



PHILIP JACKSON:
"Different is Better."

Science

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Q: Why low-budget science fiction?

D'or: It's a market-driven call. There are two answers. One, if you look at the last 15 years there's been a wave of erotic thrillers, there's been a wave of mob films, but science fiction is the only genre that has remained absolutely consistent as a reliable performer within the world of B-movie production—the films that go directly to video, with perhaps a symbolic theatrical release before going to cable. And now, as the market faces a higher state of chaos than there's ever been, sci-fi is about the only thing that will make the distributors feel confident. And two, foreign markets are claiming a bigger and bigger role in the ability to finance these pictures.

Jackson: Specifically the Pacific Rim.

D'or: Science fiction is huge in the Pacific Rim, and the Pacific Rim has expectations in style, fashion and look. When a Japanese buyer calls you and says, "I just saw *Replikator*, and we really like that nice noir look," you know that you've got something that's very important to them. It's a quality that has to remain constant throughout various pictures. We look at those markets—Japan, Korea, Germany and the U.S.A.—to define what we're going to be able to raise money for.

Jackson: I like science fiction, personally. There's an opportunity to challenge conventional thoughts, to come up with the great "What if?" scenarios. These are the qualities that give you an opportunity to have real fun. But the fundamental parameters can't change. There has to be action, there has to be guns, there has to be explosions, and there has to be a strong, American male lead.

Q: It has to be an American?

D'or: Yes.

Jackson: Well, let's put it this way, American or...

D'or: Perceived...

Jackson: Perceived as American. We speak with our Japanese buyers and our Korean buyers, and they're very explicit on those points. They're very explicit on age range and acceptability. We have tried occasionally to break those parameters with a really hot film, full of action, full of special effects, and a strong female lead. In the B-movie market, you cannot sell a strong female lead. But *Craver's Gate* is packed with good female action roles. You won't find screaming airheads clutching their purses while their men battle it out in our movies. We want every person to have character and to be there for a reason. But, it's a very cruel and very defined market.

PRODUCERS NETWORK ASSOCIATES

Fiction on a *Shoestring*

Producers Network Associates (PNA) is a Toronto-based production company specializing in low-budget science fiction. PNA has produced several titles including *Replikator*, starring Ned Beatty, and the just-completed *Craver's Gate*, starring Michael Paré. In three years, producer/directors Philip Jackson and Daniel D'or have attained what most movie producers in Canada have only dreamed of—financial independence from government funding. The duo have four other pictures slated for production this year, with international funding and distribution deals already in place. Their motto for success is: Different is Better.

Interview by Angela Baldassarre.

All photos courtesy of PNA

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D'or: You look at the international market, and it's very traditional, very stereotyped. And the reality is that people like guns and lots of people being killed in movies. Comedies and things like that don't translate easily into other languages. That's why action pictures are really the thing to sell in foreign markets, because they translate well. You don't have to have any language in the movie, you just show the action. Blow 'em up and kill 'em, and it sells. You don't even need a good movie and it will sell.

Q: Your background is in technology and you worked for Air Canada and Ontario Hydro designing interactive laser discs. What draws you to science fiction and special effects?

D'or: Well, the interesting thing about doing this type of film is that the technology is changing so quickly. We can create a lot of these effects at an increasingly lower cost. And now, we can include some of the higher-budgeted effects that you see in *The Terminator* films or *Timecop*. I strive to make each film original, from at least a technical point of view. It is difficult to do low-budget sci-fi, at least in Canada, because there really isn't enough money to compete with audiences' expectations. Philip has taught me that originality and just sheer

creativity can take over the mysticism of this sci-fi world. The trend in Hollywood for about the last seven, eight years has been remakes. Philip has taught me that different is better. I really am now starting to believe that. I didn't when I first met him. But the concept of different is better is that you take people from outside a narrow range of thinking and bring them in, rather than trying to win over a general population.

Q: I understand that you pride yourselves on never having to rely on government agencies or any kind of public funding. Why is that?

Jackson: One of the reasons is that it takes time. When you get involved with the government agencies, they tend to get involved in the creative aspects of the script. It prolongs the process of getting a film done. And frankly, I think we'd still be working on our first film if we had gone that route. What we do is to try and make films relatively quickly, because it doesn't have to take that long. Not only that, being a small independent, I really do believe that the agencies are not there to cater to us. We have to fend for ourselves. The agencies are there for the corporations that are perceived to do very well in this business.

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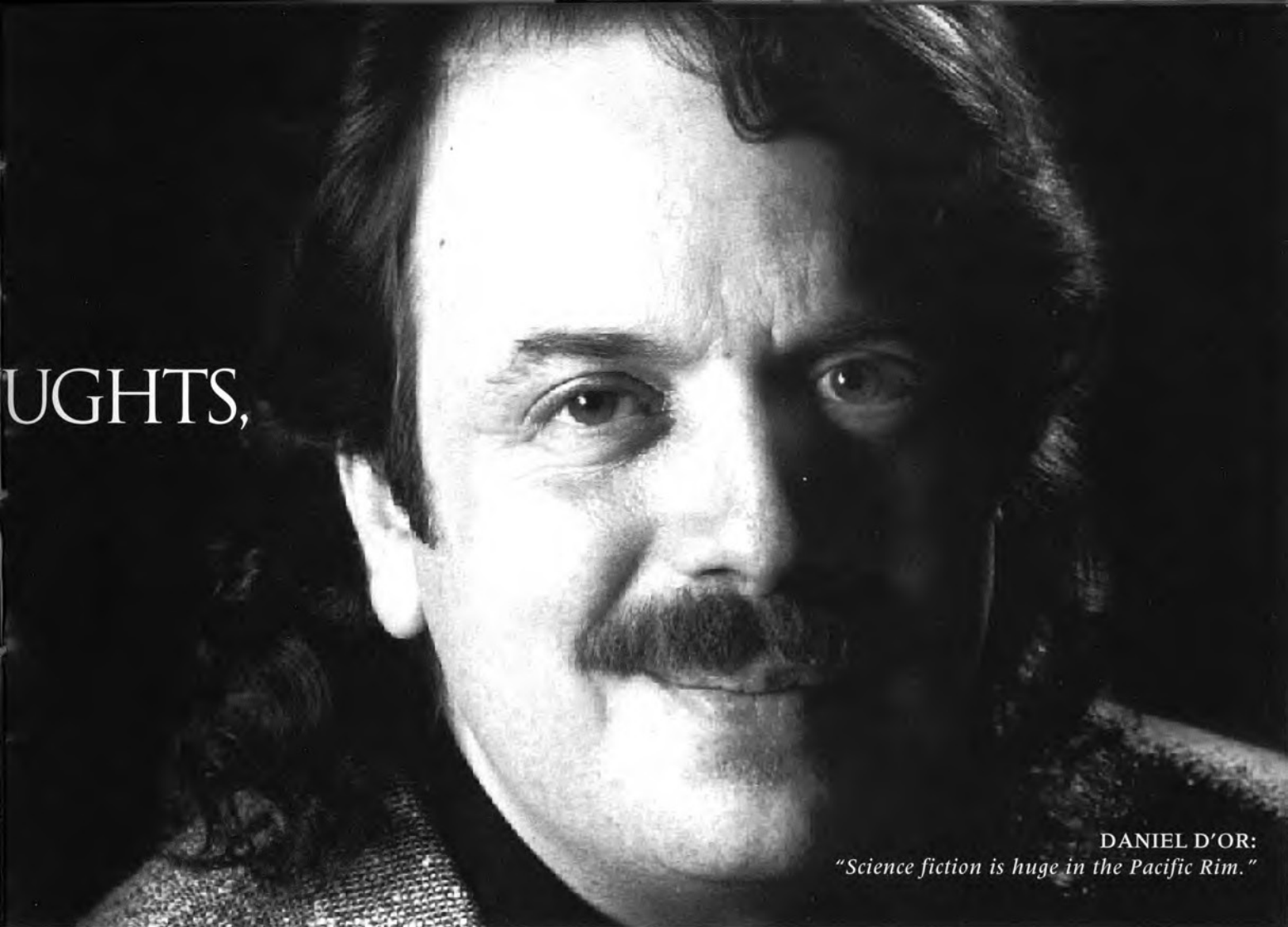
D'or: And they will deny that. I did get money from Telefilm Canada, years ago, on various projects. But I know the process. The government agencies feed the bigger production companies, and, frankly, we can't take advantage of that. The smaller ones struggle and are pushed aside, and very talented filmmakers find it very difficult to get their movies made. We said, "To hell with that, we're going to make movies. We don't need Telefilm. We can find the American way." And we did. We go down there and find distribution guarantees and cultivate relationships. We put the deals together and bring them back to Canada, and we spend the money here. We take advantage of everything that we have, as Canadians. We have an incredible talent pool here.

Jackson: We're very proud of our people, our crew, the entire team that works on our films. We get people who can get much higher wages on much larger films, not because it is the best job available, but because we're the only ones telling them, "The wackier the creative idea is—go for it." There aren't too many producers telling them that.



CRAVER'S GATE:
"You won't find screaming airheads clutching their purses in our movies."

UGHTS,



DANIEL D'OR:

"Science fiction is huge in the Pacific Rim."



Q: You have managed to pre-sell your films domestically and internationally. How do you succeed where so many fail?

D'or: You don't just call yourselves filmmakers. You have to think like a lawyer. You have to think like a banker. You have to think like a distributor. So when you're speaking to these people, you speak their language. You have to understand where they're coming from and you have to be different. A good script just will not do it.

Jackson: The odds are against you, no matter what your talent for writing is.

D'or: But the key to filmmaking is to do the impossible. You've got to find a way of doing the impossible. Just don't hit a wall and say, "It can't be done," or, "I can't get this person," or, "No one will read my script." Make someone read it. Find a way. Don't just sit there and say, "It can't happen." It can happen. There's a million different ways of making it happening. ■