

THE SHADOW

The sinister superhero leaps from the pages of the pulps to the silver screen.

By Mark A. Altman

Can radio's definitive superhero make the transition to the big screen? That's what fans of a legendary pulp-fiction crusader will find out when Universal releases its big-budget version of the venerable crimefighting specter, **THE SHADOW**.

After years of development, filming began last October with Alec Baldwin in the title role. Says producer Martin Bregman (SEA OF LOVE), "The Shadow is the original crimefighting anti-hero in pulp literature. He came way before Doc Savage, Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Dishwasherman, whatever."

Although **THE SHADOW** has undergone numerous permutations since the original 1930s pulps, the premise has remained the same: socialite Lamont Cranston uses abilities obtained in a Tibetan monastery to fight crime by clouding men's minds and becoming the Shadow. "In those days it was easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys," says Bregman of the Shadow's '30s origins. "The good guys wore white; the bad guys wore black. Here was this amazing crimefighter who wore a black cape and a black hat, who knew what evil lurked in the hearts of men."

Russell Mulcahy, whose **HIGHLANDER** films have not made him a name to be reckoned with, helms Universal's big screen adaption of **THE SHADOW**.



Alec Baldwin stars as socialite Lamont Cranston, a.k.a. the Shadow, the sinister radio superhero who "knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men."

Unlike previous incarnations, the new version will depict the character's origin, including the time when Cranston embraced evil before using his abilities for good. "The interesting thing for me is he is someone who discovers he has a great gift, which he uses for nefarious purposes in Tibet, and you see that," explains Baldwin. "You see what he was like and the changes he goes through. He is saved by a mystic who teaches him to use these skills for good; then when Cranston goes to New York in 1936, he uses these powers to fight crime, and in order to make that transformation he has to go to a very dark place."

Screenwriter David Koepp, whose recent jaunts in the genre have included co-writing credits on **DEATH BECOMES HER** and **JURASSIC PARK**, was charged with helping the Shadow haunt the big screen. "It's actually been fairly easy," he says. "There have been about 15-20

drafts, which is kind of taxing, but we wanted to create a myth. We also felt that it was really our duty to explain his origin, and it required a lot of thought. I probably worked for three years on this, because we wanted it to be meticulous."

The film's malevolent villain derives from the Shadow pulp novels, a descendant of Genghis Kahn who tries to obtain the world's first nuclear device. "I play Kahn," says actor John Lone, star of **THE LAST EMPEROR**. "His first name is irrelevant. He wants to take over the world, but instead of doing it on horseback, he has the power to possess your subconscious and control your consciousness. He has great potential, which he uses for evil, as opposed to the Shadow, who uses his powers to discover his heart and become more spiritual."

According to director Russell Mulcahy, a veteran of countless music videos and the first two **HIGHLANDER** films, "One of the biggest delights in doing this film is my role in bringing it all to life. We're dealing with a modern myth of great magnitude, and not only is it populated with great characters but also incredible sets and special effects. Even though it's not a special effects movie, I think this film is going to hold a lot of surprises."

One of the greatest challenges for Mulcahy is visualizing a hero who strikes fear into the hearts of men with his chilling and apparently disembodied voice. While easy to manifest on radio, bringing the Shadow's unique abilities to the screen convincingly was far more difficult. "We're using classic theatrical-cinematic techniques, and we're also using state-of-the-art CGI and other effects," says Mulcahy. "The thing about the Shadow is when he does reach down to grab his dark heart, it can become very scary, so there will be a lot of thrills. This film is exciting and suspenseful, but there's also a great amount of humor. This is not a dark, brooding film. I'm not saying anything negative about any films that have been out, but this film



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because of the connection.”

Rounding out the ensemble are an eclectic group of veteran screen talent including comedian Jonathan Winters as police commissioner Wanwright Barth; Peter Boyle (OUTLAND) as cab driver Moe Shrevnitz, a Shadow agent; Tim Curry (LEGEND) as Folly Claymore, an irritating scientist;

and theatrical legend Ian McKellen as Margot’s father, Reinhardt Lane. Says McKellen, “I liked being in this film with Tim Curry, because when we did AMADEUS on Broadway, he played the goodie and I played the baddie, and now our roles are slightly re-

versed.”

It’s a great thrill and, thank God, it’s not my responsibility if it doesn’t work out.” The film will not be lurking on movie screens until July, but early footage looks spectacular. Baldwin is particularly good as he transforms from a dark-hearted villain in Tibet into the crimefighting apparition in New York. Of the casting, Koepp offers, “I was delighted. I had Alec Baldwin in mind from the time I started. You never get your first choice—ever. I saw his eyes and heard his voice in my head as I was writing.”

With 50 licensees already lined up and millions of dollars invested in bringing the classic character back to the screen, Universal can only hope that, unlike Disney’s DICK TRACY, those too young to remember THE SHADOW will still be drawn in by the stylish super-heroics of a dark knight who truly knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men. If they’re right, Alec Baldwin admits to being interested in a sequel, and, if not, there’s always Harrison Ford. □

The Tony Award-winning actor, whose appearances in THE KEEP and LAST ACTION HERO have not earned the acclaim of stage productions like RICHARD III, adds, “This movie is going to be an absolute smash success, but they just wanted to have a little mascot of bad luck in the cast.

Before Universal’s adaptation, the crimefighting spectre haunted serials like THE SHADOW RETURNS.



THE SHADOW originated in a series of pulp novels and comic books in the 1930s, before making the transition to radio. [Cover art supplied by Robert Brosch Archival Photography.]



is unique in that there’s some great humor in the script.”

Reportedly, a morphing-like technique will be utilized when Lamont undergoes his startling transformation into the Shadow. “One of the reasons THE SHADOW was perfect for radio was he was invisible, so when he clouded men’s minds, he could be in the room and you weren’t aware of it,” points out screenwriter Koepp. “Obviously, there’s an element in film that is not present in radio, which is you can see it. When it makes its jump from one medium to another, there are new rules that have to be invented, and I think we’ve done a lot of that to make it a really compelling visual event. Russell has worked very hard to find ways to manifest the Shadow as other than an invisible man, because it’s not an invisible man story.”

Koepp adds, “To me, the exciting thing about THE SHADOW legend is the network of agents. That’s the thing I would really connect with—to think that I, too, could

be an agent of the Shadow. We tried to create the idea of this world in New York that exists below the everyday world.”

Says Baldwin, who had to master the Shadow’s sinister laugh, “All of the work for me with this movie has been done by David [Koepp]. The script is so clever and witty and the scenes are so much fun to play that I think it takes care of itself. You say the words and play it as written, which is always a luxury. More often than you like, you have to make more than is there [in the script]. Now, for me, the responsibility is to be as good as what’s on the page.”

Starring as Lamont’s love interest, Margot Lane, is Penelope Anne Miller, who recently wrapped CARLITO’S WAY with producer Bregman. Miller calls Lane “a glamorous dilettante,” adding that her character has “telepathic powers that aren’t recognized until I meet Cranston. Then together we become a stronger force, because I facilitate his powers and become more powerful