

From Sea to Sea

Montreal

There has been plenty of big-time moviemaking action in Montreal recently. Bruce Willis and Richard Gere were in town shooting scenes for their upcoming remake of *The Day of the Jackal*, as was *Seinfeld*'s Jason Alexander, shooting the screen adaptation of Terrence McNally's award-winning, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* But while everyone's attention was caught by the Hollywood spotlight, Quebec's own luminary, Denis Arcand, was quietly putting the finishing touches to his new film, *Joyeux calvaire*, shot last spring in relative secrecy. With *Beautiful* still in development, *Joyeux calvaire* is the Arcand film nobody was expecting. Returning for the occasion to a simpler way of filmmaking, Arcand decided momentarily to put aside his pet project and have some fun directing this low-budget feature about two homeless men, played by Gaston Lepage and Benoît Brière. Produced for under \$1-million by Cinémaginaire's Denise Robert and distributed by the newly formed company Fun Film Distribution, *Joyeux calvaire* may prove to be a surprising little gem when it hits Quebec screens in time for the holidays. Meanwhile, André Forcier is starting post-production on his new film, *La comtesse de Bâton Rouge*, shot last October and November in Montreal and Louisiana. Once again, Forcier stays true to himself with this quirky, twisted tale of a circus's bearded lady and her road show pals. Perhaps Forcier's most complex tale to date, the story spans three generations and intertwines different time periods as the multifaceted plot unravels. Produced by Max Film's Roger Frappier, the film stars Geneviève Brouillette, fresh from her success in Jean-Marc Vallée's *Liste noire*. On the independent front, Michel Ouellette's *Cine Qua Non* is also hitting the editing table with its latest production, *Cabaret neige noire*. Directed by Raymond St-Jean and shot on video, *Cabaret* is the long-awaited screen adaptation of one of Quebec's biggest and most invigorating stage hits of the last decade. Dark and cynical, sometimes uneven, yet truly exhilarating, the cult play was an experience unto itself, and with its strangely elliptical structure, seemed to have been destined for the big screen.

Claire Valade



Photo courtesy Salter Street Productions

Halifax

Ron Mann once joked at an Atlantic Film Festival (AFF) seminar that sooner or later, everybody would be working for television. Halifax-based director Paul Donovan, after biting the feature-film-funding hand that feeds him in *Paint Cans* (his caustic comedy about Telefilm Canada), and film financing in Canada, cast his lot with the small screen, turning his attentions to a science fiction project called *The Dark Zone*. Two years later, with 29 countries signed on for broadcast, the first of four two-hour episodes is about to be unleashed on an unsuspecting public. An out of competition, standing-room-only screening at the 1996 AFF, accompanied by an explanatory special effects workshop, helped prepare the uninitiated. Retitled *Lexx: The Dark Zone Stories*, the series pilot has become the most hotly anticipated project on the East Coast. Almost 65 per cent of what is on the screen is computer generated, and not just the obvious spaceship shoot outs. The actors and some basic sets were shot on 35mm against blue and green screens, in a waterfront studio in Halifax which once housed the Volvo car manufacturing plant. State-of-the-art computer graphics firms in Halifax, Toronto and Berlin then laboured over the intricacies of each shot. William Shatner's CORE Digital, which provided the computer work on Shatner's *Tekwar* series, is chiefly responsible for executing the graphics. Many of the storyboard drawings come from the pen of Alex Busby, the award-winning director of *Folk Art Found Me*. The look of *Lexx* resists easy definition. It combines the monumental scale of Orson Welles's *The Trial* with the imaginative low-budget energy of Britain's long-running sci-fi fave, *Doctor Who*. Unique organic visual cues imply a future that includes the

Paul Donovan's *Lexx: The Dark Zone Stories*

genetically manipulated. For example, the series opens with a spectacular squadron of scorpion attack fighters attempting to bring down a battle cruiser that looks like a giant spider at the centre of a huge, rococo web. Donovan has flirted with science fiction before (*Def-Con4*, *Tomcat* and *Switched in Time*), but the television format seems to have liberated both his imagination and his personal cinematic style. Normally a conservative storyteller, Donovan's innovative designs, his dark, wickedly funny sense of humour, and his penchant for fast-paced, pulpy narratives have found full expression in *Lexx*. The storyline resembles the linearity of a video game rather than the traditional dramatic structure. Rumours have been flying in Halifax that 20 more hours are about to be confirmed, to begin production in the winter of 1997. At this rate, Donovan's fascination with the little screen will soon outstrip, by volume alone, his entire output on the big screen. Mainstream films like *George's Island* and *Buried on Sunday* saw Donovan delivering what was expected—gentle, regional stories that showed him playing someone else's game. With *Lexx*, he is writing his own rules in a cosmos of his own invention. In other news, winner of the most bizarre moment in the business goes to the late summer wrap party for James Cameron's *The Titanic*. Someone spiked the fish chowder with Angel Dust, sending 80 per cent of the cast and crew, including Cameron and star Barbara Samuels and Wayne Grigsby, to the Dartmouth General Hospital for observation. The epic continued shooting interiors in Mexico and will be released this summer, barring any nasty flashbacks.

Ron Foley Macdonald

From Sea to Sea