

Let's face it, a movie about a giant red-horned demon who battles the forces of evil as part of a covert government agency isn't the easiest project to sell at the best of times. For writer-director Guillermo del Toro, the process of bringing *Hellboy* to life was a long, difficult and occasionally surreal odyssey. Based on the Dark Horse comic book series by Mike Mignola, the Columbia/Revolution Studios film stars *Beauty & the Beast's* Ron Perlman as the eponymous demon, but there were many other names being mooted at various times. Depending on which rumors you want to believe, they included Nicolas Cage, Vin Diesel, the Rock and several professional wrestlers of different



By JOE NAZZARO

ABOUT A

HELLBOY

The road to Hell has been paved—with good inventions—by fantasy filmmaker Guillermo del Toro.



Fighting for years to make *Hellboy* the way he envisioned the project, Guillermo del Toro has at last realized his dream.

shapes and sizes. And don't forget the nervous studio execs who wondered if the character had to be red, and for that matter, did he really need to be called Hellboy?

"Those are all true," confirms del Toro, "but they were different studios, at different times. Revolution was *always* behind Ron, which was fantastic, but I distinctly remember someone asking, 'Is he going to have a big lab with lots of equipment and gadgets?' I said no, he basically is what he is because of *who* he is, not what toys he has. There were also people asking me if he was going to have a really cool Hellmobile, and went as far as drawing up a couple of drafts to that effect.

"Some of the studios told me, 'We won't do a movie called *Hellboy*. Call it *Seed of Destruction* or something else, but don't call it *Hellboy*!' So suggestions were made along those lines. My favorite of them all was one executive at Universal, who proposed, 'What if he's a normal guy who gets angry and *turns into* Hellboy?' Others said, 'He's going to be skin-toned and just a *little* reddish, right?'"

Evil Twins

The first chapter in del Toro's quest to bring *Hellboy* to the big screen began with the comic books. The director had been a longtime fan of Mignola's work on such books as *Fafhrd & the Gray Mouser* and

Gotham By Gaslight, but it was *Hellboy* that caught his attention as a filmmaker. After looking into who actually held the rights, del Toro discovered that *Tomb Raider* producers Larry Gordon and Lloyd Levin were already developing the screenplay at Universal. "When I learned that, I asked to read the script and met with them," del Toro says. "I didn't connect with the screenplay, so I asked them to allow me to write it from scratch. They gave me a chance to take a stab at it, so I did, and after a five-and-a-half-year journey, we were finally able to get it made."

Del Toro's script for *Hellboy* is loosely based on the 1994 graphic novel *Seed of Destruction* (written by John Byrne, illus-



Writer-artist Mike Mignola's crimson crusader Hellboy has finally moved from the pages of Dark Horse Comics to the silver screen. And look, he brought the smiling dead along with him! *Beauty & the Beast's* Ron Perlman—both del Toro and Mignola's only choice for the role—plays the larger-than-life hero.

trated by Mignola), which acts as an origin of sorts for the character. But he also made sure that one of his first priorities was to get the blessing of the comic's creator. "I thought it was important to acknowledge that he created the mythology," del Toro says. "And even though I'm doing my own riff on it and not trying to do what he did, it was necessary that we make the universe somewhat coherent. Mike became involved in pre-production about a year before the movie got in front of a camera, and during that period he delved into every aspect of it. I consulted him about everything, and we really became like twin brothers. We used to joke that I should carry him in a backpack. Mike puts it much more pragmatically: He says that he didn't get involved before then because he never thought I would get the movie made. When he realized that the project was actually happening, he was happy to come aboard."

Another key element was casting Perlman in the title role, a decision that was not without some controversy. The studio

Like Hellboy, John Myers (Rupert Evans) is a Bureau of Paranormal Research & Defense agent.



wanted a bigger name for Hellboy, hence the aforementioned collection of stars and wrestlers, but del Toro steadfastly held out for Perlman, who remained his first and only choice. "We had some people wavering about it, and some of them had other ideas, but for both Mike and I, the perfect Hellboy was *always* Ron Perlman," del Toro declares. "It wasn't a power play, an ego trip or nepotism of any kind; I just felt that Ron was born to play this part. He has truly

London to meet with John, and we were blessed that he took the movie.

"As far as Selma goes, she was my first and only choice for the character. In the case of Doug for Abe Sapien, we had cast another actor, but I had worked with Doug on *Mimic*—where he played one of the giant insects—and I liked him incredibly. One night, we were having a big dinner for the makeup department, and [Abe Sapien's suit designer] Steve Wang said to me, 'What



Jeffrey Tambor (famed as Larry Sanders' sidekick) plays BPRD head Dr. Manning.

Ilsa (Biddy Hodson) seems nice enough, but she hides a dark secret.



Impeccably dressed but incredibly evil, Rasputin (Karel Roden) is truly mesmerizing.



grown as an actor over the years, and every time I work with him, I have the pleasure of seeing him use new tools and get better results and so forth. And with this movie, his vision of the character was 20-20. I've worked with some very good actors, but I don't think I've ever been so consistently amazed at how accurate someone has been with a performance. This is also a role that was polished and polished for him over a period of more than five years, so it was as custom-fit as I can imagine a character ever being written."

For his remaining cast, the director assembled an international group of actors, including John Hurt (as Professor Broom), Selma Blair (Liz Sherman), Doug Jones (Abe Sapien), Rupert Evans (John Myers), Jeffrey Tambor (Dr. Manning), Karel Roden (Rasputin) and Biddy Hodson (Ilsa). "We went in with a wish list, and I must confess, in some cases, like John Hurt, we didn't think we had a ghost of a chance," del Toro says. "But I was very insistent, and I traveled to

about a guy I know called Doug Jones?' We immediately phoned the producer and said, 'I know we already spent money on this other guy, but Doug Jones is the one!' I cannot say enough about the two actors we had performing in suits—Doug and, in the case of Sammael, Brian Steele. They're the best suit performers I've ever met."

If Abe's voice sounds a bit familiar, it's because Jones was re-dubbed during post-production with the distinctive vocal talents of *Frasier*'s David Hyde Pierce, a decision that del Toro says was extremely tough. "I thought Doug did a really good job, and if we do a sequel, he could end up voicing the character. This was just something I had in my head from the beginning; I had always heard the character with David's voice. It wasn't a change of heart; from the moment we hired Doug, I told him, 'You may be re-voiced, but you're going to give it the college try.'"

Devil's Work

Finding the right actors was just half of del Toro's challenge; he also had to round up a team of makeup FX artists who could help bring Hellboy, Abe Sapien and a host of other creatures to life. Unbeknownst to the director, Chad Waters and Matt Rose from Rick Baker's Cinovation Studios had heard about the project and began lobbying for the opportunity to create Hellboy's makeup. Rose even grabbed an old bust of Perlman from the shop's basement—not knowing the actor was del Toro's choice for the role—and quickly knocked out a 3-D sculpture of the character. The end result was that Cinovation got the job, and that very same Hellboy sculpture was used to create the makeup with virtually no changes.

"Every once in a blue moon," del Toro explains, "you get something—an energy or an intelligence—behind a sculpture on the first try, which you then have to labor incredibly not to lose, and this was one of those cases. They made Hellboy look so noble, intelligent and perfect that the only thing we had to do was add a couple of scars and dents. I usually know what I want from the start, and I'm pretty quick at getting it if I can guide people. The only exception in this

It might be best if Myers did all the shooting. In the comics, Hellboy isn't known as a crackerjack marksman, but he can certainly smite monsters with his right(eous) hand of stone.



Out of the mists arises Sammael (Brian Steele). Guess who must battle this demonic entity from another dimension.



whole process was the design of Sammael. That took more effort than any monster I've ever designed. It was difficult because I knew we would be using a guy in a suit, and it had to be an absolutely killer suit."

The remaining makeup FX were divided up between the teams of Spectral Motion—who created Abe, Sammael, a mummified corpse and several other characters—and the Barcelona-based DDT Efectos Especiales, who were mainly responsible for Kroenen, Rasputin's deadly enforcer. The decision to split the workload between three different shops wasn't a routine one, but del Toro knew what he was doing. "The original budget for *Hellboy* was \$85 million," he elaborates, "but when the studio said, 'We'll do it with Ron Perlman if you can do it for \$60,' I knew we needed to be very creative and careful with the makeup.

"Mike Elizalde from Spectral Motion and the DDT guys struck up a good friendship while doing *Arachnid* in Spain for Brian Yuzna, and I also knew that the Rick Baker guys would be too expensive to do the whole deal. So I basically said to Mike, 'Do you think we can attract the top talent we need?' Every name on the Spectral Motion roster is a top-shelf makeup artist, and we were mindful to make them realize that the material was extremely fun and creative. We did not have a single guy in the whole group who was even slightly difficult, and we were

very careful to stimulate communication between the shops. We actually had Cinovation baking some of the prosthetic pieces for Spectral Motion, who were painting some of the pieces and doing some of the mechanics for DDT.

"When we arrived in Prague, [producer] Patrick Palmer and I got everybody together and said, 'When we say makeup effects, we don't want to break it down to Cinovation, DDT and Spectral Motion. This is *one* shop. You will share the same space, you will share the same warehouse and transportation and essentially get into the spirit of this summer boot camp!' In the '80s, makeup effects became very corporate and there was a bout of gigantism that had every shop struggling to be the biggest, and within that structure, a lot of dirty competition was involuntarily stimulated. It was every man for himself, and we made sure that *didn't* happen on *Hellboy*."

If del Toro knows what he's talking about, it's because the Mexican-born writer-director actually came up through the ranks of makeup FX himself. He began directing amateur Super-8 horror movies as a boy, going on to form his own makeup FX company, Necropia. While Necropia worked on various film and TV projects, del Toro also honed his writing and directing skills on episodes of the TV horror anthology *Hora Marcada*. By the early '90s, he was ready to

Born of fire, brought to Earth by sorcery, Hellboy is rescued during WWII by American troops and raised by young Dr. Broom (John Hurt plays the older Broom, see page 54).





Doesn't everyone want to grow up to be Hellboy? Having custom-fit the part for Perlman, del Toro really put the actor through his paces. It's exhausting work combatting evil.

and I realized that the *only* way I was going to get *Cronos* made—I was then a screenplay-writing student—was to show the effects and storyboards when I presented the script. I actually had the Cronos device made by my shop, with my money, to interest possible backers. So in a way, I used makeup effects as a stepping stone to doing my first feature. And I told myself that I would close the shop after my first film, which is what I did.”

Cronos went on to sweep the Ariel de Oro Awards (Mexico's equivalent of the Oscars), won the Critics' Prize at Cannes and was Mexico's Best Foreign Film entry for the 1994 Academy Awards. The young del Toro had become a force to be reckoned with. “What that film had, that I still love, was a very big heart,” he says. “Technically and narratively, it's still a first movie, but it's full of really good ideas, and it's so fresh. I find it extremely charming.”

Hell Weeks

With the success of *Cronos*, the major studios were soon courting del Toro. He decided that his follow-up project would be the giant-mutant-bug film *Mimic* (which he

discussed in STARLOG #243), but the experience wasn't entirely fulfilling. Reviews were somewhat mixed, and del Toro was less than thrilled by the constraints of working on a bigger-budget picture. “As a good Catholic, I'm always full of doubt,” he jokes. “I constantly question, analyze and over-think things. With *Mimic*, I felt I approached it the same way as my Mexican and European [productions], which is that I was not guarded at all. But I *should* have been, because it was the hardest experience. However, I believe that you learn more from your failures than you do your successes.”

“Although *Mimic* made enough money to generate two sequels, it wasn't a giant box-office hit, and I'm grateful for that, because otherwise I wouldn't have understood why it was successful. I was in disagreement with so many of the decisions that were made, but I realized that from then on, as a director, I should defend my movies like my children. I've never been faced with a situation as extreme as that, but now I always make my desires known right from the get-go.”

Several years would pass before del Toro's next film, not so much because of *Mimic*'s relative lack of success as it was a major transitional point in his life and career. “There were so many things going on at that time, both personally and professionally, and that led to my eventually coming to live in America,” he says. “At the same time, I was trying to follow my own path. I was offered movies—sometimes for very good money—that didn't attract me. After *Mimic*, I wanted to do something personal. Mounting *The Devil's Backbone* proved to be very rewarding, but also a little slow.”

Stylistically, *The Devil's Backbone* was a very different project for del Toro. The poignant ghost story is set at the end of the Spanish Civil War, in an ancient (and haunted) boy's school for Republican Army orphans. Although a critical success, it failed to capture much of an audience in America. “I wish it had had a wider release,” del Toro laments, “but the thing that really counts is for a movie to be what it *needs* to be. If that means it's released in very few theaters, fine.”

“I also learned with *Mimic* and *Devil's Backbone* that DVD is really Heaven. *Devil's Backbone* has been a steady seller on



Art Colors: Mark Chiarello

With this movie, del Toro is fashioning his own version of Mignola's comic-book mythos. Interested filmgoers can enjoy most of Mignola's original works, all in print from Dark Horse Comics in graphic novel form. See your local comics shop!

start work on his first full-length feature, the stylish vampire story *Cronos*. “There was never a transitional point,” he says, “because in reality, I was directing before I did makeup effects.”

“What happened was, there was nobody doing makeup effects in my home town, so I started learning them myself. It got to the point where friends who were doing amateur films would call me to do their effects, and I suddenly realized it was a good edge to have. I finally wrote to [makeup pioneer] Dick Smith and said, ‘I want to make a feature film called *Cronos*, and I cannot do it unless you let me take your course. It will become the catalyst of every dream I have to be able to do the effects for this movie, but they're too complicated [for my current knowledge].’ Dick allowed me to take the course,



Fish-man Abe Sapien (Doug Jones) is Hellboy's best friend and BPRD sidekick. He's sort of the *Creature without a lagoon*.



Kroenen (Ladislav Beran) is Rasputin's enforcer, yet another fantastic foe who faces Hellboy.

Prague as well, with many of the same production people, and also leaned heavily on a combination of cutting-edge CGI and makeup FX. "It was exactly that, in so many ways," del Toro agrees. "When we started *Blade II*, I called Mike Mignola and said, 'Come over and work with me on this. We're going to work with Wayne Barlowe and Ty Ruben and make it a dress rehearsal for *Hellboy*. We're going to find out more about shooting in Prague, and we're also attempting some digital enhancements.' So *Blade II* was basically an experimental film to learn how to do *Hellboy*. It was the lab in which to try some concoctions for *Hellboy*, but *Hellboy* is still such a different beast. As personal as *Blade II* was for me visually—and in the creation of the creatures, which I adore—it wasn't the type of screenplay that I would normally write or tackle. *Hellboy* is an extremely personal, heartfelt story."

Demon Hearts

DVD, and it's going to be reincarnated in a new Special Edition DVD release. I'm very happy with the movie. It's so great that *Devil's Backbone* exists the way I thought of it, regardless of how many copies it sells."

To some extent, del Toro's next film was a dry run for *Hellboy*. *Blade II* was shot in

turning point for del Toro, in terms of the kinds of projects he chooses to do next. After all, superheroes are big business in Hollywood these days, so one would imagine that del Toro—a self-confessed comic book fan—would love to sink his teeth into a couple of those high-profile productions.

"As an ex-choir boy, I've dealt with temptation in Hollywood at a very early age," he laughs. "Right after *Cronos*, I was offered many sequels that I was not interested in, and for big paydays. And right after *Hellboy*, I was offered some huge movies. But I always use the same criteria when choosing my projects:



Various gas masks (props, not prosthetics) hide Kroenen's grim visage.



Here's intriguing handiwork: Kroenen's intricate mechanical hand.

Whether I think they fail or succeed, I must have a genuine *interest* in the material.

"Even in the case of more commercial movies like *Mimic* or *Blade II*, I didn't do them as assignments. I believed I could make the greatest giant-insect film ever, and with *Blade II*, I went for a crazy visual feast. That's my criteria, because what I learned on *Mimic* is that if there are mistakes on the screen, they should at least be *my* mistakes. I'm not prone to temptation. My only vices are simple and cheap. I love my DVDs and my toys, and that's all I need. I don't drive a Mercedes or a BMW, and I don't live in a 6,000-square-foot mansion. I live a very simple life."

So what's next for del Toro? There are several possibilities, but none are by any means definite at this point. "To paraphrase John Lennon, 'A career is what happens when you're making other plans,'" he remarks. "If you had asked me at age 18 what

Rasputin's magicks brought Hellboy into this world, and now, armed with this mighty mecha-glove, the wizard could take him out of it.



If Hellboy survives this adventure, del Toro and Perlman are ready for more.





By lensing in Prague, del Toro was able to maximize his budget—and terrorize subway riders.



Hellboy shaves his horns, did you notice? It makes it easier to wear a hat.

my first movie would be, I would have said *Devil's Backbone*. If you had asked me what I was going to do after *Cronos*, I probably would have named many films that never got realized.

"I'm involved in writing several future projects, like *At the Mountains of Madness*, which is based on the H.P. Lovecraft story. I'm also scripting a ghost story called *Crimson Peak*, but I don't know whether they'll be next or not. I've found out the hard way that it isn't for me to determine."

One project that will probably not get the del Toro treatment is the long-discussed remake of *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. "I was very tempted," he admits, "but at the same time, I never formally pursued it. I had a couple of informal meetings in which I tossed around ideas with [producer] Gary Ross, and some of them were attractive, but my daughter and I watch Universal monster movies, and her favorite is *Creature*. One day we were watching it, and I realized that I couldn't do it. For good or bad, *Blade II* is not *Blade*, so I've never tried to remake

something, and I've never really tried to do a follow-up. I've always followed my own rules, and the same is true for *Hellboy*. It's a Mike Mignola comic, but it's a Guillermo del Toro movie. I'm attempting to make it my own, but with *Creature*, I felt that I couldn't get past the original."

Of course, the subject of remakes and sequels raises the obvious question of a *Hellboy* follow-up or two if the first film is a success. There's certainly no shortage of story material to draw from for future adventures, and the director has already gone on record as saying he would be interested in coming back. "I feel very good about [another *Hellboy*]," he says. "I think *Hellboy* would be a looser universe to explore in the sequels than the first one, which has so much mythology to set up.

"With *Blade II*, I remember people asking [writer-producer] David Goyer, 'What's the conflict for Blade in the second one?' and David saying that Blade has very little conflict. Blade loves what he does. He learns that vampires can be noble too, but [the

sequel doesn't have] as big a struggle as the first one because he found his mother's murderer, and he found his mother. Blade killed the assassin; he killed his mother. It's almost a Greek tragedy in terms of character resolution. So the second film was freer to explore looser, more fun aspects. And with any *Hellboy* sequels, we'll be able to explore more of the things that are examined in the comics. There's his relationship with ancient myths and more characters than just the main good guys and bad guys. We can delve into the 'Books of Magic,' so to speak."

But that's a discussion for another time. Right now, del Toro is putting all of his considerable energies into making the first installment as exciting a moviegoing experience as he possibly can. "If you don't know Hellboy, and you go to the movie as a 'virgin' about the subject, you should prepare to meet an extraordinary character. He'll make you feel like when you were a kid reading your *Spider-Man* comics and wanted to be Spider-Man. You'll say, 'When I grow up, I want to be like Hellboy!'"

"There are also two love stories in the movie," Guillermo del Toro adds. "One is the father-son relationship, and the other is between the beast and the beast: Liz Sherman and Hellboy. That's what this movie has that most comic book adaptations—with the exception of *X-Men* and *Spider-Man*—don't: It has a huge heart. It has a real human, approachable core of a story. It isn't all razzle and dazzle. You'll get more razzle and dazzle than you can shake a stick at, but what's really great about *Hellboy* is its heart."

The movie opens April 2. So, are you off to the nearest multiplex now?



Design & Layout: Heiner Fell

Art Colors: Dave Stewart