

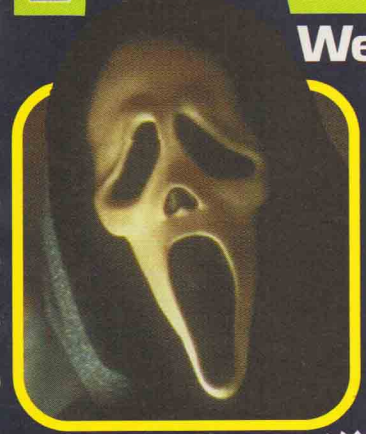
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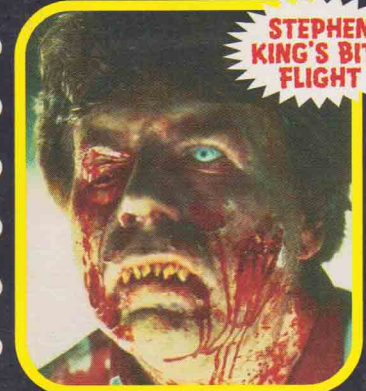
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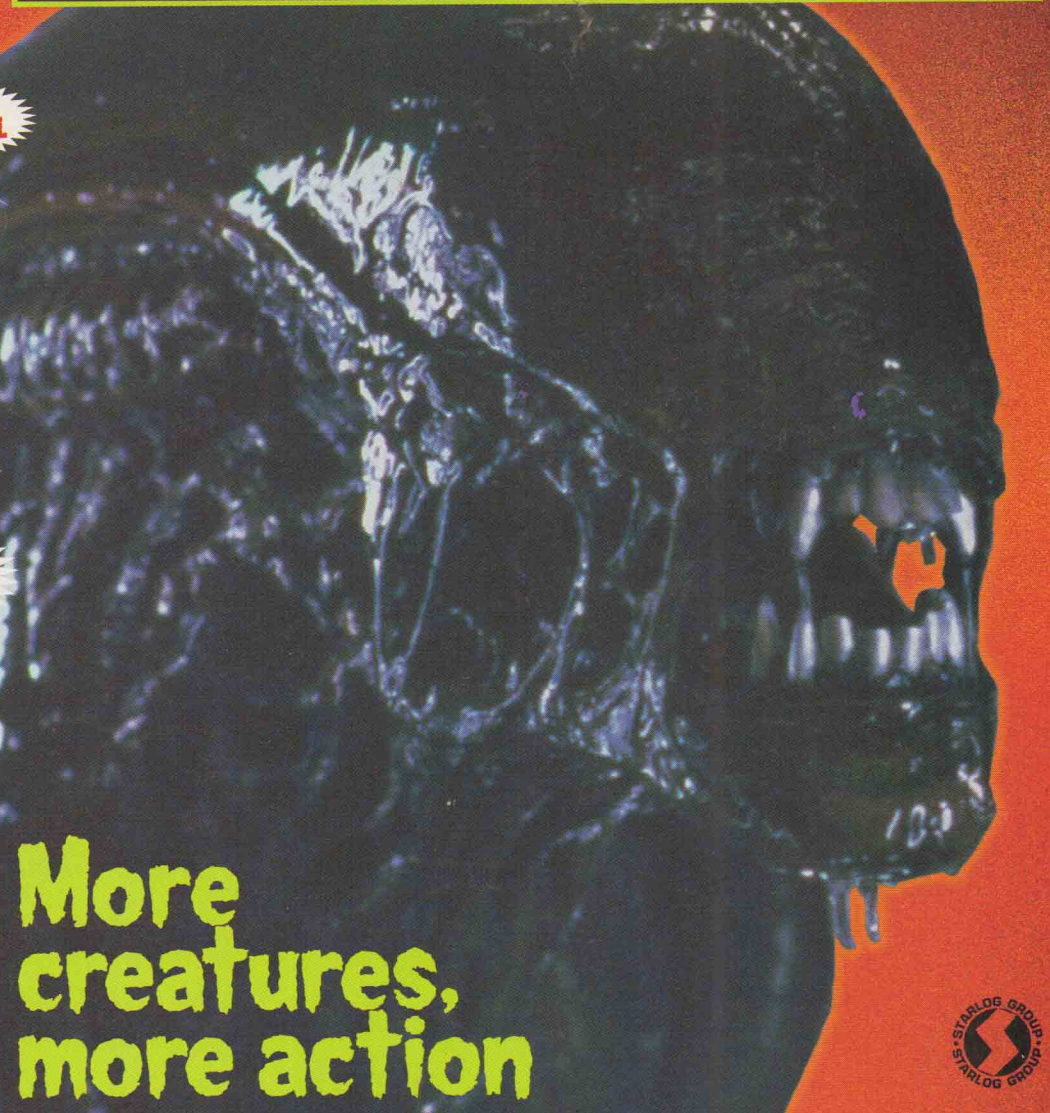
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tendencies?

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I

*If you resurrect it, they*

All these years later,  
one Alien is finally  
able to show its  
appreciation for  
Sigourney Weaver's  
underwear scene in  
the original.





By ANTHONY C. FERRANTE



**H**

ow much does a resurrection cost in Hollywood these days?

If you're 20th Century Fox, \$75 million is enough to do the trick, as the studio revives its *Alien* franchise with the ambitious *Alien Resurrection*. Venerable action heroine Sigourney Weaver returns to the fray as Ripley, with Winona Ryder added to the universe for extra youth appeal. Making both his solo and American directorial debut is

only a handful of print journalists and no entertainment news programs allowed; according to the unit publicist, the way the sets are designed, Jeunet is concerned that they will look vastly different on high-contrast video than they will on film. (Subsequent to this visit, however, several behind-the-scenes reports did air on *Entertainment Tonight*.) Endless rumors of production delays, the director's inability to speak English very well, smoke inhalation mishaps (which apparently sent

notwithstanding, the cast and crew are all in good spirits. Cluttered around a small set which production designer Nigel Phelps has subtly constructed to be shaped like a gun barrel, the crew of the contraband pirate ship *Betty* are in the midst of questioning each other's ulterior motives and arguing intensely.

Trying to figure out exactly what shot he needs, director Jeunet (with eyepiece in tow) quietly moves in and out of the relaxed cast of actors, including, among others, Ryder as the ship's mechanic Call, *The Crow*'s Michael Wincott as the crew's leader Elgyn and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*'s Ron Perlman as Johnner, the

**E**

**N**

*will come—so hope the team behind the space-monster sequel.*

Jean-Pierre Jeunet, one-half of the team (with Marc Caro) who crafted France's stunning art-house genre films *Delicatessen* and *The City of Lost Children*. Fox releases the new sequel November 26.

Visiting the set of the fourth entry in this popular series is fraught with anticipation and its own set of morbid curiosities. As with any eagerly awaited follow-up, the privilege of being given access to the set has taken on almost mythic proportions, with

19 crew members to the hospital) and the x factor of Jeunet now working within the Hollywood system instead of home turf have added even more to the production's mystique.

However, as the film enters day 56 out of 85 on this early February afternoon, the *Alien Resurrection* set shows no signs of duress. And a sarcastic sign on the Stage 16 door reading "Filmmaking 101—The red light means we're filming, please wait to enter"

hardass of the group. The ensemble acts casual, letting Jeunet conceptualize the moment as if he's simply an inconspicuous fly on the wall. When the director is satisfied that he knows what he wants from the scene, he softly and politely says, "OK, thank you" to his cast and walks away. As he returns to the monitors with director of photography Darius Khondji, the two exchange very few words, and Khondji immediately begins translating Jeunet's



**"Most movies would be tempted  
Newborn digitally...[but] it  
more real when you [use]  
—Tom Rothman, Fox**



**Vriess (Dominique Pinon)** has the arms—though not the legs—to deal with the creatures.



**Johner (Ron Perlman)** has finally found an enemy less attractive than he is.



**An old hand at Alien-blasting, Ripley offers Call (Winona Ryder) a few lessons in survival.**

ery. He's particularly fond of a Technicolor process called ENR, which dumps a certain amount of silver in the development process of the negative and makes all the blacks "pop out" and come to life. The contrasts are then more vivid and the colors are muted down, yet audiences can still discern the incredible detail of the sets. "It really gives a lot of depth to the image, and the definition looks like you can almost touch the texture," says Khondji. "The chemical process also increases the black, making it appear like China ink. It has a very interesting look."

In fact, the *Alien Resurrection* sets have been designed in such a manner that they will be complemented by Khondji's photography. Phelps purposely utilized octagonal shapes, which ultimately look larger when a wide-angle lens is used. The lighting is also hidden within the design of the sets, so the feel is less like a soundstage and more like actually being on the *Betty* itself. "By hiding lights, we're making it look more real," says Khondji, who aimed to give the movie a more oppressive look than the previous *Alien* entries. "I wanted it to be

gritty-looking and have some of those rare qualities that sci-fi B-movies have. Those films have a certain grittiness that gives them a strong quality. That's something that bigger-studio science fiction movies don't have. I really wanted that look, and to reel things in through minimalist detail and a kind of emptiness in the shots."

Also unlike typical Hollywood productions, this movie's story has been visually plotted out in great detail, as Jeunet has literally storyboarded every single shot of the film—his script exists only as a series of storyboards with the scene descriptions written next to them. "This is all extremely unusual, but

thoughts into reality, instructing his crew on how to light for the upcoming scene.

"We don't talk a lot on set," says Khondji, who served as DP on both of Jeunet's previous films before moving on to big-ticket Hollywood productions like *Seven* and *Evita*. "Before we do a movie, we watch a lot of things together, but on set we don't talk much because I know very

quickly what he wants."

The ultimate look of the film is very much in the tradition of Jeunet's previous endeavors, with Khondji providing very minimalistic lighting. Famed Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci once described Jeunet as "the prince of darkness," since his films are always bathed in shadowy and contrasty images; part of this look comes from Khondji's own experimentation with film lab trick-



# to do the looks so much animatronics.” executive

This time around, the extraterrestrials have learned how to turn our technology against us.

Jean-Pierre insisted on doing it this way,” says Tom Rothman, the president of 20th Century Fox film production who greenlit the project. “I guess this comes out of his original background of being an animator. He actually drew the entire movie before we started shooting and storyboarded it himself, not with a separate artist. We knew the script [written by Joss Whedon], and since he was able to visualize the whole film in advance, we were able to prep the movie quite proficiently instead of making it up as we went along.”

If all this sounds rather offbeat for a major science-fiction franchise film, with talk of a “B-movie” feel, quiet French auteurs brooding about shots and compartmentalized sets and a fully storyboarded script, the realization soon sets in that this is exactly the way an *Alien* set should feel. It can only be an advantage to have aboard a visionary director who brings his own approach and quirks to the mix—even if that entails hiring a predominantly French crew and having to speak through a translator during most of the production.

“It’s a French film as far as I’m concerned,” admits the film’s unit publicist. “I knew that the first day, when craft service brought out the baguettes.”

The big question is, can a foreign visionary turn around and save a franchise that suffered the slings and arrows of a misguided third installment and an audience that appears to be growing tired of outer-space thrills and chills (witness the failure of this summer’s *Event Horizon* to attract major crowds)? “I believe *Alien* has a built-in audience,” says visual FX supervisor Erik Henry. “And if you loved the series, even if the third one left a bad

taste in your mouth like some people have told me, I still think you’ll go back to see the movies because the series always has such great ideas. You also have to remember that Sigourney Weaver wouldn’t be back if it wasn’t a good story—she loved the script that much.”

There has been much praise among the *Alien* team for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creator Whedon’s new take on the series (quite surprisingly and atypically, he was the only writer to work on the script from beginning to end), which bodes well for *Alien Resurrection* to go nowhere but up. “First and foremost, we have a really good story,” says Rothman. “And ultimately, if you ask me to name one single important element of any satisfying movie, it’s a good story that people want to see.”

Even for those who don’t initially buy the idea of the cloning of Ripley, Whedon, much like he’s done on the *Buffy* TV show, has apparently crafted one wickedly surprising ride that will tweak the expectations audiences have of the *Alien* franchise. Taking place many years after the events of the last movie, the script finds the omnipotent Company having been taken over by a government faction. This group has decided that they want to harvest the Aliens for

everything from medicine to weapons to their killer instincts. The question is, how do they get to the Aliens without doing themselves in?

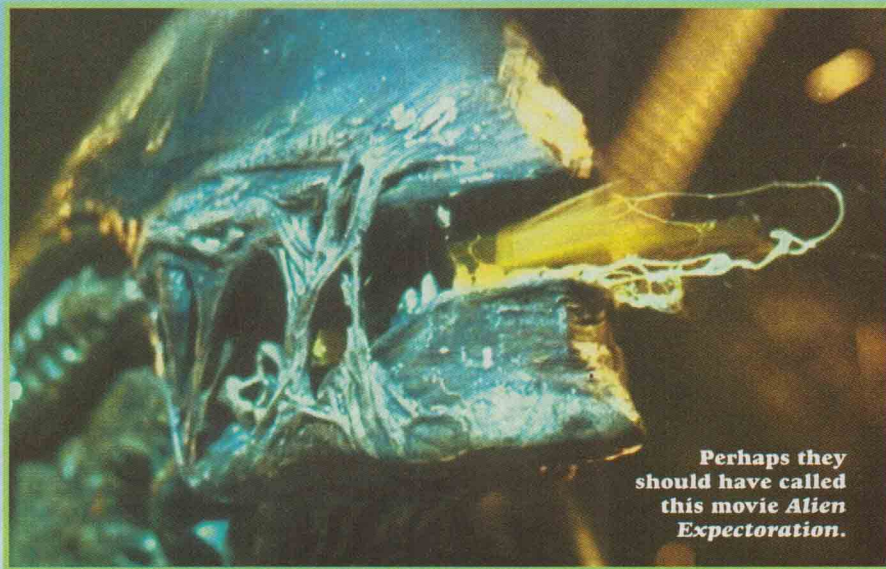
Enter Ripley’s DNA. Having carried around a Queen in her belly throughout the duration of *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, she is the perfect specimen to clone, which they do. They then perform a caesarean section in order to extract the Queen. When Ripley wakes up and discovers what type of experiments she has been part of, she soon realizes that she’s not completely what she used to be, and her loyalties (to the Aliens or to the human race) are very much in question.

Heading the operation on the government-run science ship the *Auriga* is Dr. Wren (J.E. Freeman) and his second-in-command, Gediman (Brad Dourif). “Gediman is a wall-to-wall scientist and wants to save Sigourney’s clone to study her,” says Dourif, a veteran of numerous genre films. “He really likes his research and science, so he has kind of blinded himself to the moral aspects of what’s going on. The stuff they’re doing is morally reprehensible. Were he not in a military situation and going about it in another way, he probably wouldn’t allow himself to be a part of this. But he’s such a scientist and so enthusiastic about it





Ripley's protective instincts get another workout in *Alien Resurrection*.



Perhaps they should have called this movie *Alien Expectorator*.

**"You have this feeling of very horrible, ugly things, but there's an odd beauty about it with all the imagery."  
—Brad Dourif, actor**

that he just goes ahead with it."

When phase one of the Alien "breeding" experiment is complete, the *Auriga* team hires the band of renegade space pirates manning the *Betty* to deliver some contraband that will help them finish their work. This being an *Alien* movie, though, things go horribly wrong, and the Aliens escape and begin going about their business in the only way they know how. Having a little human intellect (courtesy of Ripley's DNA) only makes matters worse for the crews, since the creatures now possess an uncanny intelligence. "Science fiction movies tend to be our modern-day morality plays," says Dourif, "and *Alien Resurrection* deals with 'What is human and what is not?' and how we shouldn't be messing with humanity. Jean-Pierre does it in a very compelling way."

The returning Alien species this time around include a slightly modified warrior, the Queen, facehuggers and a brand new offshoot dubbed the Newborn. Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr. of Amalgamated Dynamics (ADI), which previously created the brood for *Alien*<sup>3</sup> (and worked under Stan Winston on *Aliens*), are

once again the creature creators.

In order to make the familiar monsters scary again, Khondji and Jeunet sat down and rewatched the first three *Alien* movies, meticulously picking apart what worked and

so we did a number of tests on these Aliens and came up with an interesting way to light them," says Khondji, who finally decided to not shoot the Aliens with any direct lighting. "We never see the Aliens soft-lit," he explains. "They're only lit by reflections of light and fluorescence. They're never lit by a source, which gives them a very unique appearance. ADI told me they had never lit a creature like this, and thought it was the most interesting and exciting way to make the creatures come out of the darkness."

And while the rest of Hollywood relies heavily on the new expensive tool of the moment—CGI—the *Alien Resurrection* crew ultimately decided to use digital FX sparingly. Thus, there isn't going to be an army of all-com-

puter-generated Aliens on view to make the die-hard fans wince. "Most movies would be tempted to do our new Alien, the Newborn, digitally," says Rothman. "Yet the creature guys who designed it are so good at what they do that it looks so much more real when you have 15 guys running the animatronics to bring it to life."

That's not to say that CGI doesn't play an important factor in the film,



In the classic tradition, Dr. Gediman (Brad Dourif) learns there's a price to pay for playing God with monsters.

what didn't. They ultimately determined that the first film's success lay in the fact that the Alien blended into the ship itself, so audiences never knew when it was going to leap out. "We wanted to give the Aliens a different feeling in this one, but we liked how they came out of the sets,



as Henry notes that there will be 18 computer-generated Alien shots in the movie, created by the Blue Sky digital FX company. "We knew that when it came to close-ups, we were going to be better served on our time schedule to go with the live creatures," Henry says. "It literally takes six months to make something look good in the computer, and that's just getting it to look right; it doesn't include the animation. That's something else. So we knew the close-ups would look great with the Aliens being performed live on set. But we discovered that when you show the Aliens from the waist down, it always looks like a man in a suit and there's nothing you can do about it. We had fewer shots that required the Aliens to climb and walk, but where we would see them in full frame, we gave the shots to Blue Sky, and they turned out beautifully."

The other major area where a CGI Alien was necessary was in the underwater sequences. This is a realm that audiences have never really seen the Aliens in before, and to do it practically proved to be too complicated. "Talking with ADI, we realized that they could drag a cable [operated creature] through the water, but it was never going to be as elegant as we wanted it to be," Henry explains. "Jean-Pierre also told us that one of the keys for the sequence was that he wanted to build the power and danger of this new warrior Alien. He wanted it to be scary, and we wanted it to be just as fluid in the water as it is on land, even though the Alien has never stepped into the water before. The theory was, that grace right out of the boat is what will make it truly terrifying. We knew from the beginning, then, that the only way to achieve that was to use the computer."

The sequence involves our heroes trying to escape the ship, with the only exit being an elevator shaft; in order to get to it, they have to swim through a flooded kitchen with the Aliens in pursuit. Filming the elements that comprise these scenes proved to be a daunting task, regardless of the CGI enhancements that would be added later. Without a water tank available at any studio in Los Angeles at the time, Fox invested in building its own on the lot; at nearly 13 feet deep and holding close to 548,000 gallons of water, it is now the second largest in town.

Water, however, is always scarce in the Los Angeles region, something Fox learned the hard way when it came time to fill their tank, since the Department of Water and Power only allots a certain amount of usage per

(continued on page 82)

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—Mathew Mungle, Oscar Winning Special Make-Up Effects Artist for Francis Ford Coppola's "Dracula"



## CONTRIBUTORS' CRYPT

**A**bbie Bernstein covered *The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca* for *Drama-Logue*. **Thomas Crow** has begun work on a novel about a female Jack the Ripper. **Donald V. Day** frequents the Internet—under an assumed name, of course. **Thomas Deja's** story "A Quiet, Normal Life" appears in the upcoming *The Ultimate Hulk*. **Anthony C. Ferrante** loved *Dark City* and hopes they don't change the title again. **Don Kaye** wants to see a director's cut of *Event Horizon* on laserdisc. **Linda Marotta** recently had a wild night with Poppy Z. Brite. **Randy Palmer** promises not to write any more articles about Paul Blaisdell. **Chris Poggiali** is working on a Stephanie Rothman interview for us. **Steve Puchalski's** *Slimetime* volume sold out its first printing. **Marc Shapiro's** latest book is *What's Your X-Files I.Q.?* (Citadel Press). **Caroline Vié** has been re-elected for the Selection Committee of Cannes' Critics' Week. **Bill Warren** is compiling a list of films not yet on video in hopes of spurring their release. **John Wooley** lives near "the world's largest man-made totem pole."

## THINGS TO COME

**J**ust in time to spread a little Happy New Fear, the next issue of *Fango* will dig into a winter season packed with horrors.

Thirsty for new vampire films? We'll check out the set of the Marvel Comics-derived chiller **BLADE**, and join Wesley Snipes as he hunts down a legion of bloodsuckers. Then we'll take off with the promising young talents behind Stephen King's **THE NIGHT FLIER**. **Mark Pavia** and **Jack O'Donnell**, who have made the difficult transition from fans to genre filmmakers.

Following up last winter's surprise hit, **SCREAM 2** brings back the talented cast of the original (those who lived, anyway) and adds a roster of new young victims—er, performers. Who will survive and what will be left of them? Our multi-actor profile will attempt to find the answer.

If it's ocean-bound thrills you're after, cruise into our **DEEP RISING** set visit, where director **Stephen Sommers** and his cast will discuss their sea-creature epic. Venturing below the surface, we'll drop in on **SPHERE**, an underwater SF thriller based on Michael Crichton's best seller.

And for all you sequel fans, next issue will feature our delayed **PROPHECY II** set visit and an investigation into the FX of **ALIEN RESURRECTION**. There'll be plenty to celebrate in **FANGORIA #170!**

ON SALE: JANUARY 13

## ALIEN

(continued from page 33)

day. Thus, it took a total of six days to get the tank ready for filming (leading one crew member to remark, "It was like waiting for paint to dry"). The resulting look proved to be striking, though, as the nature of the shots required the director to go for realism. This included having all the primary actors (including Weaver and Ryder) take diving classes and learn how to hold their breath for long periods underwater. Khondji even took some lessons from an experienced underwater photographer on how to handle this very precise experience. "The water tank was insane," says Khondji. "It was a really hard thing to do. I designed the lighting and then shot it myself for two and a half weeks, 12 to 13 hours a day underwater. It was a challenge, but it ended up looking great."

Dourif was able to see the sequence finalized during looping sessions, and confirms that it matches the brilliance of Jeunet's best moments from *Delicatessen* and *City of Lost Children*. "Traditionally the monsters produce fear, but after seeing this, they can also produce awe," Dourif raves. "It's incredibly cool, and it just gives you the feeling of 'Wow.' This is something we didn't see in the other three. I mean, they are terrifying, but it's a whole different way of looking at the thing. I got that from *City of Lost Children* too. You have this feeling of very horrible, ugly things, but there's an odd beauty about it with all the imagery. It's as if evil is not quite so scary, and has this beauty unto itself."

With *Alien Resurrection* now preparing for its Thanksgiving weekend launch (after being moved out of the brutal and cluttered summer '97 movie season), there are still a few obstacles that it must face, namely competition from the action-oriented alien invasion movie *Starship Troopers*. Hopefully, a very impressive trailer, Jeunet's stellar track record for strange, eerily fascinating filmmaking and good old-fashioned word of mouth will allow *Alien Resurrection* to succeed on its own terms.

"I really believe this will be an event movie," Rothman insists. "This is the right date for it, and while there is competition out there, there is, unfortunately, competition all the time, 52 weeks a year. It's not like the old days, but we have sensational entertainment here and our film is really about something. We also have three weeks distancing us from *Starship Troopers*, and in the marketing world today, that three weeks can be a very long time."

## SCREAM

(continued from page 25)

dead characters are back. And I'm willing to give you any fabricated stories you want."

Once assured that the truth will suffice, Williamson offers a few observations about horror sequels in general and *Scream 2* in particular. "A big reason why horror franchises are not always successful is that they are not well-thought-out. *Scream* was sold with the idea that, 'Yes, this will work and this is what needs to happen next.' What we did with the first film was to go in with the idea that, 'OK, we've seen this movie before, but we're going to try to approach it in a fresh way.' Now with *Scream 2*, we're saying, 'Well, we've seen that old sequel before, and now we're going to try and approach that in a fresh way.' We're making no bones about the fact that *Scream 2* is a sequel." And he adds that with *Scream 2*, familiarity with the humor has led the filmmakers to turn up the horror. "We know that the joke's over. We can't play it anymore. And since we can't play the joke, we have no choice but to just scare the hell out of you."

Not everyone is screaming all the time, though. "I'm still the comic relief," Arquette snickers with an inflection not unlike his character, Dewey. "I've got a lot of strange little lines. I've lost my uniform but, all of a sudden, my father shows up and it's on him." Arquette offers that Dewey, now out of a job and determined to avenge his sister's death, is still the same glutton for punishment he was in the first *Scream*. "I'm still giving Sid bad news and still not coming through for her. I'm mad at Gale for what she says about me in her book, but she continues to play me like a fiddle because I'm obsessed with her. I'm a lost dog."

But, he warns, Dewey in *Scream 2* is a lost dog with plenty of bite. "I may be the most twisted individual in this movie," he hints. "I'm a little darker and a lot more depressed and angry. I could be the killer. Anybody could be the killer. It's that kind of movie."

The day wears on, and Craven and company struggle through the multiple camera angles necessary to complete the hospital scene. Finally, it's dinner time. After which comes "the secret scene," and *Fango* has to go. But Arquette offers one parting shot, something that says everything and, in keeping with the tone of the day, nothing.

"It could be one of us," he laughs. "It could be more than one of us. But then, it could be somebody else."