



Tom Cruise and a very British sounding Mia Sara as forces of good in *Legend*. "I hadn't even seen *Risky Business* when I cast Tom in the role," says director Ridley Scott. "Mia Sara's from Brooklyn—and she really speaks like that."

Ridley Scott and the Forces of Darkness

In This Exclusive Interview, the British Director of 'Blade Runner,' 'Alien,' and the 'Recent' *Legend* Talks About His Conflict Between Making the Movie of His Dreams and Appealing to 'a General Audience'

By DIANE RAFFERTY

Ridley Scott, a burly man in his mid-forties dressed in a black leather jacket, sits on the edge of a French antique chair in his elegant pale-blue suite at New York's Carlyle hotel. The setting looks like the final sequence from Stanley Kubrick's futuristic classic *2001*, when Keir Dullea ages rapidly then turns into a feline in a cold, Versailles-style room, and it seems oddly appropriate: Scott, at the crossroads of a career like Kubrick's built on futuristic vision and secrecy on the set, has just returned with his latest feature *Legend* to the past, "before time began," as the opening credits say. *Legend*, on the surface a story of the eternal struggle between the conflicting powers of darkness and light pullulating with goblins, insects, dank caves, fairies, and unicorns, also tells a history of filmmaking, of shooting for 27 weeks in a studio for 14 hours a day, of storyboarding and restoryboarding to cut the budget down, of acting under eight layers of prosthetic devices, of handling horses and elaborate sets and prosthetic devices simultaneously, of having all of this finally see the light of day in a theater near you.

Millimeter: The script for *Legend*, by William Hjortsberg, took three years and 15 revisions to complete. Why did it take so long and how did you get involved with *Legend*?

Scott: I started thinking about doing a fairy story before my first feature, *The Duellists*, in 1977. I co-wrote a script, a sort of *Sleeping Beauty*—with the working title *Castle X*. That one very nearly got made. Then after shooting *The Duellists* in the Dordogne [an area of France noted for its mists and atmosphere] and particularly after seeing

[Robert] Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*, I wanted to do *Tristan and Isolde*, which isn't a fairy story, but mythology. But I decided it was too esoteric for the market I was interested in and for the cinema I'm interested in, which is essentially mainstream cinema. Then, as a reaction against *Blade Runner* [1982], a depressing film to make—27 weeks of getting beaten up every day—I took up the idea of doing a fairy story again. (I'm rather haphazard in my choice of material.) But I couldn't find a suitable screenwriter for it—I didn't want it to

be too precious and was aware of the danger of doing this kind of material for a present-day audience. My favorite story is [Jean] Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*—a wonderful film, but you couldn't run it for a general audience today.

Millimeter: You seem to be torn between doing more esoteric and more mainstream work.

Scott: Always. I'm always torn.

Millimeter: Why did you choose Hjortsberg?

Scott: First, he's a poet, and I read his novel *Fallen Angel*, which Alan Parker is making right now in New York. [The movie's title will be *Angel Heart*.] And another book, *Gray Matters*. We met and talked about the fairy story while I was in preproduction with *Blade Runner*. We agreed that he should write a rough draft. Five months later he brought me the screenplay, almost the day I showed my devilhead—*Blade Runner*—to the gods—the producer. The script was enormously long. It was an absolutely brilliant read, and I wish I could have made that, but it would have been a three-and-a-half-hour movie. It had many sidetracks, many levels, which, as I bend toward more esoteric, I like.

Millimeter: Did you contribute any ideas?

Scott: It's fair to say that I always do with writers. What happens is I integrate the environment of the film into the story. I'm frequently criticized for that. The environment, for instance, in *Blade Runner* was almost another character. The danger is when it

becomes too powerful. It worked in *Alien*—that claustrophobia worked. In *Blade Runner* people found the environment became a statement of fact about the future. Ironically, I'm now being asked to lecture at universities on future shock, 'cause they're using *Blade Runner* as an accurate sense of what's going to happen, where we're

going. When you think about it, it's so bloody obvious, okay? It doesn't take a genius to say, "I think the cities are

One of the evil goblins in Legend, created by special makeup artist Rob Bottin. "Along with Rick Baker, Rob Bottin is the best prosthetic artist in the industry," says Ridley Scott.

RIDLEY SCOTT



going this way." It's here right now outside on the street [waves hand toward window]. Most big cities in the world are one step away from ghettos, apart from the immediate expensive shopping vicinities [points to window, overlooking Madison Avenue and 77th Street].

But a lot of people got offended by *Blade Runner*. They found it depressing rather than interesting. It didn't make any money, it broke even. Nobody got hurt. And I hope that at least there's an interesting film loose in the world. Too bleak, I think, initially. But it's odd that people now find it very interesting. They see it two or three times, get used to the environment, and see other layers.

Millimeter: You graduated from the Royal College of Art in London and planned to be a set designer before you took up filmmaking. I assume you storyboard elaborately.

Scott: Yeah, I do. What do they say? "A picture's worth a thousand words"? I give very detailed instructions of what I want and employ very talented people, like my production designer for *Legend*, Ashton Gordon

Millimeter: How long was the storyboard process for *Legend*?

Scott: Roughly four months.

Millimeter: When you were thinking through the visuals in *Legend* did you change any plot elements?

Scott: No. Gatz [Hjortsberg] stayed throughout the preproduction. I like writers to be around as much as possible, as in the old Hollywood tradition. I kept him there right through the beginning of principal photography because we were going through con-

stant changes in terms of budgeting. So we could talk about how best we could deal with something without losing the gist of what we were trying to do. The first, long draft had been trimmed down to 125 pages—and that was the screenplay that should have been made. I went through a fairly extensive preparatory process at 20th Century-Fox, who wanted us to shoot in their backlot. [Fox released the European version of *Legend*; Universal, the U.S. version.] We saved money by shooting at Pinewood Studios in England instead. Every shot had to be storyboarded for cost, as in any film in-

On the set of Blade Runner. "The problem with Blade Runner," says Ridley Scott, "was that it came out within a week of E.T. We got devastated."

volving special effects. And that first-pass budget was enormous—\$36 million. We were \$11 million off on special effects alone. So we had to trim that. The trouble is that the effects were very much involved in the story. My protection in doing a film with classical leanings was always high-action/adventure, so that the film would appeal to a more general audience. Unfortunately, I had to lose some of the high-action/adventure stuff, because that involved the most special effects. The *Legend* you see now has virtually no optical effects at all, except at the end. It was almost all done in the camera.

Millimeter: What was the final budget for *Legend*?

Scott: Twenty-five million. Arnon [Milchan, the producer] and I didn't want to go above a certain figure. This wasn't even the studio coming into it at this juncture.

I could have treated the script in a Celtic manner. The studios think I'm very dark, and I'm not really dark at all. I'm quite a cheerful chap, really. But maybe I work it out in my work. But also maybe, because I'm Celtic, there's a basic leaning in that direction. And I could have taken that script and made it Celtic. It would have been very dark,

Scott's Other Life: Commercials

"I have a whole other life going on apart from feature films," says director Ridley Scott, who has done such impressive work as "1984" for Apple, the Pepsi spot featuring Don Johnson and Glenn Frey, and spots for Coca-Cola and W.R. Grace. "The trouble with a feature film is that you're involved in it for so long that it becomes 'the tablets from the mountain.' In the commercial industry, there's a fast turnover of work, and I've never spent longer than two weeks on a spot. You move on from one subject to another—a healthy process. The kind of advertising I do is interesting and keeps me sharp, like an athlete. I tend to do a few big ones, between features."

Scott's recent spot for Pepsi was reputed to cost \$2 million. How

much of that went on talent? "Don Johnson," says Scott, then adds after a pause. "Oh yeah."

What effect has Scott's and his brother Tony Scott's [spots for Chanel No. 5 and the recent feature *Top Gun*] work had on commercials? "It would be stupidly modest of me to say that we haven't influenced the look of advertising, but with others—Adrian Lyne and Alan Parker from the U.K. and Americans Bob Giraldi, Joe Pytko, and Steve Horne. In fact, looked at another way, the whole period of British advertising through the sixties influenced feature films drastically. The whole technique of filmmaking for commercials—cutting, lighting—changed the look of features. I don't know why, but it did."

—D. R.



Ridley Scott: A Rock Sensibility

"It's funny, rock people, musicians, seem to 'get' my work instantly," says director Ridley Scott. "Maybe because they don't break it down into elements, but see it as an orchestration."

Has Scott thought about doing music videos? "I nearly made two," he says, "one for Bob Dylan and one for Duran Duran. But Duran wanted me to do the whole LP, and then you're talking about a movie. I chose director Tim Pope to do Bryan Ferry's video promoting *Legend*." Ferry's song in the video, "Is Your Love Strong Enough?" is also the closing song of the movie. "Pope said, 'Why don't you do the video?' But I felt too close to it. I watched Pope make the video, though. Yeah, I'm interested."

- D.R.

Scott's prize-winning "1984" spot for Apple: a vision that shook the world.

indeed, and that darkness would have been lethal, and maybe unwatchable, except for an adult audience.

I've always been attracted to Disney's treatments of stories. Everything he did in those early years of animation are still state of the art.

Millimeter: I was thinking of *Snow White*...

Scott: *Snow White* is brilliant.

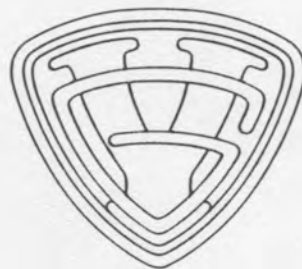
Millimeter: ...and *The Night on Bald Mountain* segment of *Fantasia* looks like the character of Darkness, played by Tim Curry.

Scott: It is Tim Curry. There's darkness for you. But you must remember that Disney didn't make it up, either. I'm convinced they took that image from William Blake's drawings. I was aiming for a Disney audience. Don't forget, those were very frightening films. And the character in *Night on Bald Mountain* is very sexual. I felt that the character of Darkness shouldn't be a horrible, rotting corpse. I think Evil must have a much better time than Good, 'cause he's without conscience, right? So, he has a hell of a time. He's healthy, jogs a lot, and is omnipotent. In Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* there's a degree of sexuality, but it's mostly about loneliness and the need for companionship. The character Darkness in *Legend* implies that, but I think he just wants to lay the heroine.



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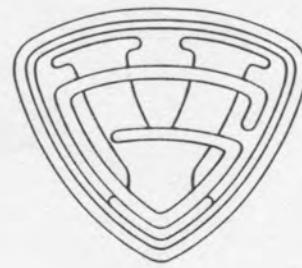
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RIDLEY SCOTT

Millimeter: The makeup, by Rob Bottin, seems more subdued than his work in *The Howling*. Did you have a say in that?

Scott: We both agreed—because Rob isn't just involved in prosthetics, he's got a very good film sense—that you can't have a theater full of 10-year-olds

screaming and their parents upset, although they're probably tough little sons of bitches. Below a certain age, it becomes a switch-off process when you terrify them. Because I'd done *Alien*, the studio was concerned that I'd be too dark. So Rob and I figured out how far we could go with darkness.

Millimeter: Did Tim Curry have any problems with his makeup?

Scott: He actually started to enjoy seeing what he could do with his fake

body. The better the prosthetic, obviously, the better it is for the actor. A badly made prosthetic becomes thick like coarse leather as opposed to fine leather: You can't see anything moving underneath the mask. Rob works like a surgeon. On Tim's head, say, there were eight or nine separate pieces applied every morning, and those pieces work off his muscles, his actual anatomy. But, with all that on there's also a great sense of claustrophobia, and the actor has to learn how to use the prosthetic. Underneath it all, Tim was giving a larger performance than usual to make the prosthetic work. While his performance is theatrical, it's also full of wit. Quite subtle, really.

Millimeter: You worked with cinematographer Alex Thompson, who shot John Boorman's *Excalibur*, in an unusual manner, since you always operate the camera yourself. How did that relationship work?

Scott: It worked out pretty well. I liked the look of *Excalibur* and the body of his work. But *Excalibur* was all exteriors. Lighting for interiors is very dif-



The three major networks banned Ridley Scott's "Deficit Trials" spot for W.R. Grace because, they claim, it was "too controversial."



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RIDLEY SCOTT

ferent. Frequently cameramen can't handle both. But Alex is a very good all-round cameraman who is capable of handling a large canvas—and that's what I needed for *Legend*. You're looking at a shot that's 350-feet deep and 150-feet wide. I mean, it's major.

Millimeter: What equipment did you use?

Scott: Arri BLs and Canon lenses. Fuji stock. I've worked with Fuji on commercials, so I knew what it could do, and Alex persuaded me to use it. It's cheap!

Millimeter: What was your most difficult shot in *Legend*?

Scott: All of it. When you make the environment so important, all the shots are difficult. Also, shooting entirely in a studio means you're creating everything—it's murderous. It's extremely demanding being a director. You're always "on." It never stops. (Instead of having a drink at the end of a shooting day, I play tennis to keep fit.) Any film involving animals and prosthetics and elaborate sets—you've got the worst combination. One thing works, but the other doesn't. Iron-

ically, the easiest shot was the horses—the biggest concern from a completion guarantor's point of view. The handler just stood on the side of the set, commanded the unicorns to do something, and there it was—"cut"!

Millimeter: Did you have any post-production problems?

Scott: There were no composites. It was all done by scenic artists—and dressers. But the American version is different than the European one. Before *Legend* ran in Europe, I tested it in America and didn't find the results satisfactory. I cut roughly 20 minutes out of the film for both versions, slightly less for the European one. In fact, the audience's reaction was infuriating, because the studios had said [mimics a broad American accent] "We don't want it too dark. We don't want it too frightening," and the kids in the test audience are saying, "This isn't very frightening!" So I changed the music for the U.S. version. The new Tangerine Dream score helped reinforce the threat. It's a pity because the Jerry Goldsmith score (he did *Alien*) was one of his best. We originally

wanted it sweet. But the combination of what he did and what I did didn't work with the audience. I come out of advertising [see sidebar], so I'm very aware of marketing. But what the marketing people don't understand is that an audience doesn't normally think about the different elements of a film—until they're asked to fill out a questionnaire. But I don't know how else to do it.

Millimeter: Do you see yourself as forever working in the "fantastic" mode of feature-filmmaking, or do you intend to return to the realistic style of *The Duellists*?

Scott: I've had enough of exotic movies for a while, thank you very much. I'm making a cop film *shot entirely on location with no storyboards*. It's a very contemporary piece, very interesting idea, and I can't talk about it. The screenplay's finished, and I'm just dithering on the edge, deciding whether to get married or not.

Millimeter: Married?

Scott: When you decide on a screenplay, it's like getting married—and it's an awful long marriage. □



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