

Having sat out the previous sequel, Dr. Grant (Sam Neill) finds himself standing in raptor attention again.

By MARC SHAPIRO

Actor Sam Neill got a real workout when he

# Back to the PARK

**D**irector Joe Johnston had warned Sam Neill that he had better get fit before stepping back into the role of Dr. Alan Grant in *Jurassic Park III*. And Neill took Johnston at his word.

"I definitely got myself into pretty good shape for this movie," Neill chuckles. "But it's all gone now. I'm the same old butterball that I was before I did the movie."

Neill, the soft-spoken, accommodating actor who has carved out a rather substantial career in genre films, acknowledges his association with horror and the fantastic but also points out that his participation

in such horror films as *Event Horizon*, *In the Mouth of Madness* and *The Final Conflict* has been part and parcel of his approach to acting. "I end up doing quite a few of these things because I sort of deliberately try to mix up the stuff that I do."

After bringing a real sense of humanity to the potential cardboard cipher of Dr. Grant in 1993's original *Jurassic Park*, it would seem a given that he would be asked to reprise the character in the first sequel, *The Lost World*. But such was not the case. "Actually, I was not that shocked when I was not asked back," Neill says. "I knew my character had not been in the second book, and so it probably would

have been a bit of a stretch to have brought me in for *The Lost World*. I didn't really miss playing Grant again. But then, I never usually miss any of my characters once they clear the script."

Nor was he put off by the fact that Steven Spielberg wasn't returning to the helm for *Jurassic Park III*, or that there wasn't a Michael Crichton source novel this time. "I was actually encouraged by the fact that neither one of them would be involved. It's probably better at this point to get a fresh and different perspective on things," he says.

What Neill found when he read through the *Jurassic Park III* script was a quite nat-





returned to "Jurassic" duty.

Photo: ILM

ural evolution of his character. "Grant is now older, gnarlier and much wiser than he was before," he notes. "He is still very much the dedicated scientist, but his attitude has obviously been changed by what he experienced in the first *Jurassic Park*. He is definitely reluctant to go through that experience again, but as he soon discovers, the fates are conspiring to return him to this hell."

And hell, the talented thespian laughs, is a good assessment of what he went through on the movie. "It was a very physical shoot, much more so than the first film," recalls Neill, who was born in Northern Ireland and

"These films are only as good as the actors make them, and we worked hard at making this one believable."

raised in New Zealand. "There were the expected bumps and bruises, and we were wet and cold and in many uncomfortable situations. It seemed like every time I turned around, I was running from something or hanging from something or acting afraid. It was all good fun, but definitely hard work. I would have to say that the highlight of this film for me was getting out of it in one piece."

Neill balks at comparing director Johnston to Spielberg, diplomatically stating, "Comparisons are odious. But I loved Joe. He was a great guy to hang out with and he had a wicked sense of fun, which is the kind of attitude you need on a film like this." Working alongside the likes of Téa Leoni and William H. Macy was another perk. "What a lot of peo-



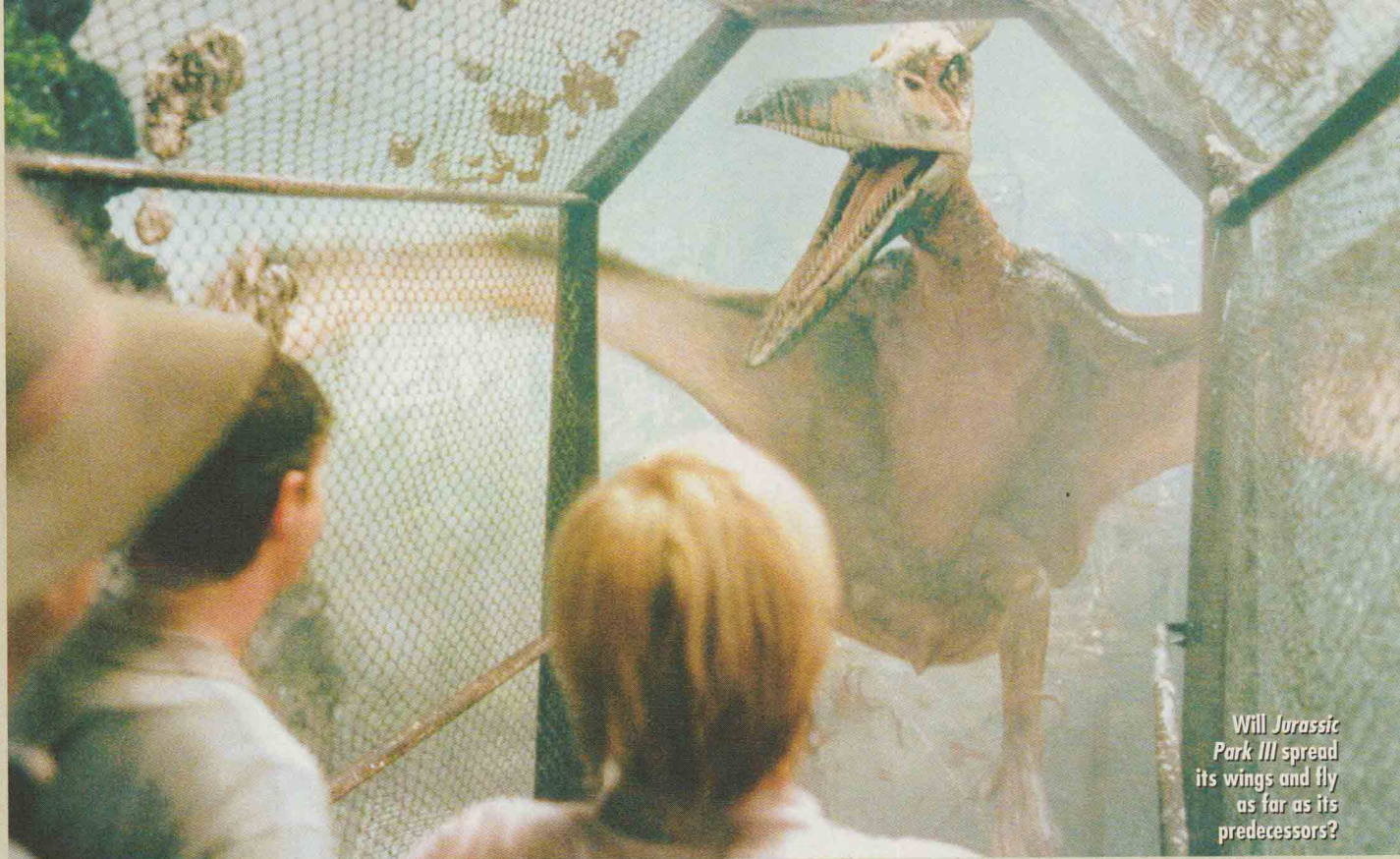
The Spinosaurus would dispute who the biggest star in the movie is.

Photo: Zade Rosenthal

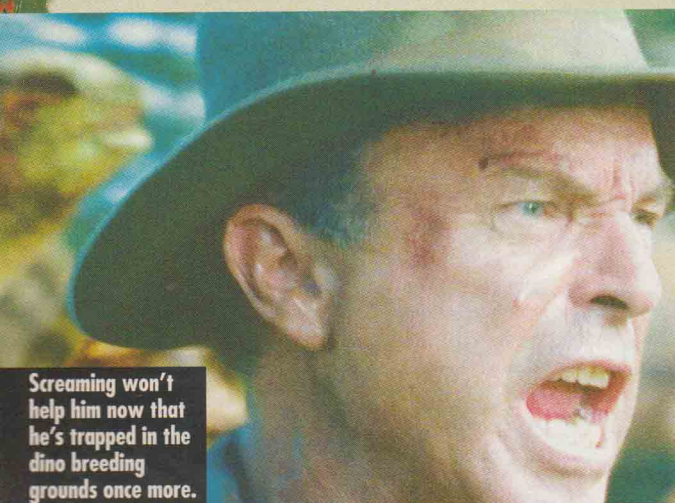
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Will *Jurassic Park III* spread its wings and fly as far as its predecessors?



Screaming won't help him now that he's trapped in the dino breeding grounds once more.

of production for some time led to a few surprises during filming. "A lot happens when you've been away from something for seven years," he muses. "I found that, technically, things have advanced with incredible velocity. The creatures are light years ahead of what they were when we started. The dinosaurs here were much faster and more sophisticated, and as an actor, I had to adjust to that. It was hard work, but it was fun too. I wouldn't have done it if I

enjoyed playing a classic character and reveled in the sheer fantasy of the tale. "It's the rare part that returns me to my youth, but Merlin definitely put me in a childlike state of mind."

His most recent straight horror jaunt was the 1997 outer-space shocker *Event Horizon*. And while he has fond memories of the cast and crew and thought the story was solid, Neill also has one problem with the finished film. "My only criticism of *Event Horizon*," he says, "was that the pace was so relentless that there were never any quiet bits. The way the film was cut together, it was kind of tough to take at the end of the day. Personally, I felt it needed some of those quiet moments to counteract all the other stuff. There was too much noise and not enough quiet. But having said that, there were many things I found very impressive about the film. The special effects were quite good, and there was a real sense of terror running through

thought it was going to be a chore."

Neill looks back on his first foray into dino territory with fondness. "I had never been remotely involved with anything like

**"It was a very physical shoot...the highlight of this film for me was getting out of it in one piece."**

ple seem to forget is that the casts of these films have always been high-quality, and this was no exception. These films are only as good as the actors make them, and we worked hard at making this one believable."

Performing opposite dinosaurs was equally memorable, and Neill recalls that the techniques came back to him quite naturally. "There's the obvious stuff, looking wide-eyed and frightened. But there's a lot of subtlety involved as well. What's the look when a long-necked plant-eating dinosaur is wandering in the distance? How do you react when a T. rex is charging? On the surface it may seem simple, but you really have to work at stuff like that."

The 53-year-old actor does admit that not having worked on this particular type

*Jurassic Park*," he remembers. "I was amazed that something like that was even being attempted. It was a terrific experience in which I spent a lot of time wondering just how they were going to pull it off. The first time Grant sees a dinosaur was a magic moment for me. It was at that point that I felt it just might work."

Just prior to *Jurassic Park III*, Neill weaved some magic of his own playing the title role in the TV miniseries *Merlin*. Neill

the film that I believe got through to audiences. The tough part was filming in Pinewood Studios in the dead of winter and not having any heat."

But it's John Carpenter's *In the Mouth of Madness* (1995) that continues to be one of Neill's favorite scare-film experiences. "In my opinion, there has never been anything quite like it," he says. "It was definitely a quirky kind of one-off, and I loved working with John. He's the type of director actors



Why would Neill want more quiet moments in *Event Horizon* when he can't see by film's end?



Photo: S. Harvey/Copyright 1994 New Line



Venturing In the Mouth of Madness was one of the actor's favorite fright-film trips.

love: somebody who knows exactly what he wants, but is willing to give his actors the freedom to try different things."

Integral to *Mouth of Madness* lore is the fact that an alternate ending was shot but ultimately discarded. Neill is vague on the specifics of that conclusion, but does reveal, "In one ending, the character of Styles is sort of seen behind me in the climactic scene, and in the final cut, she's not there."

Neill remains diplomatic when it comes to discussing his participation in another Carpenter film, 1992's *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*, and the much-reported disputes between the director and star Chevy Chase. "I was not aware of any conflict between them, and I make a point of getting on with everybody. Given the opportunity, I would have played the invisible man within the parameters of what I do as an

actor. But I have no criticism of Chevy's performance—I thought his work in the film was fine."

That both of those films were box-office failures is not something that lingers in the actor's mind. "When you have a success you've got to be grateful, and when things don't come off you just have to be philosophical, and that's all I (continued on page 82)

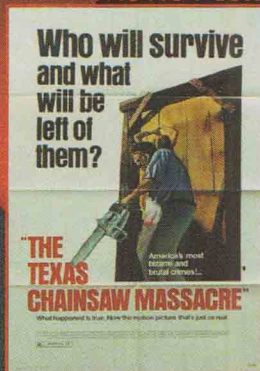
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**C**raig W. Chrissinger was recently hugged and kissed by Elvira at a charity auction. **Thomas Deja** wants you to check out the updated Frightful Fiction section at FANGORIA's website. **Roberto E. D'Onofrio** is covering *Andreas (Violent Shift)* Schnaas' *Demonium* for us. **Don Kaye** will be interviewing Peter Straub about his new collaboration with Stephen King, *Black House*. **Matthew Kiernan** talked to *Session 9*'s David Caruso for fangoria.com. **Tom Mes** thinks Takashi Miike is the greatest Japanese filmmaker since Akira Kurosawa. **Marc Shapiro** went to Ozzfest and lived to tell about it. **M.J. Simpson** is hanging out with Forry Ackerman and Paul Naschy at Manchester, England's Festival of Fantastic Films this month. **Steve Swires'** interviews with Edy Williams, Elke Sommer and four vintage *Playboy* Playmates will appear in the forthcoming book *Fantasy Females Volume 2*. **G. Vitacane** owns the largest collection of Merle Haggard CDs in Sardinia. **Douglas E. Winter's** long-awaited critical biography of Clive Barker, *The Dark Fantastic*, will be published by HarperCollins this fall in the UK and next spring in the U.S.

**W**e're having so much fun doing these theme issues that we're gonna keep the trend going next time (a 100-page special!). And by happy coincidence, there's a new glut of movies on tap dealing with the original psycho-killer.

That would be **Jack the Ripper**, whose life and crimes get their biggest-scale treatment in **FROM HELL**. The adaptation of the classic graphic novel is directed by the acclaimed **Hughes brothers**, with **Johnny Depp** on Jack's trail. We'll have an extensive set visit.

Then we report from the location of **RIPPER: LETTERS FROM HELL**, an indie film which depicts a present-day incarnation of the legendary killer going on a bloody rampage. Another contemporary Jack job is **BAD KARMA**, based on Douglas Clegg's novel, whose director **John (Twins of Evil) Hough** will discuss the film. We'll even have a comprehensive **Ripper movie retrospective!**

Meanwhile, the most famous modern-day ripper returns in **HALLOWEEN: HOMECOMING**. **Jamie Lee Curtis** is back (briefly), *Halloween II*'s **Rick Rosenthal** is behind the camera helming Michael Myers' latest rampage and Fango is there to capture the gory details. Another much-awaited sequel is **TREMORS 3: BACK TO PERFECTION**, which introduces yet another variation on the underground monsters; we'll be on location.

Want more set visits? Join us for on-the-spot previews of Halloween's two big fright films. In **BONES**, **Snoop Dogg** is back (from the dead) and **Pam Grier**'s got him in director **Ernest (Demon Knight) Dickerson**'s latest. And a whole houseful of specters haunts **13 GHOSTS**, the Dark Castle update of the **William Castle** chestnut that sets the terror in a mansion made of glass.

Want still more? Look for a preview of **CREATURE FEATURES**, the made-for-cable remakes of AIP faves co-produced by **Stan Winston**, and a whole lot more. Let 'er rip: It's **FANGORIA #207!**

## PARK

(continued from page 37)

know how to do. I couldn't begin to speculate on why some things work and some things don't."

Neill's performance as the Antichrist Damien was easily the best thing about 1981's *The Final Conflict*, the third installment in the *Omen* franchise. In recalling his first major starring gig, Neill has a good laugh at his approach to playing the ultimate evil. "When I go into a role like that in *Final Conflict*, I generally try to think of a way to play things that is different from what might be expected. When I was playing the Antichrist, I found myself being mindful of the Rolling Stones song 'Sympathy for the Devil.' It seemed to me that there could be no lonelier job than being the Antichrist, so I played him as the lonely guy. My attitude was that I could not go around telling everyone I had a dark secret. I had to keep it to myself."

Neill agrees with the notion that his horror portrayals have been consistent in the sense that he always seems to be cast as somebody in a position of power. "I guess it has to do with the serious demeanor with which I present myself," he says. "I always appear to casting directors as somebody of authority, who knows how to handle power and responsibility. It's kind of hard to argue with what works, but I'd like to think I'm capable of doing a comic turn."

His thoughts return to *Jurassic Park III* and the notion that the film, like the previous entries, will be kept firmly in PG-13 territory for maximum commercial opportunities. "Looking back on what we've done in this film, I would have to say that some of it is pretty full-on," Neill says. "I recall shooting certain sequences and thinking the movie might have a tougher rating. I mean, people get eaten and people do die. I would suggest that parents will need to hold their children's hands."

Neill has managed a long and varied career in and out of the genre, and is finally content with his lot. "When I first started getting work in films, I felt particularly fortunate. This level of success doesn't happen to very many people, and I feel lucky to be in this position. Throughout my career, I've often been surrounded by actors who were less than happy with the way their careers were going. That to me has always seemed to be wasted energy. There are two ways of looking at one's career: One is that it's not as good as it might be and two is that it's better than it should be. I think the second way is a healthier way to live."

A fourth *Jurassic Park* is already in the planning stages, leading to the inevitable question of whether Neill, ever the troupier when it comes to dinosaur adventure, would do it again. "It's a thought," he says. "But let's see if I live through this one or not. After all, they can do anything in the editing room."

## MIIKE

(continued from page 73)

sink their teeth into. The two-part series, which was preceded by a non-horror first season, was based on a popular, long-running comic book and features an impressive assortment of young starlets duking it out with vampires and each other in terrific martial arts sequences.

Though *Tennen Shoji Man* has its tongue firmly placed in cheek at times, another Miike-directed TV series, *MPD-Psycho*, pulls no punches when it comes to delivering the shocks. MPD stands for Multiple Personality Detective, and the show is a furiously complex tale of characters who switch identity, all centered around a schizophrenic private eye's obsessive search for a serial killer who mutilates his victims with surgical precision and who might be linked to an underground organ donor network. Each episode contains a number of graphically gory scenes, which were all censored when they were aired (by way of covering the offending parts with a digital mosaic). The shots resurfaced in all their crimson glory when the series was released on DVD, however.

The director must have had fun with the schizophrenia theme, since he next made a cameo appearance (his only one to date) in Toshiyuki Mizutani's *Isola: Multiple Personality Girl*, which was released in Japan on a double bill with *Ring 0: Birthday*. Miike can briefly be seen as one of the onlookers in a scene in which cult Japanese actor Susumu Terajima, the tombstone-featured supporting actor of many Takeshi Kitano films, rips open his jugular vein with a handful of meat skewers.

As for Miike's most recent work, no less than six films are scheduled for release this year; three have already played in cinemas across Japan. The following titles are of particular interest to genre fans: the aforementioned *Visitor Q*, a highly provocative and thoroughly twisted family tale which recently surfaced on an English-subtitled DVD; an as-yet-unnamed horror musical filled with murder, mayhem and the living dead set for release in Japan this fall; and last but certainly not least, another blood-drenched gangster epic called *Ichii the Killer*. The director refers to this as his most violent film yet, which must certainly be something to behold. *Ichii* stars Japanese superstar actor/model/musician Tadanobu Asano as a scar-faced, masochistic criminal hunting the murderer of his boss, who goes by the name Ichii. Stopping at nothing, he slaughters most of the Tokyo underworld in an effort to find the mysterious hitman. An American release for this film looks likely.

It seems an exhausting output, but Miike is not planning to retire anytime soon. "Even though it's hard work, I enjoy myself while making these films, and as a result I believe they also entertain the audience," he says. "The minimum requirement for a film is that it entertains the audience. Anything more than that depends on whether or not the director has any talent."