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EVIL DEAD III
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SAM RAIMI'S

The horror auteur behind DARKMAN returns

By Steve Biodrowski

ARMY OF DARKNESS is the official title of the third entry in Sam Raimi's low-budget horror series, but the budget is low only in comparison to Raimi's DARKMAN. Compared to the earlier entries in the series, ARMY OF DARKNESS is a lavish, high-profile production, with a budget that should ultimately top the \$10 million dollar mark, thanks to post-production enhancement shooting last November. Dino DeLaurentiis Communications is providing the financing, and distribution will be handled next summer by Universal, who produced and distributed DARKMAN.

"This is back to the kind of hands-on filmmaking that we grew up with," said Raimi. "Dino DeLaurentiis is the creative-financial force. He gives us an incredible amount of freedom, which is why we want to make this picture—we can tell any kind of story we want in as wild a way as we think the audience would like it. Therefore, we're happier, and maybe the audience that really wants to see something wild is happier, even if it is somewhat smaller."

The sentiments are echoed by Bruce Campbell, who reprises his behind-the-scenes role as Raimi's co-producer and his on-screen role as Ash, the protagonist left stranded in the 13th century at the conclusion of Part II. "DARKMAN was a good experience for Sam," said Campbell. "But I think he wanted to go back to having a little more control. Dino DeLaurentiis loves Sam and leaves him alone, except for the money. You could compromise and get 30 camera set-ups a day, but that's not what these movies are about—they're about Sam playing with the camera and taking a visual roller coaster ride."

Noted Raimi, "I had to come way down on the budget for this picture. None of us are making any money; we had to kick all our money into the film."

Robert Tapert, Raimi's producing partner, agreed with the decision to trade

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Sam Raimi (right) and Bruce Campbell as Ash in ARMY OF DARKNESS, devising an appropriately medieval prosthesis for the monster fighter's missing hand.

money for autonomy. "The making of DARKMAN was great," said Tapert. "The studio has the money to support you, so you can turn the 'money hose' on any problem—you don't have to think too hard about how to solve them without money. There's a great deal to be said for getting everything you want, for not having to compromise technically. It's just that the script gets a little watered down."

"Creatively, on this one, we've had a great deal of freedom," said Tapert. "We've had battles with Dino, but at the end of the day he's reasonable: he'll take a stand, but if you can convince him otherwise, he'll back off. I don't know what's going to happen in post [production], but they can't do what they did to DARKMAN in many respects. The concern, from the studio's point of view, was they wanted a mainstream, commercial movie that wouldn't be too idiosyncratic for the people in Peoria. So a lot of DARKMAN got honed off in post-production, I feel, in an effort to make it as accessible as possi-

ble. In that respect, this picture will have a much harder edge. The tone and subject matter will not appeal to as wide an audience, but I think I'll like it better. You have to make the movie you want to make. If people pay to see it, great. It's the studio's decision when they make your movie. If they want to make their own movie, then they should get somebody else."

Raimi is taciturn when describing how DARKMAN was "honed" in editing. Were many of his signature stylistic flourishes deleted? "Not enough to merit a lengthy conversation," said Raimi. "When you work with a studio—and every filmmaker should know this—you're saying, 'I will trade creative autonomy for studio money, studio marketing, and a studio release.' The trade-off is you have to listen to them, creatively. So I could talk about things I was sorry to lose, but I knew what I was doing going in, so it would be wrong of me to complain."

The deal to make ARMY OF DARKNESS was actually struck during the long development process on DARKMAN. "It took so many years to finish up the script that I was getting worried that I had to make a picture fairly soon," recalled Raimi. Dino DeLaurentiis, who had ended up with the EVIL DEAD sequel rights after his now-defunct D.E.G. company financed Part II, offered partners Raimi, Tapert and Campbell the opportunity to make EVIL DEAD III. When DARKMAN finally got the green light, the sequel was moved to the back burner, a fortunate delay because the successful release of Raimi's studio film encouraged DeLaurentiis to raise the budget of EVIL DEAD III. DeLaurentiis then made the deal with Universal to handle domestic distribution rights and sold the foreign rights at the February 1991 American Film Market.

It's unprecedented for a major studio to pick up a sequel to two relatively obscure cult films and try to sell it to a wider

EVIL DEAD III

back to his low-budget, independent roots.

audience which may or may not have heard of the originals. For this reason, Universal has opted to change the title and market the film as an original. Noted Tapert, "Universal—and they're right to do it—said, 'The EVIL DEAD title is a draw-back because, based on how it did theatrically, no one saw EVIL DEAD II. It was a flop for all practical purposes—though it did very well on video, far outstripping what it had done at the boxoffice. So they felt that fans would know this is EVIL DEAD III, and the rest of the audience would just see it as ARMY OF DARKNESS.'"

"We're real tickled about that," said Campbell of Universal's decision to distribute the film. "The fact that it's called ARMY OF DARKNESS, I think, is fine. If more people will come and see it, I'm all for it. The first two were limited releases. I think it's a logical progression, in that we hope this one is as entertaining as, or more entertaining than, the others. It's not as graphic. It will be R-rated. The others were unrated: the first one rightfully so; the second one, we just went around the MPAA because we knew they were going to give us such grief. But now this is Universal Pictures—they'll help a little with the rating. The fact that John Carpenter's THE THING was rated R was proof to me that a studio can go to bat for you."

The contractually mandated R-rating would seem to indicate that ARMY OF DARKNESS will be a considerable departure from its graphic predecessors, but then EVIL DEAD II's hysterical tone was quite a departure from the grim original. This time out, Tapert insisted, the shift won't be as dramatic. "It's somewhat of a departure, but it's still in the same vein as EVIL DEAD II, with a much heavier emphasis on comedy and scope. We don't have scenes like the head falling into Ash's lap. We can't do that. But we've tried to find other ways to go over the top and still remain within the limitations of the MPAA. We don't have nearly the



The new sequel picks up from the ending of Raimi's EVIL DEAD II, with Ash stranded in 1300 AD with only his chainsaw, shotgun and car, fighting off an army of the undead.

money of DARKMAN but twice the scope, with medieval archers, horses, castles and flaming catapults."

Curiously, Raimi's desire to trade gore for comedy is not intended to broaden the film's appeal, though he admits the R-rating will make it available to a wider audience; in fact, Raimi doesn't see ARMY OF DARKNESS as much of a departure from the EVIL DEAD films at all. Said Raimi, "It's the same thing: Bruce Campbell—kick him in the face, hit him in the head, kick him in the face again, spit out the blood and make the funny face—cut! It's the old routines. It was a bigger change from EVIL DEAD to EVIL DEAD II."

The filmmakers do acknowledge that a large part of their new audience will have to be filled-in on how Ash ended up back in the 13th century, battling armies of the dead. Like EVIL DEAD II, ARMY OF DARKNESS will begin with a mini-remake to bring viewers up to date. "We fudged the beginning and the back story of Part II," said Campbell. "In Part I, five kids go to a cabin, and I die, for all intents and purposes. But, as Sam says, Ash is resurrected by positive boxoffice response. For Part II, we couldn't get the rights to footage from Part I, because they were made by different companies. So we thought not that many people saw EVIL DEAD—we'll just have Ash go with one

girl. But it was misconstrued by a lot of people. They thought Ash was stupid enough to go back to the cabin.

"We're giving him a little more back story. He is studying to get a graduate degree in mechanical engineering, and he's a little older, because I can't still play a college undergraduate—I was pushing the envelope at 21 back when the first EVIL DEAD was made. It's still the same setup: Ash goes to the cabin, resurrects long-dormant forces, and winds up in the 13th century. His quest is to find a way back home. But Ash, as he usually does, screws up."

Still, as much as one may appreciate seeing Ash back in action, one cannot help wondering whether it wouldn't have been easier to make a sequel to DARKMAN, which is instead being developed by Universal as a television show for the Fox network. Said Tapert, "DARKMAN didn't do enough business to generate the kind of money that makes it worth making a sequel—they're not going to give us a \$25 million budget. I don't think Sam wants to make a sequel, and I don't want to make a sequel to that movie. But I would make EVIL DEAD IV—or ARMY OF DARKNESS II. We've got a great story for it, and this one ends setting up the fourth one perfectly." □

Campbell as Ash, the foil of Raimi's horror formula, filming the independent Dino DeLaurentis production, opening nationwide from Universal next summer.

