



**"I want to be in the best movies I can be in, but if I can't be in the best movies, then I want to be the best I can be in whatever I am in."**

DISCIPLINE (1983), it was his leading role in the runaway hit *THE TERMINATOR* (1984) which should have assured his future as a box office star.

As Sean French points out in his examination of the film for the *BFI Modern Classics* range, 'In the improbable event that we encountered Biehn's Reese in real life, we would consider him to be an extraordinary hero. He sacrifices himself for a mission to save a woman, out of idealism but also because he has fallen in love with her picture. He arrives in our world with nothing, and manages to save Sarah Connor with the pitiful weapons available to him and, more than this, to awaken her to her true self. But heroism doesn't work like that on the big screen.'

"I think *THE TERMINATOR* is the only movie I've done for which, at the time, I didn't get the recognition I deserved," Biehn considers. "Arnold kind of came out of that as a big star, even though he doesn't really say anything in it," he adds, referring to the fact that a character who utters a total of seventy four words and kills twenty seven innocent people is something of an unlikely hero, even by the gung-ho standards of Eighties film making. Perhaps, as French points out, it was Reese's uncommon vulnerability that counted against him: "An authentic action hero does not die and leave the heroine to face the villain alone, however capable she might be."

**I**N 1989, AROUND THE TIME I FIRST BEGAN WRITING PROFESSIONALLY, my friends and I ran a poll to discover our five favourite genre movies. Of the resulting list of titles - for which I make no apologies - three were James Cameron films (*THE TERMINATOR*, *ALIENS* and *THE ABYSS*), two were obscure horror movies (*RAMPAGE* and *THE SEVENTH SIGN*), and Michael Biehn was in all of them.

Back then, it would have been hard to imagine that, ten years later, Michael Biehn's name would still be known only to a hardcore group of science fiction fans who remember his strong performances as popular genre characters: the lovelorn, time-travelling freedom fighter Kyle Reese in *THE TERMINATOR*; the sympathetic soldier Dwayne Hicks in *ALIENS*; the nervy Navy SEAL Lieutenant Coffey in *THE ABYSS*. Although Biehn's single scene in *TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY* was cut prior to the film's release, and he has scored only one major success since (*TOMBSTONE*, in which he co-starred with Val Kilmer and Kurt Russell), it is difficult to see how an actor as handsome, talented and watchable as Michael Biehn has singularly failed to become a movie star, while his erstwhile *TERMINATOR* co-star has become one of the biggest movie icons of all time.

"I don't know either," Biehn says down the line from his home in the Hollywood Hills. "I suppose it's because I've been in a lot of successful movies, but most of the movies I've done that have had me [in the leading role] have not been huge successes. The big deal in Hollywood, obviously, is whether or not your movies make money, and the only movies that I have been in that made money were Jim Cameron movies, rather than Michael Biehn movies."

There is also the fact that, with the exception of *THE TERMINATOR*, Biehn's biggest hits have been as part of a larger cast. "ALIENS, THE ABYSS and *TOMBSTONE* were all big ensembles," he points out, "so I've never really carried a movie myself that was very successful. If *RAMPAGE* or *THE SEVENTH SIGN* would have made \$200 million, I would have been a movie star. It's kind of the way it goes."

Born in Anniston, Alabama, in 1956, Michael Biehn moved to Los Angeles at the age of eighteen, his tough-but-vulnerable male-model looks and nascent acting ability quickly earning him a range of below-the-radar roles, from *GREASE* (1978) to the television series *THE RUNAWAYS* (1978-79). Although his profile was slightly higher in *THE FAN* (1981) and *THE LORDS OF*

**A**LTHOUGH BIEHN is anything but bitter about the direction his career has taken, he admits that his choices have not always been as shrewd as Schwarzenegger's. "There haven't been really too many [parts] that I've had offers on, but there have been a few that I've read but didn't quite 'get,'" he says. "Like *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*, which I read, couldn't figure out, and said, 'This isn't going to be any good.' Then it came out and made [stars of] Kevin Spacey and all those other guys. One other big one that I didn't do, which was a mistake, was *EIGHT MEN OUT*, the John Sayles movie about baseball."

"I was [also] offered a part in *NEAR DARK*, and if I would have known that was going to be as good as it was, I'd have done it." *NEAR DARK* would also have given him the chance to work with his *ALIENS* buddies, Bill Paxton and Lance Henriksen. "I just didn't like the script," he admits. "[Director] Kathryn Bigelow hadn't really done very much at that time, and if you see *NEAR DARK* to this day, there are story points which I don't really think make a lot of sense. It's got an incredible amount of style," he allows, "but the script did not read that well to me, and I think that movie is a little more style over substance."

So what are Biehn's criteria for choosing a project? "There's a number of things that go into me making a decision," he says. "I've got three kids, an ex-wife and a lot of expenses, and I like to live nicely, so I've gotta make

Above: *ALIENS*

Left: As Kyle Reese in *THE TERMINATOR*

Below: *The Terminator*





**MICHAEL BIEHN  
BIOGRAPHY**

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- Fan (1981)
- Lords of  
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- Terminator  
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money — that's really number one. Number two, I want to be in the best movies I can be in, but if I can't be in the best movies, then I want to be the best I can be in whatever I am in."

These days, another factor he takes into consideration is location. "I'd rather be shooting something in Los Angeles than

sitting around in a trailer in Spain," he says. "I've got people that I love here, and I want to be close to my children when they're growing up. There's also, like, who's directing the film or the show, or who's producing it." Having said that, he adds, "I've also taken jobs that had bad directors, or the scripts weren't that

good, because I didn't have any money in the bank and I needed to make my house payment, so... it's a combination of things."

Biehn admits that those criteria have continued to change over the past few years. "For a long time, I was trying to prove myself," he says. "I was really picky and I wouldn't do a lot of things. Then I turned forty and I thought, 'People know that if I'm in a good project then I'm good, so now if I'm in something that's not very good, they're not gonna say, 'He's not very good'.' So I decided I was going to work like Michael Caine. He just does everything, and some things are really good and some things aren't, but he's always really good."

One of the "easier choices" Biehn made recently was *ASTEROID*, the big budget NBC mini-series which beat the similarly-themed *DEEP IMPACT* and *ARMAGEDDON* out of the gate. "It was before those two movies," the actor acknowledges, "and it did incredibly well. It was, like, the number one-rated four-hour television movie for the past ten years. They did a lot of advertising for it, everybody watched it, and it did very, very well."

"After that, I did a movie for John Landis called *SUSAN'S PLAN*, which is another ensemble piece, [with] Dan Aykroyd, Nastassja Kinski, Billy Zane, Rob Schneider and Lara Flynn Boyle. It's about a woman who's trying to have her husband killed for the insurance, and she hires me and Rob Schneider, a couple of bozos who are, like, the worst killers around. It's kind of a broad comedy caper," he adds, "even though it's a black comedy, like *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*, so it's got laughs in it, but it's really violent, too."

In between other film projects - such as the Disney movie-of-the-week *SILVER WOLF*, and *WONDERLAND*, a mooted bio-pic of porn star John Holmes - Biehn is currently playing gunfighter Chris Larabee as part of the ensemble cast of the CBS series *THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN*. "We did a pilot, which was two hours, and we did eight more, and then they picked us up for thirteen more, so now we're working on our second instalment," he says. "For a while, I resisted doing television, because I didn't want to be one of those guys like Lance [Henriksen]. I mean, he's in every shot of that show [*MILLENNIUM*]. He's putting in fourteen hour days, five or six days a week, and I don't know, man. This is tough enough for me as it is," he says of his duties on *THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN*, "and it probably averages out eight or ten hours a week!"

**W**ITH *TERMINATOR 3* now all but certain to be made next year, there is a good chance that Michael Biehn may begin the new millennium with his highest-profile role yet. Nevertheless, the actor remains justifiably sceptical in view of what happened to his single scene in *T2*. There may be no fate but what we make, as the film's central

