

SPECIAL REPORT: Horror's Big Comeback

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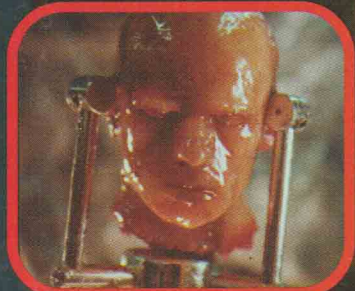
Horror's dark hero

**Stephen King's
TV Takeover**

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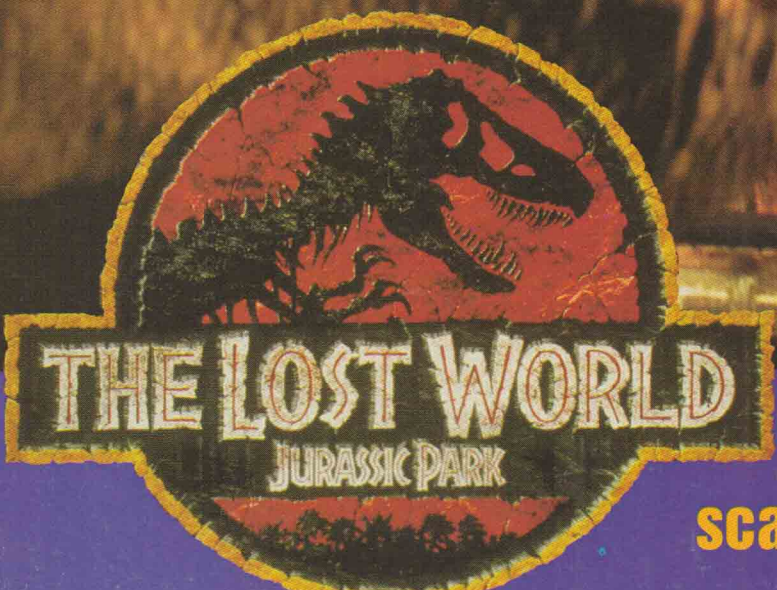
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THE LOST WORLD
JURASSIC PARK

Jurassic Park's biggest star
rex again in *The Lost World*.

Returning scriptwriter David
Koepp brought all his
experience to bear on scripting
the Spielberg sequel.

By ANTHONY C. FERRANTE

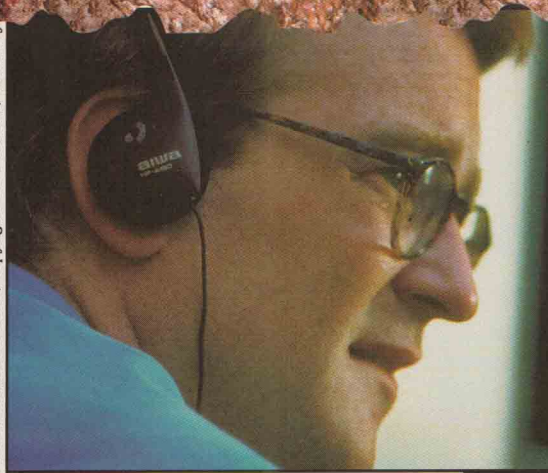
For David Koepp, screenwriting is very much like the five stages of accepting death—there's a little bit of fear, anger, sadness, denial and acceptance in the process no matter which way you approach it. Luckily, Koepp keeps busy enough that by the time the acceptance stage comes around and a movie is released, he has already moved on to the next couple of projects, where the process starts all over again.

"A script is an imperfect reflection of a film, and you have to pull out all the stops and do everything you can to make it seem like a movie—and that doesn't mean just writing camera moves in there," Koepp says. "It means implying things so that readers can get an image in their heads, and of course that's very hard. I think the mark of a good screenwriter is how often you're willing to return to the well. How many times you are willing to go back again and again to it, because it needs that in order to make it better."

While Koepp initially made a name for himself writing quirky, character-oriented material like the dark thrillers *Bad Influence* and *Apartment Zero*, it's his higher-profile films such as *Jurassic Park*, *The Shadow* and *Mission: Impossible* that he's best known for. As for his approach to writing in the two different realms, Koepp notes that it all comes down to depth. "The demands for each one are different, but I just try to respond to what the story dictates when rewriting," he explains. "When you have a big concept hovering over everything, it tends to inhibit you as far as getting into the characters. In a smaller movie, the expectations are different, and so is an audience's patience. They're willing to sit there and listen to three people sitting and talking for a while, but that might not be appropriate in an adventure movie."

This summer, Koepp switches to blockbuster mode again, having returned to the world of *Jurassic Park* by adapting Michael Crichton's sequel novel *The Lost World* into Steven Spielberg's big-budget dinosaur extravaganza, opening May 23 from Universal. Of course, as is common with Spielberg's genre projects, secrecy surrounding *The Lost World* is as tight as Fort Knox, with a sense of vagueness coming from anyone who dares discuss it.

"It's its own thing," Koepp ventures. "The book, as you know, diverges a little bit from the first one, and it was a curious situation where the book was a sequel to



The man with the megabuck imagination: writer David Koepp creates the spectacle for directors like Steven Spielberg to visualize.

the original novel with some acknowledgment of the first movie, notably the survival of Ian Malcolm [played by Jeff Goldblum]. So it's a follow-up to the first movie, but it's also based in part on the book."

Given that the Crichton novel had been viewed as nothing more than a disappointing cash cow by some, it's not surprising that Spielberg would want to make some drastic changes to make it more palatable and groundbreaking for the big screen. For instance, a couple of the movie's dinosaurs reportedly end up trampling through the city of San Diego, thus beating Godzilla's forthcoming attack on New York City via *Independence Day* creators Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin by a year.

Of the returning cast members, Goldblum reprises his role as mathematician Malcolm and Sir Richard Attenborough has an extended cameo as Jurassic Park creator John Hammond, who informs Malcolm that the breeding ground for the dinosaurs was Isla Sorna, a different island nearly 80 miles away from the first movie's Isla Nublar. The dinosaurs there have now been accidentally released from captivity by a hurricane. Hammond sees this as an opportunity for people to study the prehistoric creatures up close in a natural environment, not the synthetic one he created for them in the original, and Malcolm soon learns some of the same lessons he did the first time around—namely, that Mother Nature should be left alone. His new research team finds this out the hard way as they must avoid being devoured by a new, ferocious crop of carnivorous dinosaurs.

Sounds like a setup for a few potentially scary situations—and Koepp isn't averse to placing the sequel in the fright genre. "I've always wanted to do a horror film—I love horror films," he says. "As soon as I think of

The big-budget sequel introduces new humans such as Dr. Sarah Harding (Julianne Moore) for the prehistoric beasts to play with.



"You can solve everything else, but the most important thing is the characters...if you don't nail that, you're in trouble."

a good one, I will do it, but *The Lost World* definitely has some of those elements and comes pretty close." The novel's double Tyrannosaurus assault on Malcolm and his girlfriend, Dr. Sarah Harding (Julianne Moore), in their trailer will likely be one of the adapted highlights.


Joining Goldblum in his jungle adventure are *Jurassic* newcomers Moore, Vince Vaughn, Arliss Howard, Peter Stormare, Richard Schiff (from Koepp's *The Trigger Effect*) and Vanessa Lee Chester as young stow-away Kelly, now Malcolm's daughter. *Dragonheart*'s Pete Postlethwaite co-stars as big-game hunter Roland Tembo, who hopes to bag one of the island's rampaging T. rexes and who was added to the story by Koepp. In fact, the screenwriter has junked most of the situations and supporting characters from Crichton's novel, replacing meddling corporate thief Lewis Dodgson with Hammond's evil nephew, Peter Ludlow (Howard), who wants to capture the island's creatures and display them in the U.S. Like the novel, the *Lost World* movie adds eight new dinosaur species to the mix, among them several Stegosauruses, the chicken-like

Compsognathuses (featured in the *Jurassic* novel but not the film), a Maiasaurus and the ever-popular Apatosaurus.

Much has changed in the film universe since *Jurassic Park* was released in 1993 and broke numerous box-office records. The original presented state-of-the-art computer-generated dinosaurs mixed with Stan Winston's animatronics for a seamless, eye-boggling journey. Four years later, CGI creatures are old hat—even the Pillsbury Dough Boy has shed his stop-motion origins and is now solely created in the computer realm. Thus, Koepp and Spielberg, as well as the illusion makers at Stan Winston Studio and Industrial Light and Magic, knew they had to find new ways to surprise and thrill a "been there, seen that" FX-savvy audience of the '90s.

"We really are trying to do something different with this movie," says Koepp. "There's a different story, different characters with different needs and goals. It is a little bigger and grander in scale than the first one. We've progressed so far in terms of digital effects and the like that what we're able to do now is much more adventurous than it was four or five years ago."

It was during the writing of the first *Jurassic Park* that Koepp first learned how the then-burgeoning CGI technology was slowly changing the face of film and the screenwriting process in general. "When I started working on *Jurassic*, I asked Steven what my limitations were, and he said, 'Your imagination,'" recalls Koepp. "I soon learned that



The "Jaws on land" analogy is just as true here as in the first film—only this time, there are a lot more of them.

this was a great summary for how you ought to write for fantasy or adventure movies—you just cut loose. If they can't do something, they'll tell you. I remember writing a line of description in *Jurassic* that said, 'The T. rex runs down the Galimimuses and devours them in a cloud of dust.' I thought, 'It took me 24 seconds to write that line, let's see if anybody can do this,' and sure enough, that's exactly what they did. *Jurassic* was a watershed in terms of special effects, not just because of any particular techniques,

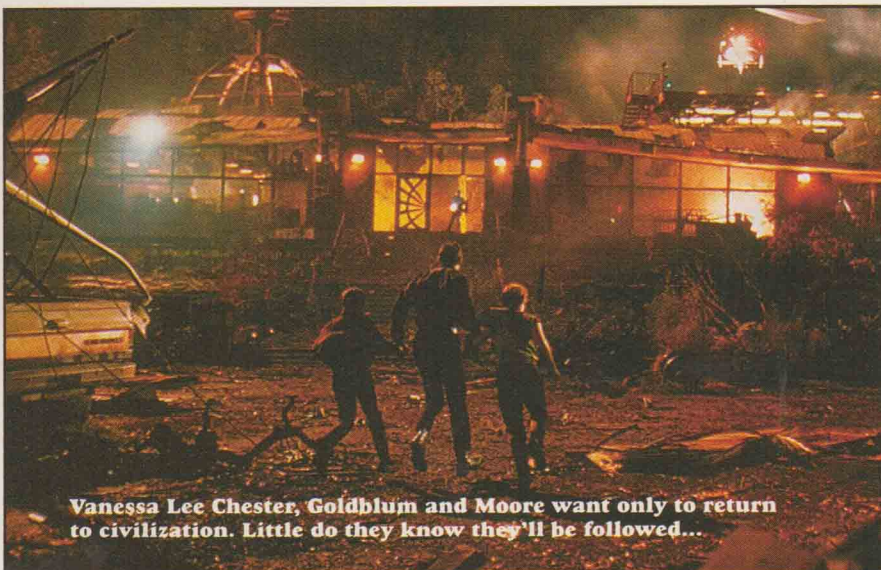
but because of an overall attitude of 'We can do anything.' It's not even about costing a crushing amount of money, although \$50-some million is a lot, but that stuff gets cheaper every time."

Truthfully, the only limitations that now exist in transforming the written word to an onscreen image, according to Koepp, are the budgetary kind. "I think any film can be made for any price," says Koepp. "You could have made *Jurassic Park* for a million dollars, but you would have ended up with *Carnosaur*. It

would have been a considerably different film. You could also have made *Apartment Zero* for \$48 million. It's just all about how you do it. I don't think a screenwriter should ever feel hindered by the bounds of reality; you just have to write the best story you can, and if you're forced to make some changes because of economic reality, you do it."

With the good all this brings to the table, Koepp does note that there is a downside to technology—especially when the hardware supplants storytelling, as was the case this past year, when movies like *Eraser* and *Dante's Peak* delivered plenty of great FX but skimped on delivering any real, solid story. "When you have a new technology, there's a great rush to want to use it—and use it in the most spectacular way possible, which is why you're seeing all these disaster movies coming out," says Koepp. "There's a great deal of excitement at first to use the new technology in creating fires, volcanoes, tornadoes, floods, but once that excitement fades, I believe in the second wave you will see the technology used to further stories and make them even better, rather than supplant them."

Koepp landed in Los Angeles nearly 13 years ago when he transferred to the UCLA film program. The now-34-year-old screenwriter



Vanessa Lee Chester, Goldblum and Moore want only to return to civilization. Little do they know they'll be followed...

“Jurassic” Survivor

Have you heard the joke about the two cannibals who are eating a clown?” actor Jeff Goldblum asks in his trademark deadpan demeanor. “One says to the other, ‘Hey, does this taste funny to you?’”

It’s evident that Goldblum’s onscreen charisma is no act, as he displays the same charm and eccentricities that audiences have come to love over the years, right down to his sense of humor. The actor has managed to mix pseudointellectual posturing with pathos and warmth in a myriad of memorable characters throughout the years, including: transforming scientist Seth Brundle in *The Fly*; the furry alien who lands in LA and discovers that *Earth Girls Are Easy*; the cable TV troubleshooter who is the first to discover that the mysterious signals from space in *Independence Day* are not friendly; and *Jurassic Park*’s mathematician Ian Malcolm, whose assertion that turning man-eating monsters into amusement park attractions isn’t the smartest thing in the world is proved frighteningly correct.

“I like variety, and I like doing things that are both funny and serious,” Goldblum says. “When I started, Stanley Eisner said that it takes 20 years to become an actor anyway. It’s a worthwhile pursuit to utilize your life-long appetite for expression in this neat little game of made-up situations and feeling it out like it’s real. I love it and enjoy doing different things, whether it scares me a little or challenges me.”

This summer, Goldblum embarks on a first in his career—a sequel. Four years after the original box-office behemoth, he returns to the Malcolm role in Steven Spielberg’s *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, based once again on a novel by Michael Crichton. “I really enjoyed the book and adore Steven Spielberg,” the actor says. “I had a great time making *Jurassic*, and I thought this could be very good too.”

While Goldblum confirms that *The Lost World* follows the basic story of the book (which, in deference to the movie, brought back Malcolm, who died in the original *Jurassic* novel), there will be some differences. “It’s the same general idea of the book,” he says. “The island is still there, but we’re doing our version of it, and the dinosaurs totally take us over this time.”

The general themes of cloning and extinction were very important to Goldblum, who feels that both movies broach the issue without being heavy-handed. “Nature has selected species for extinction, and we shouldn’t try to change that,” he says. “We have the technology to do a lot of things, but we need to be as self-examining and wise with it as we can.”

Whereas the previous film cast Malcolm as a supporting player to Sam Neill and Laura Dern’s primary heroes, the actor now finds himself the star of this latest adventure. It didn’t hurt that since *Jurassic Park* became a huge hit, Goldblum also starred in another big summer blockbuster—*Independence Day*. “I don’t want to count my chickens before they hatch, but I’m optimistic about the future,” says Goldblum about the chance that his latest vehicle will be yet another record-breaking release.

Finding himself continually drawn into the science fiction world, particularly in scientist roles, Goldblum admits that he’s slowly becoming fascinated by these realms himself. “I wasn’t a science kind of person in school,” he says. “Now that I’m playing parts that require me to know these things, I’m really getting into this stuff. I’m reading a Carl Sagan book called *The Demon Haunted World*, and he makes science seem very human, cool, approachable, sexy, vital and spiritual.”

Returning to the role of Malcolm with this newfound knowledge was enticing for Goldblum, who notes that what attracted him to the first *Jurassic Park* was the character’s non-scholarly stance. “He’s a smart mathematician, but not an academic,” the actor says. “He’s such an interesting, complicated character and the real voice of reason and sanity. He has a real vision for science and its place, but there was a fun story to tell as well. It was an intricate little dance that Steven helped me with a lot.”

Goldblum, in fact, grew up loving the very same genre he now stars in when he would visit the local cinema in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania every Saturday afternoon as a child. “We had a beautiful old theater called the Leona, and my sister and I once saw Vincent Price in *The Fly*,” says Goldblum, who got to play his own version in David Cronenberg’s remake. “*King Kong vs. Godzilla* was another big movie when I was little. I remember

it being packed that day. You couldn’t hear anything on the screen. Kids were throwing popcorn boxes. It was great.”

In between megabudget screen assignments, Goldblum continually broadens his horizons; he was nominated for a 1996 Academy Award for his first short film as director and also manages to frequently join his *Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* co-star Peter Weller to play jazz in Los Angeles clubs with their band. But as Goldblum describes it, everything he does is part of a learning process. “I still consider myself in training,” he says. “I’m enjoying every bit of it, especially the acting. It’s like somebody who thinks, ‘I want to dance. I love to watch dancing,’ then you go to class and it’s thrilling when they show you. So it’s been fun seeing myself grow, because this is what I’ve always wanted to do.”

—Anthony C. Ferrante



Striking a blow for mathematicians everywhere, Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) takes over hero chores in the *Jurassic* sequel.



Photo: Copyright 1992 Universal/Amblin

Koepp is one of the few people who could control the actions of *Jurassic's* Velociraptors.

reflects that he has certainly come a long way from his first two years, when he had to ride the LA bus system every day to get to classes. "It was great," notes Koepp, "because I read more than I ever read in my entire life. You get on a bus and you have to hide yourself. It was a long ride—90 minutes a day of uninterrupted reading—but it was nice."

Upon graduating, Koepp got his break co-scripting the offbeat thriller *Apartment Zero*. "I cannot lay claim to a rich pedigree of suffering as much as I would like to," says Koepp.



Moore and Goldblum search for dinosaurs, while we'd be happy just with a few more photos of them.



Lost Photos: David James/Copyright 1997 Universal/Amblin

By this point, Richard Schiff (left) doesn't need the others to tell him that hunting dinos is a bad idea.

"I was working a day job and had just gotten out of school—when Martin Donovan and I had a meeting for this idea he had called *Apartment Zero*. We wrote it together, raised the money ourselves, sold the foreign rights and made it for about \$4 million."

While *Apartment Zero* managed to become a modest little cult hit, Koepp admits that it didn't open the Hollywood door completely. "It was great in terms of experience for a number of reasons, none of which were from a financial point of view," he says. "Artistically, it was very satisfying. I met my wife on that movie, but my big break came when I wrote *Bad Influence*. That was the script that got me jobs and agents."

After that screenplay was produced, with Curtis Hanson directing James Spader and Rob Lowe, Koepp slowly eased his way into the studio system. He co-wrote original scripts such as *I Come in Peace* (with John Kamps, though both ended up taking pseudonyms), *Death Becomes Her* (also with Donovan) and *The Paper* (with his brother Stephen) while doing adaptation work for a number of other high-profile films, including Brian De Palma's *Carlito's Way* and the disappointing translation of the classic pulp hero the Shadow to the big screen. "I don't think the script for *The Shadow* was ever really good," says Koepp. "You just try to tell the most interesting story you can. It's hard any time you're recreating a legend—but you know, some times you do a better job than others."

One of the most important things Koepp has learned about being a

screenwriter in the studio system is to get his vision of the movie down first and deal with everyone else's input from there. "The purest writing stage is the first draft," he explains. "That's when you're pretty much left alone. Then the writing gets into the non-isolated stage—you start meeting with people, talking about stuff, changing things, going on set, dealing with actors, rehearsals, producers and studios. I can usually write a first draft in anywhere from three to six weeks, depending on how inspired I am. Then I rewrite from there." Koepp keeps all the drafts of his scripts nearby in his office, just in case "I throw something out and it turns out it was actually good, and a month later I need to go back and find it so I can put it back in."

Keeping things fresh, however, is the tricky part. "Sometimes, if you're lucky, six months can go by between drafts," he continues. "You write it, they say, 'Gee, this is great, we'd like to make this,' and you go, 'Oh, fantastic.' So you go off and do something else, and then six months later they want another draft and come back to you, and it's like a clean slate. You can read it and say, 'We should change this and that should be different and this should go there.' Sometimes scripts are not all new versions either. The rule of thumb is that the bottom stack of the drafts are vastly different from one another, but as you rewrite it gets less and less as you get to the top. By the time we got to late August of '92 on *Jurassic*, for example, we were just changing a few lines on a

Hurricanes caused problems on the Jurassic shoot, so for *The Lost World*, Koepp just wrote them into the script.

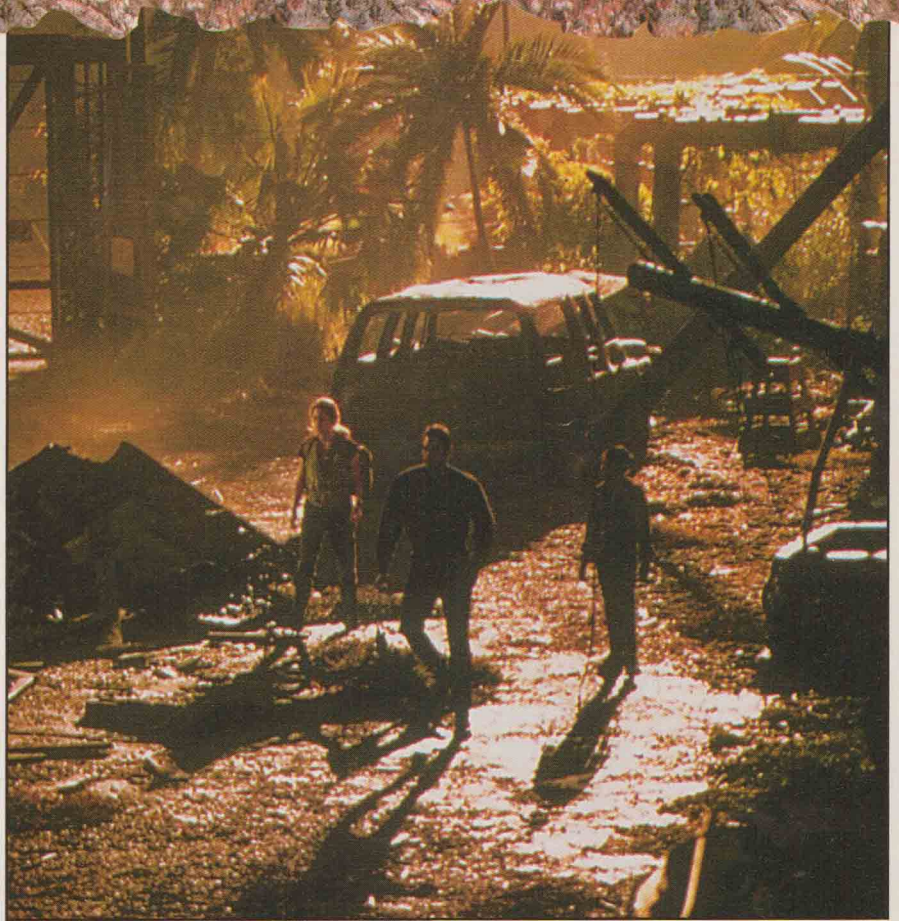
few pages while we were shooting.”

While one could conceivably get lost writing so many different drafts of one project, Koepp points out that as long as you don't lose sight of the characters, you can't go wrong. "You can solve everything else, but the most important thing is the characters," says Koepp. "Structural problems and storylines can be worked out. You can change an ending, re-write scenes to make it better, but if you don't nail the characters, you're in trouble. If you find yourself going back to a later draft and saying, 'I haven't given this character something to do so she *has* a character,' then you definitely have a problem."

While Koepp had a hand (as did many other writers) in last summer's blockbuster *Mission: Impossible*, it was on his directorial debut *The Trigger Effect* later in '96 that he felt he was finally coming into his own. "Directing is really fun, and it's great when you're also the screenwriter, because the conversations are a lot shorter and you win all the arguments, depending on which side you're on at the moment," he says. "The best thing, though, was finally being able to see something through from idea to finished film—that uninterrupted concentration is something screenwriters just don't get."

Very much inspired by the *Twilight Zone* episodes he grew up watching on TV, *Trigger Effect* follows the plight of three characters during a massive power outage and examines how they struggle to survive without the luxuries of transportation, phones and electronic equipment. "There was an old *Twilight Zone* called 'The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street' which my uncle [Claude Akins] was in, and I always felt that the '50s paranoia in that episode was suddenly appropriate again," Koepp says.

While he certainly could have tackled a larger canvas similar to the blockbuster movies he had previously written, Koepp admits that he preferred making his debut at the helm with a more modest project. "It was a perfect film for a first-time director, because it was so much more controllable and mostly about these three people," he explains. "I didn't want to confuse the issue with special effects shots. We did have just one, but it was a big pain in the ass: There's this huge crane shot that rises up over the house, and we put in this entire background for the blackout. After doing that shot, I was kind of glad we didn't have any



"I've always wanted to do a horror film [and] *The Lost World* definitely has some of those elements and comes pretty close."

more to worry about for the rest of the shoot."

Of course, Koepp wanted to get his feet wet before jumping into the \$8-million *Trigger Effect*, so he fronted \$50,000 and made a 14-minute suspense short entitled "Suspicious," starring Janeane Garofalo and Michael Rooker. "It was based on this old campfire story," explains Koepp. "It's about a woman on a long car trip. She goes to this diner and thinks everyone is staring at her, which in fact they are. So she leaves as quickly as she can and gets to this gas station, where the attendant is acting very suspiciously. He's staring at her the whole time, trying to get her out of the car with one lie or another. She finally gets inside the building and he races after her. She thinks he's going to kill her, but what he was trying to tell her was, 'There's a man with an ax inside your car.' It's that old story," one that was also dramatized

in 1983's anthology film *Nightmares*.

Nabbing Garofalo and Rooker to star in the short was a coup, though Koepp observes that it still fell into the guerrilla filmmaking category in comparison to his feature. "You beg the actors and their agents, and you basically pray," he says. "You can't really pay them, either. I did pay the crew, but the rule was that the department heads and actors didn't get paid. That way they hope that someday you'll go on to do a feature and ask them back for that. And a lot of people from my short actually came along for *The Trigger Effect*," including Rooker.

Naturally, Koepp has continued to use his screenwriting work and the chance to hang around on set with such great directors as Spielberg and De Palma as an almost secondary film school. For the present, he wants to divide his time between being a scribe-for-hire and nurturing his own directorial projects.

"Working on movies like *The Lost World* is such a good experience—I like to hang around as long as I'm welcomed, and I've been welcomed a lot," he says. "Working with directors I respect, yes, I like that. I enjoy writing scripts I originate, and would like to direct again. But you work to try to get yourself into a position where you have choices, and I would like to continue to have the option to do both." 