

RUNNING MAN

Arnold Schwarzenegger stars in this futuristic action tale based on a novel by Stephen King.

By Dan Scapperotti

Production began on THE RUNNING MAN last September for Taft/Barish Productions and immediately ran into problems (17:1:6). The producers were unhappy with director George Pan Cosmatos (RAMBO) and two weeks into filming he was replaced by Paul Michael Glaser. The film's screenplay is based on the science fiction novella written by Stephen King under his Richard Bachman pseudonym.

Glaser calls it "a minimalistic, futuristic action film." The story is set in Los Angeles 40 years after a killer earthquake has devastated the city, in a society run by big corporations and the media. "When I first came on board and looked at what I had to work with, I thought to myself, this is bizarre," said Glaser. "It's like doing a commercial version of BRAZIL attached to NETWORK." Tri-Star considered a late summer release, but now plans to open the film in December.

Arnold Schwarzenegger stars as Richards, a former cop framed for a mass murder, a role originally essayed by Christopher Reeve before production was shut down. Richards breaks out of prison with a pair of fellow convicts, Laughlin (Yaphet Kotto) and Weiss (Marvin J. McIntyre). In THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME meets high-tech storyline Richard Dawson plays the host of a TV game show on which convicted felons are the contestants called "Runners." The prizes are suspended sentences or full pardons. The losers



Runners Yaphet Kotto and Arnold Schwarzenegger after their defeat of Subzero, a Stalker assigned to kill them on a televised gameshow of the future. Tri-Star has put off the film's release to December.

don't get a second chance. The Runners are pursued by Stalkers, super-athletes, using futuristic weapons.

Among the Stalkers are Subzero, who uses razor sharp hockey sticks and exploding pucks; Dynamo, whose main weapon is deadly electrical charges; Buzzsaw, a chainsaw-wielding butcher; and Fireball, whose napalm fists spell fiery doom. The slipping ratings of the game show, devised as a Roman circus to keep the populace diverted, makes host Dawson desperate to find an opponent worthy of the Stalkers. He decides that Schwarzenegger is the answer.

The film's action calls for some grisly death scenes and Glaser said he doesn't want to pull his punches. "You want to deliver each particular weapon in the most emphatic way possible," he said. "Some of them have been toned-down and some of them have been toned-up." Glaser said he changed

several aspects of the production to tie up loose ends and fit the action scenes into the available schedule and budget.

Former Taft/Barish executive producer Rob Cohen and producer Ted Zinneman gave Glaser only two days to prepare before he had to begin shooting. "With two days you only have time to look at the locations for next week and reread the script a couple of times."

Glaser made his mark as an actor, playing Starsky on the popular STARKY AND HUTCH TV show, which led to directing several of the episodes. "I had toyed with directing in graduate school," said Glaser. "When I did my television series I found it was the only way to avoid boredom, so I actively began pursuing the directing." Glaser admitted that being one of the stars of a popular series gave him the clout to move into directing. But that leverage disappeared

with the end of the series. "Thereafter I had a shallow period of six years where no one in town wanted to give me a shot. It's like everything else, you have to be persistent and keep at it." Glaser's break came from Michael Mann the director of THE KEEP, who used Glaser to direct several episodes of Mann's popular MIAMI VICE TV show as well as the feature BAND OF THE HAND.

To get a grasp on the production without being inundated by a deluge of details, Glaser told co-workers on THE RUNNING MAN to feed him information in small doses. Glaser resumed filming and began

to assimilate important facts about the production at the same time, during the first seven weeks of night shooting. "This gave me an advantage," said Glaser of the night scheduling. "I'd finish at 7 a.m., then sleep four or five hours, and get up to prep in the afternoon. I had pretty long days."

Glaser said he maintained his 61-day shooting schedule despite the obvious problems in taking over for another director. Much of the filming took place in Fontana, California near Palm Springs. The location provided an old Kaiser Steel mill that sat on 1,500 acres. The plant, which is currently being disembowled by the Japanese, served as the prison in the opening scenes and as the lethal Game Zone.

"Directing is basically problem solving," said Glaser. "When you come into something in the middle like I did, your problem solving goes up about 300%." □