on the science fiction procedural as Dr. Jacob Hood, a biophysicist and FBI special science advisor who, joined by Special Agent Rachel Young (Marley Shelton), races the clock to solve one medical crisis after another. "I was doing a play at the time, and I mulled

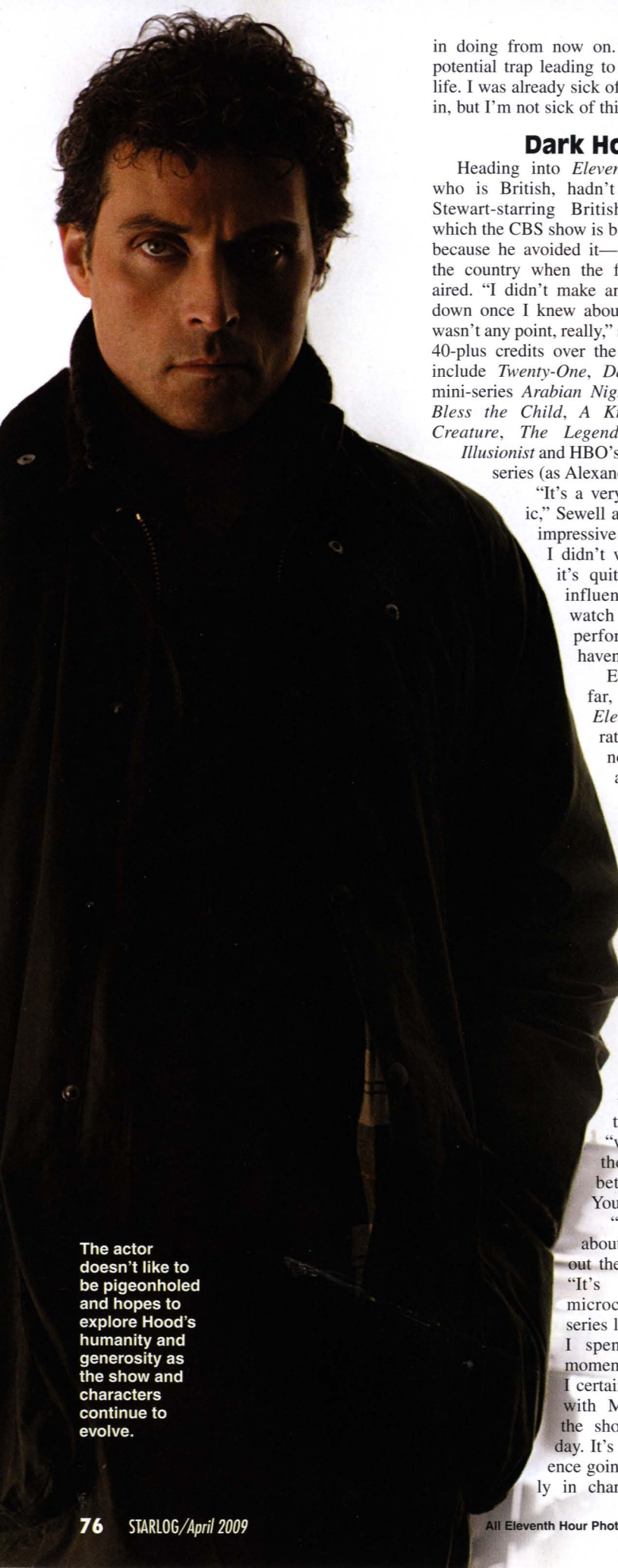
over [joining *Eleventh Hour*] for a while," he continues. "I had a meal with Mr. Bruckheimer and the crew, and then I had coffee and donuts with Mr. Bruckheimer later on. I needed to think about it, because there were pros and cons as far as I was concerned. I had some worries about being *trapped* in one job for a while.

"There were two potential traps, actually. There was the trap of being associated with one character and one series for a long time. Then there was the trap that I felt I was *already* in, which was that I was being seen in a very specific way and as a very specific type. And that [pigeon-hole] had very little to do with my capabilities as an actor and what I was interested

MAN OF THE HOUR

BY IAN SPELLING

Taking a gamble on TV, Rufus Sewell explores dark new possibilities.



in doing from now on. So, this was one potential trap leading to another, but that's life. I was already sick of the trap that I was in, but I'm not sick of this one yet!"

Dark Hours

Heading into *Eleventh Hour*, Sewell, who is British, hadn't seen the Patrick Stewart-starring British mini-series on which the CBS show is based. And it wasn't because he avoided it—Sewell was out of the country when the four-episode series aired. "I didn't make an effort to track it down once I knew about it, because there wasn't any point, really," says Sewell, whose 40-plus credits over the past two decades include *Twenty-One*, *Dark City*, the TV mini-series *Arabian Nights* (as Ali Baba), *Bless the Child*, *A Knight's Tale*, *She Creature*, *The Legend of Zorro*, *The Illusionist* and HBO's *John Adams* mini-series (as Alexander Hamilton).

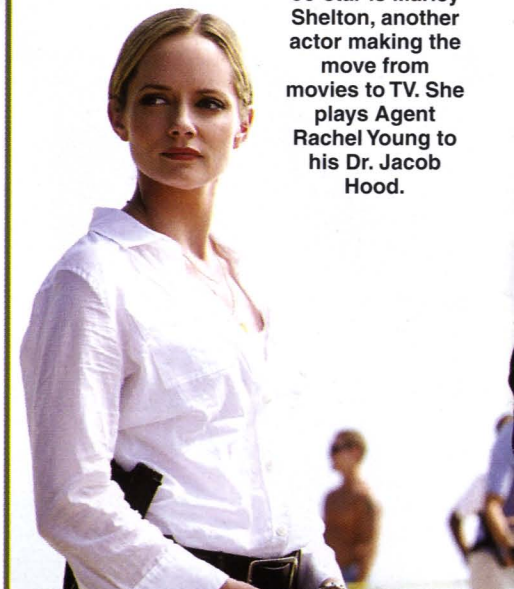
"It's a very different dynamic," Sewell adds. "Patrick is an impressive figure, and even if I didn't want to copy him, it's quite hard *not* to be influenced [when you watch someone else's performance]. So I haven't seen it."

Either way, it's so far, so good for *Eleventh Hour*. The ratings are solid, if not remarkable, and at least enough to earn an additional five-episode order from CBS (so that the series will air new shows well into March). *Eleventh Hour* quickly found its creative footing and visual look. Sewell and Shelton get along fine and there's an entertaining whiff of "will they/won't they?" chemistry between Hood and Young.

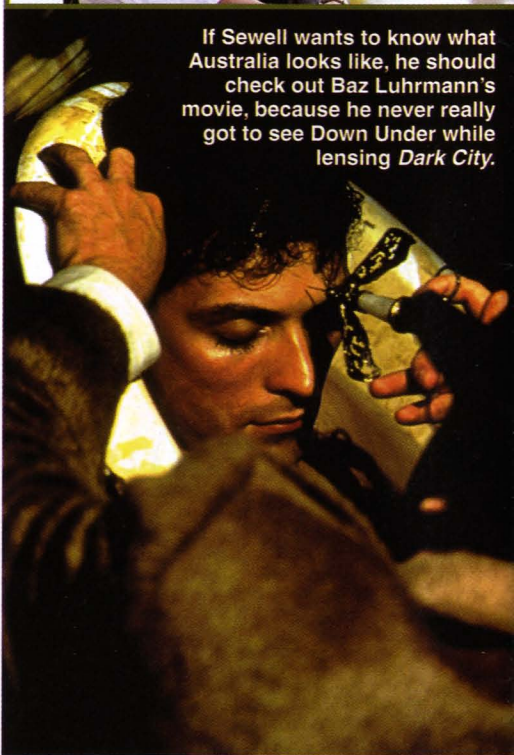
"I don't know about the reaction to it out there," Sewell notes. "It's a strange little microcosm, doing a series like this. Basically, I spend every waking moment filming the show. I certainly enjoy working with Marley and doing the show all day, every day. It's a different experience going to bed practically in character, waking up

The actor doesn't like to be pigeonholed and hopes to explore Hood's humanity and generosity as the show and characters continue to evolve.

Sewell's *Eleventh Hour* co-star is Marley Shelton, another actor making the move from movies to TV. She plays Agent Rachel Young to his Dr. Jacob Hood.



If Sewell wants to know what Australia looks like, he should check out Baz Luhrmann's movie, because he never really got to see *Down Under* while lensing *Dark City*.



and going straight back into it. I quite like the comfort, the fit of that.

"But as far as I'm concerned, there's still much more to develop. I'm very keen on exploring the quiriness and the humor, and that's hopefully something that will come out more and more. It's something that I'm personally battling for in the face of all the science that I have to get through. But that's becoming stronger as the show progresses. What interested and *still* interests me about Hood and his potential as a character is his humanity and the fact that he's a humanist who has an enormous intellect, but also possesses a generosity and a scruffiness that take the edge off his intellect. It reminds me of the few extremely bright people I've known who are also very generous.

"Those people have a way of proffering

Dark City Photo: Copyright 1997 New Line Cinema



enormous nuggets of information as though they're accidentally falling upon you. They don't *obviously* teach you. Rather, you feel like you're making the discovery yourself. That's something I enjoy very much about Hood's potential. It's something that comes and goes. I also like his sense of humor and slightly scattered train of thought. And in terms of his relationship with Rachel, what I want to work on more, and what I've liked so far, is when we've had that slightly old-fashioned screwball element."

Happy Hours

Sewell laughs when asked to preview what fans can expect to see on *Eleventh Hour*. And he's chuckling because between the episodes already shot, scripts in process and ADR being recorded for various shows, not even Dr. Hood could keep track of it all. "We're on episode 13 right now, but I don't know the order in which they'll be airing

"I had some worries about being trapped in one job for a while."

them," Sewell explains. "There's 'H2O,' which is about random acts of hallucinogen-inspired violence in a small town. It's sweeping across the community and tearing it apart, and no one can quite work out why people are suddenly going crazy and attacking each other. It has something to do with PCP in the town's [water] system.

"Then we did one called 'Miracle,' " he adds, "which is about a spring in a small village that seems to be curing cancer, but the downside is that there's only one person who appears to have been cured. So all these people are abandoning traditional medicine in order to sit by the banks and drink the water—and many of them are falling very ill."

Eleventh Hour may be Sewell's first TV

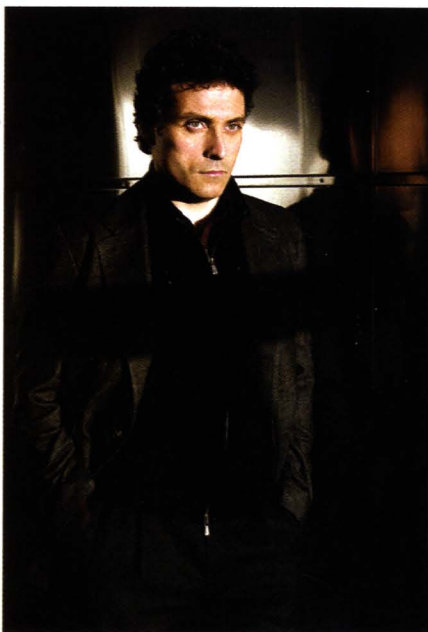
series, but it is far from his first genre effort. STARLOG readers probably know him best from his turn as John Murdoch in *Dark City*, which director Alex Proyas shot in Australia. "What I remember about that film is basically being locked in a factory for four months and never seeing sunlight—very much like my character!" Sewell laughs knowingly. "Occasionally, the studio doors would open and I would see wind-blown, brown-bodied surfers going past and sand swirling in the air. But that's all I was really aware of [indicating] that we were in Sydney."

His most recent genre effort was 2006's *The Illusionist*, which starred Edward (The Incredible Hulk) Norton as a turn-of-the-century magician who earns the ire of Crown Prince Leopold (Sewell) when the two compete for the love of the same woman (Jessica Biel). "That was a fantastic experi-

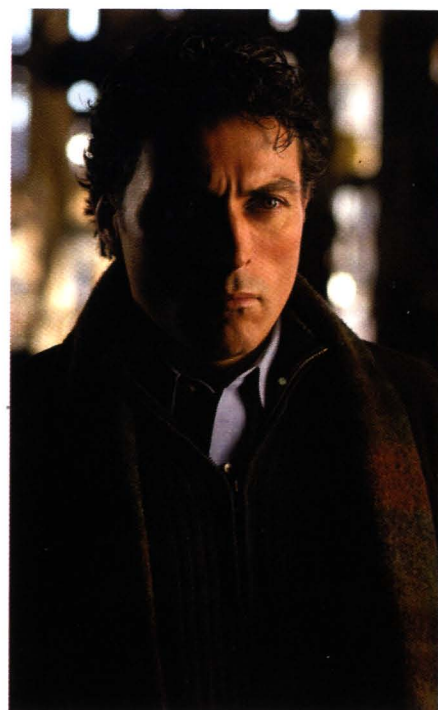
"I just imagine that it's one endlessly fascinating episode that I wake up to every day."

ence," Sewell relates. "Initially, I was very grumpy about the idea of having to play another bad guy, but I was quickly informed that if I wanted to be in the film, I had to be the bad guy or nobody. So I donned the mustache and cigarette holder and actually ended up thoroughly enjoying it."

Sewell's next genre film is *Vinyan*, the horror-thriller helmed by Fabrice (*Calvaire*) Du Welz. "I play one half of a couple with Emmanuelle Béart. They're mourning the loss of their child in a tsunami, and the movie is sort of an homage to *Don't Look Now*. It should be coming out pretty soon."



He isn't entirely sold on a long series run, but Sewell is excited about the character commitment required in television acting. "I spend every waking moment filming the show," he says.



Coffee and donuts with producer Jerry Bruckheimer—plus a little bit of contemplation—helped Rufus Sewell decide to make the jump to TV.

Some actors bemoan the speed of shooting a television series, but not Sewell. He's accepting of that, explaining that TV is as different from film as film is from theater. One adapts. And all of the scientific mumbo jumbo, the actor notes, is like Shakespeare: One bites into it and does everything within their power to make the audience feel as if their character understands and believes every word of it. Sewell won't even complain about the dangerous trap inherent in procedural dramas: that one episode tends to resemble another.

"I make sure that I change my jacket every week, and sometimes you'll notice that my hair is slightly ruffled and sometimes it's a little neater," he jokes. "Otherwise, I just imagine that it's one endlessly fascinating episode that I wake up to every day."

Taking all of that into account—the fear of a lengthy association with a single character and show, the limits of such a role and this sort of drama—what are Sewell's thoughts on *Eleventh Hour* running for several years?

"I can certainly envision myself resenting it [if the series ran] that long," Sewell candidly replies. "I've built my resentment into the schedule of every job I've ever done. I'm essentially someone who's affronted at the very idea of work, and that's something that I have to simply take as a given. But the idea of doing it for years does, frankly, scare the bejesus out of me. The notion of security always worries me slightly.

"But, you know, you replace one gamble with another, and that's the risk I've taken," Rufus Sewell reasons. "I really like the character of Jacob Hood, and I can certainly think of worse things to do for a while!"



WANTED! MORE STARLOG READERS LIKE MURPHY ANDERSON! The legendary DC Comics artist has drawn his share of *Strange Adventures*.



By WILL MURRAY

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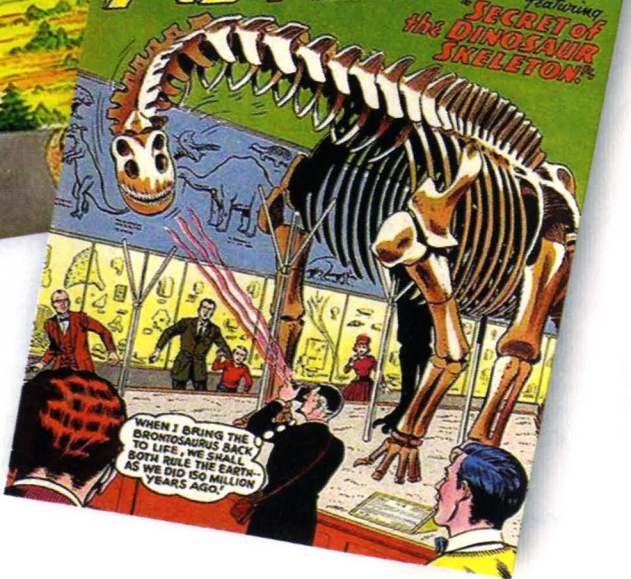
With the recent release of the *Showcase* trade paperback collection of *Strange Adventures* (arguably the top SF comic book of the 1950s and '60s), DC Comics has revived a half-forgotten classic for a new generation. Edited by the legendary Julie Schwartz, *Strange Adventures* boasted many top talents, but the artist who best exemplified its crisp illustrative look was equally legendary.

Murphy Anderson grew up during the Great Depression reading the SF pulps



STRANGE ADVENTURES

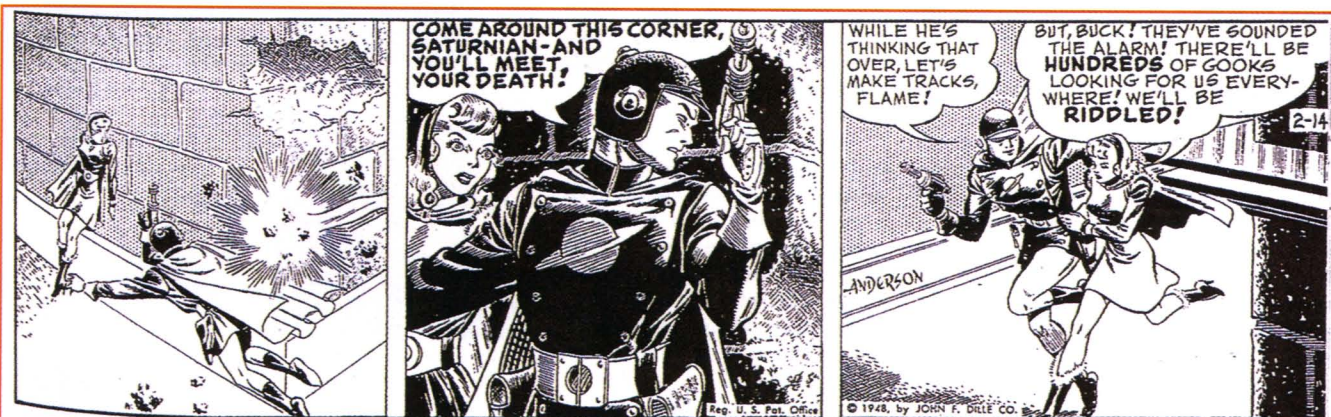
Featuring "SECRET OF THE DINOSAUR SKELETON!"



Artist **Murphy Anderson** recalls his *Strange* days & Atomic Knights in SF comics.



“There wasn’t any storyline” to his Life on Other Worlds feature in Planet Comics.



Anderson did two stints illustrating the Buck Rogers newspaper strip, “a seminal feature.”

Amazing Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories and Startling Stories. He followed Carl Pfeufer’s Wings Winfair in Gulf Funny Weekly. Buck Rogers was his favorite newspaper comic strip. And for his Greensboro, North Carolina high school paper, he produced a comic strip called The Time Traveller.

“I enjoyed anything science fiction,” he says today. “Especially if it was in the Captain Future mold. I just like the whole idea of the unknown universe—there’s always something new to discover. Not that there isn’t any right here on Earth, if you know how to look.”

Anderson first broke into the field in Fiction House’s Planet Comics #33 (November 1944), taking over the long-running Star Pirate series that was being produced by a battery of in-house writers. One person would provide a plot for the artist to break down, then another dialogued the finished art.

That issue also launched Life on Other Worlds, another feature that Anderson scripted, inspired by Frank R. Paul’s classic pulp portraits of alien planets. “There wasn’t any

storyline,” he notes. “They were like fact pages. I would come up with an idea and lay them out in two or three pages.”

With Buck Rogers

Editor Wilbur Peacock soon put him to work illustrating Planet Stories and other pulps. The artist continued to do them during a post-war hitch in the Navy. Then came Anderson’s dream job: a two-year stint on Buck Rogers (replacing a retiring Dick Calkins) for the Dille Syndicate. “I couldn’t believe it,” he recalls. “I was such a fan. When they sat me down to work in their big art room, they had these Buck Rogers Sunday pages by Russell Keaton. If I had to pick one artist who worked on Buck, he was the best.”

His favorite part of the job? “Oh, just the fact that it was Buck Rogers,” Anderson says. “It was such a seminal feature. And I got to know Dick fairly well. I more or less had free rein. They wanted to start fresh—new costumes and so forth.”

It wasn’t entirely perfect. “They had a bad guy, Dr. Modar,” he says. “I always cringe when I look at the character. He was a humanoid alien with black eyes and white

pupils. But he was hunchbacked! Why John Flint Dille wanted that, I don’t know. Just something to make him distinctive. I thought it was in poor taste. But I wasn’t going to yell at the boss about that. The old man and I never quarreled. Our relationship just fell apart.”

The early ’50s found Anderson toiling for another pulp house dabbling in comics, Ziff-Davis. Under Editor and Superman co-creator Jerry Siegel, Anderson contributed to a raft of SF comics titles, beginning with Siegel’s “The Asteroid Witch” in Amazing Adventures #1. Soon after, they created Lars of Mars, whom Anderson recalls as “a combination of Superman and Buck Rogers.” Then, one day, Anderson hit a patch of freelancer’s black ice.

“Jerry said, ‘Murph, I’m sorry. The writers haven’t brought in the script, but I’ll have one in a day or so.’ I had taken [studio] space with Dan and Seymour Barry. They were doing lots of work for DC, so I ran home, got my portfolio and called on Julie. We had hardly started talking before we realized that

we had lots of people in common. Julie, having been an agent, knew most of the big names in science fiction. He certainly knew [Ziff-Davis editor] Ray Palmer quite well, and I had been doing some stuff for Ray. So Julie took me on and began giving me a regular supply of scripts.”

It was the beginning of a beautiful and productive friendship. Science fiction was resurging in pulps and on the screen, prompting DC to launch Strange Adventures in 1950 with a Destination Moon cover story. Mystery in Space followed a year later. Anderson was thrilled to be assigned “The Comet Peril,” which ran in Mystery in Space #3. The author was Captain Future’s Edmond Hamilton, who was then scripting a series starring Chris KL-99 for Strange Adventures. That character became the first in a long string of space heroes whom the artist would depict for DC.

“Chris KL-99 was really a knockoff of Captain Future,” Anderson offers. “Hamilton wrote quite a bit for Julie. Unfortunately, I don’t think I ever did more than three or four of his scripts. I loved his stuff. His wife [Leigh Brackett], too. I didn’t know they

were married! She was working for Fiction House while I was there. Hamilton had a gift for doing that cowboy Western space opera."

Anderson got the chance to collaborate with some of the cherished writers of his childhood. "Manly Wade Wellman was a favorite writer of mine before I met him," he says. "I worked on his scripts. He wrote some of the Captain Comets. I came aboard after Carmine Infantino pencilled the first one or two. It was more or less a *Buck Rogers* kind of thing. I enjoyed it quite a bit."

Within a year, Schwartz was asking for cover concepts. "Julie was always in search of good ideas," Anderson relates, "but he was also always looking for *better* ideas. Very often the cover was conceived and executed before the story was even written. Julie would tell me to come over prepared to do a cover or two, and he would ask me to bring in lots of science fiction magazines that had good covers like *Amazing*, *Planet Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures*. We never stole actual covers, but it would get us thinking on the right path."

Schwartz's approach was unusual: Writers were assigned to generate scripts based on finished cover concepts. "We would work out a cover, and then sometimes I would be tapped to do the story itself," Anderson explains. "Very often not. Some other artist would do it. I was working to the disadvantage of Julie and myself, [because I was working] from North Carolina and sending this stuff up."

On Captain Comet

Anderson's first DC cover featured Captain Comet in *Strange Adventures* #18 (March 1952). He executed most of the Captain Comet covers thereafter. One early concept was a theme that they would return to again and again: an aquatic humanoid who had hooked a human fisherman on his line. "The idea was bought by Julie, and I went ahead with it," Anderson says. "Julie had shown the cover around asking for comments, but no one had any. Later, [fellow DC



If Anderson had his druthers, "I would rather draw costumes. I liked to do covers with characters like Captain Comet."

editor] Bob Kanigher asked me if I remembered that cover. He said, 'You could have improved it by having the fisherman that's caught by the monster hanging upside down rather than being snatched by his shirt.' I said, 'You know, you're absolutely right. It would have been a better cover had I done that.' But that's the way things break. How much more successful that cover would have been had it been drawn with a little more thought, we'll never know."

After the Captain Comet feature ended, Anderson was assigned fewer and fewer concepts in favor of Gil Kane. He was content to draw many of the interior stories, often inking other artists. All that changed in 1960, when Anderson produced a variation of the alien fisherman idea, "Raiders from the Giant World," which depicted bizarre butterfly-eared extraterrestrials capturing fighter jets in gargantuan nets. It was a concept so striking that readers demanded an encore appearance.

Another startling cover alien, the Faceless Creature from Saturn, returned twice more. "He was the only one that was recurrent," Anderson confirms. "Julie and I were kicking it around and couldn't determine what kind of look the guy should have. And just as a joke, we decided to do him without a face. He caught on a little bit.

People appreciated the idea. How he ate or saw or smelled things is beyond me! But somehow he survived."

Anderson was promoted to the regular cover artist, often huddling with Schwartz for that perfect eye-catching idea. It was a working method that the artist enjoyed. "That was fine with me," he says. "Julie wanted something provocative. All of them had some gimmick. There was one with a green monster pushing over a rocket to the Moon. That was *Strange Adventures* #123."

In those early days of the Comics Code, there were limits. "Definitely," Anderson affirms. "I did one splash page of an evil face and two hands dropping humans from one hand to the other. It was inspired by some weird cover from Julie's past. Julie liked it and said, 'Let's use it as a cover.' It went through the channels of approval, but it was not long before [publisher] Jack Liebowitz came back holding it and said, 'No way! I'm not going to have this kind of thing scaring



This cover might have been better, Anderson was advised afterward, with "the fisherman hanging upside down."

"We would sit and brainstorm," he recalls. "If it looked interesting enough to get a potential reader to pick it up, that was the whole idea."



the kids.' He wanted covers without that frightening element."

Only one thing bothered Anderson. "For some time, I had been after Julie to work the cover scene into the story," he relates. "And that would have been fairly easy to do, but it wasn't always convenient. Julie grumbled a little and said, 'Well, I don't know.' I said, 'When you used to go to the theater and

Of the popular alien's third cover gig, "We started out with a theme to get the United Nations in there. The Faceless Creature just fell into it," Anderson admits.



Editor Julie Schwartz and Anderson usually devised cover concepts first. The actual stories (eventually incorporating the cover scene) came later.





As part of a recent Guinness Book of World Records event, Anderson (front left) and his wife Helen dressed as People of Steel for the largest gathering ever of folks costumed as Superman.



"The Man with the Head of Saturn" was, well, ridiculous. "I don't know how we happened to come up with that!"

"Every DC editor started putting talking gorillas on the cover. It was contagious," he says. Why? Apes sold comics.



In their quest for the unusual, sometimes they drifted into the ridiculous, as in "The Man with the Head of Saturn." "I don't know how we happened to come up with that!" Anderson laughs. "Didn't we have another similar cover? Julie wanted to have the head doing something. That was his contribution—sparks flying off the rings of Saturn!"

Then there was a spate of talking gorilla covers that quickly spread to other DC editors once word got out that they boosted sales. "I didn't do the cover that sparked all of the gorillas," Anderson points out. "It was contagious. Every DC editor started putting talking gorillas on the cover. But they were doing so many, word came from the front office to only use them occasionally." Anderson did many of them. For variety, he sometimes gave the big apes wings.

As time wore on, Anderson found himself working with Schwartz's two top writers, one of whom, Gardner Fox, had appeared in *Planet Stories* back when Anderson was

illustrating it. "I always felt that John Broome had a better sense of science fiction," Anderson asserts. "Gardner was good in his own right. He had a different take on science fiction. John was a very serious writer, and he took comics seriously. I can't say that Gardner took it as seriously as John. In my book, John had more of his heart in his work. Gardner was a journeyman doing a good job. It was interesting to work on John's stuff because he gave a feeling to the material that no one else could. That was because of his pulp roots. Julie had represented both Gardner and John as a science fiction agent."

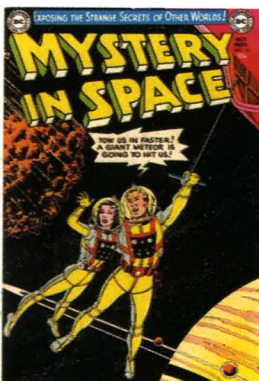
Of Adam Strange

Adam Strange came along in 1958, triggered by Russia's launch of the first *Sputnik* satellite. An updating of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *John Carter of Mars*, Adam Strange was scripted by Fox. Anderson was slated to draw the strip, but other commitments interfered. After a tryout in *Showcase*, the spaceman landed in *Mystery in Space*, where he was cover-featured for years. (The complete Adam Strange series was recently immortalized in a three-volume *DC Archives* hardcover set.)

Working with Schwartz and Infantino, Murphy co-designed the character's costume, which harked back to Captain Comet and Buck Rogers. "I remember that about that time, the space program was getting underway, and we were seeing pictures of the spacesuits that the government was devising," he says. "We were inspired by the bands on the waist and the arms, and tried to put that into the costume."

Although Infantino drew the character, Anderson inked the stories and covers, adding his distinctive flavor. The costume debuted with the classic story, "The Planet and the Pendulum." Anderson's version of the cover, however, was rejected and redrawn by Kane. "I like Edgar Allan Poe, and the thought crossed my mind that we could work a pendulum into the story, and that's how the cover got started," Anderson reflects.

Simultaneously, a familiar childhood hero came calling again. "Buck Rogers wanted me back," he grins. "Old Man Dille had died and his son, Bob, had taken over. It was kind of impossible not to do it. They made it



"I always felt that [writer] John Broome had a better sense of SF," Anderson declares. "Gardner [Fox] was a journeyman doing a good job."

Carmine Infantino pencilled SF hero Adam Strange's otherworldly adventures, which Anderson inked.



attractive enough, you know?"

The second time around proved equally short-lived. "I had improved my drawing quite a bit," he says. "The second run was more successful, but I think I had more enthusiasm on the initial stuff. I just drew the costume like I thought it should be—and got him out of it pretty quick!"

Then came the Atomic Knights. They ran in *Strange Adventures* as a rotating feature written by Broome, who created it with Schwartz. Set in a post-WWIII wasteland, the series revolved around a sextet of atomic-age knights. The strip, Anderson's personal favorite, was tough to draw. "Just the fact that there were so many of them, and each suit of armor had its own design," he notes. "They were relics from a museum. But that's the way we wanted to do it.

"I don't know how successful it was," Anderson adds, "but the fans seemed to love it. I have thought about doing an annotated coffee table book of the Atomic Knights. There's no one else around other than me who could tell the story of that series' beginnings."

Although a fan favorite, the Atomic Knights rated the cover spot only once. That cover pictured the Knights riding huge, mutant Dalmatians into an ambush by mole men. "I came up with that cover," Anderson recalls. "We often talked about using the Atomic Knights for a cover, but Julie was afraid it wouldn't sell well. Finally, we did one, but it was the only one. I'm not sure if the Dalmatians had appeared before or not, but we needed them [for sales appeal]. We were talking about how mutations were affecting other things in the Atomic Knights' universe, and somehow the idea of the dogs came along: Why not have them be big enough to ride, like horses?"

Another space hero who fell into Anderson's lap was the Golden Age superhero Hawkman, who had been revived by

artist Joe Kubert in *The Brave and the Bold*. Sales on the winged lawman from the planet Thanagar weren't strong, but Schwartz still wanted to make the character work, so he put him in the back of *Mystery in Space*. Since Kubert was unavailable, the strip went to a delighted Anderson.

"I liked Hawkman," he acknowledges. "I

explanation. "Probably because of the space program. That stirred up enough interest where people would see something imaginative done with that theme, and they would pick the comic off the newsstand. DC's theory was to get the reader to pick up the book. Julie felt once they did, it had a very good chance of selling."



"I like science fiction primarily, and I liked the Atomic Knights," Anderson says. Still, they rode onto the cover just once.

"Dinosaurs with modern jet fighters. We liked to get the readers wondering, 'What's going on here?'" he reports.



"It's a nice theoretical problem," he explains of this cover. "I don't think they both can exist at the same time. That's a no-no in SF."

Adam Strange's classic exploits have been collected in hardcover by DC.



was attracted to his uniform, and the fact that he could fly. He was a character I enjoyed as a kid. I remembered him quite well. Hawkman always had a pretty realistic appearance because of [artist] Shelly Moldoff's love of Hal Foster and Alex Raymond. He sold quite well in *Mystery in Space*, and the rest is history."

That SF comics era ended at DC in 1964, when Schwartz was reassigned to the *Batman* books. Anderson reluctantly went along. "I preferred science fiction," he explains. "It was always a drag for me to do people in clothes. I would rather draw costumes. I liked to do covers with characters like Captain Comet and Adam Strange."

To John Carter

Anderson did return briefly to his beloved SF in the 1970s when he got the opportunity to illustrate *John Carter of Mars* for DC's *Edgar Rice Burroughs' Weird Worlds*. "I loved working on that stuff," he says. "It was interesting to read Burroughs' words and come up with my own versions of how the characters would look. I tried to make them different than the usual interpretation—I tried to make the Tharks and Thoats more believable."

But as a genre, traditional hard-science SF comics had died out in the mid-60s, and nobody has done anything like them since. Anderson is at a loss to explain exactly why. "It's strange," he agrees. "There must be some reason, because it's difficult to sell. I guess there's something about science fiction that doesn't appeal to the current market."

As for why they once flourished, the artist does have a ready

Having worked on some of the greatest space heroes of the 20th or any other century, Anderson is now retired. Regrets? Few. Unrealized ambitions? One. "Well, I always liked the Flash Gordon character," he confesses. "That would have been interesting, if I had been given a chance. Dan Barry got the job while I was there. We talked about concepts. I thought that it ought to be taken seriously, more in the vein of a Milton Caniff story. Dan seemed to take that to heart. I'm not sure how much he was influenced by our conversations. As a matter of fact, years after Dan was off the feature [*Flash Gordon*], and King Features was looking for someone to do *The Phantom*, I interviewed for that.

"[Editor] Sylvan Byck told me, 'I really don't think it would be suitable for you financially.' So that went nowhere. But we talked about *Flash Gordon*. He said, 'If I had just known about you when we were looking for a *Flash Gordon* artist, it might have been different.' But that's a 'What if?' It doesn't mean much, you know? But they were words of praise."

Although he later worked with another idol, Will Eisner, Anderson's time on *Strange Adventures* and its companion titles stands out, a brief but glorious supernova. "I was most content working with Julie," he reflects. "He was just a regular, friendly guy who really knew his stuff. Julie wasn't only a good editor, but he was a good friend of mine. He once told me, 'I'm not an artist, and I can't give you an artist's criticism. But when I don't like something, I'll tell you. But I can't tell you why. You have to figure it out.'"

"I don't know of anyone who was more knowledgeable about the pulp SF market than Julie Schwartz," Murphy Anderson remarks. "He and Mort Weisinger were the makers and shakers of that field."



Hawkman flew again with Anderson as artist. "He was a character I enjoyed as a kid," Anderson notes.



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