

# BEAST RES

## ONCE A MONSTER WITH A BEAUTIFUL HEART, RON PERLMAN NOW PLAYS BEASTLY SMUGGLERS & GUNSLINGING MINISTERS.

By IAN SPELLING

Resurrection Photos: Suzanne Tenner/Copyright 1997 20th Century Fox



Joining the *ALIEN Resurrection* cast at the request of director Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Ron Perlman kills Aliens as obnoxious rough-and-tumble-mercenary Johner.

Design & Layout: Jim McLennan

like stories that are well-told," Ron Perlman explains. "I don't like doing what was in column two of the newspaper as a show or movie. That's bullshit. I hate disease-of-the-week TV movies. I like great literature. Very often great literature brings you into worlds that are autonomous and unique. So they fall into the heading of genre. Do I go seeking those things out? No. Do they seek me out? I don't know. Maybe."

It certainly seems as if they do, for Perlman has evolved over the years into something of a genre veteran, both on TV and in the movies, turning up with incredible regularity in SF and fantasy projects. Perlman aficionados can probably recite his related credits by heart: *Quest for Fire*, *Ice Pirates*, *Sleepwalkers*, *Cronos*, *Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The City of Lost Children*, *Mr. Stitch* and, of course, the much-beloved, still-missed TV series *Beauty & the Beast*. In a wide-ranging interview with STARLOG, Perlman's first since 1989, he looks back on a number of fan favorites and also discusses his current flotilla of genre outings, beginning with *ALIEN Resurrection*.



Forever beloved to fans of the series, Perlman portrayed the tortured but noble Vincent on TV's *Beauty & the Beast*.

Photo: David James

*Resurrection* casts Perlman as Johner, a taciturn mercenary who joins with Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), Annalee Call (Winona Ryder) and others to form an uneasy alliance in a wild, claustrophobic effort to survive the latest onslaught of Aliens. Perlman joined the film's cast at the behest of director Jean-Pierre Jeunet, who had previously guided the actor through *The City of Lost Children*. "Johner is a guy who, when you first meet him, you dislike immensely. He's very obnoxious," Perlman notes. "He and these other mercenary types pretty much do their tasks regardless of ethics or morality, as long as there's a paycheck at the end of the rainbow. They're rough-and-tumble guys, men of action equipped for any eventuality."

"As it stands, they're delivering some cargo to a government vessel which is operating clandestine scientific experiments that even Congress isn't aware of. In so delivering the cargo, we find them taking a little R&R and gathering supplies for their trek back into space. That's when all hell breaks loose. Now, Johner's a jerk, has no patience, is an underachiever and wants no part of leader-

# UNRECTED

ship, but he's a fierce fighter and he'll kill anything that gets in his way. The only side is the side of survival and all of us, regardless of our politics or morality, just want to survive. It's a rather eclectic bunch that has been thrown together. Some of us are soldiers, trained and loyal to the government. Some of us, like Johnner, are loyal to no one and nothing at all, but we're all in the same boat when we're being pursued for our lives by the Aliens. It makes for a very strange survivalist continuum of humanity where there is no real good or bad."

## Beastly Role

Heading into *Resurrection*, Perlman had seen all three previous *ALIEN* films. He was, he insists, a fan of the series long before *Resurrection*. Once he signed on, he popped tapes of the first three movies into his VCR. "I wanted to see if there was a through-line between the three stories that would inform the fourth one in some way," he replies. "In fact, there was none. Aside from the Alien itself, everything was autonomous. Each film was a unique expression of the different makers' visions."

"Jean-Pierre in his two prior films displayed an incredibly unique and evocative visual filmmaking style. He also has a very skewed way of dealing with different worlds, very singular and unlike anything you've ever seen before. He did it in *Delicatessen* and then again in a much more blatant way in *City of Lost Children*, because that was a post-apocalyptic fantasy world. Here again he was able to unleash his strange sensibility, because he was depicting a pure fantasy world that exists 100 years in the future, in a totally manufactured environment in space. He has also added, stylistically speaking, a very fresh, very different take on our old friend the Alien."

Perhaps more accurately than anyone else in *Resurrection*, with the possible exception of Jeunet regular Dominique Pinon, Perlman can comment on just how much of a fish out of water Jeunet was in directing the movie. After all, Jeunet had never before dealt with a Hollywood studio, major stars, a mega-budget or a mostly American crew. "I was very, very curious to see how Jean-Pierre would handle a film of this scope and magnitude, because it was probably five times larger and more expensive than anything he had done before. It was a totally new milieu for him," Perlman says. "In a studio environment, there are many opinions that need to be incorporated into what becomes the final mix of a film, and those opinions are offered willy-nilly. It's very difficult not to take the



Offering a friendly hand, Perlman claims that the *Resurrection* cast and crew were "the most fun-loving group of people I've ever worked with."

opinions and suggestions of a studio head seriously, yet you want to make something that's close to your vision, that speaks with your voice.

"I had no idea how Jean-Pierre would respond to this and I had a half-smile on my face for the whole six months of the experience, because I wanted to see when he was going to crack or explode. But he handled it with complete aplomb. The things he didn't feel were particularly important to fight for, he didn't fight for. The things he felt were important, he did fight for, but all of his fights were done in a very professional, unemotional, low-key manner so that he could maintain the sensibility he had to maintain. Having come from no frame of reference and being thrust into as big a movie machine as you could possibly be thrust into—and believe me when I say the budget was up there—Jean-Pierre moved with amazing dexterity between the worlds of his own vision of *ALIEN Resurrection* and the corporate world that is the studio system. I really think he made the film he set out to make, without too many compromises."



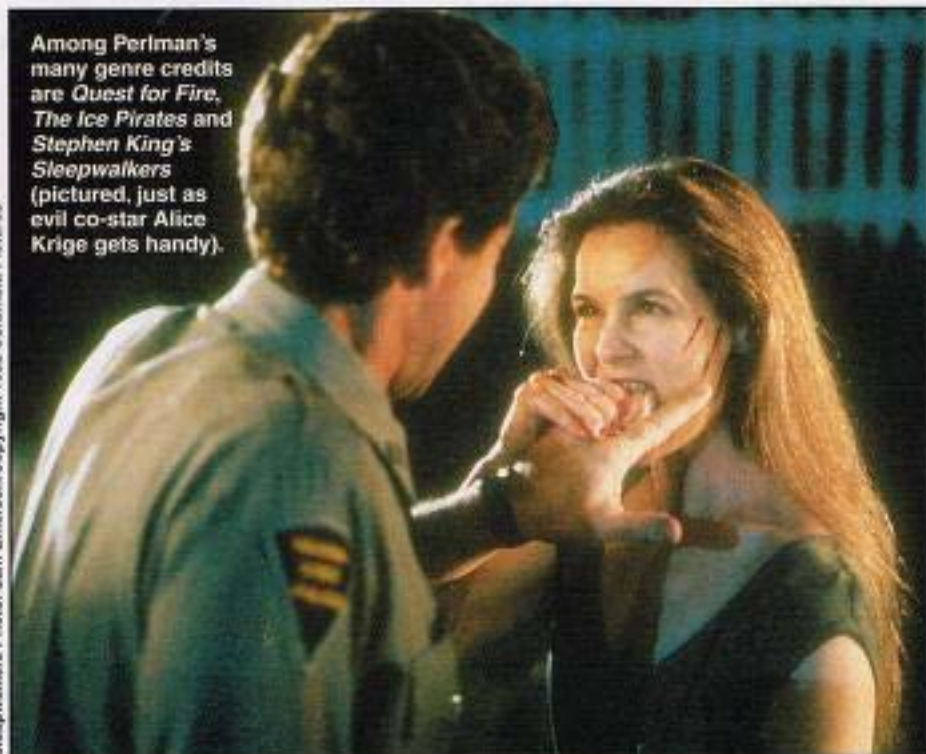
"Captain Zoom was just me being shameless," admits Perlman, who reigned as a Ming the Mirthless in the TV movie spoof.

Perlman reports that he got on just fine with all of the other actors in the *Resurrection* ensemble and adds that good-natured casts are typical on a Jeunet production. "The people I worked with on *City of Lost Children* were just really nice folks to hang with. There were no rough edges to any of them. That's important to Jean-Pierre," he asserts. "Aside from getting the take he wants, in terms of talent or interpretation, it's very important for him to be around people who don't take themselves particularly seriously. The *Resurrection* cast was the most fun-loving group of people I've ever worked with on a film, and I made some life-long friends, which you can't always say. We partied hard, we worked hard, but we never went through a day where something heavy was plaguing us that we didn't get through with humor, good will and good nature. I believe it's no accident that Jean-Pierre surrounds himself with people like that. I've seen it twice now, on two different continents, and it's no fluke, no mistake."

When Perlman states that he and his fellow actors worked hard on *Resurrection*, he's

Zoom Photo: Copyright 1995 MCA TV

Among Perlman's many genre credits are *Quest for Fire*, *The Ice Pirates* and *Stephen King's Sleepwalkers* (pictured, just as evil co-star Alice Krige gets handy).



Cronos Photos: Courtesy FANGORIA

Sans makeup in *Cronos*, Perlman was a harassed millionaire's son trying to steal a vampiric artifact.



And what does Perlman think of the 1996 version of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (in which he played the Sayer of the Law)? "Next."

not kidding. The actor did a good many of his own stunts, particularly the harrowing underwater sequences in which Johner and the other characters are chased by Aliens. The scenes were filmed in a gigantic, Olympic-sized pool set built especially for the production. Perlman also performed his own stunts for a scene in which Johner hangs from a ladder by his feet. Under normal circumstances, a stuntman might have been called in, but Jeunet sought to cover the action in such a way that Perlman simply had to be in the shot.

At no time, Perlman points out, was he ever in any real danger. The various action

sequences were merely physically challenging and required a great deal of endurance, concentration and discipline. That said, however, Perlman jokes that he did "see God a couple of times" while submerged in the tank. "I would run out of air with 15 or 20 seconds left to go in the shot," he recalls. "You're stuck with the option of either ruining the shot and having to do it again, or toughing it out and getting to the end so you don't have to do it again. I always opted to go to the end, but there were a couple of times where I was almost unconscious by the time the safety divers got to me with the air regulator. I was just one of many in that situation.

"It's one thing to rehearse it calmly with a mask on, where you can see where you're going or where you can breathe freely through a regulator. It's quite another to strip away the mask, where you become blinded, and to take away the regulator, and then try to perform the terror of being chased by Aliens and expelling all of your breath before the shot is halfway done because you're panicked. It was challenging and, somehow, fun. But let's just say I'm glad it's over."

## Beast Western

There's a resurrection of another kind, as the focus of conversation turns to *The Magnificent Seven*, the CBS mid-season series based on the classic John Sturges film and its three sequels, *Return of the Seven*, *Guns of the Magnificent Seven* and *The Magnificent Seven Ride*. "We are in pre-production for the start of the first episode after the pilot. I approach this show like I approach everything else, which means I'm very, very humble, very, very guarded," Perlman says. "There is work to be done. We're trying to depict a place that's hopefully interesting for an audience. We have seven characters that haven't realized their capabilities yet, who are dark and brooding, but have these incredible streaks of humanity and heroism to them. We're very much in a building process. I don't ever approach anything from an external point-of-view, like, 'This is going to be a great success.' We're just trying to get it right and trying to make the material as interesting as possible, with these characters, for a show with the potential to be really interesting."

"I'm a fan of Westerns, great Westerns. I'm a huge fan of John Ford. I'm a huge fan of the original *Magnificent Seven*. I've become a fan of late of many of Clint Eastwood's movies that I've been studying as I prepared for the series. I actually like the genre more than I like SF. Anyway, my char-



acter on *Magnificent Seven* is based very loosely on Bernardo O'Reilly, Charles Bronson's character in the original film. He was half-Irish and half-Mexican. My character is as well, though we haven't begun to deal with his ethnic lineage. I am a defrocked minister who's searching for some higher meaning in the universe and I will do anything, including peyote rituals and sweat lodges, in order to go to a higher ground and perhaps discover the meaning of life. I have this curiosity about whether the answer to life is in death, so I put myself in these death-defying situations with my compadres, half expecting that each one will be my last, that I'll then go to the great beyond and seek the undiscovered country from where no traveler returns."

Perlman co-stars in *The Magnificent Seven* with several familiar genre names, including Michael (Terminator) Biehn, Dale (Time Trax) Midkiff and Eric (Dark Skies) Close, none of whom he knew before they met on the set. As far as he knows, he and all of the actors will appear in all six episodes CBS has ordered, despite the fact that characters from the *Magnificent Seven* films tend to expire before the final credits roll.

## Beasts Past

As *The Magnificent Seven* rides into the picture, so too do several other projects Perlman has in the can. There's *Prince Valiant*, an action-adventure directed by Anthony Hickox, which casts Perlman as Boltar, a role originated by James Mason in the 1954 film adaptation of Hal Foster's comic strip; *Self Storage*, a black comedy that stars Perlman, Joe Pantoliano and Kristy Swanson; and *A Town Has Turned to Dust*, a remake of a classic Rod Serling script.

"I had a very good time working on *Prince Valiant*. It was a very smart script with a very good director. Tony's sharp, intelli-



"He's a total wunderkind," offers Perlman of *Cronos* director Guillermo Del Toro (standing). "He's one of the brightest men I've ever met."

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"We were cut off in mid-stride," Perlman laments of his cancelled TV series. He would welcome a chance to revisit *Beauty & the Beast* in a film.

gent, doesn't talk down to the audience and is able to stay one step ahead of them," Perlman says. "I haven't seen the finished film, but it seemed to me when we were making *Prince Valiant* that it was going to be a frothy little romp. It's loaded with wonderfully colorful, unsentimental characters and some good action sequences. It had a really nice tone to it. The last I heard, it was having trouble finding distribution.

"In *Self Storage*, I got to play one of my favorite characters ever. That's another film still looking for a distributor, but it's very, very funny. That was a total labor of love. It was based on a play I did, which was actually the first thing I did after *Beauty & the Beast* was cancelled. I play a serial killer who used to be an impersonator on the Sunset

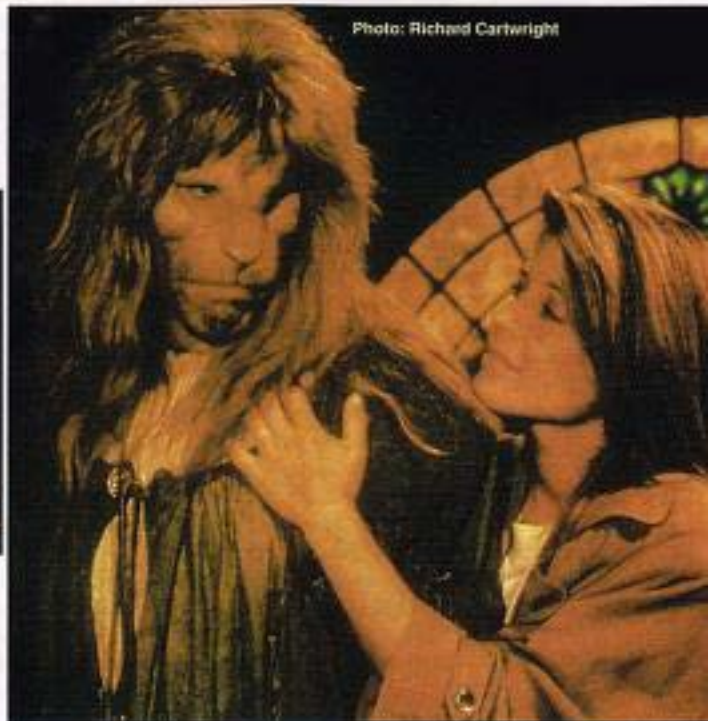


Photo: Richard Cartwright

Strip. I do about 25 impersonations in the movie. It's very dark, but also a very well-constructed satire on Hollywood. I hope it finds the light of day because I know there are people out there who will get a big yuck out of it.

"*A Town Has Turned to Dust* is one of the first in-house films in the Sci-Fi Channel pipeline. Serling's script was a brilliant piece of writing, brilliantly adapted to 300 years in the future," he continues. "We had a great cutting-edge director named Rob Nelson, a pretty good cast and I had a great time making that. I haven't seen it. If it turns out like I think it will, the Sci-Fi Channel will have a nice movie."

And now it's on to a review of credits past, as Perlman reflects on Guillermo Del



All Beauty &amp; the Beast Photos: Copyright 1987, 1988, 1989 Republic Pictures TV/CBS

Would Catherine return for a *Beauty & the Beast* movie? Says Perlman, "Linda Hamilton will do anything she thinks is good."

Toro's breakthrough film, *Cronos*; the much-maligned *Island of Dr. Moreau* remake; *Mr. Stitch*; the family SF telemovie/series pilot *Captain Zoom* and, in more detail, *Beauty & the Beast*. "I didn't think much of my work in *Cronos*, but I loved the movie," the actor enthuses. "I've become life-long friends with Guillermo. He's one of the brightest men I've ever known, one of the most brilliant, well-read minds I've ever met. He's a total wonderkind, a great director. I look for him to have a really important career."

At the mention of *Dr. Moreau*, there's a long, ominous silence. Finally, after a few beats, Perlman simply says, "Next," which leads to *Mr. Stitch*, a failed *Frankenstein* variation from director Roger Avary that one might expect Perlman to dismiss with another utterance of "Next." But think again. "I had a nice time working on that," the actor reveals. "I have a real good relationship with Roger. I'm not sure the movie turned out as well as he might have initially intended, but it was a noble effort. Sometimes, that's what you take away from an experience. Some of *Mr. Stitch* was very good and some wasn't. I look upon that in a very positive light and I would work again with Roger in any way, shape or form."

"*Captain Zoom* was just me being shameless. I would love to be like that every once in a while, just doing some old Vaudeville comedy. The writing was very funny and I had a great time making it. I know it was silly and over-the-top, but hey, a guy has to have a couple of laughs. It was actually very close to going to series and they're still talking about doing it if they can get the financial side

together. It's one of those things that has three dots at the end, as in 'To be continued...'"

And, finally, there is *Beauty & the Beast*, the story of a beastly prince of the New York City underground, Vincent, and his great love Catherine (which Perlman discussed in STARLOG #128 & #143). Though it has been several years since the series ended, a victim of low ratings despite a fervent, adoring fan base, rumors arise every so often about the prospect of a *Beauty & the Beast* feature that would reunite such familiar talents as Perlman, Linda Hamilton, Roy Dotrice, Armin Shimerman, David Greenlee, Jay Acovone and series creator Ron Koslow.

"We all think there is a little bit more story to tell," Perlman suggests. "We were cut off in mid-stride. We all also think of this as among the great moments of our lives. Who doesn't want to revisit that? There are places we can go. I have some ideas that I think are great ideas, in terms of opening up the scope of the original vision for the purposes of a feature. But if it just stays on its current level, that's fine too. Unfortunately, *Beauty & the Beast* is not like *Star Trek*, where there was such a vast audience that demanded a film. The audience we had for

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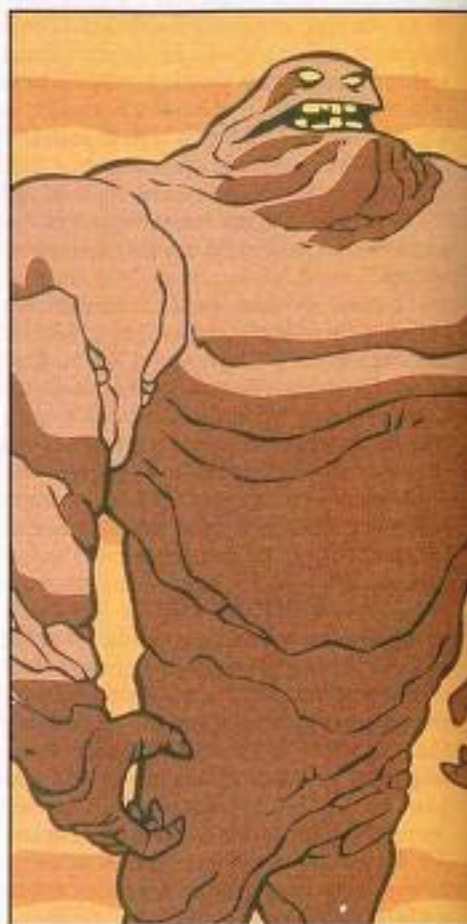
*Beauty & the Beast* was incredible and vociferous, but not that huge. That's the reality that rules the day with regard to the viability of doing a film version. The idea I have, which I can't tell you, would stand on its own and would not necessarily need the vast popularity of TV as a springboard. I just think it would be unique and very well placed in a film milieu."

The big question remains: Would the long-elusive Hamilton agree to return from the dead as Catherine? "I don't know the answer to that," Perlman admits. "Linda will do anything she thinks is really good. She has very good taste in material. If something comes her way that's great, she'll entertain the idea of doing it. But I would never presume to second-guess what she, or anyone, would do. Linda and I are still pretty close. Koslow and I talk every once in a while. I see Roy once in a while and I speak to Jay every so often. We're all so busy, but we try very hard to stay in contact."

After all this time, Perlman believes he knows why *Beauty & the Beast* captured the imaginations of fans. There are, he notes, several overlapping elements. "The juxtapo-

sition of the limitations of this man, what he was physically as opposed to what he became, how huge his heart was and the way he impacted humanity around him appealed to many people. He became large as a result of being made small, of his world being made small," Perlman maintains. "He grew logarithmically, but commensurate with the bad blow that life dealt him. I think there's a side of that in every one of us. There's a side of every one of us that's imperfect, that feels at odds with the world, like a castaway. It's overcoming those odds and taking it to the level of self-realization and going in the service of mankind and the greater good that's the stuff of true heroism and true mythic proportion. That really rang a bell in people who long for that kind of Gothic, romantic, chivalric character in their lives. I was very honored that I had the opportunity to play the character and also felt honored that he so deeply affected and touched as many people as he did."

Perlman intends to keep on seeking characters that challenge him, that make audiences think, that push their buttons in one way or another. The past has been rewarding and the future, the actor surmises, seems equally bright and promising. "My career has gone way better than I ever could have imagined. I've gotten to work with truly exciting people, including some visionaries. I've gotten to see the world. I've had a lot of laughs along the way," Ron Perlman concludes. "And it beats working."



Clayface, one of several toon characters voiced by Perlman, deals deception in *Batman: The Animated Series*.

# RIPLEY REVISITED

Sigourney Weaver relives the death & life of her alienated alter-ego.

By IAN SPELLING



**D**ead doesn't necessarily mean dead—just ask Sigourney Weaver. Weaver's now-famous alter-ego, Ellen Ripley, died at the conclusion of *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*, taking her own life to once and for all rid the universe of the dreaded Aliens. The series seemed over, especially when critics and SF fans alike savaged the David Fincher film, and it seemed further kaput when the film grossed only \$55 million upon its 1992 release.

But a few funny things happened after the last epitaphs were read. *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>* went on to gross more than \$200 million worldwide. Then, as the years passed, SF's popularity skyrocketed. By late 1995, 20th Century Fox realized it was sitting on a franchise ripe for revitalization. But there was one problem: Ripley was still dead.

"I was very happy to die," Weaver remembers. "I had heard the studio was going to do *ALIEN vs. Predator* and I wanted to get as far away from that as I could. I

thought, 'Why are they doing this?' We had done three quite amazing films and now they were going to throw it all away to make more money. That was one of the main reasons why I wanted Ripley to die. I also thought, storywise, it was the only thing she *could* do, and I didn't want my part in the series to go on forever. It would become ridiculous."

Ultimately, Fox shelved the *ALIEN vs. Predator* concept, while Weaver invited the studio's conversations about a third sequel. Once the actress expressed her willingness to re-up, Fox commissioned a script from Joss Whedon, who devised *ALIEN Resurrection* and its cloned Ripley plot. Fox then sought out the right director, first selecting Danny Boyle of *Trainspotting* fame, then turning to Jean-Pierre Jeunet, the Frenchman behind the acclaimed *Delicatessen* and *City of Lost Children* (both co-directed by Marc Caro), after Boyle dropped out.

"What was important to me was to restore the Aliens' superiority, their elegance and ability to sense what people are going to do



even before they did," states Weaver, who came on board not only as the film's star, but as one of its producers. "I really wanted to bring back what the Aliens were about in the first movie. All the ideas of ambushes I thought were very important. Also, the idea that Aliens eat people and that's what you should be afraid of had to go. What the Aliens do to you, you can't imagine. They should not be like some big, hungry tiger. I wanted to restore the mystery to the series, and I also wanted to play this Antarctic side of Ripley. She's a new Ripley."

### Hybrid Heroine

So, *Resurrection* went into production. Janet called the shots. Weaver kept an eager eye on the proceedings and her character. And a cast that included Winona Ryder, Ron Perlman, Dominique (City of Lost Children) Pinon, Michael (The Crow) Wincott and Leland (Star Trek: Voyager) Orser went about its business, playing unlikely allies who join with Ripley in a spaceship-wide battle to destroy the Aliens before the Aliens wipe them out.

Asked what she feels is the movie's strongest element, Weaver finds it hard to answer. "What resonates for me about *Resurrection*? It's so hard to judge because I'm not that distant from it yet," Weaver notes. "One of the things I think is compelling is the introduction of the scientists. They are very Jean-Pierre creations. They're terrifying-looking, completely inhuman, and it's a view of the future which is—appropriately enough, because it is an *ALIEN* film—very bleak. What I was trying to do as Ripley, and I can't tell if it came across or not, was to play her as a completely different creature who has this genetic crossover and who's completely revved up."

Though Weaver hoped that *Resurrection* would echo *ALIEN* in its depiction and use of the Aliens, she's not sure the film succeeded on that front. If the idea was to keep the Aliens lurking in the background, to make



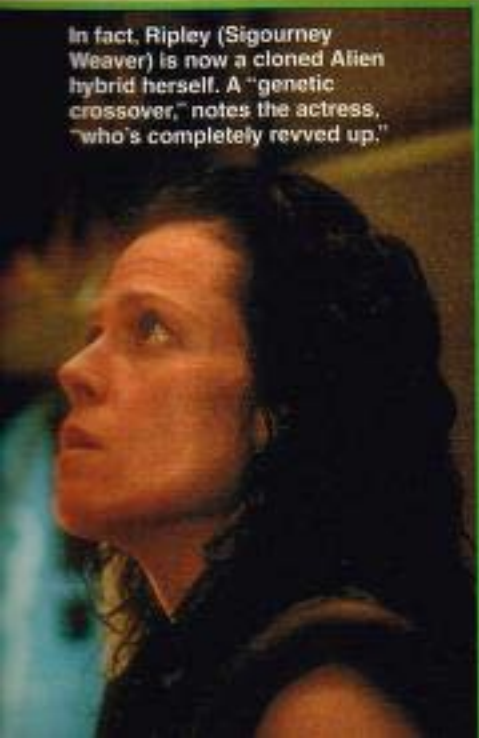
*ALIEN Resurrection* is a movie about Ripley's relationships: with androids, Aliens, humans and clones.

"Humans, as always in *ALIEN* movies, are such creepy people."



Might Weaver step out of the shadows and try her hand at directing an *ALIEN* film? "I don't know," she admits. "I would have to direct a different movie first."

In fact, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) is now a cloned Alien hybrid herself. A "genetic crossover," notes the actress, "who's completely revved up."



"I was surprised by how much monster movie there was in *Resurrection*," says Weaver, who longed for a more subtle Alien.





"What was important to me was to restore the Aliens' superiority," the actress explains. And the filmmakers complied.

them scarier for lack of screen time, somebody dropped the ball. There are Aliens galore in *Resurrection*. The audience sees them constantly and even gets to watch them think and learn, particularly in the laboratory sequence in which Dr. Gediman (Brad Dou-rif) tries training them. "I was surprised by how much monster movie there was in *Resurrection*," Weaver admits. "If you're in it, and you're playing opposite a creature that is essentially your child, you see it as a person-ality. You don't see it as a thing with big teeth."

"For me, playing opposite the Newborn was like playing opposite Lon Chaney Sr. This creature could do everything. It was immensely moving and all of my interaction with it came out of improvisation, not from the script. The Newborn was a creature operated by 14 puppeteers. They gave it energy. It was very eerie. There were six different people on its face alone—the eyebrows, eyes, cheeks, nostrils. Every part of it moved. Most of the people who built the puppet—and I don't like the word puppet—worked the part they built. The guy who made the tongue did the tongue and so forth."

Then there was Ryder. Considered one of

the best actresses of her generation, Ryder seemed a most unlikely choice to essay Call. After all, the actress is a tiny little thing, and who would think that the two-time Oscar nominee, a staple of period dramas like *The Age of Innocence* and *Little Women*, would have any interest in an SF film? But Ryder did have an interest, practically an obsession. She loves SF and has long worshipped Weaver. It was no surprise, then, that she went so far as to commit to *Resurrection* without even seeing a script. Weaver met with Ryder and the two hit it off. "I saw the [Ripley-Call] relationship as half-predatory and half-wonder," Weaver says. "It's not maternal or sisterly. Winona's so funny and she's a wonderful actress. What she does with the part of Call is so arresting because she's so vulnerable; she's such a surprise when we find out what she's made of. I thought it was a great idea to cast her."

"We had such a lovely group of actors. You have to pull yourself together and not have too much fun when you're dealing with life-and-death scenes, but it was such a pleasure to work with someone like Winona, who's down-to-Earth and very self-deprecating. We were always up to some sort of mis-

chief. She's a wonderful mimic. At one point, for a couple of weeks, we basically talked nothing but *Duckman* talk."

## Film Forum

What does Weaver feel about the various *ALIEN* movies in the series? As she emphasized in a mini-interview last issue, the actress claims to have liked the first film the most. But what about *ALIENS*, and its director James Cameron? "I love Jim," says Weaver. "He's such a fighter. Though he's very demanding to work for, he doesn't demand any less from himself. It's great to have a director who will go to the nth degree for his movie. He wrote this remarkable part for Ripley and he had never even met me. I was working on two other films in France and they sent me the script, which was all Ripley and a great part. They hadn't even mentioned it to me. I met Jim, and he was this guy who had gone to the producers, who wanted him to do something else, and he said what he wanted to do was write and direct *ALIENS*. He had only done *Piranha 2*; they hadn't even seen *Terminator* yet. So, it was just an incredibly fortunate thing." Weaver has little more to say about her last outing that hasn't been said already, but offers a very interesting insight into that director's vision. "The third one was such a David Fincher film. It's a young man's film—very cynical and, at the same time, very innocent. We never brought this up," adds the actress, "but to me it was about AIDS."

As each of the *ALIEN* adventures entered theaters, they did so accompanied by a great deal of media attention. When *ALIENS* came out, Weaver was dubbed "Rambolina." When *Resurrection* hit movie screens, some journalists referred to it as a manifesto on feminism and motherhood. "I would say that the only thing feminist about *Resurrection* is that you have a big-budget picture with two strong women leads. And that's good enough for me!" Weaver claims. "But I don't see the *ALIEN* movies as political statements. I think it's quite horrifying that in 1997, if you have a woman in the lead of a picture, you're making a feminist statement. That's appalling."

It's pointed out to Weaver that although Fox considered continuing the *ALIEN* franchise without her, the studio never, ever—so far as anyone knows—considered replacing her. Weaver is Ripley and Ripley is Weaver. Is she that irreplaceable? After all, several men have grabbed 007's Walther PPK in the James Bond series and three guys have donned the cowl and cape for the Batman features. Weaver doesn't know quite how to respond. "That's like an essay question," she jokes. Then, after a moment, she offers an answer, although it's not one that satisfies the question. "I always sound Pollyanna, but it's just as hard for men to find good parts as for women. I mean, Batman? Hello. I haven't seen the last...two or three. But it's the actor's job to make these roles interesting. Anyway, what I am happy about is that people are beginning to make it very clear that they like to see women in strong roles in movies. So, after this 15-year-long bleak period where

men had almost all the interesting roles. I think Hollywood is coming back to what was characteristic of the 1930s, '40s and '50s. I mean, how can you have a great film without a woman in it? Unless it's *The Guns of Navarone*. But I think things are changing.

"What was astonishing about Ripley in *ALIEN* was that our original producers had this script about a bunch of guys and they said, 'Hey, wouldn't it be interesting if the last person you would expect to save the day was this young woman?' They did it, really, for commercial reasons and because they thought, 'Why not?' They all loved and respected women. The mistake that Hollywood makes is that every time they have really strong woman, they usually have some scene where they tell you why she's so tough. She was abused. She lost her parents. They do that instead of just writing a great story with a great part played by a woman with no apologies and no explanations. Eventually, they'll all catch on."

### Directing Desires

Might Weaver ever want to take matters into her own hands and direct an *ALIEN* film? Clearly, the thought has crossed her mind. "I don't know if that will ever happen," she responds. "I don't know that the things that interest me are the things that interest Fox. The things that interest me about the *ALIEN* series are the characters and the more personal aspects. I'm sure I could do that action. Business-wise, I would have to direct a different movie first. I would have to do my *Delicatessen* before they were willing to take a chance on me. They do give me a lot of input. I think they trust me a lot. But it's frustrating not to cut the film."

While a movie directed by Weaver might happen down the road, she has plenty going on right now. It's possible that the actress will notch an Oscar nomination for her stunning performance as the emotionally detached mother and wife in the family drama *The Ice Storm*. Chances are that people are still renting *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, and Weaver hopes to be well into production on her next film, the comedy *Dear Rosie*, about a struggling writer who unexpectedly becomes a popular diet guru.

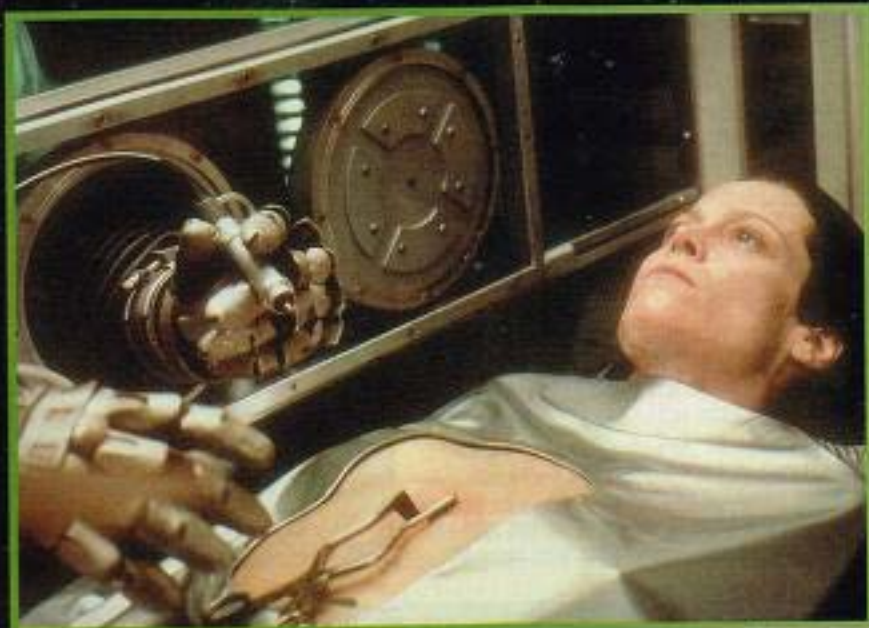
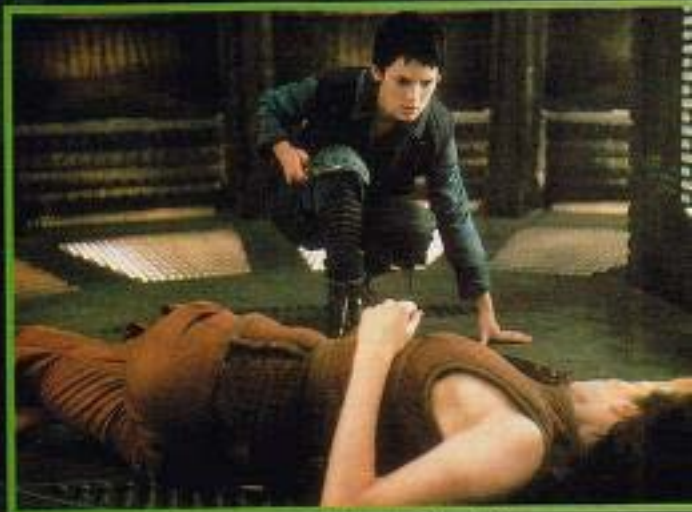
And, yes, Sigourney Weaver would consider yet another facehugger face-off, for, believe it or not, she says there's still more Ripley story to tell. "There were actually some scenes that we didn't shoot for *Resurrection* in which Ripley's dual nature was explored much more. In *Resurrection*, you can't really tell whose side she's on. What I felt at the end was that she wanted to get off that ship, that she wanted to live. It's my feeling that she aligns herself with the humans because they have the ship, but I don't think she has actually chosen sides. It's not possible for her to choose sides at this point. She feels a great kind of relief when she's with the Aliens and a real cynicism when she's with the humans. I think the humans, as always in the *ALIEN* movies, are such creepy people. So, there's still more to explore and maybe we'll explore it."



Director Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Weaver says, has put a darker spin on *Resurrection*. "It's a view of the future which is...very bleak."

"You really can't tell whose side Ripley is on."

A big *ALIEN* fan, Winona Ryder opted to play android Annalee Call in *Resurrection* before even reading a script. "It was a great idea to cast her," says Weaver.



If Ripley survives at the box office, Weaver is game for another outing. "There's more to explore," she offers. "Maybe we'll explore it."

# ACTRESS

As heroic Annalee Call, Winona Ryder

# ON

experiences the terrors of *ALIEN Resurrection*.

# CALL

By IAN SPELLING

**W**inona Ryder was, is and will forever be a science-fiction nut. "I loved *Invaders from Mars*. I saw that when I was a little kid. When the boy sees the knobs on his parents' necks, that turned me on to SF," recalls the actress. "Then, I really got into Ray Bradbury and *Fahrenheit 451*. I was also kind of raised on *Twilight Zones*. *Star Wars* was more of a boys' thing."

Then, there was *ALIEN*.

"I saw the first *ALIEN* when I was eight or nine," enthuses the actress. "I actually sat through it twice. My brothers and I hid in the wings while they cleaned the theater between showings. It remains one of my favorite movies of all time. It's a completely revolutionary movie because it was the first SF movie ever made where the woman survives and the woman is the hero. That was a really big deal. Ripley [Sigourney Weaver] was really the last person you expected to survive. You think it's going to be Tom Skerritt or one of the other guys. When Skerritt dies, you think, 'OK, everybody's going to die.' It just did not enter your mind that the woman would actually survive."

"Then, Ripley goes back to get the cat and blows up the Alien. That was incredibly



Android smuggler Annalee Call doesn't trust this Hybrid Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), but Winona Ryder was thrilled to work opposite her favorite SF heroine.

"I saw *ALIEN* about 15 times. I was obsessed



exciting for me as a girl who wanted to be an actress and who wanted to be an actress in an SF movie. Ripley didn't die. Ripley did not get saved by a guy and get sent back to Earth. I saw *ALIEN* about 15 times. I was obsessed that a woman had kicked ass in a movie. It really had a huge impact on me, so much so that I still had the poster in my room at home until I was 17—and it's still actually there. I moved out at 17. When I go home to my parents' house, it's still in my room."

### Avid Android

Now, of course, Ryder's name figures prominently on the poster for *ALIEN Resurrection*, in which she co-stars with her hero, Weaver. As an avid fan, Ryder looks back at the merits of the first three *ALIEN* features. "The first one was great because you didn't see the Alien a lot," she says. "But you felt it. It was lurking all the time. It also has this incredible actress and these other wonderful performances. It wasn't just a bunch of actors screaming and running around. It had really great characters that you cared about. I consider the first film to be SF and *ALIENS* to be an action movie. The second one was more shooting at things, seeing the Aliens. I

enjoyed it, but it wasn't as fun and creepy.

"I wasn't a fan of the third one. I just did not get it. People say, 'Oh, that's because Ripley died.' I was really upset about that. It took me a long time to get over it. With all the action in the second one, you at least saw that Ripley had a soft side. And then, in the third one, it was set in this weird prison and it had all this religious stuff that I didn't understand. Then, Ripley had sex with that gross guy. It just didn't seem like Ripley to me. I hate saying that about *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*, because I love Sigourney and I know that she's very close to all three films. But it's my personal opinion that *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>* didn't work."

One day not long ago, Ryder's phone rang. Executives at 20th Century Fox, the studio for whom she had just finished *The Crucible*, the studio that owned the rights to the *ALIEN* franchise, wanted Ryder to visit with them. They didn't inform her of why. "When I went in, they said, 'Would you ever consider doing SF?' I said, 'I love SF, but it's usually so bad and cheesy. The only way I would do it is if it were something along the lines of *ALIEN*, but that's over because Ripley's dead and nobody can replace her.' " Ryder remembers. "And they said, 'Actual-

ly, we're bringing her back.' I thought, 'OK.' They said, 'There's a part for you in it.' It was the first time in my life I agreed to do a film without ever reading a script. I didn't really care if I died in the first scene. I just wanted to be able to tell my brothers I was in an *ALIEN* movie. That's all I wanted. When I read the script [by Joss Whedon], I thought it was really good. The way Ripley was brought back was pretty interesting and relevant to what is going on today with cloning. It was kind of interesting to know we were making this futuristic SF movie, but weren't too far off from [reality]."

Another key to securing the talents of Ryder, a two-time Oscar nominee whose credits include *Edward Scissorhands*, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *Beetlejuice*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Reality Bites*, *Little Women* and *How to Make an American Quilt*, was that the studio went with French wunderkind Jean-Pierre Jeunet as *Resurrection*'s director after Danny Boyle excused himself from the project. Ryder thought the auteur behind *Delicatessen* and *The City of Lost Children* would be perfect for breathing new life into the *ALIEN* franchise. "The tradition with the *ALIEN* movies is to hire interesting, vision-

that a woman had kicked ass in a movie."

Ryder has confronted monsters before. She both loved and lost the vampiric Count (Gary Oldman) in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.



any directors," she notes. "I was confident that they wouldn't hire some hack action director. When Jean-Pierre came along, it was just completely ideal. He is alien. He is completely the weirdest, most incredible, brilliant man. He really is a genius."

"It's like he's from another world. His ideas, his visions are stuff that I'll never understand, but that I completely admire. I really loved working with him. Jean-Pierre will never do anything like it has been done before. He's so completely original and uncompromising. The studio was incredible, because they gave Jean-Pierre—this guy from France who has never made an English-language movie—a lot of freedom to make his film. I can't tell you how surprised I was. He created a different world, a new ship, a new everything. Even when we're running down a corridor, which has been done a million times, he makes it interesting. He shoots it so it's unique. He's just very original."

On the set, Ryder and Weaver got on fine, but Ryder didn't take the opportunity to gush to Weaver about what a fan she was, or to blather on about Weaver's influence on her. "I didn't bother Sigourney with questions," Ryder says. "I was much too shy." Instead, she focused on her character, the mechanic Annalee Call, who turns out to be a sensitive android who's very protective of Earth and extremely anti-Alien. Ryder, a self-described "98-pound weakling," honed her skills to come across as believable. After all, *Resurrection* was no period piece, and it demanded a far different kind of performance than she had been used to delivering.

"Dialogue makes more sense to me in contemporary pieces or period pieces," she stresses. "I wanted to see if I could make the technobabble in an *ALIEN* film, the stuff that doesn't make sense at all, sound real and normal coming out of my mouth. I don't know if it worked. I personally love the movie, but I'm not crazy about myself in it. I kind of stick out as someone who *doesn't* really belong there. My role is secondary—it's Ripley's movie. I think the thing Call and Ripley have in common is that they both want to be

human. I didn't see their relationship as mother-daughter at all, but they do grow to really care about each other. So, I would say it's kind of a sister relationship. The core of the story is Ripley's relationship with the Alien—I'm there as the sidekick, running around and chasing after her. But I did think there were a lot of interesting parts about Call. I knew it would be different and a challenge and I didn't want to die without trying *everything* as an actress."

### Able Android

The *Resurrection* experience proved at least as tough as Ryder expected, particularly the physical aspects of it. Other *Resurrection* actors and filmmakers have commented on the grueling underwater chase sequence, in which a sleek swimming Alien hunts down Ryder, Weaver, Ron Perlman, Leland Orser and the rest of the cast. The bravura sequence was filmed in a giant tank, with upside down sets and cold, murky water. Rehearsals were conducted with masks and oxygen tanks, but such luxuries were just off camera—which at times seemed light years away—after Jeunet called "Action!"

"It was *bad*," Ryder remembers. "It was especially bad for me, because I was probably the most afraid and the whiniest of the bunch. When I was 12, I technically died drowning. It sounds very dramatic. I was at Dylan Beach in Northern California and I got caught in the undertow. I was in for a long time and when they pulled me out, I didn't have a pulse. Then, I coughed up water and I came back to life. I would cut school to go to the beach, so it was a big deal. I was with my stoned friends, who were like, 'Ooooh!' and freaking out. I had never gone back underwater. I would go into water, but never put my head under. I told the studio that. I said I had this terrible experience and was really scared. They said, 'Oh, well, we'll get a stunt double. It's no problem.' I said, 'Well, OK.' I cut my hair off and they couldn't use a stunt double because you can see my face the whole time. So, I was pissed and I was scared. Then, I started training and went two feet underwa-



"He created a different world," says Ryder of director Jean-Pierre Jeunet's quirky style. "He is the weirdest, most incredible, brilliant man."



With fantasy credits that include *Beetlejuice*, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Edward Scissorhands*, Ryder isn't exactly a stranger to the genre.

ter. After a few weeks, it got better."

Better, yes, but not easier. Picture it: Itsy bitsy Ryder deep under water, with weighted boots, her costume ballooning, surrounded by actors struggling with their own fears and problems, attempting to act. The Little Mermaid star of *Mermaids* was not. "It was *really* terrifying," she continues. "The worst



Playing Call involved stunts—including wetwork, complicated underwater sequences Ryder didn't enjoy. "It was bad. It was really terrifying."



"Dialogue makes more sense" to Ryder in non-SF films, but she tried to make the *Resurrection* technobabble "sound real and normal."

day was when we were down in the pool set, 30 feet deep, and we were completely drowning. You would look up and see a ceiling, but it wasn't like you could just swim up and have room up top. You had to find an opening to swim to. You had to find the light and swim up. Leland would push me up. I would get up to the top and we would grab this bar. I'm like 'Huh-huh' [heavy breathing], and this grip says, 'You know, you might not want to hold that, because you could get electrocuted.' We were like, 'OK, do we drown or do we get electrocuted?' Those were our choices. It was scary and the water was gross."

In the end, though, Ryder feels it was all worth it. "I think *ALIEN Resurrection* is great, I really do," she enthuses. "Watching myself is always hard, but I think it's an art-house SF movie. It has a very European feel, but it has great action and suspense. I love it."

And now it's on to other things. Next on the agenda for Ryder is *Girl Interrupted*, a small film about a young college student (Ryder) who survives a "meek" suicide attempt and is placed in an asylum for four years as a result. The actress also worked for two weeks on Woody Allen's next, as-yet-untitled film, in which she shares most of her scenes with Kenneth Branagh.

As the conversation wraps up, Ryder ponders just how far she has come and what's still out there waiting to be achieved. "I think I'm in a great position. That's due to the fact that I started out very young and I've never been in any big blockbusters that were because of me," she says. "The successful movies I've done were successful because of other people and other reasons. If *Dracula* was successful, it wasn't because I was in it,

but because it was *Dracula*. If *Beetlejuice* was successful, it wasn't because I was in it, but because of Tim Burton. I think that has been a big plus for me."

"I was always the girl from *Beetlejuice* or *Heathers* or *Mermaids*. I was never really an overnight success, which can be really bad for actors. When that happens, an actor has to follow up that movie with something equally big. When people approach me on the street, it's a very familiar thing. It's like they know me. It not like, 'Oh, my God!' It's like, 'Oh, hey, I don't feel so threatened. I use Julia Roberts as an example, which I shouldn't, but I do only because it really happened to her in a huge way. She was kind of unknown and then she did *Pretty Woman*. That was real hard on her. It was a huge movie and she was considered the luckiest girl in Hollywood. But from that point on, she was a movie star more than an actress, even though she is an actress. She's good, but it's always about her box office. Is she over? Is she back? I would hate to be talked about like that."

"What my route has given me is a chance for people to consider me an actress more than a movie star. Although people have called me a movie star, and that's great—it certainly lets me earn more money—it has been so gradual for me. I feel that, ideally, I would like to stay right where I am," Winona Ryder says. "I get offered the movies I want to get offered most of the time. I don't get bothered that much. I've never had to use a bodyguard. I've never had the problems that many people have. Many actors you see are huge. They're huge movie stars and then they go away. But actors work forever, and that's what I want to be."

