

THE MUMMY, RESURRECTED

Universal revives the long-dormant franchise from its Golden Era of horror.

By Joe Fordham

Stephen Sommers knew that America had been chuckling at the Mummy for years. The cartoons of Gary Larson are just one example. Yet the Universal icon fascinated him since he first saw the Karloff original as a boy on late night TV. "Frankenstein I always felt sorry for. Dracula was kind of cool and sexy. But the Mummy was really creepy. The way they photographed Boris Karloff, never actually showing how he killed people—it really creeped you out."

The image intrigued Sommers throughout years of rumblings in Hollywood about the old Egyptian's return. "I'd heard they'd been trying to make this movie for nine years," Sommers recalled. "Every time I'd check, they had a new director on it—I knew George Romero had been involved at some point and Joe Dante. Finally it fell apart once again, so I called up my friends at Universal and asked if I could pitch them my idea."

Writer-director Sommers recalled the strategy behind his initial pitch, for what has now become the biggest film of his career. "They showed me their previous script, which I had no interest in doing," Sommers recalled. "They were trying to do a remake of the original MUMMY, which I loved, but I didn't really want to do just a standard gothic horror movie. There have been so many of those,



For one of the film's RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK action scenes, Stephen Sommers (left) directs Brendan Fraser (far right) as the Indiana Jones-type hero.

like MARY REILLY or the Branagh FRANKENSTEIN, although I liked the Coppola DRACULA a lot. What I proposed was, basically, to do THE MUMMY as the big event movie. I wanted to do an epic, romantic adventure—and I also suggested we had to have Industrial Light and Magic create our Mummy. I didn't want a guy wrapped in bandages. I wanted to take a real human being and turn him into a corpse, then turn him from a corpse back into a human being."

Sommers' had a past association with ILM visual effects supervisor John Burton, who had provided the digital sea

creatures for the climactic sequences of Sommers' previous film, DEEP RISING, and Sommers had been keen to share his plans for future projects. "One of them was THE MUMMY," said Burton. "I thought it would be really great to get involved because of the potential for updating a classic like that into something that was reflective of the technology that we have for making visual effects now."

Sommers and Burton were quick to agree that a truly frightening modern Mummy would require a cutting-edge digital approach, if only to counteract the obvious baggage the ancient Egyptian brought

with him. "We wanted to make sure that our Mummy wasn't what everyone expected," Burton continued. "If you tossed this idea around town you'd have people saying you could easily out-run them, or why not just tear their arms off? That was always a problem. We really wanted to create something that would be frightening and dangerous, something that you'd never seen before. We wanted to create a photo-realistic living corpse that was obviously not a man in a suit, obviously not an animatronic, and obviously alive."

"Generally speaking," Sommers explained, "I'm bored with straight prosthetics, when they build a guy's head out and then they remove part [of it]; everybody knows it's fake. I wanted to do it digitally so that when the Mummy woke up he could walk towards you and you could clearly see it's not a puppet, and it's not a guy in a suit because we can see through his ribs and through holes in his head."

Having established the tone and the scope of their story, and having obtained sufficient interest in the technical approach towards their title character, producer Jim Jacks and his co-producer Sean Daniel at Alphaville Productions began to plot logistics and assemble key members of their crew. Other return players from earlier Sommers' productions included film editor Bob Ducsay, who cut Sommers' directorial debut, CATCH ME



Above: High priest Imhotep (Arnold Vosloo) is mummified alive for trying to revive his beloved princess from the dead. Below: Since the old bandage-wrapped Mummy was deemed insufficient to scare contemporary audiences, the film has the risen Imhotep inflict Biblical-style plagues (in this case, flies), courtesy of ILM's CGI.



THE MUMMY

ARNOLD VOSLOO

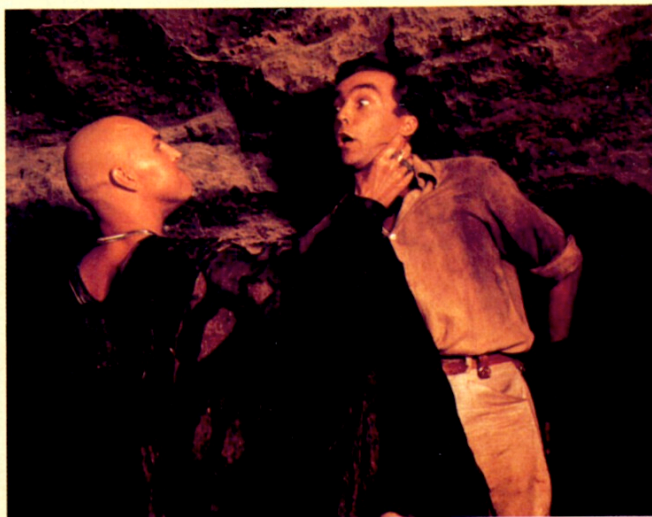
From Darkman to Imhotep, changing one set of bandages for another.

Born into a theatrical family, Arnold Vosloo took to the stage as a classically trained actor in his homeland of South Africa. After ten years of taking part in anti-apartheid theatre, Vosloo was invited to appear in his first American theatrical production in Chicago in the early '90s. Director Ridley Scott noted his imposing stage presence and cast Vosloo in the better of the two Columbus epics, **1492** (1992), playing sidekick to Michael Wincott's heavy. As much as he enjoyed the experience, Vosloo felt his 18-month sabbatical in America was over and headed for New York before wending his way back to South Africa.

"I called my folks and said I'm coming home," he recalled. "Then Al Pacino's people called and asked me to come and read for *Salome*, the Oscar Wilde play. I was certain they were going to want a big name actor to take the role opposite Pacino and Sheryl Lee from *TWIN PEAKS*, who was great. But I was there in New York, and I said, 'What the heck? I'm flying out in two days; I'll go in.' So I went in, and I was so filled with fear I gave a good reading and they hired me!"

The New York theatre crowd turned out in droves to see Pacino, who had not set foot on Broadway since *American Buffalo* eight years earlier. Once again, Vosloo made a big impression, which resulted in his second cinematic role—another bad guy, this time for acclaimed Hong Kong action director John Woo, who was making his American theatrical debut with *HARD TARGET*—produced by Jim Jacks at Alphaville Productions, who would later produce *THE MUMMY*.

Before teaming up again with Jacks, Vosloo's genre connections began to take root in a more circuitous route with John Woo introducing Vosloo to film-maker Sam



Arnold Vosloo's Imhotep throttles explorer Jonathan Carnahan (John Hannah).

Raimi. Raimi at that time was searching for a new face to don the Darkman mask, taking over from Liam Neeson. "I did *DARKMAN* 2 and *DARKMAN* 3 for Sam, so it's kind of interesting," Vosloo observed. "My wife pointed out to me the other night—I didn't really think about it when I took on *THE MUMMY*, but a lot of genre fans might know me from these *DARKMAN* films. It seems like it's gone this way. I just finished another horror movie before *THE MUMMY* with Brian Yusna, whom I loved. It's called *PROGENY* and will probably go straight-to-video. Some classic Yusna, about a doctor and his wife impregnated by an alien, or at least he believes that she is. He sneaks her into the operating room and cuts her open. It was pretty creepy. Now I'm doing all this horror genre stuff, which is kind of nice."

An admitted horror fan—who lists *PHANTASM* as his taste—Vosloo is aware of the problems associated with being typecast into the horror world. Nevertheless, he has enjoyed the unexpected challenge. "Had you asked me how I

thought I might make it in Hollywood, I would have thought I'd go in on the character bad guy stuff. I never would have dreamed that it would have been *THE MUMMY*. If this movie works, it'll change my life. For better or for worse, I can't tell you now. Because I am the shark in *JAWS*. I'm the fire in *TOWERING INFERNO*. I am the disaster in the disaster movie. That really does type you in a way. But I'm really proud of the film, and I'm proud of what we achieved.

"The challenge that Universal is going to have with this film, certainly for the MTV crowd, is to change the whole public perception of this character. It's always been a guy running around in rags, stumbling through the streets with tampons hanging from his head—it's completely not that in this movie. There's never really been a movie where the Mummy has had super powers. There's never been a movie where the Mummy has been really scary. I think Stephen's script addressed all that, so I think it's going to be pretty wild."

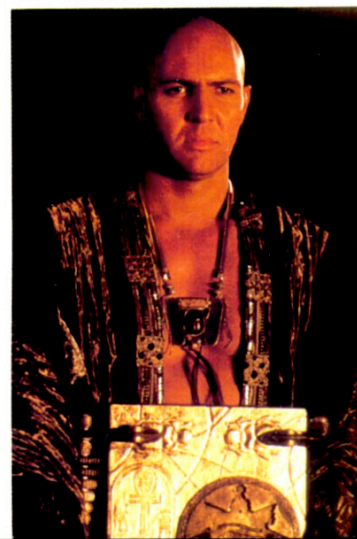
Joe Fordham

IF YOU CAN in 1989; and British-born production designer Allan Cameron, who designed Sommers' take on *THE JUNGLE BOOK* for Disney in 1994.

"*THE MUMMY* was my 19th film as a production designer," Cameron said. With *HIGHLANDER*, *WILLOW*, and *STARSHIP TROOPERS* behind him, Cameron was no stranger to working in fantasy, yet the approach he adopted for Sommers' latest project began with a discovery that would lend historical detail to the horror. "I watched the Karloff movie, but I really didn't want to be too influenced by it, so I went to the British Museum and spent hours in their library, researching Egyptology. I found this amazing volume that Napoleon had commissioned when he invaded Egypt. He had his artists, etchers and archeologists catalogue all the artifacts and tombs they found in ancient Egypt. It became our art department bible."

Sommers' screenplay dictated three major locales. A 12-minute prologue would establish Imhotep's backstory in Ancient Egypt, circa 1000 B.C.; then the main body of the film would be set in and around Cairo, 1925, with two visits to Humanaptra, a subterranean City of the Dead, the later for the final showdown with the resurrected Mummy. After considering locations in the Arizona desert, an area used by Jacks for *TOMBSTONE*, costs for the extensive studio interiors of Humanaptra made a Hollywood

Arnold Vosloo appears in his ceremonial robes, preparing to raise his beloved princess from the dead.





The intrepid trio of explorers enter Humanaptra, the underground city of the dead.

shoot impractical. Instead, the 81-day production would take the company across the Atlantic for six weeks in Marrakesh, Morocco, and the outlying deserts of Erfoud, followed by eight weeks at Shepperton Studios in England.

"Once we decided to shoot in London, Morocco became a very easy choice," commented Jacks. "Also, creatively it was better. Erfoud had some of the biggest sand dunes in the world, so we had these three mile long dunes in the background of our shots. It looks like the end of the world." With cinematographer Adrian Biddle rounding out the mainly British crew, casting was also taking shape in Los Angeles.

The first player to be secured was Brendan Fraser, whose appearances in light-hearted fare like *GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE* have alternated with subtle dramatic roles, most notably in *GODS AND MONSTERS*. The starring role in *THE MUMMY* would land him somewhere in between. "Pretty early on I wrote the lead guy as a macho action hero because he was involved with a lot of physical conflict, and I wanted him to be able to respond," stated Sommers. "The script also had a lot of humor in it—it was never camp, because whenever we're with the Mummy I wanted to play it deadly serious. But I also wanted the story to have

an element of humor and be fun. At six-foot and close to 200 pounds, solid rock, Brendan was a big strong guy who could throw a punch and shoot a gun, but he could also make you laugh, and laugh at himself. He has that kind of charm."

Fraser's involvement cemented the studio's interest, which was growing hotter thanks to developments at ILM. "We were working on the design before the picture was completely green-lit," said Burton. "Of course, we mostly had to meet Stephen Sommers' vision of what he wanted his Mummy to be, but on top of that there were lots of people making decisions about whether or not this was going to be the kind of picture that they wanted to put their money into. Our involvement certainly helped that decision-making process by presenting the studio with a viable, good-looking design."

Burton turned to creature department supervisor Jeff Mann and art director Alex Laurent to instigate the process. "We came up with some designs for the different stages of the Mummy, to show how he regenerated back into a human," Burton recalled. "Once we worked out how he would transform from one stage to the other, we did a lot of conceptual work showing the Mummy not only in a black-

used motion capture, plus traditional key frame animation and procedural systems, so that as he moved, his guts would swing, his bandages sway, his skin would stretch, his muscles would bulge and his brain would bash around inside his head. He was one gruesome guy, and we were really proud of him."

Two sets of Imhotep maquettes were rendered in clay, each approximately 18 inches tall, full-body and head-and-shoulder versions, to illustrate the overall and close-up detail plan. The sculptures were then used as the basis for planning all computer graphics work and for plotting the interface with areas to be generated by make-up artist Nick Dudman in London, who would join the team in early 1998.

Himself a veteran of *THE PHANTOM MENACE*, and a long-time associate with ILM, Dudman recalled entering *THE MUMMY* as very much a collaborator in developing the CG approach. "They were very clear that there was a very heavy CG involvement from ILM," Dudman noted, "but they were very unclear at that point where the cross-over was going to be. There was a big area in the movie where Imhotep would be half makeup and half CG, and it was necessary to create a makeup that the computer could lock onto in post-production and add CG elements that couldn't physically be created without injuring the actor."

Imhotep's regeneration would finally break down into a five-stage progression, the first

Evelyn Carnahan (Rachel Weisz, center), as the librarian of antiquities, adopts native garb during her search for the lost city of the dead.





An invasion of rats inhibit the explorers' progress—another of the Biblical-style plagues realized via ILM's computer-generated imagery.

being ILM's full-body walking corpse. "My involvement was really the bits in the middle," said Dudman, "where he went from half-rotted to sort of quarter-rotted to, ooh, only a bit rotted. Then when he was absolutely gorgeous he was just in straight makeup, which wasn't my involvement." Large chunks and cavities were to be carved into the Mummy performer by mapping the actor with a skillfully designed prosthetic, the edges of which were marked with an array of specifically designed light-emitting diodes that the computer could track and lock onto throughout the scenes. It was a refinement of a technique employed by Dudman and ILM on the STAR WARS prequel.

"We were doing a head re-

placement on one of the characters in THE PHANTOM MENACE, Dudman recalled. "In that instance, it was something that was not going to end up in the final cut of the film; it was merely a way of giving the artists rendering the final creature a base to work from. On THE MUMMY, we were creating 50 percent of what the final guy was going to look like, so we took the technology we had on PHANTOM MENACE and refined it down into a makeup, which meant you had to get LEDs, batteries, switches and things down to about a two millimeter thickness on the surface of the actor."

Clearly, there was still one crucial element missing from the production. Before Dudman could begin, and before ILM

could start modeling their evolving CG monster, the living, breathing human performer was still needed to fulfill the inestimable task of stepping into Karloff's shoes.

British actress Rachel Weisz had already been selected to play Evelyn Carnahan, librarian at the Cairo Museum of Antiquities and catalyst to reviving Imhotep's passions. "I first saw Rachel in the movie LAND GIRLS," Sommers recalled. "When I met her and she did some readings, she was really terrific. As for Imhotep, we were kind of at our wit's end. We auditioned a bunch of people; then suddenly Arnold Vosloo walked in. It was funny. At first there was something kind of intimidating about him. I can't explain it. He's Shake-

spearean; he's serious; he's very commanding. Within 30 seconds I knew he was going to be the guy, and I never do that. Usually, I'm more pensive and maybe bring people back for a second time. But he walked in and it was a done deal. And he was a blast to work with."

Vosloo shared the sentiment, although initially he had not held much hope of winning the role so quickly. "At that point I figured the studio was looking for a big name, because DeNiro had just done FRANKENSTEIN. I came in anyway because I was such a fan of the original—it was not even like a horror movie; it was more like this romantic fantasy—and I said, if I were to play Imhotep, I was not interested in playing him as the bad guy; I wanted to play the romance aspect. I guess Stephen and I were on the same level in the terms of what we wanted to do because, four days later, I got the call and I absolutely freaked. They told me I was the Mummy!"

One shaved head later, Vosloo was subjected to the beginning of his torture at the hands of the visual effects team. "When Arnold was cast we were chomping at the bit because we needed his head to start building our creature," Burton recalled. "We ran him through our typical wringer. We sent our photo team down to L.A. to shoot him with still

Taking Imhotep's image beyond the old bandage look was a combined effort of ILM and makeup man Nick Dudman.



cameras against grids and figure out how big his head was. We measured every part of him, photographed him walking to calculate his gait, and then we cyberscanned and motion-captured him—which was a real integral part of what we did.”

The cyberscan was a process whereby Vosloo sat motionless before a laser scanner that captured a digital contour map of his body surface, and a head and shoulders life cast immersion in a sandwich of hot plaster and cold porridge courtesy of Dudman’s prosthetic crew. Next, Vosloo had to face the reality of his first costume fitting in London. “I’m no Mister Fitness, but I had done some exercise,” stated Vosloo. “When I finally got to London, they showed me my costume, and it was like the size of a postage stamp.” Producer Jacks, who had worked with Vosloo on the John Woo action film *HARD TARGET*, was quick to offer advice. “Arnold was only about ten or fifteen pounds overweight, but he had to put on this little skirt and, boy, did every ounce of it show!” Jacks laughed. “I told him he had a month to lose the weight, and I suggested he take a look at *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS* to see how Yul Brynner looked back then.”

Jack’s suggestion proved hard to follow, although Brynner was exactly the look that Sommers wished to imbue to the living Imhotep. “Brenner was just so powerful. How can you match that, clothed or not clothed?” commented Vosloo. “They inflicted a trainer on me, whom I tried to avoid at all costs; but, because we were all in Morocco and it was so hot, you just don’t eat in that kind of climate. So I said ‘to hell with all alcohol and sugar,’ and that really did it. You’ll be amazed: stop drinking your Starbucks lattes, nix the sugar, and it’s two thousand calories less than you normally use. It was pretty easy, actually, to get in shape.”

In addition to looking like an Egyptian, Vosloo also had to talk like one. From the outset, Sommers worked on research. “Doctor Stuart Smith, of the Institute of Archeology at UCLA, went over my script to ensure everything was as authentic as possible,” said Som-

TOMB RAIDERS

“What I proposed was to do *THE MUMMY* as a big event movie,” said Sommers. “I wanted to do an epic, romantic adventure, and I didn’t want a guy wrapped in bandages.”



John Hannah, Rachel Weisz, and Brendan Fraser prepare to confront the terrors that await them in Imhotep’s underground lair, the city of the dead.

mers, who recalled some particularly illuminating details. “I never really knew how people made mummies. They didn’t just wrap you in bandages. They stuck a sharp poker up your nose to scramble your brains. Then they’d rip it out through your nose with a tong and squirt vinegar inside you, and rattle your skull around. They ripped out your kidneys, your liver and intestines, and threw them into jars. It was really a gross, disgusting process. We’re PG-13, so I just had my characters talk about this. When it came to ancient Egyptian dialogue, that was also a problem because no one has heard the language in over two thousand years. Doctor Smith really had to coach us.”

Vosloo worked with Doctor Smith by phone, phonetically learning lines, sometimes repeated back to him at 3:00 a.m., Morocco time, from L.A., when shooting demanded a new line. Vosloo was proud of his interpretation. “Imhotep’s dialogue was Ancient Egyptian all the way through, though I also speak some Hebrew,” Vosloo noted. “I’m sure the studio would have been happier if we’d

just been speaking English, but we really fought for it, and I think it’s much more authentic.”

In keeping with that authenticity, Sommers insisted his *Mummy* play it totally straight. “Absolutely,” Vosloo agreed. “I’d never do any horror acting, for want of a better word. I knew that since the ILM effects were all going to be there, I just had to show up and be absolutely straight and say, ‘Guys, I’m gonna kill you all, but, hey, I want my girlfriend.’ That is what this film was all about.”

British actor John Hannah (*SLIDING DOORS*) imparted necessary exposition as Weisz’ screen brother, Jonathan Carnahan. Weisz, Fraser and Hannah supplied Sommers’ requisite vein of humor. “Imhotep is *Sturm und Drang*,” Vosloo observed, “their stuff is far lighter, throwing in those aspects of comedy. They were really great.” Vosloo was particularly complimentary of his co-star Fraser’s performance. “If this really works, it’ll change the public’s whole perception of Brendan Fraser. It really puts him in a whole new kind of Clark Gable-Harrison Ford-romantic leading man role.”

The production landed in Marrakesh two weeks prior to shooting to set up a base of operations in the ancient market city and finalize the transformation of the city into by-gone Cairo, an operation that employed both physical art direction and digital enhancement. “The real Cairo today is a modern city, with huge hotels and office blocks,” explained production designer Cameron. “It was much easier to shoot in Marrakesh. We turned the local Town Hall into the Cairo Museum of Antiquities, which was quite an interesting project. We took over several streets and squares, took down telephone lines and electricity cables, and dressed it with period cars, market stalls, and brought in camels and really gave it the atmosphere of Cairo.”

Visual effects producer Jennifer Bell was on hand to shepherd the logistical aspects of the effects. “We shot a lot of plates for our matte paintings in Marrakesh, we did a sandstorm sequence there, and we had to endure some sandstorms ourselves.” The sandstorm in the film was one of a series of apocalyptic phenomena conjured by Imhotep in an attempt to disable mortal intervention in his plan to revive his ancient queen. “The sandstorms were amazing,” commented Burton. “They were kind of an outgrowth of existing technology that had been done on *TWISTER* which we adapted to our own evil purposes. It’s pretty spectacular.”

Numerous other plagues wrought by ILM included rains of insects, beetles, locusts and flies. “We didn’t do frogs,” Burton apologized. Dudman’s crew were also called upon to set what he believes may be a prosthetic record. “We had umpteen crowds running around covered in boils and sores, and we had to mass-produce prosthetics for all of them,” he stated. “As I recall, we applied 147 prosthetic makeups in three hours, just six of us. They were chuckled on, but we did it, and churned out a crowd of about 400 covered in prosthetic boils.” Calculating the math, each artist handled 24

makeups, at eight an hour, produced one make-up every seven point five minutes.

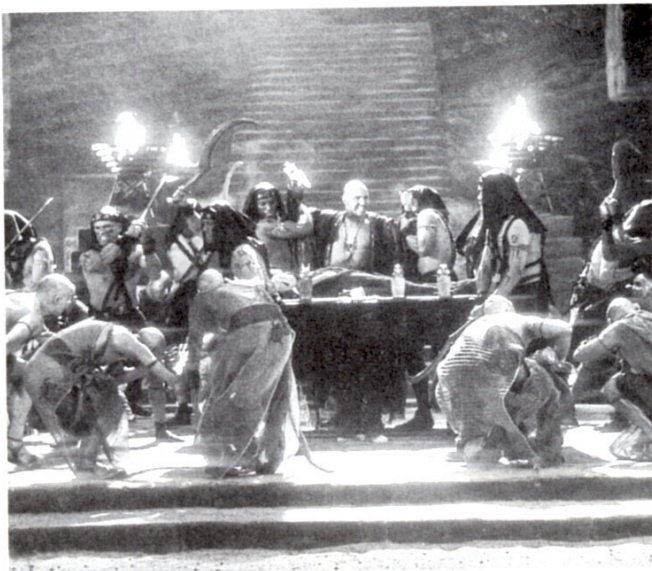
Fortunately for Dudman, both the plague of boils and the first applications of Arnold Vosloo's partially regenerated Imhotep prosthetic occurred in night shoots, sparing Vosloo and the prosthetic team the nightmare of trying to make makeup stick in 130° heat. Application times for Vosloo's full-head rotted makeup, a foam prosthetic with LEDs, averaged an hour and a half, with the half-head version taking approximately 50 minutes.

Digital crowd replication and background plates for period city-scape matte paintings completed the Marrakesh effects duties for ILM. A remote desert location at Erfoud, near the Algerian border, would next pit cast and crew against the full force of the Saharan heat. Sommers recalled his first experience of the desert landscape, on a location scout prior to the shoot. "I now understand when in LAWRENCE OF ARABIA they ask Lawrence why he likes the desert and he says, 'Because it's clean.' It really is; and it's so quiet. We've been talking about that in editing, how there are no sound effects out in the desert. Whenever you cut to night it's a cliché you hear crickets, but when you're really out there it's like being on the surface of the moon."

Director of photography Biddle was equally enamored by the natural beauty of the desert, which often necessitated mobilizing the crew at 2:30 a.m. to capture the first rays of morning light. "The color scheme was so romantic," said Sommers. "The sky was blue and the desert was gold. We got really nervous on our first location scout. The desert looked so beautiful. Then one of our location contacts told us that by the time we started shooting in May, it was going to be so hot that the sky turns white. Adrien was so depressed, but for some reason when we arrived it was really hot, but the sky stayed blue." Shooting was structured for the early hours and evenings to avoid the flat, harsh, featureless lighting cast by the midday sun. Then, as they arrived at Humanaptra, the story took on a

ROMANCING THE BONES

"Since the ILM effects were going to be there, I just had to show up," said Vosloo, "and be absolutely straight and say, 'Guys, I'm gonna kill you, but I want my girlfriend.'"



In the prologue, set in ancient Egypt, Imhotep is seized by the temple guards before he can complete the blasphemous resurrection ceremony.

darker bearing.

An extinct volcano housing a disused ancient prison served as the entrance to the Mummy's subterranean domain. Cameron's discovery solved a story point and began a series of events in his director's mind that would set up a new climax for the film by multiplying the odds against O'Connell's team.

"We knew we wanted to build this city in the desert," Sommers observed, "but it had to be hidden because no one's seen it in a thousand years. We didn't want to make it so small it would be boring, but if it was huge somebody would have spotted it. Allan was driving around Morocco and he found this volcano; that gave us the idea to build everything inside." As written into the script, the moment of discovery of the city in the film was to be an optical illusion that revealed itself only from a certain part of the desert, at a certain time of day. ILM provided the visual trick, shooting elements in the desert. It was around this time Dudman

ultimately finalized the look for the fiercest of Imhotep's minions buried with him at Hamunaptra.

"Stephen re-wrote the script halfway through our build, when we were already up and running," Dudman recalled. "He came in and said, 'Wouldn't it be great if there were these things called Soldier Mummies? I wonder what they'd look like?' I sat down with my lead designer, Gary Pollard, and we came up with the design for the Soldier Mummies and the Priest Mummies."

Dudman and Pollard conferred closely with ILM, who advised on the technical parameters required for rendering computer-generated versions of the new ancillary characters. Dudman's design process also crossed over into the realm of the costume department. "John Bloomfield, the costume designer, was very, very helpful and let us have free rein, which I can only admire him for," Dudman remarked. "We ran everything by him, costume-

wise, but we handled the total look of the Soldier Mummies."

Burton explained, "The Priests are Imhotep's minions. When they wake up from their three-thousand-year sleep, they're not in particularly good shape; they're pretty screwed up. Their limbs aren't exactly what they used to be, and their faces definitely have seen better days. But they're aggressive, and they're nasty, and they won't stop until somebody chops them into enough tiny pieces to prevent them from being useful. That doesn't mean they stop moving, but they're not that big of a threat anymore. These are all bandaged-up guys; they're a lot creepier and more corpse-like than the traditional Hammer and the original Universal Mummy. The Priests are more or less sort of hand-to-hand fighters. They're guys whose business is raising the dead, not fighting, but they're very creepy and clawy, and they're hanging all over everybody and they're very dangerous and nasty."

"Just about the time those guys get dispatched, the Soldier Mummies show up," Burton continued. "These guys, although they're mummies, and brought back from the dead, are well armed. They're extremely strong, move incredibly quick. They can leap through the air, and they are very aggressive. They were born a little out of some of the really great Hong Kong period warrior pictures. They're not drawn too strongly from that, because we didn't want to cross the genre, but they are certainly very, very good fighters. They carry battle axes, swords, spears; they move in groups, and they attack in a very sophisticated style. They wear armored skirts and armored breastplates, and usually have more than one weapon."



he did with the earlier ILM conceptual art, Sommers homed onto one key image that crystallized the Soldier Mummy concept and the feel for the climax of the film. "Nick Dudman did the drawing that really turned everybody on," noted Burton. "This guy who's leaping through the air

continued on page 46

continued from page 28

with two blades raised and this huge snarl on his face and his eyes wide open with this big tall hat and all this stuff flowing off him. He jumped right off the page. Stephen Sommers said, "That's the guy!" and I hung that picture on my wall here at ILM to remind me this is what these guys had to be like. They're going to be really, really scary. These guys are mean!"

Dudman instructed Pollard to produce a battery of half-scale head and shoulder clay maquettes depicting the Priest and Soldier Mummy concepts, imparting each character with a unique and separate personality. "We had about 20 Priest and Soldier Mummies, and they all had to hold your interest, even if they might just get one big quick close-up," said Dudman. "I wanted to feel that there was a history behind each one. Gary came up with the lot. He did splendid stuff. He's a very good characterizer."

Look closely and you might catch a small homage to the creator of the original latex and bandage Karloff Mummy amongst the group. "One of our mummies is very much a Jack Pierce celebration," Dudman pointed out. "We wanted to make sure we didn't inadvertently copy what somebody else had done, which, with that many previous versions out there, could easily happen quite accidentally. We also wanted to get a flavor of what this movie was about. This was a Universal Picture, very much in the trend of the old '30s movie. We all grew up on these things and it's important to take them seriously, to take what you can from them and pass a little bit on. I'd like to hope Jack Pierce would spot a few things in our movie if he were alive."

May through August, 1998, filming of *THE MUMMY* filled six sound stages at Shepperton Studios, in the heart of the English countryside. Shooting was laborious, requiring Vosloo in and out of makeup in his partially regenerated subterranean guise. "We had to shoot a live-action reference plate of Arnold for every visual effects shot," stated effects producer Bell. "Several passes for ILM and then one to give the editor,

FILLING KARLOFF'S BANDAGES

"I hope we can rekindle interest in the old films," said Arnold Vosloo. "It would be really cool if some of the young audience went out and rented the original."



The mummification process is performed on the still living Imhotep—as punishment for his blasphemous attempt to raise the princess from the dead.

Bob Ducsay, some way to pace and time the action. This also gave John Burton's animators a way to reference the nuances of the shot, to make sure the CG character always had the same mannerisms as Arnold."

Not putting too fine a point on it, Stephen Sommers declared, "Shooting special effects is a huge pain in the ass! ILM were fantastic, and my crew up in San Raphael were great. I'd just want to work with them again and again, but, boy, it's a big pain in the butt. It's like making two movies. It takes twice as much time and effort as any other movie. My normal shooting day lasted 14 to 16 hours, but that's just to make the movie. After that I'd have to spend at least another three or four hours every day dealing with all those practicalities. And this one was more complex than *DEEP RISING*—more shots, bigger shots. Unbelievable."

Although Vosloo found the process—and his director's boundless exuberance—exhausting, the opportunity of bringing a character to life in the digital realm was a unique and rewarding experience. "It

was fantastic. It's you, but it's not you, but it is you," Vosloo mused. "It really was a head game. There came a point where I was there, with all these little red LEDs stuck all over me, and I started to think I might as well not be there; I was going through the motions. Then I saw the playback on the computer monitor, showing what they're going to be doing to me. I freaked out. I realized I had to go for it with every take because they were using everything. I asked them if they wanted me to ham it up and play it broad. They said no, be as subtle as you want. It was amazing. If this works, these guys will win the Academy Award."

Vosloo compared the technique to Gary Sinese's scenes in *FORREST GUMP* when ILM removed the actor's legs. "Now imagine Gary with his stomach blown away and you can see the back of his spine, his heart throbbing, even completely through him, and all of that completely three-dimensional. I can see why a lot of people would be turned off by it, but I really think it's the future. It's totally taking performance to

another level."

In addition to the on-set effects, Vosloo also appeared at Shepperton in his original splendor as High Priest, enraptured by his Princess, Anksu-Namun. "I worked so hard in making the Mummy human. I wanted to make sure it's very understandable this guy just loves this woman—when you see her naked, painted in gold, you will understand too—but I didn't even think about this guy's special powers, the fact that he was a holy man. I just played a guy who was fairly powerful and had some kind of voodoo, but he was really a man in love, who prostrated himself in front of this woman. That was all I went for. All the other stuff will be there, but on my side of things, that's all I went for."

One concern for Vosloo, both as an admirer of the genre and as a relative newcomer at the center of a big-time Hollywood blockbuster, was that comparisons would be made between his and Karloff's legendary performance. "Every day I was thinking, 'I'm gonna get crucified. I should never have done this job,' Vosloo reflected. "Hopefully the fear factor ramped it up a notch. I know the studio's going to make sure it's not just the genre fans who will come to see this film, but the hope is they will accept us too. As Jim Jacks is fond of saying—'It's not your grandfather's Mummy.'"

Sommers and Vosloo discussed the Karloff influence, to the extent that Vosloo offered to duplicate mannerisms and demeanor. "Karloff was so underrated in the first one," commented Vosloo, "so still and quiet; it was very nice." Sommers' response was quick but reassuring. "Stephen said no. He told me to make it my own; he told me that was why he cast me, because what I had been doing was interesting, and it was right for what we were doing." Vosloo revealed their creative solution, partly a product of his research. "The priests in ancient Egypt were handed down from father to son, and from a very young age raised and taught by their fathers and the other priests how to behave, until they finally stepped into



Industrial Light and Magic's computer-generated imagery helps separate the new version of *THE MUMMY* from its predecessors, inflicting a swarm of locusts (above), plague of boils (left) and showing a face dissolving into sand (below).



the role or even ascended to High Priest, which is what Imhotep was. In the back of my head I said to myself, 'Imagine that Boris was your Dad, that's the kind of genes you're carrying and that's the way you carry yourself.'

As the main unit wrapped up its work on *THE MUMMY*, a final week of shooting followed that supplied ILM with a crucial element to bring to life their visual effects. "We spent our last week in London shooting a motion-capture session with Arnold, duplicating all the shots that would contain the CG Imhotep, capturing Arnold's motion on a green-screen recreation of the set," Bell explained. "All that information for each of those shots could then be translated into the computer and applied to our CG Imhotep, so—as Stephen put it—Arnold's mother would know it was him."

Five months later, in his cutting room at Universal City, Sommers sat down with his editorial team and composer Jerry Goldsmith for a music spotting session, viewing the latest cut of the film he had pitched two years previously. The assembly was full of title cards representing missing visual effects, but as the shots were trickling in, the finished film was beginning to emerge.

"It's a really fun movie!" Sommers exclaimed. "Sometimes at this point in editing you get tired of watching and rewatching your own film, but I've not got tired yet because this movie seems to keep getting better with all of the effects. They've blended really well. I think by now I've learned to integrate the effects into a story and its characters so you're not just showing the effects: something's really hap-

pening; a character is involved or growing from it. As a special effect comes to life, suddenly a story point becomes clear, or a character trait pops, suddenly something that you were hoping would be funny makes you laugh, and that's been really great."

ILM supervisor Burton was equally proud of their achievement. "I think we've created a remarkable creature," he said. "Our Mummy really looks like something you've never seen before, moves like something you've never seen before, and really creates an incredibly strong screen presence. I think cinema is always at its best when it can present something to the audience that they can't get anywhere else; and personally I see that as a Yin/Yang thing—for every feel-good movie of the summer, there should be a hide-under-the-seats movie of the summer. I

think that's what we've made."

The final word went to the Mummy himself, Arnold Vosloo, whose mellifluous voice intones the movie's opening narration. "I have this pet theory that the reason we're attracted to any of these horror icons—Dracula, Frankenstein, the Wolfman, the Mummy—is because ultimately they all beat death in their own weird way. They may get killed in the finale, but invariably they rise again in the sequel and the next one. They are immortal. I think that's why we take pleasure in them. If you asked me what I hope for with this movie, I hope you'll pay your seven bucks, it surprises you, and you have fun. But I hope we can rekindle interest in the old films. It would be really cool if some of the young audience who saw our film went out and rented the original. That would really make me happy." □

THE MUMMY

DEVELOPMENT HELL

Universal Pictures took over a decade, with a half dozen writers and directors, to unwrap Imhotep.

By Joe Fordham

THE MUMMY has a great deal riding on it, after 12 years in development, backed by the talents of nine writers and five directors. It is always difficult to assign authorship to the development process, and the 1999 MUMMY is no exception; its genesis has been a complex and multi-colored story.

According to the records of the Writers Guild of America, West, first evidence of the remake was logged in 1987 with a treatment from distinguished horror filmmaker George Romero. Although Romero proved unavailable for comment, screenwriter Abbie Bernstein was able to throw light on the concepts being entertained in 1988. "My understanding was that George Romero had originally been brought in to write and direct," Bernstein recalled. "They still wanted him to direct, but they wanted somebody else to write. So I was brought in and they said, 'What we want is something like THE TERMINATOR.' My perception of THE TERMINATOR was you have a creature chasing a person who has something he can't get rid of. The creature is going to keep chasing the person as long as he has it, but if the person stops, not only is he going to get ripped apart, but it's the end of the world.

"What I came up with," said Bernstein, "was an idea that a sacred orb had been buried with the Mummy. If you got this thing wet it would completely dissolve anything organic, so if you got one drop of this on your body, you would melt like the Wicked Witch of the West. My story was set in the present day, where scientists had designed a machine that could stimulate nerves on disabled people. They test this on a mummy that had been recently unearthed, buried with this ball, and the machine works way too well. The Mummy comes to



This design by XFX, Inc., is one of the many versions of the Mummy that were developed but never filmed.

life, starts ripping everybody to shreds and goes after its ball. One of the lab technicians, the hero of the story, grabs the ball and starts running with it, and as he's going discovers what it is and what the mummy wants. The Mummy all this time is getting stronger by ripping out people's internal organs and planting them in its own chest, where they take root. The Mummy wants to get his ball back, throw it into the ocean where it will destroy all life on Earth the

first time it rains. Our hero has to figure out how to kill the Mummy, and in the meantime everybody's thinking he's a mass murderer because everywhere he goes there are all these horrible dead bodies.

From what I understand that is not really at all what any of the subsequent versions are about."

Bernstein said Romero's involvement at this point was confined to phone conversations from his production base in Pittsburgh, but after approximately a year on the project he chose to leave. Said Bernstein, "I think the agenda of the film changed totally. While there was a smidgen of romance between the lab tech and the female acquisition person in the museum, my draft was totally constructed as a foot-race. In fact, I was told to slow it down. In my first draft, the Mummy started ripping people apart on page four. It was very violent and very fast and the Mummy was not remotely romantic. He had no more social interaction than the T-Rex did in JURASSIC PARK. He basically just wanted his ball back so he could get on with destroying the world."

With Romero's departure, Alphaville producers Jim Jacks and Sean Daniel redirected their sights to another team. Per the Writers Guild's next listing, the next two MUMMY players were logged in by a 1990 treatment by Clive Barker, followed by a 1991 screenplay by Mick Garris.

"Clive and I had met and talked about doing things together before," Garris explained. "Originally, Universal was very high on making CLIVE BARKER'S THE MUMMY, so Clive came up with a brief outline which he was going to direct. I wrote a very bizarre and twisted script based on Clive's very bizarre and twisted treatment; we both were really excited about it. Most of the story took place in Beverly Hills, in the land of tummy tucks and face lifts, but it was set in a museum

with a large Egyptology department. They brought an entire tomb and rebuilt it as it was originally in Egypt, recreated entirely within this Beverly Hills museum. It was almost like 'Chariots of the Mummies;' in other words, the ancient Egyptians were inspired by and involved with alien intelligences from thousands of years before."

Barker concurred with Garris as to the studio's conservative reaction to their refurbished Mummy tale. "It was a little too weird for Universal," Barker explained. "One of the problems is that, unlike vampires or the Frankenstein Monster, the Mummy is one of the least likely characters to scare you. So our version only used the Mummy as the starting place for something else, which was very grim."

Garris would later find himself further grappling with the mummy, as would George Romero, but before their return Alan Ormsby was brought in to provide another version in 1993 that brought the project closer to its origins. Ormsby, veteran of Paul Schrader's updated CAT PEOPLE, recalled a take on THE MUMMY that was in some ways close to Bernstein's, although his pitch was delivered cold.

"When I came on board, I didn't know any other people had been involved," Ormsby said. "What I was told was that Anne Rice had written a book called *The Mummy*, which I also hadn't read, and I guess they were a little worried about some conflict with what we were doing with THE MUMMY. Basically, I went back to the original Karloff film and did a modern day updated version of that story. It had a prologue in Egypt and then the rest of it took place in Los Angeles. My pitch to them was that it should be a 'Terminator' Mummy. They liked that,"—he laughed—"I didn't know they'd heard it before!"

Ormsby recalled that Joe Dante was linked to the project as director at this point, which may give some idea to the tone of the project at the time. It was grounded in L.A.—Dante's idea; makeup effects man Rick Baker would eventually become involved; and both writer and director brought a new enthusiasm to the source material. The problem was that costs had begun to climb.

"The script came in with a fairly sizeable budget," stated Ormsby. "I think that spooked [Universal exec] Sid Sheinberg, and he kind of dismissed the whole thing with the idea that it should take place in

UN-SCARY MONSTER?

"The Mummy is the least likely character to scare you," said Clive Barker. "So our version only used him as a starting place for something else, which was very grim."



George Romero (directing THE DARK HALF) was the first director attached to THE MUMMY, when Universal first decided to revive the character back in 1987.

Egypt. He wanted the guy with the bandages stumbling around. I don't know if he's right or wrong, but that was what he wanted, and that's not what we delivered. We did have a guy in bandages; we had him come back to life; it had a lot of great stuff in it, but it wasn't there yet. It never quite got finished before they pulled the plug."

Ormsby envisioned the ancient prince Imhotep, like Karloff's character in the original, as an intelligent, romantic figure—although Ormsby's would have been more overtly virile and would ultimately have suffered a particularly ironic demise. "Imhotep regenerated himself into a very attractive young guy," Ormsby explained. "The way he learns about the past—what happened to Egypt—was that he went to a synagogue. He hears people singing in Hebrew, goes in and sees the murals on the wall, and they're the only language he can understand. The Rabbi talks to him in Hebrew, tells him about the Red Sea. My ending took place in an underground pyramid in Death Valley. I had a twist where Imhotep discovered his princess really didn't love him, that the whole three thousand years he'd spent in this living death was based on a wrong assumption, at which moment he became quite vicious." Ormsby remained open-minded as to the potential: "I loved the idea. If I had another shot at it, I would have said, 'Let's do this straight; let's try to do this really scary.' I was very

disappointed it didn't pan out."

Dante and his subsequent 1994 screenwriter, John Sayles, were unavailable for comment. 1994 also saw the return involvement of George Romero, followed closely by Mick Garris in 1995. "George came in and did a new couple of drafts," Garris recalled. "He was involved in another project where the schedules interfered, and it was pay-or-play, so he had to leave THE MUMMY to do this other project, which eventually fell apart. The poor guy—such a nice man and a very talented filmmaker. George's version was close to going, so Alphaville came to me to do a rewrite and direct. I did two or three drafts that I was really excited about, and the studio had virtually green-lit. We were into casting, I was considering Vincent Perez as Imhotep. We had Steve Johnson doing designs for the effects, which were beautiful; he and his art director Bill Corso really did some great stuff."

Garris found himself back in more familiar territory compared to his previous mummy venture with Clive Barker.

"What Clive and I had done was something entirely out of the imagination. This next version really combined the Karloff and the Lon Chaney, Jr. movies in that we had both Imhotep [Karloff's reincarnated prince] and Kharis [Chaney's bandaged zombie]. It was a romance," Garris continued. "It did have some elements of DRACULA, that love beyond the ages between Imhotep and his princess, which was very similar to the passionate romance that Coppola used—but that actually came from the Richard Matheson-scripted television version of DRACULA. I would love to have made it a period movie, in that Art Deco explosion of the '20s and '30s which was inspired by the King Tut discoveries in 1922, but the budget would not allow that. They were very tight on the budget."

Contemporary settings and Egyptian prologue were to be shot in British Columbia; production staff had been secured. What nobody counted on was the sale of Universal MCA to Seagrams. It was a frustrating time for Garris. "We were virtually green lit," he explained. "Sid Sheinberg was leaving the company, and he had a deal with Universal. They gave him the option to choose movies in the pipeline at Universal to produce through his independent company, the Bubble Factory. He decided he wanted to produce THE MUMMY."

For a second time, Garris saw his version of the project unravel. "Our budget was be-

tween \$15- and \$16-million. It was a low budget, high quality movie. Sheinberg decided to spend a million dollars on a writer and, with this name attached, draw a more stellar cast. This was going to jack up the budgetary levels, but it was a little bit disheartening because everyone was so happy with the script, including myself. No writer wanted to do it. They all either liked the script or felt it wasn't something they wanted to do. They then decided to bring in a high-profile director. They were unable to do that too. So basically they came in on a virtually green-lit project and turned it into a no-go movie."

In 1996, one year after Garris' last draft of *THE MUMMY*, the next incarnation was registered at the Writers Guild. Written by Kevin Jarre, whose credits include *TOMBSTONE* and *GLORY*, this would prove to be the final stepping stone that led to Stephen Sommers' ultimate involvement and the film unspooling on screens this summer. As producer Jim Jacks explained, the executives at Universal were still determined to resurrect the Mummy. They were finally convinced the way to do this was to provide finances for stars, a period setting, action, and effects.

Jarre's script was dark, romantic and harder-edged. Stephen Sommers' version would adopt a radically new tone which differed from the original Imhotep tale in two major areas. First, Imhotep must still fulfill his curse, but his revenge is not initially directed at the main protagonists of our story. Secondly, Imhotep still wants to resurrect his bride, but the reincarnation theme has been transformed into a rejuvenation. "Basically what happens in our story," Jacks explained, "is they awaken the Mummy; they escape to Cairo; he follows them, but then once he gets the woman he needs to regenerate his princess, he fulfills the Mummy's curse by killing the men that actually awak-



get. "A lot of writers become very protective once they get their script on, but Stephen was very collaborative," Jacks recalled. "The interesting thing was, as the script got better and better, the budget kept climbing. In fact, when I started off I told Stephen the studio would never spend more than \$40-million on this movie. Our first budget came in pretty high, so I thought the studio would just never agree to it. When they said, 'Well, it's pretty high but who do you think we can get in it?' I had no idea they'd react like that. I thought they'd say, 'Well, we're not even going to talk about this until we cut \$15 mil. Anyway, we started talking about casting, and they put Brendan on the list. Now Brendan shares an agent with Steve, so he was aware of the project, and he was instantly interested. They offered him the part; we got the movie green-lit; the budget still crept up a little, but I have to say the studio have stuck with it, and we went off and we made it.'"

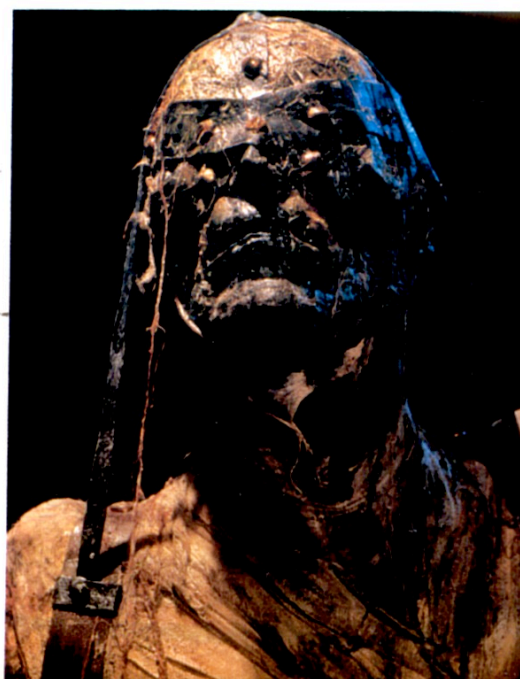
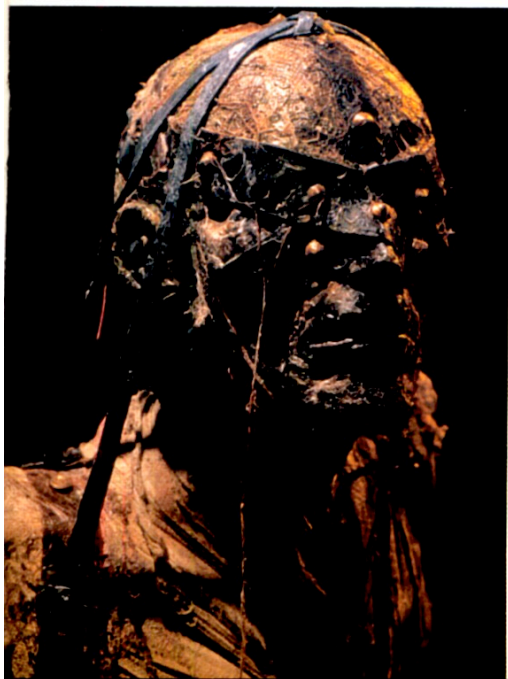
The second half of Sommers' story involves Fraser and Hannah's attempts to prevent Imhotep completing the reincarnation of his bride, with Weisz as sacrificial victim. Jacks continued, "Imhotep has to go back to the tomb, to this City of the Dead, to revive Anksanamon. Our heroes follow him and he causes to be reborn all the priests and soldiers that were buried alive with him. These are our bandaged mummies. It's like an army of the undead."

Only time will tell if this new Mummy will rise in triumph or crumble into dust until the next revival. "You don't want to be overly optimistic," said Jim Jacks. "Certainly we aren't, but the nice thing is we're already figuring out what we're going to do with the sequel, how the Mummy comes to London. We actually changed the fate of one of our characters—if there's a sequel we want this character to be in it. We certainly had fun making it and we'd like to do it again." □

ened him—not our heroes, who were actually on a different part of the dig at that time."

The heroes in question are Brendan Fraser as a French Legionnaire, Rachel Weisz as an American archaeologist, and John Hannah as a British Egyptologist. Fraser was secured while Sommers worked with Jacks and company in developing the final screenplay, a factor which itself proved advantageous to the evolving bud-

XFX's designs and makeup tests for Mick Garris' unfilmed *MUMMY* included a Clive Barker-inspired S&M element, slightly reminiscent of the Cenobites.





THE MUMMY: The turbulent relationship between Brendan Fraser & Rachel Weisz was inspired by the Gary Grant/Rosziled Russell rivalry in *HIS GIRL FRIDAY* (1940). "It was very much that unlikely pairing," says Weisz. "They're a pair who spar all the way through."

MUMMY MAIDEN

RACHEL WEISZ

STAR OF INDEPENDENTLY PRODUCED PIX GOES COMMERCIAL, ENDURING CAMELS, CURSES, DESERT HEAT AND CGI EFFECTS.

BY RUSSELL DRAKE

Speaking from her London home in the grip of a "freezing, freezing, honec-billing winter," Rachel Weisz reflected on her role in Universal's production of *THE MUMMY*, only months ago—while literally sweating it out in the Moroccan desert's oppressive heat—she was deep-sixing resurrected Egyptians with Brendan Fraser. It was an episodic addendum in what's turned-out to be a very busy four-year odyssey: with eight theatrical features behind her—playing an archeologist, a nuclear physicist, a wind-swept Victorian heroine, a modern noir femme, an Eastern European peasant wife and "a cow"—Weisz is now sinking her teeth into a meaty chunk of Tennessee Williams on the London West End Stage. Little wonder why Stephen Sommers, director of *THE MUMMY*, cast the actress as Evelyn Carnahan, a crusading prelibertine.

But let's flashback to winter, 1998: Weisz was summoned to the hallowed temples of Universal Studios to meet with Sommers on the heels of the Sundance Film Festival. "After I audi-



The Mummy (Arnold Vosloo) tries to separate Evelyn (Weisz) from her bodily fluids. Producer Jim Jacks & co-producer Sean Daniels referred to the film as *RAIDERS OF THE LOST MUMMY* ("Now it's a bit more like *GUNGA DIN*," says Jacks).

tioned," recalls the actress, "I came back to London and then I flew back to screen test with Brendan—two of the main funny scenes from the movie between Brendan's character and Evelyn—then we went off to Morocco in March.

"*THE MUMMY* was a comedy. The whole film was funny. Stephen wanted someone who was very

much a blue-stocking, academic girl but he also wanted her to be likeable. There's nothing Americans hate more than a stuck-up British girl [laughs]. He wanted to create a personality that had a lot of warmth. Even though she's been hurried away in libraries and Egyptology studies for years and years, Evelyn is quite fun. And she's no shrinking

violet. She's studied Egyptology her whole life, so all she really wants to do is go out on digs where girls aren't really allowed. She's a very modern girl. I wouldn't call her a feminist, it's too early for that. And she's quite proper...put it this way, I don't think she's ever, um, been kissed...but she is kind of a rebel, a rebel who's completely ill-equipped to

deal with the situations she gets put in."

It was evident from the screen test that Weisz and Fraser obviously clicked. One past point of reference for their on-screen rapport was the relationship between news room rivals Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell in *HIS GIRL FRIDAY*, the 1940 classic, adapted from a Charles Lederer script, was directed by Howard Hawks. "That's the kind of script Stephen wrote," said Weisz. "I mean, it's not as fast paced as that but it was very much that unlikely pairing, a pair who spar all the way through."

THE MUMMY fades-in on Evelyn, who's working in the Museum of Egyptology in Cairo. Enter her brother Jonathan (John Hannah), an archeologist who tells his sibling that Rick O'Connell (Fraser) has purloined an ancient artifact.

"When I get to see this, I recognize it as being something that is incredibly important, a key to a hidden temple called Hamunaptra," explains Weisz. "We go off to find Brendan and he's actually in prison, about to be hanged. I have to save his life, not necessarily out of the goodness of my heart, but because I know that he's the only person to have ever found this lost city and come back alive to tell the tale. So I plead with the warden of the prison, who's sitting watching the execution with thousands of prisoners jangling their hars in a sort of *MIDNIGHT EXPRESS* fashion. I tell the warden that Brendan knows where the Hamunaptra is, and the warden doesn't believe me. I say, 'He does! He does!' and, at that moment, Brendan is about to be hung—in fact, he's banging but his neck hasn't broken! Brendan gets cut down and the warden comes along on the journey, because everyone wants to find the treasure. You see, anyone who's ever gone in search of Hamunaptra has died. We all end up going in search of the lost city: the men are in it for the trea-

RACHEL WEISZ

"I don't like horror films! I get really scared! The thing about *THE MUMMY* is it's not a horror film. It's PG-13 horror. It's really funny, a perfect script & mine was a really brilliant character."



7. Brendan Fraser, Weisz & John Hannah "John, in our movie, is very much in the tradition of Cary Grant or David Niven," says producer Jira Jacks. 8. "My character, Evelyn, is buried away in libraries & Egyptology," notes Weisz. "But she's no shrinking violet. She wants to go on digs where girls aren't allowed."



sure, and I'm in it for the archeology. That's the thrust of the story."

Weisz admits her own studies in Egyptology were pretty limited. "I bought a book called *How To Decipher Hieroglyphics* but it was too difficult to get my head round [laughs]." Her first real taste of ancient traditions was of a much more tactile nature. "We all

had to learn to race camels. We arrived in Marrakesh before the start of shooting and spent two weeks, every day, on a camel to keep the studio's insurers happy. It was actually quite hard. Camels don't have a steady gait, like horses, they're just all over the place—and they're bloody fast as well." Weisz quickly realized all her prior equestrian skills

went out the window. "It absolutely did not help. Nothing can prepare you for that camel apart from the camel, which is a law unto itself. To make it go fast you have to shout, 'Zeet, zeet, zeet, zeet!' Then to make it stop, you pull the reins and tap on its front leg with a stick while yelling, 'Hap, hap, hap, hap, bap!'—and it sort of crouches down and almost throws you off. They're really dangerous creatures and they smell really bad! Their breath is beyond adjectives. It's just the worst halitosis in the world."

But the worst was yet to come. "Marrakesh was not so bad, because it was a city," Weisz recounts, "but after two months in the desert, where we were at most of the time, it was very tough. There were scorpions and snakes, people getting bitten by scorpions and getting air-lifted out. We were in the middle of nowhere in 120° heat and it was, physically, very demanding." Weisz was not alone in her suffering. Actors required to transport themselves on camelback were subjected to boot camp training. Eventually, the ensemble were able to drive their mounts across the desert parallel to dune buggy camera cars that shot the action. ("Not one single pain in the butt," grins director Sommers. "Not one single whiner. They were just a world-class group.")

Further challenges included the rigors and the endless hours devoted to visual effects. "I had to react in horror to Arnold Vosloo [Imhotep, the Mummy] when he didn't look any different than Arnold Vosloo," said Weisz. "We did a lot of work in front of blue-screens, imagining swarms of locusts coming at us, imagining armies of rotting mummies coming at you, when there was actually nothing there. That was a first for me and it was very technical, but it was challenging. When you have to make your reactions real, it's very hard. Normally, you read things off the actor in

front of you: if there's nothing there, it's all up to your imagination. It can be quite exhausting to keep doing it again and again, and you don't get anything back.'

Weisz's acting career originated at Britain's Cambridge University, where she studied English. It was an environment that lent an insight into Evelyn Carnahan's academic background, although Weisz declines to describe herself as a full-fledged blue-stocking: "I know exactly what a blue-stocking girl is like! I've known a few in my time [laughs]. I'm a bit of a chameleon, so when I was at Cambridge I was quite bookish. I didn't have glasses." On campus, Weisz developed *Talking Tongues*, her own student theatre repertory which entertained at Scotland's Edinburgh Festival. "It was actually just me and another girl who would perform, sometimes on a stepladder," adds Weisz with another hearty laugh. "Very avant-garde."

Talking Tongues drew a Guardian Award at the festival, prompting Weisz to join the National Theatre Studio. "I was doing an improvised show about French courtesans in the nineteenth century, when the casting director from the West End theatre production of Noel Coward's *Design for Living* came round. It was all just pretty normal. They just thought I would be right for the part." The casting turned out to be a coup: earning the London Drama Critics Circle Award as "Outstanding Newcomer." Weisz subsequently made her film debut, opposite Liv Tyler and Jeremy Irons, in Bernardo Bertolucci's *STEALING BEAUTY* (1996). Despite working with a lauded director in the Tuscany countryside, the experience was hardly idyllic. "It was just that I was playing such a bitch," Weisz explains. "I mean, it was only a little part but I was just playing a cow! I didn't really enjoy playing a cow."

The actress was promptly



Weisz and Fraser in search of a lost city. Stephen Sommers helmed the movie but, notes producer Jim Jecks, "We went through a lot of directors at different times. We had people like Clive Barker, Joe Dante, Mick Garris & George Romero."

cast in the critically-drubbed *CHAIN REACTION*, which landed co-star Keanu Reeves a Razzie Award nomination (Worst Actor). "I didn't choose it, it chose me," says Weisz. "Morgan Freeman was in it and it had a good director [Andrew Davis], so it wasn't like I'd set out to look for a snow movie or anything." Though the '96 release is, at

least marginally, a genre film, Weisz is quick to point out that "the crucial difference between a film like *CHAIN REACTION* and *THE MUMMY* is that the former film was not meant to be, and certainly never was, funny in any respect. *THE MUMMY* is a comedy. It's really light. The people are in peril but they have brilliantly drawn charac-

ters—and it's a period movie, so it's romantic. I don't want to say camp, but you know the humor in *MEN IN BLACK*? It's funny but sort of scary—and we have the same 'visual effects' guys, Industrial Light and Magic, the company that does the CGI effects. See, I can do all the talk now: the CGI from ILM!"

The following year, Weisz was afforded a more intimate role in *GOING ALL THE WAY*. Helmed by Mark Pellington, a "music director" making his theatrical debut, the cast included Amy Locane (*LEGEND OF THE MUMMY*) and Rose McGowan: "It was really low-budget, a tiny, tiny independent movie, shot in Indianapolis. It was from a novel by Dan Wakefield, which had a bit of a cult in the seventies. It's about these two hlokes in the fifties, played by Ben Affleck and Jeremy Davies, and they've just come out of the Korean War and they're coming of age, meeting with girls. I played Ben's girlfriend. It's kind of like a buddy movie. Jeremy was terrific, and Mark Pellington was a lovely man."

Shot during the same year, *SWEPT FROM THE SEA* (1997), whisked Weisz back to her homeland. Directed by Beehan Kidron, the story's central setting was windswept Victorian Cornwall. "It was an art house movie," says Weisz. "It's me and a French actor, Vincent Perez, with Kathy Bates. It was actually an adaptation of a Joseph Conrad short story." Another British-based scenario, *LAND GIRLS* (1998), cast Weisz as one of a coterie of youthful femmes grappling with Yanks during World War II. Opening quietly in the winter of '98, Weisz admits, "It didn't make the biggest splash in the world." Nevertheless, her performance impressed Stephen Sommers, among the few who screened the film.

Michael Winterbottom directed Weisz in *I WANT YOU*, an exercise in film noir that's scheduled to debut this year. "It's a fantastic movie, really uncommercial, about as uncommercial as you get," enthuses Weisz. "But it's a great film." *TASTE OF SUNSHINE*, wrapped last year in Budapest, paired the actress with Ralph Fiennes. Weisz, directed by Istvan Szabo (*MEPHISTO*), describes it

RACHEL WEISZ

"We did swarms of work in front of the blue screens, imagining swarms of insects, imagining armies of rotting mummies coming at you. That was a first for me: technical but challenging."



Weisz defines her character, Evelyn (l. w/ Fraser), as "a very modern girl. I don't think she's ever, um, been kissed. But she's kind of a rebel." & Weisz, Fraser & John Hannah ("The men are in it for the treasure, and I'm in it for the archeology," explains Weisz) The producer estimates the budget as "over \$60 million."



"as a period piece that spans a hundred years in the life of a Hungarian family. It's quite a serious film."

One can't resist asking why, with a track record of prestigious roles, would Weisz compromise with something as comparatively eclectic—and potentially profitable—as *THE MUMMY*? "Because that movie was just really funny and

mine was a really brilliant character," she replies. "As an example of its genre, I thought it was a really perfect script. So I'm basically just interested in good writing. I'm not just drawn to any particular project because it's commercial or uncommercial. It doesn't really bother me who's paying for the production."

Having said that, Weisz

is quick to add, "I don't like horror films! I get really scared! The thing about *THE MUMMY* is it's *not* a horror film. It's like PG-13 horror; it's family horror, so I'll be able to watch it. I can't watch things that are scary!" The thespian, whose university work included a dissertation on the supernatural, summarizes the appeal of the genre: "The thing to remember about creatures like Frankenstein and the Mummy is that they were once human. I think there's something about that related with everything beyond the grave. People have always been fascinated with what happens after we die, so the idea of bringing somebody back from death to haunt us, who's evil, is part of that whole tradition. People are just fascinated by the unknown. It's like fairy tales, isn't it? From when you're a child."

"*THE MUMMY* is pure entertainment. It's not a profound, thought-provoking treatise on the afterlife. In this film, it's a temple collapsing and you're running away, and then a gag and then a leap in the air, and then a camel race. There's always stuff going on: someone's drunk or someone's falling off a roof. There's constant action. It's for the MTV audience who've got to have things happening all the time—otherwise they'll go out and buy more popcorn or whatever they do!"

As for her future plans, Weisz is realizing a childhood dream of her own back on the London West End Stage. "I'm doing Tennessee Williams' play, *Suddenly Last Summer*. It's hardly ever put on but I was brought up on the film. I was always watching it a lot and—*oooh!*—I always wanted to play this part." Weisz is cast as Catherine Holly, the role played by Elizabeth Taylor in the 1959 adaptation. Flashing a smile, the actress succinctly concludes our interview with a final allusion to *THE MUMMY*: "Stephen Sommers rocks!" □



Hanneh, Fraser & Welsz open Imhotep's sarcophagus. "As a result, the Mummy wakes up, regenerates and brings with him the ten plagues of Egypt as he tries to revive his princess," says director Stephen Sommers. **B.** In the climax, the trio tries to escape the sinking city as its last vestiges collapse above ground. The producer recalls that Kevin Jern's original screenplay was "very fine but really, really dark. Very scary, very upsetting. We may do it some day in one of the sequels."

