

# MARVEL MOVIE MAGIC

## Marvel Studios chief Avi Arad on film Things to come.

By Scott Pierce

With the success of X-MEN cementing Marvel Comics' cinematic potential while simultaneously generating tremendous profits, the future bodes well for other Marvel movies in the works. The man responsible for recruiting the talent to realize comic books on film is Marvel Studios president Avi Arad. Starting as far back as 1993 to bring comics to the big screen the correct way, it's only recently that his persistence has begun to pay off. Before being involved in the realm of movies, Arad was a toy inventor. "I'd been inventing toys for many, many years for Hasbro, Mattel, Galoob, you name it," said Arad from his offices at Sony, where he is prepping SPIDER-MAN. "Then I got involved in animation." In 1993 when Toy Biz and Marvel Comics merged, Arad took over the entertainment part of Marvel and began to develop motion pictures. Along the way, Arad also produced animated shows for Marvel such as X-MEN, SPIDER-MAN, IRON MAN and FANTASTIC FOUR.

Because of the overwhelming response to X-MEN, other Marvel movies in the pipeline are moving through the development process at a faster pace. "I think it's inevitable," related Arad. "It's a dangerous business because movies are not inexpensive," he said, "and therefore, success like X-MEN makes studios really comfortable."

Most likely, the first of these disparate projects to begin filming will be SPIDER-MAN, for release by Sony Pictures May, 2002, directed by Sam Raimi with Tobey Maguire (CIDER HOUSE RULES) portraying Peter Parker. The script originally had nemeses Dr. Octopus and the Green Goblin, but now only has the one villain, Nor-

man Osborn, who becomes the Green Goblin. Originally rumored to be a role for Nicolas Cage, the Goblin role will be brought to life by Academy Award nominee John Malkovich. Nicholas Cage will be part of another Marvel movie although the precise project at press time is unknown. Of the SPIDER-MAN movie, Arad said, "We are doing some technically amazing stuff. I think it's going to be something special dramatically and emotionally."

The slate of Marvel movies in current development at various studios also includes FANTASTIC FOUR, currently in the pre-production stage, which still has Raja Gosnell (BIG MOMMA'S HOUSE) attached as director with a script by Michael France (GOLDENEYE) rewritten by Sam Hamm (BATMAN) being co-produced by Chris Columbus' (HARRY POTTER) company 1492, and distributed by 20th Century-Fox.

THE HULK has been scripted by FANTASTIC FOUR screenwriter Michael France, rewritten by Michael Tolkin (DEEP IMPACT) and is now being given a rewrite by X-MEN scribe David Hayter, with



Also in pre-production at Fox is FANTASTIC FOUR, to be directed by Raja Gosnell from a script re-write by BATMAN's Sam Hamm. Above: The unreleased 1993 Roger Corman version.

Universal Pictures distributing.

Acclaimed screenwriter Andrew Kevin Walker (SEVEN) is currently writing SILVER SURFER, with rumors of Ang Lee being approached to direct. Another project in the script stage is DAREDEVIL, written by Mark Steven Johnson (SIMON BIRCH) who is also attached to direct for New Regency.

Arad also revealed that a unique Marvel project called GENOMAX is in TV development in collaboration with Tribune Entertainment. The project deals with Genome Technology, which is the mapping of genes, human and mutant. Arad described the series as "a very interesting depiction of what mutants in the future will be. It's a new concept at Marvel—instead of mutants from birth, it's customized mutants genetically created."

Before X-MEN even came out, Arad noted, "I was pretty optimistic." Leading all the way up to X-MEN's release, rumors abounded on the Internet about the film, often drawing negative

criticism from the fans. The fans are blatantly honest, even harsh in their opinions, which Arad said, "is great by the way because it shows the passion." Continuing, he added, "They care and it's worth it."

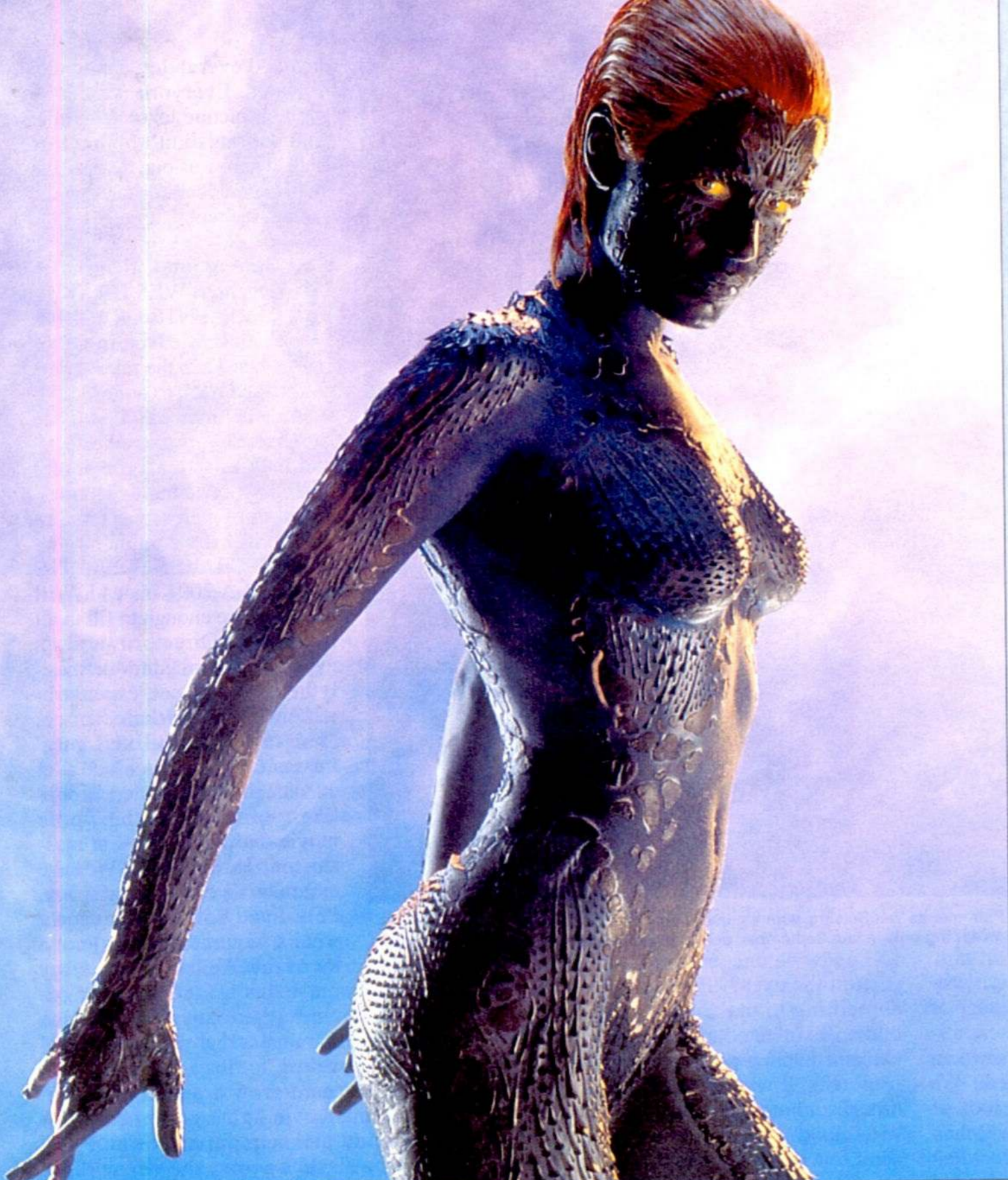
Fox signed their X-MEN cast to multi-picture deals and is said to be exploring filming X-MEN 2 and 3 back-to-back to cut costs. Arad knows the direction he wants the sequels to take. "The movie says to you basically, 'let's follow Wolverine and see where he's going,'" said Arad. The fans on the internet and the creative powers that seem to be on the same wavelength as to the direction the next should take. Noted Arad, "The instincts are right because they're talking about Operation Zero Tolerance, which obviously we want to get deeper into, Weapon X, that we touched upon. People want to see some of the Sentinels and obviously Sentinels should be dealt with cautiously. We don't want to have the Tin Man from THE WIZARD OF OZ."

Part of what made translat-

ing X-MEN to the big screen work was basing it in the real world. "We have to be very cautious with that," offered Arad, "and make sure we don't take away from it. We can't all of a sudden be BATMAN. It's not a stylized world—it's the real world. BATMAN was obviously glorious for what it was. We don't want to visit that world, we want to stay where we are."

As far as other characters to make it into the sequel, Beast, Nightcrawler and Gambit are the most talked about to be included. "I'll definitely push to get Beast in there," said Arad. "I think that will work very well with Zero Tolerance. People like him and Nightcrawler really have no place to hide."

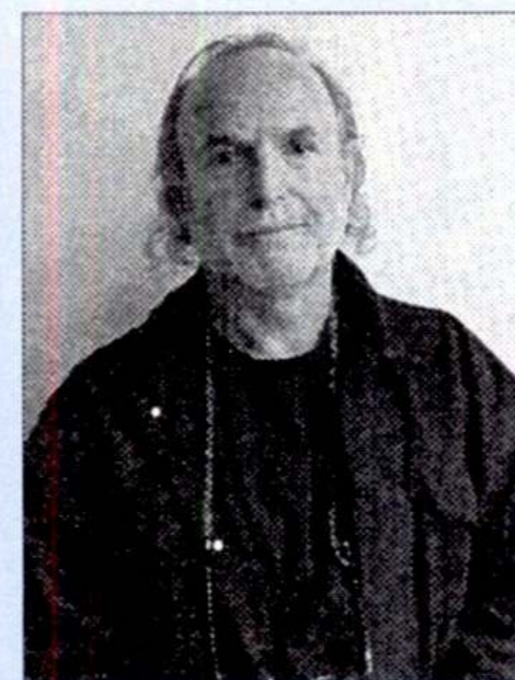
Prior to the release of X-MEN, at last year's Cannes Film Festival, Marvel signed a massive deal with Artisan Entertainment encompassing some 15 characters with flexibility to increase beyond this initial core. The new deal includes well-known staples from the Marvel Universe like Captain America,



Rebecca Romijn-Stamos as Mystique returns in X-MEN 2 & 3, which 20th Century Fox may film back-to-back next year. Tobey Maguire stars as SPIDER-MAN for Sony and director Sam Raimi, but the comic's Doc Oc (below right) is now out.



Arad, the Israeli-born president of Marvel Studios, a comic book fan now living out his boyhood dream.





In a development deal with Artisan, THE MIGHTY THOR is headed for television and THE PUNISHER is being readied as a feature film.



Thor, and The Punisher to a myriad of popular characters such as Morbius, Deadpool, Black Panther, Iron Fist, Ant Man, Longshot, Power Pack, Man-Thing, The Black Widow, Dazzler and Mort the Dead Teenager. The deal develops Marvel properties into feature films, television series or made-for-TV movies, as well as product for the internet in the form of short films and videos. No sooner was the deal announced than the phones started ringing.

Arad has had a lasting relationship with Artisan's co-chief executive officer Amir Malin, which led to this unprecedented deal. Artisan "is an excellent market to use and they are good producers," said Arad in explaining the choice of pairing with the company. "They understand the Marvel Universe very

well. The development crew understand our business, our characters and therefore we are a very good match."

Artisan's first Marvel movie will be THE PUNISHER, while their first project for television will be THE MIGHTY THOR. The mythology for the Thor character is appealing for the television format because there is so much information to convey. Arad noted, "It's such a huge universe with Thor being the God of the Nine Realms." Arad predicted that "together we will make the kind of movies [like the next PUNISHER] that will be unique and special for us."

What is extremely promising has been the response from the creative arena. Artisan senior vice-president Patrick Gunn pointed out that "there's kind of a personal attachment to some of these characters," because people have grown up with them. "The response from the creative community has really been incredible," noted Gunn including, "the really A-list writers, directors, producers, people who want to be involved in developing Marvel properties for both TV and film. We are talking to writers and directors to listen to what characters that they're interested in, while at the same time we are deciding what characters we want to get involved with most immediately." Gunn's favorite: Captain America.

A second pact Marvel made at Cannes with Crystal Sky Entertainment, calls for the filming of GHOST RIDER, with an expected budget of \$75 million

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which may feature Johnny Depp as the avenging motorcycle rider with the flaming skull, as well as being co-produced by Academy-Award winning actor Jon Voight, who may give his acting talents to the film. The film will be co-financed and distributed by Dimension Films in a three-picture deal.

"We met with Johnny Depp who loves the idea," said Arad, "and is into it, but obviously we have to work up a deal of the logistics." Stephen Norrington, director of BLADE, is in place to helm the picture. The GHOST RIDER film will focus on the original character of Johnny Blaze and his girlfriend Roxanne, rather than the later incarnation featuring Danny Ketch.

Reuniting with Norrington is BLADE screenwriter David S. Goyer who co-wrote a GHOST RIDER script years ago, when it was originally set up at Savoy Pictures. Arad proclaimed Goyer "the Godfather" of the recent interest in the production of Marvel movies.

Noted Goyer, "When GHOST RIDER was at Savoy Pictures they didn't know what they wanted." Now in the right hands, GHOST RIDER is gearing up to be as kinetically appealing as

BLADE. "I sort of have a new approach that's much more simplified," explained Goyer, "and in some ways it's maybe what I would have done had I been allowed to do it back then."

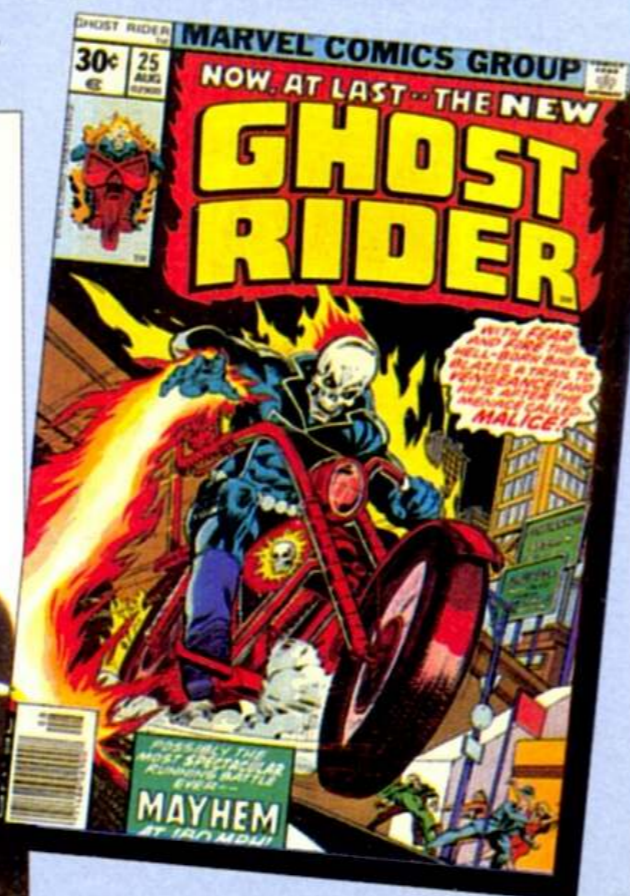
Goyer, who also scripted DARK CITY, is heavily involved in the highly anticipated BLADE 2: BLOOD HUNT, which he will write as well as produce for director Guillermo del Toro. Filming on BLADE 2 is expected to start in January 2001.

Goyer may be involved, with the Artisan deal as well. "There's talk of me producing four or five properties that Marvel went into partnership at Artisan," said Goyer. If plans proceed positively, Goyer would supervise stories and be involved on the producing end.

In the past, missteps have occurred on the road to the recent success of Marvel movies. The recent positive trend resides with Marvel's man at the top, Avi Arad, Goyer said, "I think Avi has a good sense of the film business, a good commercial sense." Although Arad humbly added, "we are attracting the right talent to make this a real worthy cause."

The plethora of superhero characters that surround Arad now were nonexistent to him while growing up in Israel. Arad's access to comic books then was extremely limited to just Tarzan. But, he noted, "When I came to this country, it was like being a kid in a candy store. I've always loved comics as a form of literature." Summed-up Arad about his success at Marvel movies, "I got to live out the dream." □

Wesley Snipes will return in BLADE 2 for New Line Cinema, again scripted by David Goyer, who has also penned and will produce Marvel's GHOST RIDER.



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PART FIRE. PART INVISIBLE.  
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