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RAIMI KNIGHTS

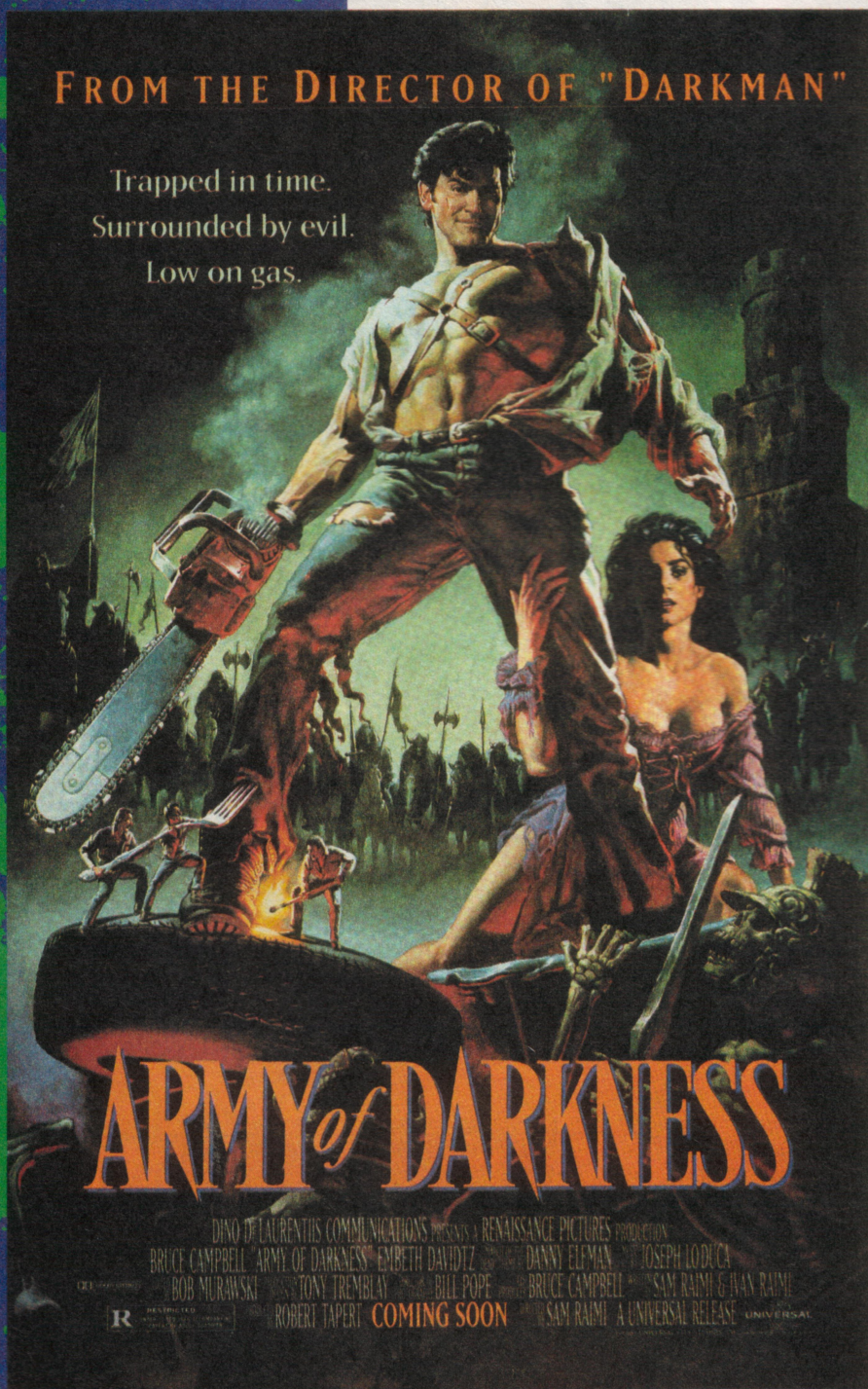
SEAMUS A RYAN looks at the long overdue third

Evil Dead movie,

ARMY OF DARKNESS

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF "DARKMAN"

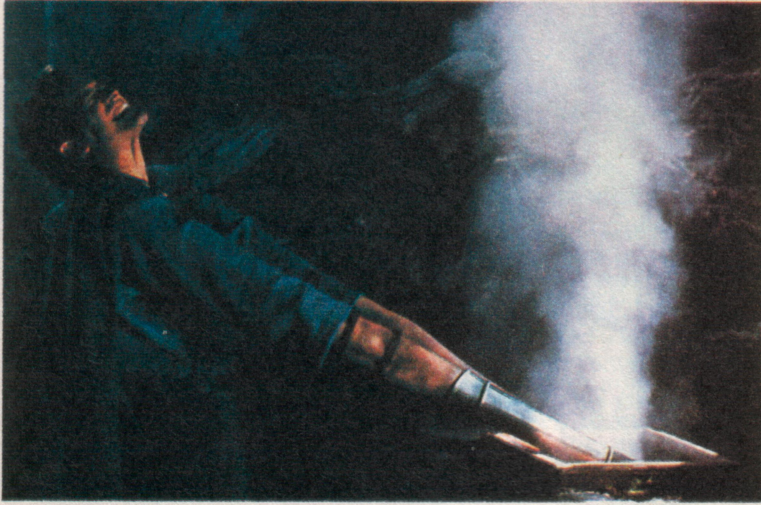
Trapped in time.
Surrounded by evil.
Low on gas.



Back in 1981, a (very) low budget horror movie entitled *Book of the Dead* and directed by 20-year-old unknown Sam Raimi — later to be responsible for *Crimewave*, *Darkman* and, with maverick movie duo Joel and Ethan Coen, *The Hudsucker Proxy*, premiered at the Redfort Theatre in Michigan.

Having taken almost three years to finance and film, it was to take a further two years and a name change to *THE EVIL DEAD* before the movie was given a commercial release by **New Line**, later to be distributors of the smash hit *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* series. Despite the fact that the film was shot on grainy, colour-desaturated 16mm film and blown up to 35mm, it netted in excess of \$3 million — not bad for an outlay of just over \$350,000. Raimi has since enjoyed undeniable success as a screenwriter, director and even actor (watch for his great death scene in the Coens' *Miller's Crossing*) — and the part played in his initial success by horror novelist and publishing phenomenon Stephen King must be noted. Having seen *Book of the Dead* at Cannes in 1982, King raved about it to all and sundry, and when it was finally released he was heavily quoted on the posters.

Four years later, Raimi began shopping around the script for *EVIL DEAD II: ARMY OF DARKNESS*, co-written with genre veteran Scott (Intruder) Spiegel. Both **Universal Pictures** (subsequent distributors of the retitled *EVIL DEAD III*) and **20th Century Fox** passed on it, but finally a deal was struck with Dino De Laurentiis' **DEG** company, producers of Stephen King's *Maximum Overdrive* and, later, Michael Mann's prequel to *The Silence of the Lambs*,



Manhunter. Raimi originally wanted to use footage from the first movie for flash-back sequences, and to base *EVIL DEAD II* in the thirteenth century. Unable to secure a favourable deal on the rights to use the footage, however, he was forced to alter the script drastically, losing the entire concept of a 'Deadite' army. Thus *EVIL DEAD II* became essentially a remake of the first film (no bad thing) with a decidedly humorous approach the director hoped would grant him a commercially viable 'R' rating. Partly due to the furore surrounding the now-banned original and partly due to its own unfathomable inconsistencies, the **Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)** slapped an 'X' on *EVIL DEAD II*, making it virtually impossible to distribute to a wide audience. Both films would, it seemed, remain popular only on a 'cult' level.

Then, in 1990, while the director was hard at work on his first major studio film, *Darkman*, Raimi struck a deal with De Laurentiis to finance a third *EVIL DEAD* movie, wittily working-titled *The Medieval Dead*. This time, Raimi teamed up with his *Crimewave* co-writer (not to mention brother) Ivan to write the third instalment, spending almost eight months on the first draft alone. Taking the premise of Ash — both movies' lead character, played by genre favourite Bruce Campbell — being sent back to the thirteenth century to fight the undead army (the original idea behind *EVIL DEAD II: DEAD BY DAWN*), they aimed for a still humorous and character- (as opposed to effects-) driven story.

(Skip the next paragraph if you don't want the plot spoiled!)

At the end of *EVIL DEAD II*, Ash was transported back, 'chainsaw in hand' and car in tow, to the Dark Ages, where he was greeted by the locals as their saviour. Once there (or *then*), he must find the pages from an ancient tomb, the *Necronomicon*, so that he can return to the present day. Unfortunately, Ash reads out the wrong

passage (a cool joke on 'Klaaty borada niktu', the phrase spoken by Michael Rennie in *The Day The Earth Stood Still*), raising an undead army. And therein lies Ash's dilemma: will he be selfish and continue searching for a way home (always assuming he hasn't changed history so much there won't be a home to return to), or stay and sort out the

mess he's created?

With the story emphasis shifted from out-and-out gore to humorous horror,

Universal Pictures became involved, agreeing to distribute the movie in the United States. With their backing, *EVIL DEAD III* would have a greater chance of box office success, providing it received an 'R' rating from the **MPAA**. Towards the end of the scheduled shoot, Raimi was approached by De Laurentiis with a further \$3 million to shoot some extra footage at the start of the movie to introduce the character of Ash and go over the events that led to *EVIL DEAD III*. Fine, said Raimi, and got on with the job of bringing the movie to a larger audience.

Unfortunately, **Universal** began to quarrel with De Laurentiis over who owned the sequel rights to the smash hit *The Silence of the Lambs*, which led to a year and a half of writs and, therefore, a massive delay in the release of the third *EVIL DEAD*. By this time, both studios had insisted on shelving all references to the first two movies and monickering it simply **ARMY OF DARKNESS**.

Finally, **Universal** and De Laurentiis settled their dispute, allowing **ARMY OF DARKNESS** the release its fans craved — possibly the first movie to have a better-painted comic book adaptation than publicity poster. Raimi was already well on the way to completing *The Hudsucker Proxy*, his forthcoming film with *Raising Arizona* and *Blood Simple* creators Joel and Ethan Coen.

And **ARMY OF DARKNESS** was on its way to us ...



"There will be no *Evil Dead III*...

There will be

ARMY OF DARKNESS."

— Bruce Campbell, actor/producer of the *Evil Dead* trilogy.

