

DARK WORLD

CROW director
**Alex Proyas' new
tour of darkness.**

By Chuck Wagner

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, drink deep or taste not the sacred spring."

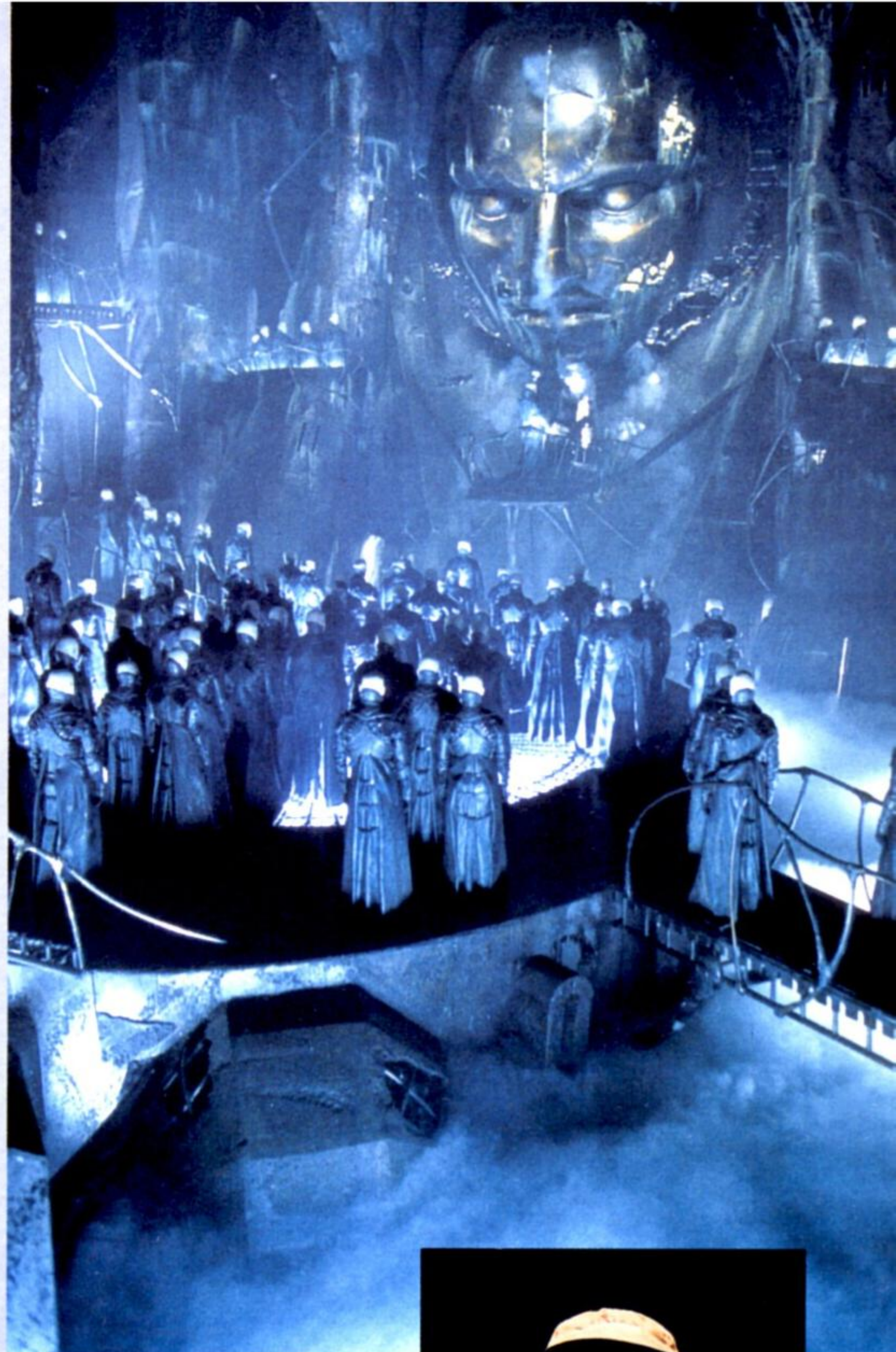
We all want to know more. What's going on? Why are these things happening? Is everything a big conspiracy? Are we free, or are we all merely acting out a script? And if so, whose script?

These existential questions and more lie at the root of **DARK WORLD**, a noir-ish tale set in a '30s-'40s-style City That Never Was which features murder, mayhem, mind control and a malevolent presence. The film is produced by Andrew Mason and directed by Alex Proyas—both having fulfilled

those duties on the equally dark **THE CROW**—and written by Alex Proyas and David Goyer—who scripted **THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS** (aka **THE CROW II**). The casting of Rufus Sewell and William Hurt—as a man accused of a series of murders and the detective searching for him—rounds out the gray color scheme. New Line cinema opens the film nationwide October 17.

Once again, Alex Proyas will take us on a tour of darkness. In conversation, at least, Proyas seems a sunny man from a sunny place. Born in Egypt of Greek parents, Proyas made **DARK WORLD** in Sydney, Australia, where he lives. "We built the entire film," Proyas said. "Everything you see is a

In Proyas' alternate universe the subterranean strangers control everything above ground, surreptitiously, without anyone's knowledge.



The Lair of the Strangers. Inset: Aussie Alex Proyas, about to give audiences a lethal injection in a Kafka-esque tale of mind-manipulation.

set. There was virtually no location used whatsoever. It was an idea that's been with me for a very long time. It grew over time. It's been with me so long I can't really tell you. I can't remember. There's a character in the movie who's a detective, who's sort of a classic '40s-style, hard-boiled detective. I came up with an idea of making a film with a character like that who's absolutely obsessed with the facts, on a case which doesn't add up. Nothing about it makes factual sense to him. He slowly starts to go insane through the story. He can't put the facts together because they don't add up to anything rational.

"That was the germ of the idea, and it progressed into what the film is now: a story



about an entire world that is manipulated by beings."

In the story, John Murdoch, played by Rufus Sewell, finds his memories have vanished. He slowly unravels the puzzle of who he is by discovering the brain-manipulation (or Tuning, as it's called) of **The Strangers**—from which he is somehow immune. Impervious to their manipulation, he

DARK WORLD RIFF-RAFF

ROCKY HORROR's Richard O'Brien is chilling as the ultimate suit.

By Chuck Wagner

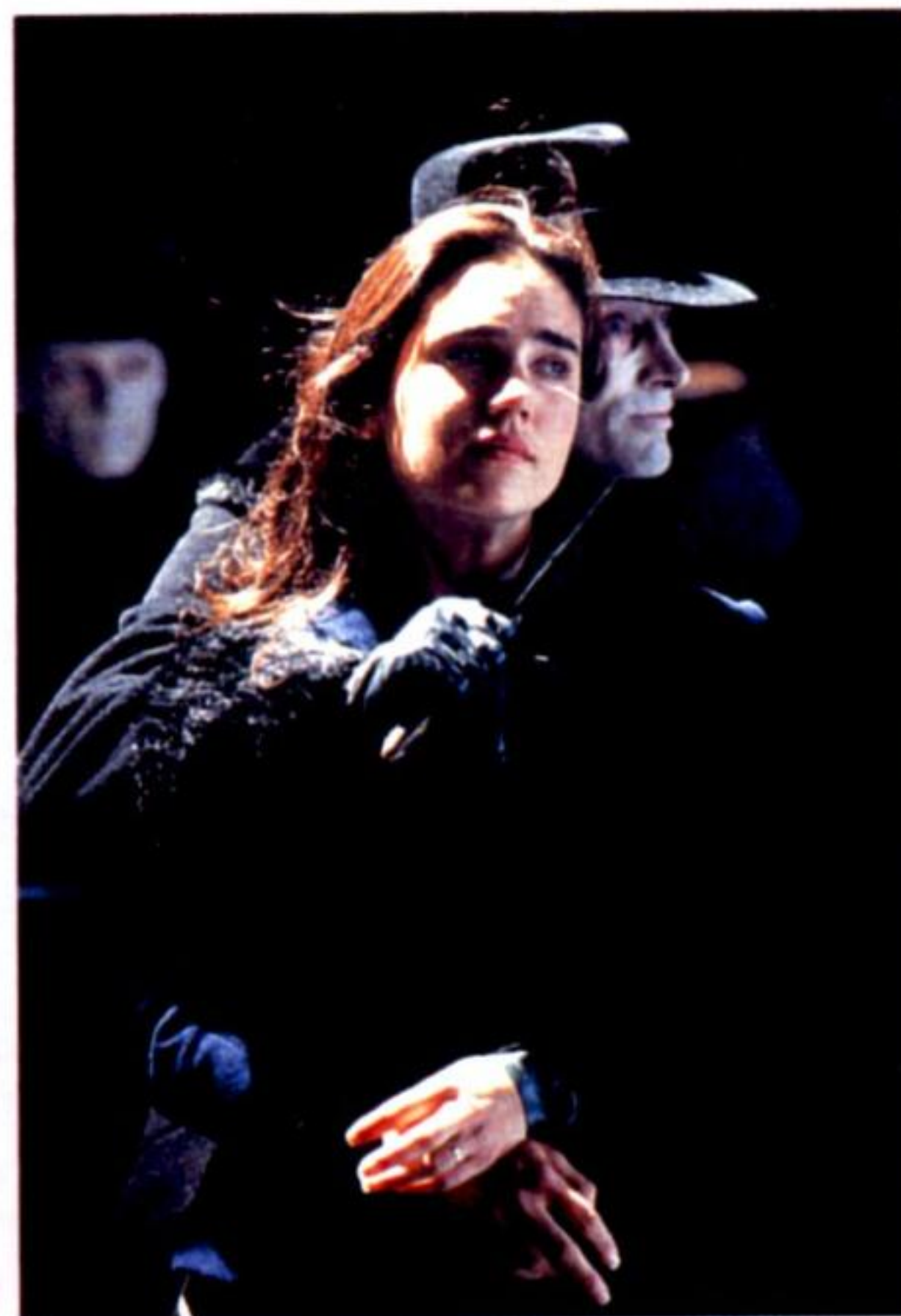
Richard O'Brien. Say his name and most people in America will say, "Huh?" But mention Riff-Raff and everyone will smile and chant "ROCKY HORROR!" O'Brien's is that sort of creation: a piece of the popular culture (crafted from popular culture). Writer, actor, lyricist, O'Brien is all these and more.

But in *DARK WORLD*, he's Mr. Hand—a character far colder than Riff-Raff. "All men in suits are fairly frightening," O'Brien said, as he mused on the character. "I went along to meet [director Alex Proyas] and read for it. He seemed to like what I was doing."

And as for the film itself, the odd story... "If you say this is a dark fairy tale, set in its own time and its own space—that's what makes sense to me. If you try to relate it to any reality that we are familiar with, then you start to ask questions: where is this place? how does this happen? But if you say it's an analogy, a parable, then it really makes sense."

O'Brien's character is one of a group called The Strangers—secret manipulators of the citizenry. "What I do," O'Brien explained, "is set up memories, false memories, chemical memories for these humans. They think they're free, but they're actually quite Pavlovian about their daily experiences."

O'Brien was born in England during World War II, but his parents moved to New Zealand. "I returned to England in 1964, and started riding horses and making movies in 1965



Jennifer Connelly as Emma in the grip of Mr. Hard, *ROCKY HORROR SHOW's* Richard O'Brien.

and have been at it ever since. One way or another," he said.

One escape from New Zealand's banal rural existence was the local, late night cinema. O'Brien watched loads of movies...and therein lies the genesis of *THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW*, which owed much of its structure from bits culled from earlier films. "It was collected lovingly from everywhere," O'Brien recalled. "It was like going into the kitchen and saying, 'I want to bake a cake.' All the ingredients are there—from science fiction, from rock-and-roll, from that period of time."

Even the awkward narrator from *TALES OF NEW SCOTLAND YARD* would figure in the story as the Charles Gray/Inspector character. Romance comics of the '50s and Lichten-

stein art also figured in the dialogue and the look of the film. And the rest, as they say, was history.

Interestingly, O'Brien didn't really script Riff-Raff for himself. "I wanted to play Eddie," he said. "I wanted to come out of the fridge, sing a rock-and-roll song and get off. Just in case it wasn't going very well. Then I wouldn't be around too long!"

Instead, he played Riff-Raff. And he doesn't mind being linked to that character. But as to a sequel to *ROCKY*...

"I think people want me to do one," O'Brien said. "And I say, where do you pick the story line up? The next day after the house has gone up? Do we pick it up twenty years later? One of the nice things about

ROCKY is that it's a definitive little piece. It's a moral tale, a fairy tale with a beginning, middle and end. Will it turn into a soap opera if you take it further? Perhaps Oedipus would provide a theme. You could call it *REVENGE OF THE OLD QUEEN!* I sat down and did a screenplay [with that title]. And I actually did three or four songs from it, and the songs are pretty good actually!"

But it didn't happen, and O'Brien was actually relieved. "Get on with something else!" he said.

And so he did. "I'm finishing off an album now, and I'm on page 120 of a novel I'm writing. So you know, it's plenty to keep going."

In this case, the moving Mr. Hand writes, and having writ, moves on. □



William Hunt plays Bumstead, a noirish detective on the trail of a murderer, but who's pulling the strings?

now is a threat to this bizarre "world order."

It all sounds so very Kafkaesque. "I love Kafka," Proyas said. "In fact, I visited his grave in Prague, because I really like his work. A lot of people have said this is Kafkaesque, but it really isn't. There is an element to that, but it's probably closer to *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*."

But at the core of this story, rather than a sense of irony, are The Strangers and their hypodermically-injected cranial agenda. "Basically they manipulate people's lives," Proyas explained. "They are basically shadowy figures. Who knows, in [our] world maybe they exist. When we all fall asleep at night they come in and rearrange the chess pieces. They change peo-

Rufus Sewell as protagonist Murdoch hounded Dostoevsky-like for a murder he didn't commit, or did he?



“The film’s something I’ve always wanted to do,” said Alex Proyas. “Really unsettle people so they look at things strangely when they come out of the theater.”

ple’s lives. They’re toying with us. Experimenting on us. The heroes in the movie discover that. Everyone else is oblivious to it. The film is essentially a mystery. I hope you’ll be deeply disturbed, along with everyone else, when you see this movie.

“For me the film is something that I’ve always wanted to do: really unsettle people in such a way that they look at things strangely when they come out of the theater. To me, in some ways, it’s a classic horror film in that respect, because I find that the horror movies that I loved when I was a kid, were ones that stayed with you. If it was a vampire movie, you went to bed with the covers up around your neck.

Besides Kafka, Proyas was influenced by science fiction more than horror, but he retains his youthful love of genre fiction. But film—instead of fiction—is Proyas’ preferred form of expression. “I paint and I write and I draw,” Proyas explained, “but for me, film combines everything: music, writing, acting. It’s a thing that is immensely powerful if it’s done well.”

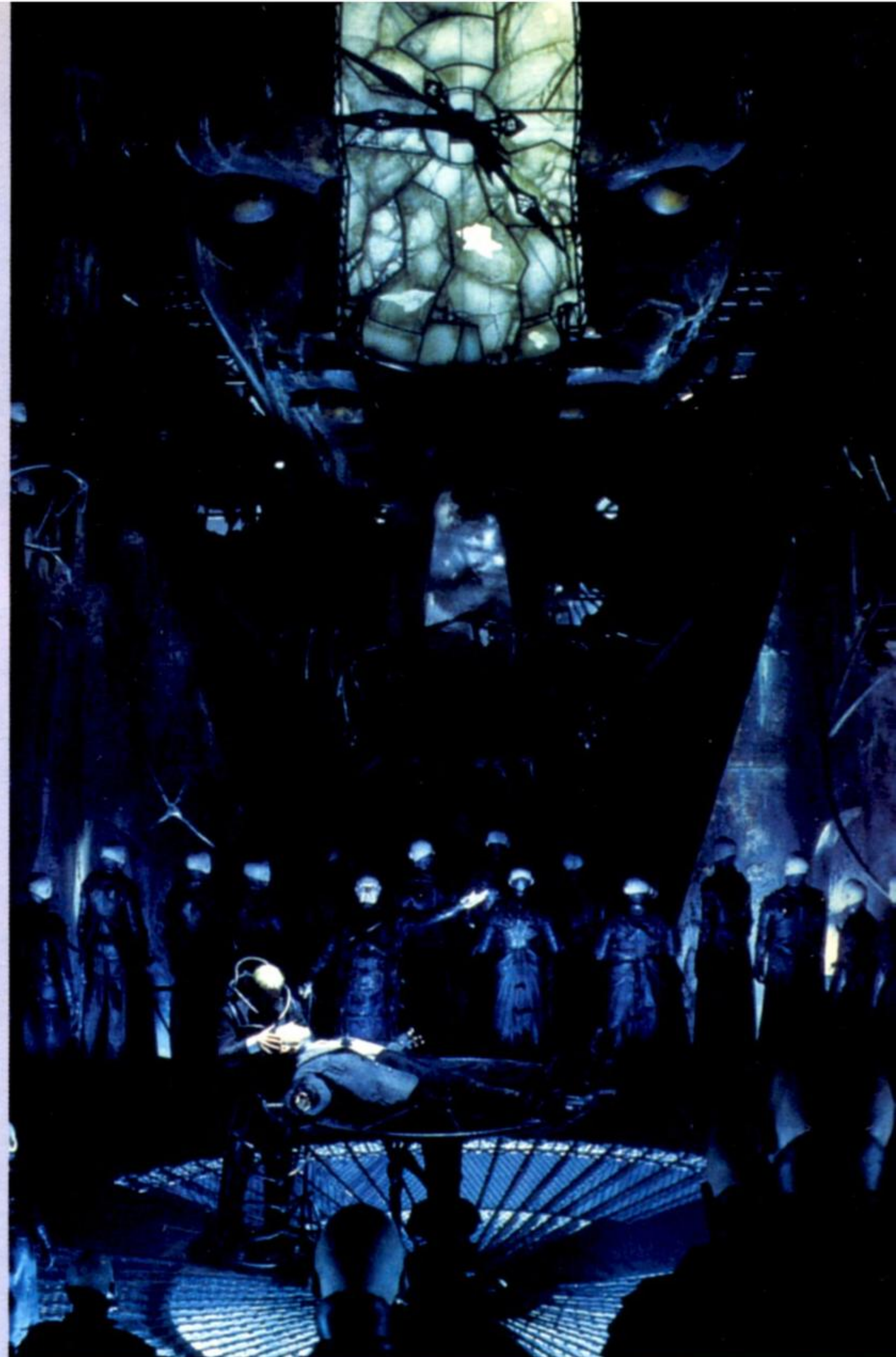
Among a stellar cast, Proyas sought a new face for his lead, a man suspected of murder and

chose stage-trained Brit Rufus Sewell. “I wanted someone fresh and exciting for this role and Rufus is all those things in plentiful supply. I think he’s going to be a very big star.”

And Richard O’Brien (Riff-Raff in *THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW*) seems to be in charge of The Strangers, making him the nemesis to Sewell’s character. O’Brien’s character, Mr. Hand (or “Under Hand,” as O’Brien himself chuckled when discussing his role) seems to be the perfect “suit.”

Noted Proyas, “I had Richard in mind physically when I wrote the character, because I had these strange, bald-looking men with an ethereal, androgynous quality. I’d seen him in *ROCKY HORROR*, but I wasn’t aware of what he was up to when I went to London to cast, but we decided, ‘Let’s meet him!’ It was like the cliché: he walked in and he was the character. He was perfect and from that point on we couldn’t imagine anyone else playing that role.”

The Strangers also have the nifty little power of being able to shut down the entire city. “It’s not so much stopping time,” Proyas said, “as it is



The Stranger’s subterranean torture chamber, Proyas’ bizarre world on stage-bound sets constructed in Sydney, production design by Patrick Tatopoulos.

putting people to sleep. Stopping people in their tracks. The face and the clock [in the Strangers’ massive lair] are their weapons for doing that.”

Other members of the *DARK WORLD* cast include William Hurt (as the detective), Jennifer Connelly (as Emma, the Murdoch/Sewell character’s estranged wife) and Kiefer Sutherland (as Doctor Schreber, an unwitting henchman of The Strangers). “William Hurt is a very demanding actor for a director,” Proyas said, “but he’s an exceptional actor. He plays a detective and Rufus Sewell is his quarry. He understood this project on a lot of different levels, in fact more levels than I had even intended! Which was great. He brought a helluva lot to the project, even beyond his own character.” Originally, Hurt

had asked to play Dr. Schreber’s character.

By the time the film opens, Jennifer Connelly will have her first child. Rumors that her involvement didn’t go well might have stemmed from early pregnancy difficulties. But Proyas denied any problems. “She told me she was pregnant on the last day of shooting,” Proyas recalled. “I wasn’t really aware of it. I appreciate her not telling me during shooting. It would’ve been one more thing for me to worry about.”

Up next for Proyas is a remake of Hammer’s *QUATERMASS & THE PIT*, being scripted by David Goyer. “I love science fiction and horror movies,” said Proyas. “I’d be very happy to just make those sorts of movies. I’m not that in love with naturalism.” □

Keifer Sutherland as Dr. Schreber experiments on one of the Strangers. New Line Cinema opens Proyas’ dark valentine on October 17.

