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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

MAY 1998

MGM moved up the release of SPECIES II (yes, the Roman numeral title is the correct one, not the Arabic 2 which appears in our earlier preview articles and in this issue's cover story). As we go to press, the film is set to open nationwide April 10 instead of June 5 as planned.

New York correspondent Dan Scapperotti provides this issue's cover story, reporting from SPECIES II's warehouse set in Maryland, a chronicle of how FRIDAY THE 13TH series producer Frank Mancuso has attempted to turn the success of the original SPECIES into a continuing horror and science fiction film franchise. Scapperotti interviews former X-FILES scripter Chris Brancato on crafting the sequel's strategy with Mancuso, as well as director Peter Medak (THE CHANGELING), creature creator Steve Johnson, CGI experts Digital Magic, star Natasha Henstridge and Oscar-winning alien designer H. R. Giger. We call our cover story "Giger's SPECIES" because it is the alien design work of the Swiss surrealist artist that makes the project most interesting in our eyes. We called our cover story on the original SPECIES "Giger's Alien," a reference to the designer's groundbreaking work on Ridley Scott's ALIEN and his seminal influence on science fiction film design. It was therefore a little distressing to receive Giger's personal request, as we went to press, to remove his name from the cover, a request we could not honor due to our press deadline.

After seeing a cut of SPECIES II, Giger declined to take any credit for his design work for the film, claiming it was largely ignored or unused. On the sequel, Giger chose to take the credit "Original Species Design by H. R. Giger." Since it is that very design which graces the cover, magnificently realized by effects creator Steve Johnson's XFX for the new sequel, spotlighting Giger's key contribution to the project is not inappropriate. Too bad the production chose to ignore his other work.

Frederick S. Clarke



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SPECIES 2

DESIGNER H.R. GIGER

The world's premier monster-maker on his art.

By Dan Scapperotti

Perhaps the most famous of film monster designers today is the venerated H. R. Giger whose creation of the ALIEN monsters and the Sil creature from SPECIES have become icons of modern science fiction. Giger is a man who takes his artistic integrity seriously. *Very* seriously. He is currently involved in a credit battle with 20th Century-Fox over his lack of screen recognition on the latest Alien film, ALIEN RESURRECTION. Fox apparently "forgot" the creature design credit for the Swiss artist, much like Andrew Lloyd Weber's oversight in failing to give credit to Gaston Leroux, the author of *Phantom of the Opera*.

Giger was vocally less than pleased with the CGI incarnation of his design of the Sil creature in SPECIES and was a bit surprised when producer Frank Mancuso, Jr. contacted him to work on the sequel. "I was happy to receive Frank's invitation to come back and work on SPECIES II," said Giger. "He is a thorough professional and only concerned about what is in the best interest of his film."

When director Peter Medak first signed onto SPECIES II one of his first questions for producer Frank Mancuso was, is H.R. Giger involved? The director, it turns out, was a big fan of the Swiss designer.

Their face-to-face meetings only lasted a week, but Medak was bombarded by Giger with a steady stream of design material. "He's got this incredible dark vision, particularly the Alien," said Medak. "He's done all kinds of other things. It's just that he's known for his ALIEN



Oscar-winning Swiss surrealist H. R. Giger (l) confers with XFX creature effects supervisor Steve Johnson over the design maquette of Eve, repeating Giger's original Sil design with slight modifications, sculpt by Nori Honda.

creatures. I had a great time with him. We spent endless time talking on the phone and he started sending lots of sketches and drawings. He did some of the designs which Steve Johnson then executed. I have 150 faxes from him of drawings which I'm keeping forever because I think he's a genius. He gave me designs of what the creature should look like and ideas for the transformation when the two creatures are making love to each other, the love scene. He also came up with ideas for when the tentacles shoot out of the little kid and he gets taken up into the ceiling of the barn and then goes into the chrysalises, the cocoon stage."

The love scene between the two alien life forms, Eve and Patrick, was brief but, Medak felt, pivotal to the story. "I wanted to make it very beautiful and idyllic," he said, "and kind of lyrical. Giger kept talking about the hair, which is kind of

floating around, and which then becomes tentacles and we go into the whole transformation of the creatures. He would send an idea and I would send it back to him and we'd talk a lot on the phone and eventually we came up with something incredible. It is a science fiction movie and that's what brings it to that world. Those two creatures. It was a very important part of it."

Putting the new creatures on screen was a joint effort between Steve Johnson and H.R. Giger—imagination linked to practicality. "It was a great combination working with the both of them," Medak said. "Steve has to put into practice what Giger puts on the page. They have to move and they have to function and they have to jump and attack. It's very difficult to work with creatures because once you get them together nothing actually works properly with staff people holding the arms up and things they have to take out. There are all

kinds of restrictions, but once you get the hang of it, it's quite an incredible medium to work in."

Mancuso sent Giger a copy of the script for the proposed movie and a contract to the designer's agent. "Because of the need for storyboards very early on in the pre-production, Steve Johnson's XFX was already on the job before I was even approached," said Giger. "Consequently, I think many decisions relating to certain design executions had already been made before I took on the assignment or even before I was approached to return. As an unfortunate result, by the time I was allowed to start my own work, I had to stay within certain parameters which had already been established.

Giger was disappointed not to have been brought onto SPECIES II earlier. "Steve Johnson, without question, is one of the best in fabricating articulated and animatronic creatures, but, I think, his work in this case would have been better served if he could have waited until I finished my designs rather than trying to get into my head and guessing at what he thought I would like to do.

"In the end, I was in the position of having to work on Steve's designs, not, strictly, on my own original ones. This is not what I do best, to make someone else's designs look 'Gigeresque,' or try to improve upon them. My ideal way of working is always the same. I start with a blank canvas. In the case of a film, I really have to start from the very beginning and develop the character in my own way, based upon the needs of the script."

Giger speculated that perhaps Mancuso wanted to estab-

"Since we know each other well, [Mancuso] understands my compulsion to try and improve everything, a trait of mine which is not necessarily appreciated by everyone."



Justin Lazard as Patrick watches as one of his alien sons begins to form his chrysalis. Right: Giger's concept of worms that knit to form the chrysalis.

Mancuso and [director] Peter Medak to see that a certain continuity of design is maintained from the first film to this one. During my work on the first film I had set down a unique template which provided the design aesthetic and the blueprints for others to follow, just as I had done for the first ALIEN film. For better or

cessity or an invitation requires it, I am available for a quick cross-Atlantic visit and I did spend several days in California with Medak, Mancuso and Steve Johnson and the animatronics people at XFX."

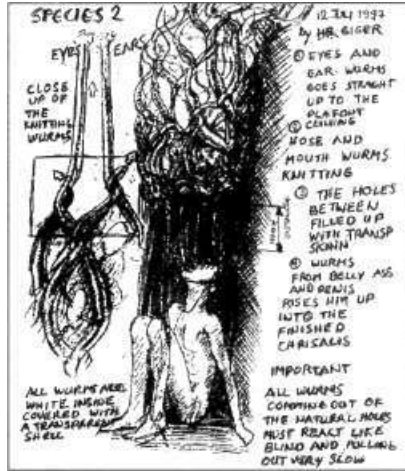
On the first SPECIES film, Giger had little contact with director Ronald Donaldson, the addition of Peter Medak, whom

lish a design direction before Giger was involved. "So I would need to follow their ideas, mostly, instead of spending a lot of energy trying to change everything," said Giger. "Since we know each other well, [Mancuso] understands my compulsion to try and improve everything, a trait of mine which is not necessarily appreciated by everyone. Still, he had the confidence, I think, that my involvement in his movie would, somehow, challenge the excellence level of the design and fabrications group.

"I think he appreciates my unique qualifications for a film designer. Not necessarily my Oscar, many others also have one, but the fact that I come from a fine arts tradition and a strong industrial design background. The maxims that I adhere to can be a nightmare come true for a lesser producer, that form follows function, not sen-

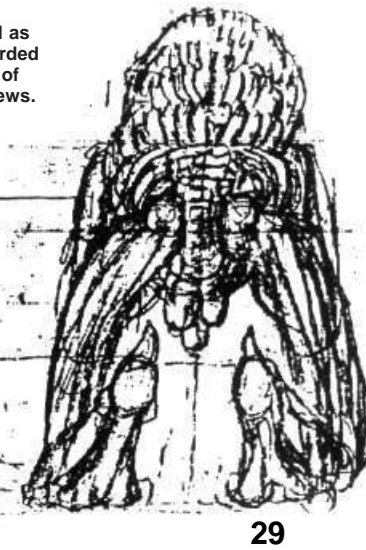
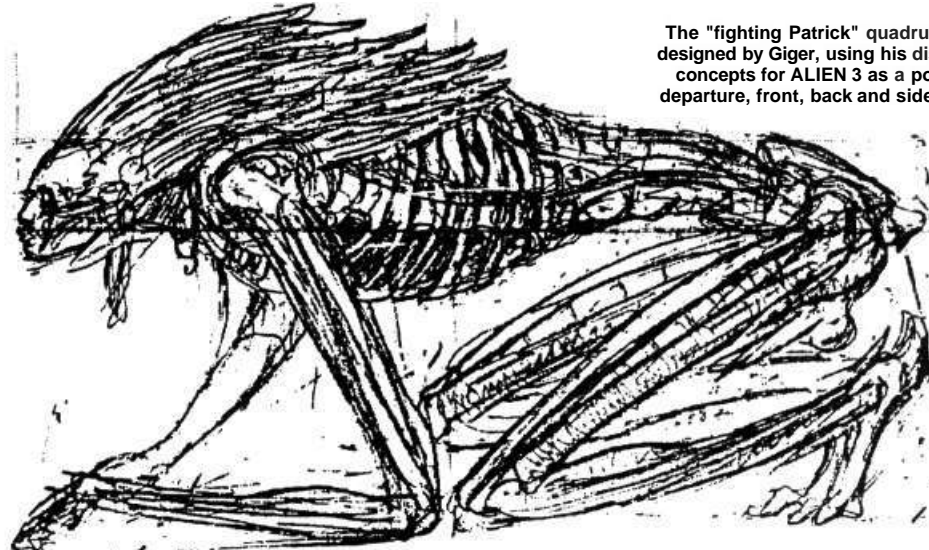
sation, and that getting it done on time must *not* be at the expense of getting it done right. The best of films will always have an individual who argues these unpopular points. In the long run, such people are good to have around for the health of the film, though not always for the health of the producer. So even though my ideas have not always prevailed, Frank will probably be the first one to admit that my ideas create a dynamic that, at the end, make a visible difference. And, at the end, that is all that matters. Only what is visible."

Giger hadn't seen the finished film when interviewed in Zurich. "I have good reason to hope that I was *not* brought into the project only because of the strong marketing value of my name, but because of the sincere desire on the part of Frank



worse—this is the way it usually must be for me since I must remain, for the most part, in Switzerland, to be home and work on my other projects, and can not be on hand in Los Angeles for the amount of time it would take to personally supervise the laborious design and fabrication process. When ne-

Giger admirers, to helm the new film was a major attraction for Giger. "The involvement of Peter Medak as the director of SPECIES II figured largely in my decision to accept MGM's invitation to participate in the film," confirmed the designer. "While Peter was too busy to visit me in Zurich we spoke often over the telephone and he also met with my agent in New York. It pleased me greatly that he is a gentleman from the 'old school' who extended to me the respect of a creative colleague and was genuinely interested in my ideas. Since I have not yet seen any of the actual footage he shot, I don't know how much of my concepts he had been able to incorporate in the final film. I am confident though, that he did try his best to do so and was able to make the most of what was put in front of his lens by Frank Mancuso and



The "fighting Patrick" quadruped as designed by Giger, using his discarded concepts for ALIEN 3 as a point of departure, front, back and side views.

"I think [Giger] is an amazing artist.... Now that I know him I just hope that maybe one day I can do a movie that can utilize him and his kind of genius."

Steve Johnson. It was an honor to finally be able to meet with Peter in Los Angeles. I am a great admirer of his films, Particularly the cult classic *THE RULING CLASS* and *ROMEO IS BLEEDING*. With Peter Medak at the helm as director and his unique ability to infuse dramatic tension into a scene he is capable of elevating the level of any script. It is also obvious from his past work that he can draw out amazing performances from his actors.

"Almost certainly, there will be surprises for me in *SPECIES II* which will not make me very happy, but I am sure that we will all be very surprised with the level of acting Natasha [Henstridge] will be able to achieve in the film under the guidance of Peter Medak. At this moment, Peter is working on the editing with all his soul, I am sure. He is a Hungarian, as is my agent, and Hungarians give it everything they've got!"

Working long-distance with Giger frustrated Medak who longs to have a closer working

Giger's detail of Patrick's son, showing how the knitting worms emerge from every natural orifice.



relationship with the artist. "I think he's an amazing artist," said Medak. "Very unique and I hope this is the beginning of us working together on some other things because I think he's a total genius and original. Now that I know him I just hope that maybe one day I can do a movie that can utilize him and his kind of genius. I would do it totally with him instead of just having him on the other end of a fax. When you do the creature long distance a lot can change with the drawing and how it comes out. I can't wait to do a ghost story and get him to come and help me to create certain things. What I know now about special effects and Giger and Steve, one can make the most incredible things."

Giger was pleased with *SPECIES II*'s non-CGI approach, but doesn't rule out use of CGI in the future. "The technological capability, for sure, has gotten even better since [*SPECIES in*] 1992, but I think only an elite few has gained full mastery of it," observed Giger. "In the coming years this is sure to change. Until then, the needs of the script and the pockets of the studio should decide what will be the best methods to use for the visual effects. I was glad that this time Frank agreed that we should not rely so much on computers, but more on animatronic creations and live tricks before the camera which Steve Johnson and his crew did so well in the first film."

Chris Brancato's script doesn't try to revive Sil from the dead. Instead he reinvents the half human, half alien creature in the form of Eve. Giger wasn't asked to modify the design from the original. "The only correction I suggested was a minor, anatomical one," said Giger. "If new molds were to be made, I hoped that her legs would be lengthened since they were made too short in the first film.

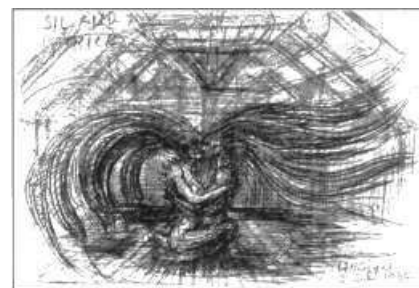


Giger's design sketch of Patrick showing how tentacles sprout from his head when he begins to mate with Eve. Below: Giger's designs show how Eve and Patrick's tentacles swirl together to form a nest

Not until I read the press release did I realize I was supposed to have made a new design."

Eve has a competitor in the new film in the form of a male of the species. Astronaut Patrick Ross infected with alien DNA on a mission to Mars returns to Earth and rapidly takes on the characteristics of another out-of-this-world creature. Some of the first sketches sent to Giger after he signed onto the project were of the transformed Patrick creature. "I didn't know why it was even necessary," said Giger of the design. "It seems to be derivative of the Alien monster, complete with the elongated skull, and with big eyes, and bird like legs, with that extra reverse-bending joint which seems to be the 'design *de jour*' in the Hollywood monster community. I understand the temptation to do this since it allows the creature to stand a foot taller than a normal person. The man inside the rubber suit can stand on high heels of a sort. Taken together with the creature's oversized hands and long animal-like claws, it can come off rather clumsy looking. Whatever enhancements it brings to the creature's imposing stature, it also sacrifices from its graceful and deadly elegance. I was in conflict over this approach with XFX and I had many animated discussions with Steve over the designs. In the end, I believe, XFX won out and got what they wanted."

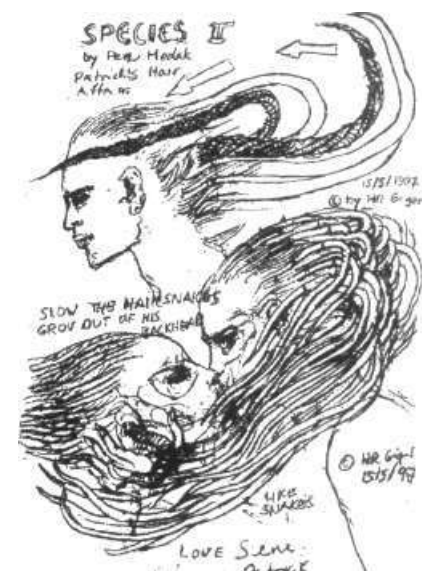
The seeming defeat, however, has not phased Giger. "This is not important," he said. "What only matters is that the audience in the theatre should

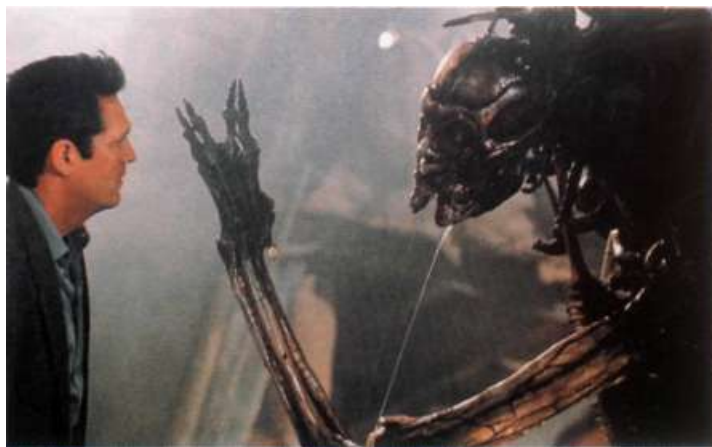


not be disappointed. Once I realized I had to accept the Patrick monster written into the script, I argued very hard to try and improve the initial design. I realized that certain elements of my unused designs for *ALIEN 3* could work, also, here. At the end, I think, I was able to bring some of these design ideas to the Patrick monster and improve him a little bit, which is what, I believe, Frank had hoped I would do.

"I think I was successful, though, in injecting another stage to the Patrick transformation, a humanoid stage which

Giger love: his concept for the hair snakes for Eve and Patrick's mating.





Lennox (Michael Madsen) confronts the fighting Patrick quadruped, created by XFX from Giger's design. The filmmakers wanted this larger, more threatening monster for the finale, which Giger designed even if he felt the concept wasn't justified by the evolutionary logic of the established story.



shoot it with unrestricted creativity, due to the way the shot had to be framed.

"I have worked on enough films now to realize that nothing may quite satisfy me the way the original ALIEN film collaboration did. There, I was given the freedom to do everything myself, from the design to the actual physical sculpting. I made myself a prisoner on that film and, in fact, that is what is necessary to allow for the fulfillment of the successful evolutionary process known as creature development and design. I must have my hand on the creature from the beginning to the end or have a top sculptor or fabricator to work with me in the atelier in Zurich. Although filmmaking is, ultimately, a compromise between many creative sensibilities, it is advisable to start with a strong hand. It is the nature of dreams that they are never to be fully realized. In that sense, I sup-

pose, everything went according to plan."

Busy with his own artistic endeavors (such as the soon-to-open Giger museum), Giger picks and chooses his film projects very carefully. "There are a few films that are offered to me," he said, "and of those, there are very few that I would like to work on. Since a film project takes a year from one's life, even if you really work on it for only a few months, at this point I need to be very selective. Above all, it has to be a script which engages my imagination and also a topic which I could bring new ideas to. The human drama in a story is as important to me as the creatures. I have two stories of my own which I am working on. *THE CROSS AND THE BLADE* is a dramatic film idea without any monsters or creatures and *THE MYSTERY OF SANGOTTARDO* is, among other things, quite humorous."

Giger's latest book, published by Taschen, is www.HRGIGER.com, which is also the address of the film designer's new website. Noted Giger, "I am very proud of the many internet awards which this website has been given and also the work of Thomas Riehn, my WebMaster, who is mostly responsible for its existence. I could not have realized two years ago that it could become such an important means of communication and interaction with my fans."

Giger looks forward to the *SPECIES* series continuing. "I think Peter Medak will make a very good picture for Frank,

quite possibly even better than the first," said Giger. "My way of working results in a lot of ideas around a design, not all of which are used. Concepts which I did for the first may possibly be used in *SPECIES II*, or ideas designed for the second film may easily find their way into the third. This also happened with the ALIEN films. Even in the last one I can see where the Newborn originated, just look at page #60 in *Giger's Alien*. Eventually, most of my designs get used, one way or another. I can only hope that, when it happens, it is under my guidance so I could supervise the interpretation and the quality of the execution. It seems logical to me that it would be the best guarantee for everyone." □

Director Peter Medak rehearses Eve. Medak and Giger hope to collaborate again in the future.



XFX supervisor Steve Johnson (l) shows Giger an effects torso of Patrick when the artist visited the production. Giger worked mostly by fax from Zurich.

