

THE TOURIST

The Hollywood horror story of writer Clair Noto's unfilmed masterpiece.

By Fred Szebin

"There are certain projects that have a form and a structure to them that any good writer can really come in and deal with," said screenwriter Clair Noto of her unproduced science fiction/horror script *THE TOURIST*. "This doesn't have that. It's all over the place; definitely a can of worms."

Can of worms aptly describes the business history of this unique screenplay, for which H. R. Giger created a series of alien designs in the early 1980s.

Set in contemporary Manhattan, the story follows Grace Ripley, a beautiful executive who counts herself among a secret group—exiled aliens, some morphed to human form to live among us, while others remain in their original guises, waiting to die on the backward planet Earth. Her secretary Marty doesn't know of Grace's origins, nor does Marty's friend Spider O'Toole, a one-eyed beauty disenfranchised from society and floating from job to job.

Frogner, an alien disguised as a human salesman, discovered Grace's alien identity while trying to make a deal. He tells this to Harry Sloane, head of the Manhattan Grief Clinic, a front for the alien hideaway known as the Corridor, where any manner of extraterrestrial is stuffed into cubicles to live out their useless lives.

Sloane desperately wants to find John Taiga, an alien who may have developed a way to leave Earth. Sloane will stop at nothing to find and kill Taiga, including enlisting Grace to go on her own search that leads to New York's seedier recesses and the Corridor's darker secrets. Anxiety kills these beings, while sex can either be a savior that rescues them from morphological



Muse of the typewriter: Noto In 1982, when she wrote her script for Universal, who commissioned concept art by H. R. Giger, the Oscar-winning designer of *ALIEN*.

breakdown, or it can kill both the alien and the chosen human mate in a life-draining cocoon. For those who want to know the full story of Noto's amazing script, see page 52.

Begun in 1980, the rise and fall of *THE TOURIST* is almost as bizarre as one of the fascinatingly grotesque creatures Giger has designed for it. Vicious in-fighting, numerous rewrites, financial mismanagement and clashing egos highlight the history of the script Noto wrote for Universal under the guidance of then-studio executive Sean Daniels.

"I was giving him 50 pages at a time," said Noto, "which he would edit down. Sean had a very good feeling for it. When the first draft was finished he was too busy to work on it any further, so it was given to

this woman named Renee Missell for revision. She and I had very little contact; I did not get along with her at all. The project became such a mess, which is part of the reason the picture never got made."

With Missell as producer and director Brian Gibson at the helm, Noto quickly and uncompromisingly found herself ejected from the project that came off her typewriter.

"The inspiration for *THE TOURIST* came from a movie that I adored ever since I saw it on television: *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*. When the film opens you see Michael Rennie in his space suit; then from that point on he is in a suit and tie. I loved the whole idea of a man who could walk around in a boarding house in Washington, who was from another planet and you didn't recognize his alienness. The idea of a human being who wasn't a human being had been in my mind for a long time."

A unique aspect of Noto's rather unconventional script was the use of strong female presences—Grace Ripley, the determined alien fighting her private battles on a male-oriented world; Spider O'Toole, the alienated New Wave human; and even the guards of the Corridor, depicted as strong yet sexy women whose sensuality belied not only their true purpose, but their underlying strength. Noto found a variety of personal sources for character patterns that she believes stymied other writers from fully understanding her script.

"The character of Frogner is lightly based on my own uncle and some stories of what my ex-boyfriend told me about his father, who was a used car salesman. The character of Spider O'Toole was sort of based on a friend of mine. The persona of



H. R. GIGER
THE TOWER

Giger's design for the New York clinic that is a refuge for extraterrestrials who find themselves stranded on Earth. Carlo Rambaldi, who shared Giger's Oscar for ALIEN, was to build the designs.



"The script had a vary New Wave structure," said Note. "At the time, Fellini and Antoniono were really Influential. I didn't give a damn about trying to write a script tor what would be mainstream."

Grace Ripley was a combination of many things, including a dog I had at the time, a Great Dane. The dog was so smart and communicative. The whole idea of communication between species was very interesting—a DAY OF THE DOLPHIN kind of thing.

"THE TOURIST had a very New Wave structure," Noto continued. "At the time Fellini, Antonioni and the more unstructured directors were some of the people I was really influenced by. On this particular script I didn't give a damn to try to make a mainstream script."

Casting such a concept proved difficult, with Noto's first choice, noted German actress Hanna Schygulla, giving the writer an opportunity to reevaluate what she was looking for. "Hanna was somebody I was interested in, although when we met I was less sure of her than I was after seeing her films. She did not have in person the kind of mystery that I wanted Grace to have. And I think, strangely enough, that there was an American quality unbeknownst to me that I wanted that Hanna did not possess.

"Right now, it would almost be closer to somebody like Kim Basinger, Teresa Russell, even Sharon Stone to a degree, although Stone may be overplayed in a certain kind of part.

Giger's bat-like nymph dubbed "The Hanging Alien with Wings," handed to director Brian Gibson during a 1982 meeting with Giger in Zurich.

H.R. GIGER

THE TOURIST

IX



Giger's concept of an alien waiting to die stuffed in a cubicle to live out a useless life on a backward planet in a Manhattan hideaway known as "The Corridor."

Michelle Pfeiffer could have the kind of Garboesque character and have it read the way I want it to read. Casting Ripley has always been interesting. People saw Kathleen Turner for a while. Madonna has come up for it. I think the script was actually sent to her."

At the executive level, Noto said she found nothing but harsh treatment from Gibson and Missell. "When they took it away from me they were very nasty; like, 'Fuck you. We're going to put it together,' and they couldn't do it. [Gibson] always looked like a jerk. To my face he was really nasty. I think he regretted it later on. I also think it damaged his career for along time. He couldn't do anything

"THE TOURIST didn't do anybody any good," Noto continued. "It hurt me, it hurt a lot of people. Renee Missell destroyed herself. You cannot do what people did with that material and not have some fallout. I couldn't get Renee Missell on

the phone. It was terrible, just terrible. She kept belittling the project saying, 'Nobody's even going to want to make this movie. Or if they would, it would be a cult movie that would play at midnight like ROCKY HORROR.' Totally insulting about it. She would say things like, 'I was the only person in town who didn't like STAR WARS.' My feeling was

that this is not a good situation."

After numerous rewrites with varying scriptwriters, including a stab taken by genre favorite Dan O'Bannon, Missell and Gibson still had an unworkable project and continued to keep the story's originator at arms length. "[Missell] didn't want to go back to my script," said Noto, "because she didn't want me to have credit. She was

trying very, very hard to make sure that if it ever got made, my name would never be seen on the screen. At one point, they changed the city from New York to San Francisco, which did not work at all. They changed a lot of the characters' names and had all these politically correct aliens running around San Francisco. Very boring."

It was around this time that H.R. Giger was brought onto the project, developing numerous aliens for the Corridor sequences. Noto believes that no completed script was ready at the time, but, hot off his inspired work for ALIEN, Giger added a certain class to the proceedings.

"I had mentioned Giger, I believe, to either Renee or to Brian Gibson," Noto said. "My feeling was that the best way to proceed for the alien designs would be to have many different designers do their own versions of the aliens that would be put into that club. What I want-

Swiss surrealist artist H. R. Giger, circa 1979, posed with an ALIEN design.





"Initially Mr. Sloan's head would explode. Then crabs and other kinds of vermin would scuttle out from the ruptured skull." The scene from the script that initially inspired Giger's design work. Below: Clinic cases.



ed to try to do was a version of the STAR WARS cantina that was more reality-based, where you had one designer's view of an alien sharply contrasted with another designer's view so that they were sharply different, giving you the impression that these aliens could be from vastly different places. If you put Giger's alien next to somebody else's, they would not look like they were made by the same person. I tried to figure out a way to really jolt people, to do something new with the way those aliens looked. Juxtaposing images of very different sensibilities so it would have taken more than one person, I think, to complete this thing as I originally saw it. But I was not involved when Giger's designs were being done. I was even surprised that Gibson and Missell picked up on Giger, because it was something that I had said."

Noto's hands-off orders extended to Giger's designs. Not only was she refused an opportunity to see the paintings, but could not even get beyond the artist's agent to talk with him. The first time she saw any of the designs was in *Cinefantastique's* May 1988 issue, which featured a Giger cover story, as well as two alien concepts Giger had planned.

"I asked to see them," remembered Noto, "but was told that I would not be allowed to. I was told that, at that point, the script did not belong to me and that I was no longer important to it. The drawings in *Cinefantastique* did not look like what I had imagined the aliens to look like, but I was not the one directing what Giger was doing. It was Brian Gibson, really, who was working with him. If I had spoken to Giger, there are other things that he had done and other ideas that I would have encouraged him to pursue. It was hard to tell which parts of the script the drawings I saw in CFQ were pertaining to. Giger may have been working from a very different draft. I think they had production designs made before they had a draft that they

H. R. GIGER'S LATEST

SPECIES

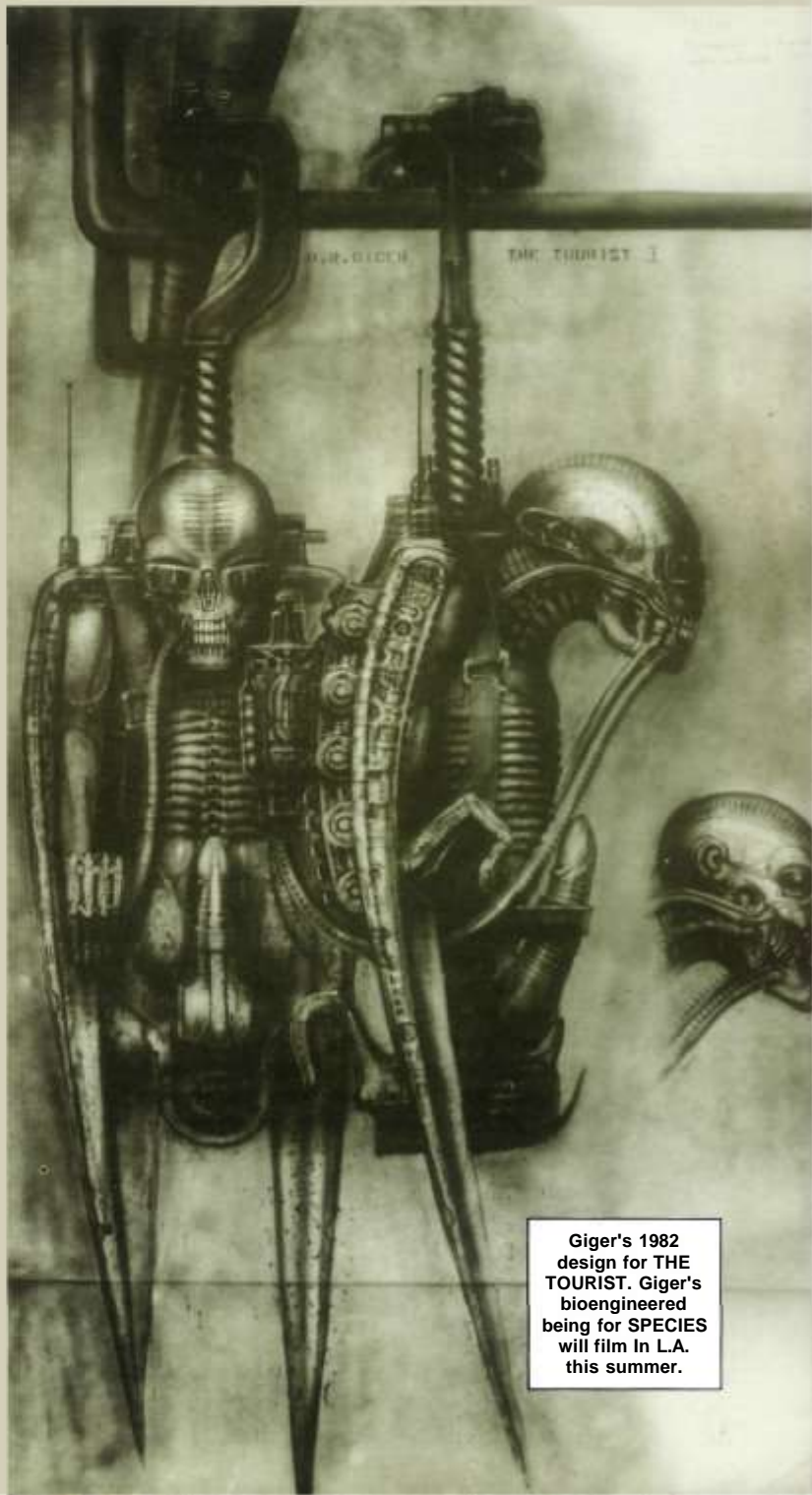
MGM lenses Giger's titular creature, to be directed by Roger Donaldson.

MGM announced in April that H. R. Giger will design the creature of their forthcoming movie project SPECIES. MGM Pictures president Michael Marcus confirmed that Roger Donaldson has been signed to direct the science fiction thriller, scheduled to begin production early this summer in L. A. Donaldson is the Australian-born director of such films as *THE GETAWAY*, *NO WAY OUT* and *THE BOUNTY*.

SPECIES is the story of a genetically engineered being capable of assuming a variety of forms, human and otherwise. As brilliant as it is ruthless, the creature proves to be a formidable prey for the scientists who created it, who are charged with the task of finding and destroying it.

The project is being produced by Frank Mancuso Jr. and Dennis Feldman, from a screenplay by Feldman. Mancuso is the producer of Paramount's *FRIDAY THE 13TH* movie sequels, beginning with Part III, and Ralph Bakshi's *COOL WORLD*. Feldman wrote the Eddie Murphy fantasy *THE GOLDEN CHILD*. Mancuso and Donaldson conferred with Giger on the designs.

Noted MGM's Marcus of pairing Giger and Donaldson, "We are thrilled to have Roger Donaldson and are equally delighted to have accomplished the enormous coup of securing H. R. Giger. This extraordinary artist has been sought out for other projects, but it was his appreciation for the work of Roger Donaldson and the strength of this terrific script that brought him on board for SPECIES. We are sure that the talents of this team will make SPECIES a fabulous film for 1995." •



Giger's 1982 design for *THE TOURIST*. Giger's bioengineered being for SPECIES will film in L.A. this summer.

THE TOURIST

The complete scenario of Noto's script that is still way ahead of its time.

During one of Frogner's weak moments, Grace discovers that he is a Dual; able to be a woman. Sexual arousal is a morphing technique to him. Grace finds him in a painful transition state; with male and female characteristics. Utilizing one of her earlier abilities—a deep, unearthly sound that she whispers into his ear—Grace helps Frogner complete his transformation from woman to man. This causes Grace to have a brief flashback—remembering herself on her home world as the wormlike slug she really is, being raped by humanoid aliens.

Now in his male form, Frogner tells her of Sloane's treachery; using her to find Taiga so he can be killed while the search and its frustrations would also kill her.

Later, Grace discovers that Frogner had gone through her office, finding Taiga's former address. She rushes there to find the mutilated bodies of the mother and daughter Taiga had lived with. She also, finally, finds Taiga. He tells her that Sloane probably killed them and that, during his last seclusion from humans, which he has to take or the anxiety they create in him would surely kill him, Taiga had built a transport that could get the two of them off Earth once and for all. He gives Grace a hotel key, telling her to meet him there later.

Frogner later meets with Sloane, refusing to help him



Hanna Schygulla, the actress originally cast as Grace Ripley, the stranded alien in a human skin.

find Taiga or trap Grace anymore. He guns Sloane down only to find him still alive and in control of the Corridor. Realizing that his time is short, Frogner gets suicide pills from an alien in the Corridor and receives a message from Spider O'Toole with Grace's name on it. She wants to find out what is happening to Grace, but in doing so, accidentally leads Frogner to a confrontation with Sloane. Frogner takes the suicide pills, which cause him to explode, and when Spider refuses to give him Grace's whereabouts, Sloane shoots her, leaving her for dead.

Grace returns to her office to find a message from Spider explaining her trick to meet with Frogner. She rushes to Frogner's office to find Spider dying. The girl, realizing the alien forces

around her, begs Grace to reveal her true form. Grace takes Spider to the Corridor, where the girl dies content amidst the swarm of alien faces she always wanted to believe existed.

Grace goes to Sloane's Grief Clinic and they battle with their hidden powers. As he begins to falter under Grace's whispered tones inducing pain, he tries to buy time telling her of a large transport in Marrakesh, but she continues her tonal assault as Sloane metamorphoses into his true form—an entire race of thousands of wormlike fragments with probing, snapping mouths. They

latch onto Grace as she sets fire to the office. The fragments that aren't consumed in the conflagration escape outside to be trampled under the unsympathetic New York traffic.

Grace returns to New Jersey for her meeting with Taiga, who had revealed his true form to her—that of the alien humanoid race that raped and enslaved her kind. Altering to variations of their alien forms, they wage a private war that Grace wins by draining Taiga of his life fluids, leaving a dead, dried-out husk.

Leaving his body behind, Grace searches for the transport Taiga had shown her earlier, but it is gone. Exhausted once she reverts to her human form, Grace finds the nearest pay phone and makes a reservation on the next plane to Marrakesh.

Fred Szebin

wanted to use."

Unfortunately for Gibson and Missell, Clair Noto had that rare clause in her contract-for-hire called turnaround, in which the author receives a year-long option on the work, should the original production deal fall through, which this one did, once Universal pulled the plug. The first to go was Renee Missell, as well as Gibson, who went on to direct *POLTERGEIST II: THE OTHER SIDE* and the cable TV bio *THE JOSEPHINE BAKER STORY*. Noto took the script to United Artists, who would have refused to allow her to work on it. From there she went to Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope Studio, one of the grandest failed experiments in excessive power in Hollywood history.

By the early 1980s, Coppola had transmuted his incredible success from his *GODFATHER* films and *APOCALYPSE NOW* into Zoetrope, which was to be the one place filmmakers could come to create their cinematic visions with total freedom, under contract in the manner of the old studios of Hollywood's Golden Age. Unfortunately, Coppola's grand dream crumbled under the financial excesses of his failed epic *ONE FROM THE HEART*, a \$23 million bomb that left nothing for the talent signed to Zoetrope and created a bankrupt mess within a few years.

One of the directors signed with Coppola's dream was Franc Roddam, a personable Brit who was hot off his 1979 hit *QUADROPHENIA*. With Noto back on the project, Roddam was brought onto the film by a mention from its former director, Brian Gibson. After *QUADROPHENIA*, Roddam spent two years trying to get his environmentally conscious project *RAINFOREST* off the ground. But even with the pull of heavyweight Robert Redford involved, *RAINFOREST* seemed a doomed project. Gibson mentioned *THE TOURIST* to Roddam while playing tennis with him and fellow director Adrian (FATAL ATTRACTION) Lyne. Producer Michael (A FISH CALLED WANDA) Shenberg also brought the script up a few weeks later and said that he now controlled it with Noto. At

"I was trying to figure out a way to really jolt audiences," said Noto, "to do something new with the way the aliens looked. I suggested Giger but wasn't there when his designs were solicited."

Zoetrope, along with fledgling Roddam came David Lynch as well as a host of international cinematic legends, including America's Gene Kelly, England's Michael Powell and France's Jean Luc Goddard.

"I was surrounded by 10 people in this little unit," remembered Roddam, "and we were all going to make fantastic films for Francis. Not only did none of the films get made, there was absolutely no money for our preparation of these films. No money for our secretaries and no money for us. And Francis, meanwhile, is spending millions and millions of dollars refurbishing his studio and making ONE FROM THE HEART. What was supposed to be the greatest ideal studio to go to and work with an artist-producer, Francis, and was supposed to be heaven turned out to be pure hell. It was worse than any journey he did up in the fucking Phillipines. He treated us like shit. He was appalling."

One story Roddam related illustrates the point of desperation everyone working at Zoetrope felt. At one point, crews and office personnel working at the studio had a meeting, threatening a walk-out unless they were paid. Walking by with an assistant, Coppola reportedly asked who all the gathered people were. The assistant told him they were workers, wanting to be paid, where Coppola allegedly replied, "They should pay to sweep my floors."

"I had an amazing moment where I tried to force the issue,"



Giger's concept for "The Corridor," an alien hideaway fronted by the Manhattan Grief Clinic, headed by Harry Sloane.

Roddam said, "to get the film made, to get my secretary paid and to keep my family alive. I remember once going into the executive's office saying, 'Where's my money?' They said, 'We can't.' The deal's held up with the lawyers.' I said, 'You employ the lawyers. You get them on the phone and tell them to send me a check right now.' For a while they were going to have me arrested for kidnapping an executive for four-and-a-half minutes."

During this time under Coppola, legendary director Michael Powell had to resort to cannibalizing ONE FROM THE HEART sets and try to furnish his film, roddam remembered seeing Gene Kelly wandering the studio grounds one rainy day with his head down, "and he wasn't singing or dancing. Meanwhile, I'm working with Clair. We're both passionate people. We were talking to art directors and discussing how the film should be made, but there were no funds coming. In the end, Francis' studio is going under." After spending eight months "pissing around, talking to actresses," it became obvious that the Zoetrope production of THE TOURIST simply would not be.

"We tried to set up a deal with Dino DeLaurentiis and other people to try and get THE TOURIST made elsewhere, because it's a fantastic script,"

said Roddam. "The deal got held up because Francis wanted a fee. He wouldn't just let it go free and clear. He wanted money even though he hadn't put any money into it. Then, suddenly, Renee Missell came into it again at Universal saying, 'Hey, there's a legal problem here anyway.' So it floundered."

Roddam believes Missell's question had to do with basic ownership of the property-for-hire. "If you look at the journey of the script," he elaborated, "it seems to me that it's a fight on the part of the writer to try and retain the integrity of the piece as she saw it. There is this danger when

somebody just takes an option on a piece of work. It's like Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead*. I think, in a sense, that Clair thought she created the work and therefore her thoughts should be respected and I agree with that. At the same time, sometimes as a director you say, 'I respect it and I'm going to see it clearly for you,' but sometimes the verbal vision has to be altered to make it work on film.

"Sometimes people have bought scripts and just said, 'We'll do the Paul Robeson story, but does he have to be black?' I've actually heard that before. The real story of this piece is Clair's attempt to protect her vision. I can't speak for Renee because I don't know what

Director Brian Gibson with Boss Film effects technician Bill Beasley during POLTERGEIST II. Gibson developed THE TOURIST with Giger at Universal.





Frank Roddam directs Jennifer Beals in *THE BRIDE*. Roddam tried to launch *THE TOURIST* at American Zoetrope.

she did, but it's quite common that a producer will take a piece and just say, 'I own it and I'm going to do what I like with it.' And that wasn't the original deal."

Although he didn't have the opportunity to create the film, Roddam's involvement with *THE TOURIST* mess did put the director in the middle of a bonafide Hollywood legend. The story, as it goes, involves a fistfight between Roddam and former *TOURIST* director Brian Gibson on a plane over the rights to Noto's script. Never happened, said Roddam. "The fight was between Brian and Adrian Lyne at Morton's over who would pick up the check for their meal. I just happened to be there."

Despite bad memories of a deal never completed, Roddam has fond memories of the script and his chance to work with its writer. "Clair is an extraordinary person," he said. "I often think of Clair as being one of

the greatest cinematic talents who one doesn't hear of.

"I think a lot of directors read *THE TOURIST* and have raided it. You'll see elements of it in other people's movies. The tragedy was that *THE TOURIST* could have been a film way ahead of its time, fantastically hip, totally cool. It's been out there in the open air in Hollywood and had its bones picked. If *THE TOURIST* had broken through, if Francis hadn't been such an asshole, it would have been a great movie, I think. It was a project I felt very close to and, when it fell through, it was a project that I very reluctantly put out of my life."

By the time Zoetrope went under, Coppola had Noto's turnaround option. *THE TOURIST* eventually found its way back to Universal and to the desk of Renee Missell. From that point on, Noto was not allowed near it again. Brian Gibson, again named director, wanted her to take another stab at the script, but

Missell would not hear of it. As individual studios continued to make money off the optioning and reoptioning of the script, Noto wouldn't see a dime.

One reason, Noto believes, that the various rewrites of *THE TOURIST* have failed to find favor is their lack of the original author's voice. "It's a very idiosyncratic script," she said. "I think that other writers can hear those voices. Those voices are from my past. Every time somebody tries to rewrite it, the script just doesn't come together. That's been part of the problem."

"Every time somebody got a hold of the script," Noto continued, "they just held onto it. Warner Bros had it for seven or eight years, optioning it after they knew they weren't going to make it. They didn't want to have it back to Universal and

have them make it into a successful picture, which would have made Warner Bros look bad. It's like a stupid chess game. Universal spent a shitload of money because of the Giger designs and paid for several rewrites with different writers, and I think they had more than one director on it. *THE TOURIST* has always had incredible supporters and incredible detractors. Right from the very beginning it aroused very strong feelings one way or another. People were either very taken by it or felt it was the Anti christ. I still don't, to this day, really comprehend what all the fuss was about. I think *THE TOURIST* is an interesting story, but I don't see the degree to which people have responded to it."

To date, ownership of *THE TOURIST* remains with Universal, which is currently being wooed by heavyweight producer Joel (DIE HARD) Silver, who wants to produce the film and has been offering large amounts of money for the rights. Noto believes Universal is reluctant to release the property for the same reason Warners kept such a tight hold on it for so long, fear of looking foolish if it should become a hit for another studio.

THE TOURIST is a unique, original work that has yet, 14 years after being written, to fall by the wayside. "There is something about that script," Noto said with incredulity. "It has a life of its own. I don't get it. Something that Giger could have been involved with, that other people were involved with on such an emotional level. Millions of dollars spent; option money paid year after year and it all comes to nothing. It's like *CITIZEN KANE*, for crying out loud!"

Below: Noto's suggestions for the part of Grace Ripley, the script's strong female lead. Turner was suggested by others and Madonna was sent the script.



Kim Basinger



Theresa Russell



Sharon Stone



Michelle Pfeiffer



Kathleen Turner



Madonna



Giger's "Tentacled Creature" design for THE TOURIST. Giger worked with director Brian Gibson and Universal producer Renee Missell, not with Noto, but plans to get in touch with the writer to revive the dormant project.