LANCE A LOT

Shivers feature by Simon Bacal and Alan Jones

Terminator, Near Dark, Aliens and **Pumpkinhead** are just four reasons why Lance Henriksen has become a firm Fantasy favourite. He simply adds a touch of class to every movie he stars in. Here the 'Boris Karloff of Action' talks about his past career, his present releases **Man's Best Friend** and John Woo's **Hard Target**, plus his future project, **Penal Colony**.

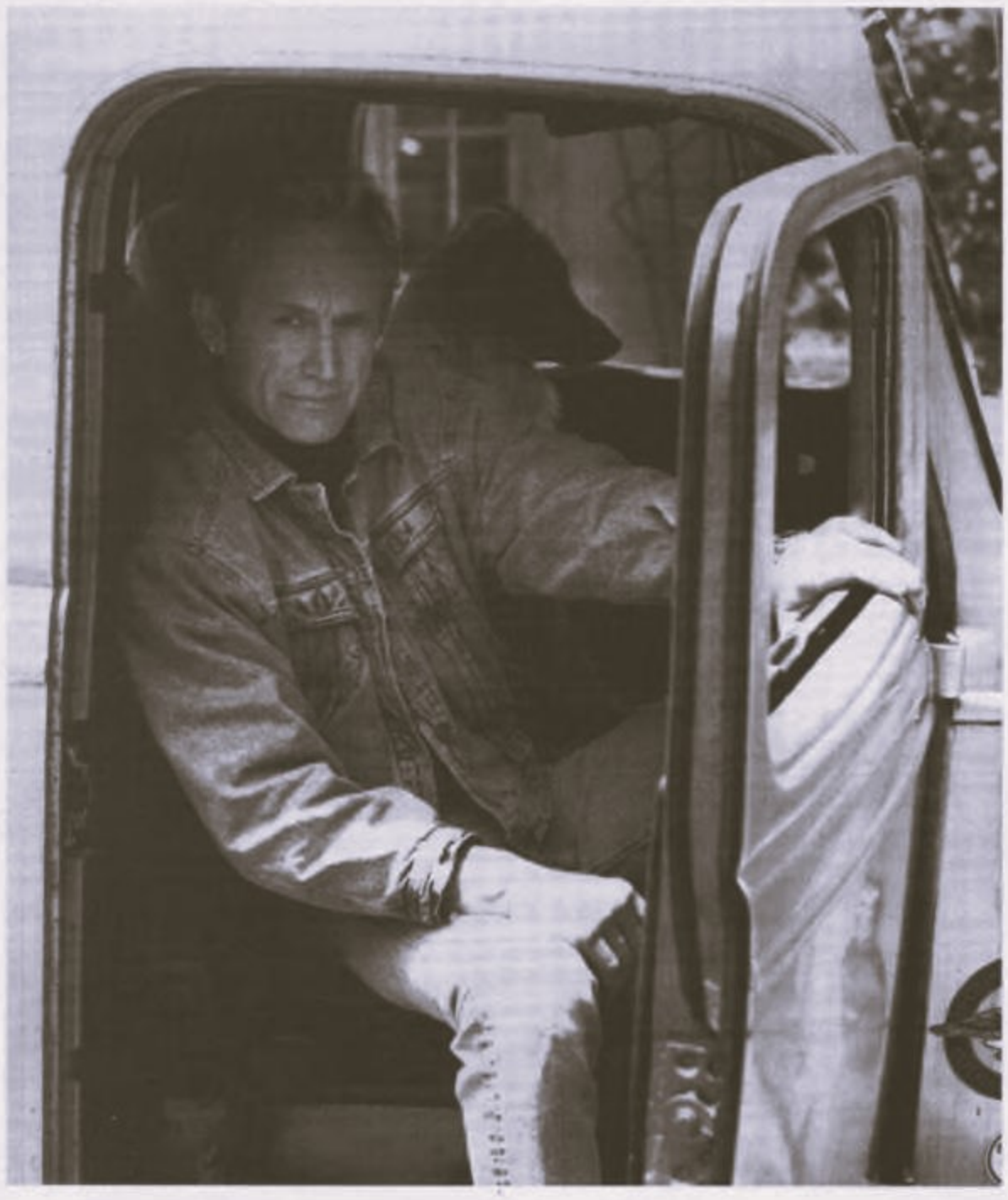
"The original version of **The Thing** made me want to act in Horror and Science Fiction films", reveals the gravel-voiced actor. "The characters, and their overlapping dialogue, conveyed the impression that the film's events were really happening. I was absolutely shocked and thrilled at the same time. So I always try to invoke those two emotions whenever I shoot a genre film."

Long before those emotions earned him prominent attention as Bishop, the heroic android in **Aliens**, Henriksen made his acting debut in the off Broadway play *Three Plays of the Sea*. Discovering that acting provided him with a secret identity, the rugged New Yorker pursued his chosen path and appeared in three Sidney Lumet films before landing a role as the FBI agent who helps foil the hostage crisis in the director's **Dog Day Afternoon**. **Network**, **Prince of the City**, **Close Encounters of the Third Kind**, **Piranha 2**, **The Right Stuff** and **Damien: Omen 2** followed, providing Henriksen with an impressive portfolio of intense bad guys, nasty villains, committed cops and caring cyborgs.

Recalling **Aliens**, Henriksen said, "I had these special eyes made for the part. But after I put them in and did a screen test, James Cameron said 'Lance, you can't use them. You look more alien than the Alien!' What an incredible stylist Cameron is. That film was bulletproof and flawless." Unlike **Alien 3** in which Henriksen reprised his Bishop role. He said, "Originally I read seven scripts all written by some wonderful talents. I would have shot any one of them. But the final script omitted a few of my favourite characters detracting from the fullness of the story."

Besides confronting aliens, Henriksen has faced creatures of a slightly different kind. In Stan Winston's **Pumpkinhead/ Vengeance: The Demon**, he portrayed a grief stricken father invoking an ancient spirit to take a horrifying revenge on the gang responsible for his son's death. He said, "Just because the characters I often play are eerie and somewhat menacing, I don't necessarily perceive them as evil. A director once convinced me there are no good guys and bad guys. It's never that clear cut. Instead there are only those bad people who are good some of the time while goodies also have their bad moments. The killer I played in **Johnny Handsome** was a dumb son of a bitch who should have been dead at twenty one. But instead of playing him as 'the bad guy', I saw him as someone who thought other people just didn't know how to live the right way."

He continued, "While I died in



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Above: Lance poses for *Shivers*; Left: Lance plays an alien cyborg in *Knights*

Pumpkinhead, the producers of **Pumpkinhead II** told me I could have any part I wanted in the sequel. I could even write my own if there wasn't one I liked. The script wasn't very interesting though. If I had the time and energy to devote to **Pumpkinhead II**, making it more than just a quickie follow-up, I might have agreed to an appearance." Jeff Burr's **Pumpkinhead II** eventually went ahead without Henriksen's involvement.

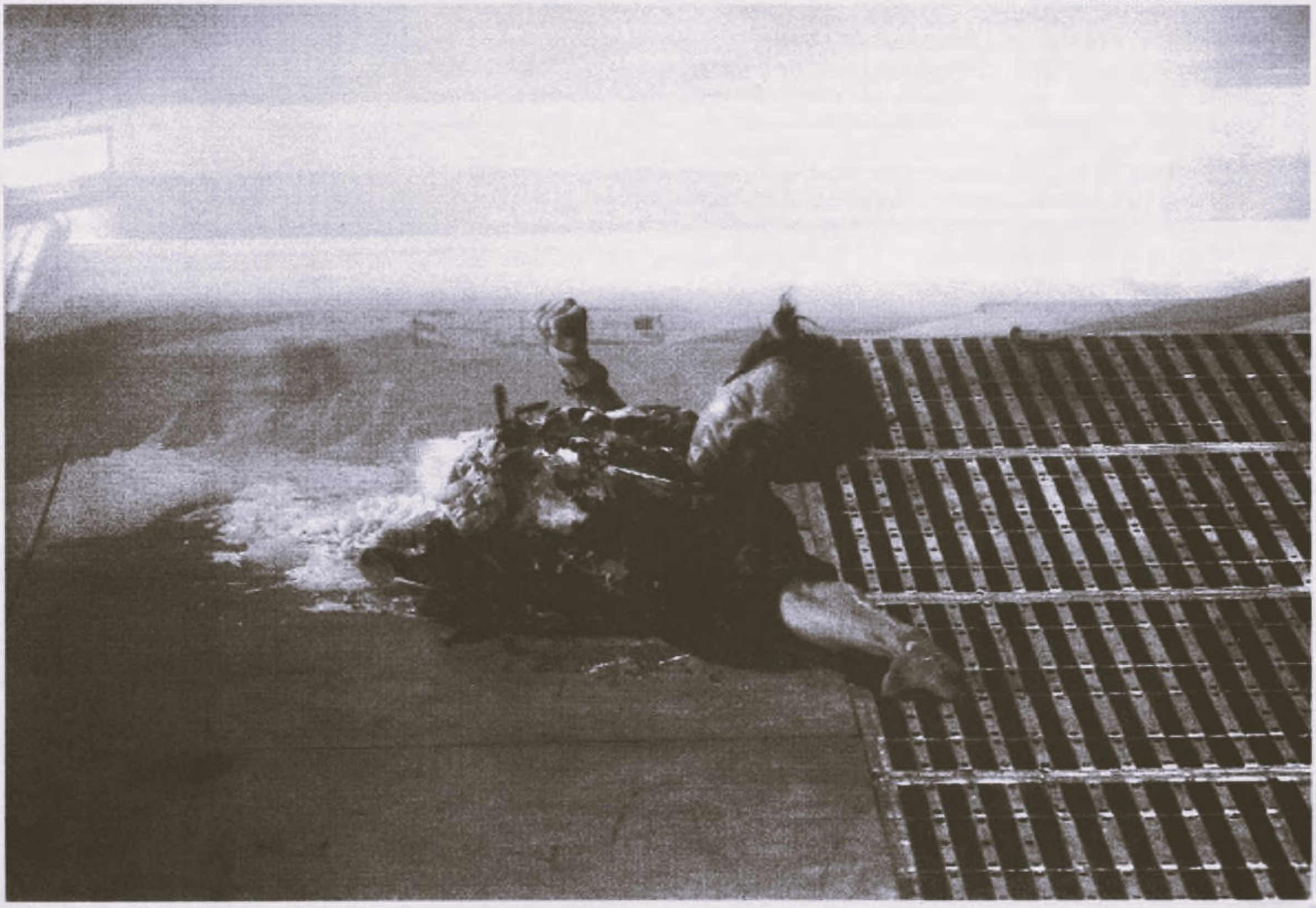
The one exception to Henriksen's 'bad guy' philosophy was Torquemada, the Spanish Inquisition torturer he played in Stuart Gordon's **The Pit and the Pendulum**. He remarked, "He persecuted millions in the name of religion and was the essence of evil. I was very upset with myself playing him because I felt like a complete slimeball. Whilst in Rome, I approached a Dominican monk and asked him why this creep wasn't excommunicated. When he told me Torquemada was considered a very important theologian, I almost threw up."

The gunslinging vampire in Kathryn Bigelow's haunting **Near Dark** is another role which allowed Henriksen to demonstrate his extensive range and depth as an actor. The critically acclaimed masterpiece sparked much talk of a prequel which would explore the vampires' lawless origins. Henriksen remarked, "On the day we wrapped **Near Dark**, the cast and crew all looked at each other and said, 'We should be doing the prequel today'. Everyone wants to do it. I don't know what will finally make it happen but we all feel it would be a really creative project. We've talked about the storyline for the last three years too so we could probably write it in a week. There's a major audience out there just waiting for it."

"On the day we wrapped **Near Dark**, we said, 'We should be doing the prequel today'."

On the television front, Henriksen has appeared in two episodes of the Home Box Office anthology series *Tales from the Crypt*. In *Cutting Cards,* an episode specifically written for him by series executive producer Walter Hill, he indulges in a gruesome game of poker. In 'Yellow', he starred as a World War I soldier alongside Dan Ackroyd and Kirk Douglas for director Robert Zemeckis. He

Above: Lance in flames in *Knights*; Below: Lance as the android in *Aliens*



pointed out, "I've adored Kirk since childhood. When I met him he was a wonderful, old-fashioned, bigger than life screen legend full of piss and vinegar. It was wild because I suddenly realized what I was really playing in the episode was his original **Paths of Glory** role. Destiny can be really strange!"

Back in filmland, Henriksen has a total of five movies awaiting release and during the past year of hyper-activity even managed to squeeze in a cameo as the King of Dinohattan in **Super Mario Bros**. First of these was **Knights**, a Sci-Fi actioner from the ubiquitous Albert Pyun, director of **Cyborg** and **Nemesis**. Henriksen plays android Job who discovers a taste for blood via a bio-mechanoid error and starts hunting humans for this new source of fuel. He commented, "I played Job as an alien Richard III. With one mechanical arm, I even had a disfigurement which made me easily, and automatically, lapse into the Shakespearean character. I saw the movie as a vampire parody as well as being a moral purge in a sci-fi setting. I'd be lying if I said **Knights** was the greatest picture in the world. I wasn't paid a huge amount either. But it was fun to do and I'm okay in it."

The most exciting aspect regarding **Knights** was the opportunity for Henriksen to go from slight sanity to total insanity. He continued, "It's no revelation to say I die in the movie. But what an exciting emotion for an android to have? I've never felt the pain of birth but I will feel the pain of death. That's great. Job was a different kind of android to Bishop. I don't feel it's limiting to play them." Even so, Henriksen did turn down the offer to step into Peter Weller's metal uniform for **Robocop 3**. Robert Burke took over instead.

The next movie Henriksen made is probably one of the most highly anticipated. **Hard Target** pits him against Jean Claude Van Damme in the American movie début of director John Woo, leading light of the New Hong Kong cinema and the man behind such violent and soulful gangster dramas as **The Killer** and **Hard Boiled**. Henriksen plays soldier of fortune Fouchon, an ex-French Foreign Legionnaire and homicidal entrepreneur behind a human hunt in New Orleans staged for the decadent rich. Woo's update of **The Most Dangerous Game** supplied Henriksen with a well-rounded character to play, as he explained. "I create the human hunt to raise my speed limit in life and feel normal. If you've only been to battle, the only thing that will get you normal again is more battle. Only the most intense conflicts are still thrilling enough to register. Fouchon is a displaced South African who loves the high of the hunt whether it be an animal or Van Damme. He's a sophisticated, dark humoured character and I've thrown a little bit of Napoleon into the mix. He's a man of destiny because he should have died a hundred times before anyway and it isn't important when he does. Fate will take care of him and that's why I loved playing Fouchon."

Hard Target pits him against Jean Claude Van Damme in the American movie début of director John Woo

Working with Woo was a great experience according to Henriksen. "He's one of the finest directors ever; gentle, communicative and supportive. He caught everything that was important to me as an actor on film and oddly enough used the lot. The times I've seen my work and gone 'Jesus, they cut the behaviour, the motivation, the only reason I made the movie in the first place'. Not John. All my major scenes are intact." What is Henriksen's opinion of the cranked-up violence in Woo's movies? He said, "It's a slow-motion ballet, a performance art. Within the balletic structure is inventively choreographed violence; his way of letting you find out something about somebody. It's Woo's filmic language, his narrative. We are living in violent times and one of the ways of dealing with it, and expressing the absurdity of it, is to portray violence in an over the top way. Woo manages to do that and show the humanity as well which is his major achievement."

Hard Target (which in military parlance means a human target) was written by Chuck Pfarrer who co-scripted **Darkman** with Sam Raimi. Raimi executive produced Woo's controversial assault on Hollywood which has now come under the MPAA's ratings scrutiny four times. Europe will see a harder version of the movie than America. Henriksen added, "Sam proved he can see a little beyond what the market is asking for. I'm praying Americans will give John the chance to fly because he is so unique. Sam saw that talent and saw Woo as a magnificent moviemaker who could possibly be the next big thing. Sam was entirely responsible for getting John to commit to the project and it's a real credit to his vision. I hope the cuts don't cause too much damage to the final film."

After **Hard Target** came **The Colour of Night**, a thriller in the **Jagged Edge** tradition starring Bruce Willis. Of note because it marks the return of director Richard Rush (**Freebie and the Bean**, **The Stunt Man**) to the industry, Henriksen said, "I play a Beverly Hills homicide cop who

Above: Lance hunts Van Damme in *Hard Target*; Right: Lance reprised his android role in *Alien 3*

can't get over the trauma of seeing his wife and daughter slaughtered in front of his eyes. I'm one of five stressed-out patients undergoing treatment from therapist Willis. I could be the murderer of his best friend. Then again it could be one of the other four. It's an intense thriller, full of twists, where nothing is what you think it is. It's going to be enormous fun to watch. I had a great time making it because it was an absolute character study. When I played a cop in Bruce Robinson's serial killer thriller **Jennifer 8**, I met people from every strata of law enforcement. That research helped me get a handle on this part too."

Henriksen's most recently completed movie is the horror chiller **Man's Best Friend** from John Lafia, director of **Child's Play 2**, in which he stars as Doctor Jarrett, founder of the EMAX bio-engineering laboratory. After his family is brutally murdered, Jarrett develops Max, a DNA state-of-the-art guard dog, with human intelligence and the ability to adapt chameleon-like to its surroundings. A special neuropathic drug keeps Max tame, but when it wears off, the dog becomes a lethal canine predator unleashing chaos in the small town of San Remo. Ally Sheedy is TV journalist Lori Tanner who tries to put an end to Jarrett's experiments after receiving an anonymous tip-off about cruelty to animals at EMAX. "One of the great things about Horror is that there are always genres within genres," said Henriksen. "**Man's Best Friend** is a straightforward morality play with lots of new twists. Lori and Jarrett have this constant battle about animal rights versus animal vivisection. The conflict comes from her being convinced I'm abusing animals while I'm really trying to experiment with the possibilities of growing back human limbs, not testing eyeliner or hair products. To Jarrett her position is totally irrational."

In common with **Hard Target**, Henriksen performed his own stuntwork for **Man's Best Friend**. He said, "My training makes me fight until the very last cell of my body collapses with exhaustion. I competed with Van Damme using tremendous will against his iron strength. I held my ground pretty well although I didn't really like him until we came to reshoot the ending to give it a higher octane finish. On almost every film I make, there's a moment when I feel stunts would be better for my character. In **Man's Best Friend**, the genetically altered dog had to push me through a plate glass window. So instead of breaking the shot up and using a stuntman, I did the whole thing in two takes. Preparing for such a stunt usually requires me to remember a time when I've been more afraid. Basically it's an adrenalin high. It's like standing on a cliff just before you take that first step off. At first it may be a while before you make your move but, eventually, you're gonna do it."

Max is a DNA state-of-the-art guard dog with human intelligence

A week after completing **Man's Best Friend**, Henriksen went Down Under to begin a four-month shoot on Martin Campbell's **Penal Colony**. Produced by Gale Ann Hurd, responsible for both **Terminator** movies, **The Abyss**, **Bad Dreams** and **Raising Cain**, it's a Science- Fiction reworking of **Papillon** co-starring Ray Liotta and Kevin Dillon. Henriksen enthused, "The script is excellent and I play a doctor/father/shaman character to the other inmates. It feels good on a karmic level too; shooting a movie entitled **Penal Colony** on Australian turf, site of *the* original penal colony. The special effects are by Bob McCarron who did the **Mad Max** movies. There's no prosthetics, McCarron is just responsible for accenting the futuristic trappings."

It's going to be impossible to ignore Henriksen over the coming twelve months. But that's fine by him. "I just want to keep working. What's great is I get to play good guys about 50% of the time now. Every movie I do changes me, makes me emerge a different person, forces me to grow and think. I hope they change audience perceptions too." While Horror and Science Fiction films will always hold a special interest for Henriksen, he feels, "The **Alien** and **Terminator** imitations will eventually fizzle out. But there will always be room for a new phobia. And *clichéd* cop movies, where someone with a cigarette dangling from the side of his mouth flashes a badge, will soon be killed off by unoriginality. But it's the uniqueness of the Horror genre that will keep it alive because it's endless."

He added, "Although my career has taken huge leaps over the past few years, and my name is more familiar than ever, I'll always go back to genre movies. They are usually the beginning steps of new good directors who put all their energy into the first film just in case it's their last. There's no money to be made in helping a young director out of the gate. But, in honesty, that's never been an issue with me."

Above: Ally Sheedy is Lance's co-star in *Man's Best Friend*; Right: Lance poses again despite a busy workload!