

UK PRODUCTION

Ridley Scott changes direction with 'Legend', an original fairy story

In his first interview for five years, Ridley Scott talks about the making of "Legend" with Chris Brown

RIDLEY SCOTT's latest film, "Legend", is so different from his two previous high-tech and, to use his own description, "heavy", subjects that one might be forgiven thinking that he deliberately chose a subject as far removed from "Alien" and "Blade Runner" as possible.

And he admits that he "wanted to change the pace and weight" of what he was doing.

In fact, he first started to toy with the idea of some kind of a fairy tale story when he was filming "Duellists" in France seven years ago.

But I really started to talk to people when I was preparing "Blade Runner" — I was already thinking maybe this idea should be my next project — so I was doing haphazard reading of various writers, including the classic and established fairy stories such as the Grimm Brothers, to find some kind of connection and lead."

He realised, however, that he needed an original story — "It would be easier to concoct something, to write an original screenplay for the film, because you can design your story to fit the medium rather than trying to bend the medium to the story" — and at that time came across books written by American William Hjortsberg.

Says Scott, "He's a kind of natural writer. The day he came up to our first meeting I read Caxton's 'Beauty And The Beast', because I was curious to see if we were both incredibly enthusiastic about it and decided we saw things pretty well in the same way."

Unicorn

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Mia Sara as Princess Lili and Tim Curry as Darkness.

For his role as Darkness, Curry spent many hours in the makeup room every morning (as did all the principal players apart from Tom Cruise and Mia Sara). The prosthetic makeup was designed by Rob Bottin, and applied by Peter Robb-King and his team of experts.

Snow scenes

Production designer Asheton Gorton assembled his sets over six of Pinewood's shooting stages, including the 007 stage.

"I had been on the big set for 16 weeks, and then, 10 days before I was due to move on to another stage to do some of the interiors we had the fire," recalls Scott. "I had started the snow scenes, but still needed to get some more snow shots, and the goddamned 007 stage burnt down over lunchtime. We were out to lunch and when we came back it was gone."

"Fortunately the other sets were in the process of being finished so I only lost three days. I got on with some editing and three days later I started filming again on the other stages."

"And we finished the snow scenes on the back lot — we just made four trees and placed them cleverly!"

Two Hollywood majors have been involved with "Legend" from the beginning — Universal, which is distributing the film in the US and Canada, and 20th Century Fox, which has the film

there an audience for this kind of movie?"

"The problem is that when I get a fix on what I want to do, in terms of my next subject, I can't look at anything else. I find the opportunity to do films, the offers to do films, are fairly numerous, but the difficulty is finding something that you know you are going to be able to live with."

"But I have this fortunate facility of being able to keep myself alive by doing advertising. Therefore I didn't get desperately paranoid while setting up 'Legend'."

Scott and his brother, Tony, have their own commercials production company and he has been able to alternate his two occupations — those of feature film and commercials director — because of the "good people" who work for the company.

Photography

Scott became a director via television. He studied at the Royal College of Art, won a travelling scholarship in design which took him to New York, where he worked for Bob Drew Associates experimenting in photography, and observed theatre and documentary film-makers at work. When he returned to London he joined the BBC as a set designer and later became a director, working on "Z Cars" and "The Informer". He then formed his own company.



• Director Ridley Scott at work behind the camera on "Legend".

beginning to lean too much in the direction of what an audience wants.

"We face the same problem of media dominance over here. It's like a simplification system where it seems they are gradually chipping away any forms of subtlety."

"Not that we really have a market in this country. We're a small part of the world market and, of course, we have less cinemas nowadays. It's bizarre, because some of the most interesting film-makers are coming from this country. It seems to be a real hotbed of film-

they should have headed the list.

"To me they are part and parcel of our film industry. And it seems irrelevant at this particular juncture, if we want a film industry, that the subject necessarily has to be English."

One project Scott would really like to get involved in in the future is a musical. "I haven't seen a musical for a number of years now that I really would call a musical," he says. "They are enormously expensive, but someone is going to emerge with a new way of doing them, with what's happening in videos, where you have a narrative integrated with story integrated with music, and I'm one of the people trying to find that formula."

Next feature

Scott will soon be at work on his next feature film, which he hopes to start later this year. "It's a contemporary subject, and will be shot on location in America, either New York or Los Angeles. I've almost forgotten what a location shoot is like. My last three films have been studio-based, so I'm curious to see how I feel about location work now."

But, before he can start his next project, Ridley Scott still has to open his "Legend".

It is, says Scott "primarily a youth market film. I think quite a few adults will enjoy it because of the sophistication of the film, but part of the problem is getting adults through the door. That is to do with how carefully you prepare your advertising."

"Word of mouth does get a kind of energy going for a film, but I still believe in the total marketing of a film. I still believe in the power of marketing and advertising."

"I come out of advertising, so I know it works."

makers. "One of the things that slightly surprised me about the list I read of the films which are travelling with the exhibition for British Film Year is that there were some obscure movies in there which have no regard for the fact that it's a business."

"Most of the films on the list had no kind of box office appeal, and they totally ignored films that have been made here like 'Indiana Jones', 'Raiders Of The Lost Ark', 'Star Wars', 'Superman', 'Alien'. All these films were made by British technicians and, frankly, I think

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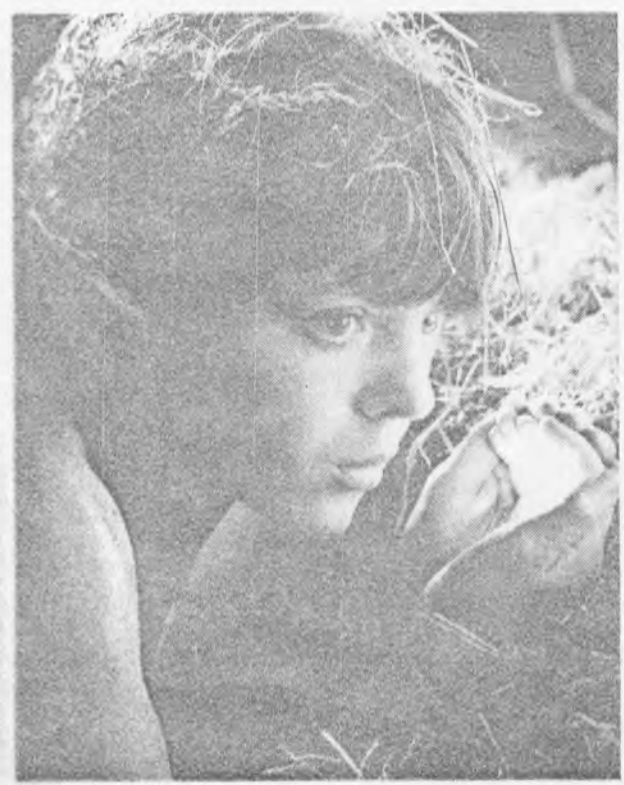
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...the vague notion of something in
...pursuit of the swiftest steed alive
...which, of course, was the
...unicorn — and all the classic
...notions of what it represents,
...good, evil and light — and really
...just that we worked out the
...storyline and William wrote the
...script.



● Gamp (David Bennent) cradles the light of Oona in his hands
...as the fires in the straw-covered floor of the cage in the kitchen of
...the Dark Lord's castle

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...Century Fox, which has the film
...for the rest of the world.

"Legend" opens in the US in
...November, just prior to
...Thanksgiving, to build up to a
...big Thanksgiving weekend.

It opens in France at the end of
...August, London in the autumn
...and Japan at Christmas.

It took a long time to set up
..."Legend", Scott admits, "It's a
...difficult subject, inevitably it was
...going to be expensive, and the
...studios looked at it and said, 'Is

Photography
Scott became a director via
...television. He studied at the
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A visual stylist, Scott
...nevertheless dismisses without
...hesitation the importance of
...visual perfection for today's
...audience: "I think the picture,
...like the special effect, is an
...embellishment and the better it
...is the more of a bonus it is to a
...small section of the audience.
...The reality is that most audiences
...don't know when something is
...well lit or not. You get films
...which are simply recorded — and
...I can name a lot of them — that
...still survive and make money.
... "I like dialogue! In
...journalistic terms a picture may
...be worth a thousand words, but
...that picture is only there for one
...viewing. To make a film out of
...pure visuals is nearly possible. I
...have found in fact that the more
...I get into it, the more emphasis
...I give to the story, the words. You
...can do a great story badly, and
...it'll still survive. You can do a
...bad story brilliantly, and it won't
...even get off the ground. So I
...think it finally comes back to
...narrative."

He points out, however: "I
...find that today an audience gets
...terribly uneasy with any form of
...preamble in a story, where you
...are building up to something.
...They usually like to move on and
...get on with it.
... "And this to me feels like an
...impatience caused by media, by
...TV, bad TV. In America the
...younger generation especially
...seem to have become almost
...totally television-orientated and
...therefore they are looking from
...that to films and they are
...criticising films on the same
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EXCLUSIVE: FIRST PICTURES FROM 'LEGEND'



● (Above) Jack O'The Green (Tom Cruise) with Princess Lili (Mia Sara). (Below) Blix (Alice Playten), leader of the goblin pack, and the pig-faced Pox (Peter O'Farrell).

