

H R GIGER AND THE BEAUTIFUL MONSTER

Giger's original bust for *Sil*, based on the head of Swiss model Nadine

A rare interview with Horror's favourite artist, H R Giger

THERE ARE numerous people who could be called to task over the new Horror film *Species*. But there are two activists who've fought tooth and nail to preserve the high standards and strong artistic concepts of the project. These unsung heroes are the screenwriter Dennis Feldman and the designer of *Sil*, H R Giger.

On January 28, 1994, Giger's American publisher received a call from Frank Mancuso, Jr who expressed his and Roger Donaldson's interest in obtaining H R Giger's talents to do some design work

for an alien creature featured in a project titled *Species*. Mancuso felt that if Giger came on board it would be the final push to get the film 'green-lighted' by MGM. Mancuso viewed the project as a film critical to MGM's hope for a return to the status of an eminent Hollywood film production company. Mancuso made assurances to Giger that with a budget in excess of thirty million dollars there would be enough funding for the film to fully realize Giger's designs in the best possible light.

Giger is constantly in demand as a fine artist and consequently can be selective as to which projects he chooses. However, Giger's agreement to work on the project is a sad tale of one man's struggle to save an endangered species.

"I got a call from my publisher, at Morpheus, and he explained to me that



he'd had a long conversation with Frank Mancuso Jr, the producer. My publisher was excited about the project. I was drawn to the idea of this new creature because I saw it as a chance to create an alien creature that was looked like the women in my paintings. Hollywood always wants monsters with an ugly face and horrible teeth. I wanted it to be scary, but also to be beautiful, powerful and a graceful female. I liked the chance to design a creature that was not just a strict ET, but one based on the human form. I wanted the chance to have a transparent creature, which before was not possible. It was this 'beauty in the beast' idea that interested me to work on the movie."

TALKS

"After the first call from my publisher, Roger Donaldson and Mancuso came to Zurich to talk with me about what they wanted me to do. Mancuso said he would call me each evening to talk about my designs for the film, and how Dennis Feldman was changing the script."

Giger began his pre-production work on the alien creature *Sil* in Switzerland, hoping not only to develop and execute his designs in his homeland, but also to deliver a working model the film-makers could use. MGM was resistant to the idea of a transparent creature, claiming that it would be too expensive to execute. Giger was determined to prove that not only were his theories for the creature's designs possible, but cost effective. He was aided in his quest by his talented friends Cony De Fries and Andy Schedler, whom he had previously worked with on his Giger Bar, which is located in Chur, the place of his birth.



The finished version of Sil's attack in the jacuzzi, and Giger's original storyboard, left

"In February 1994, we attempted to build a pre-production Sil in Switzerland. My designs were based on an early script they sent us (along with a very complicated contract which I needed to have examined and studied). When I worked on Alien I had a plaster shop and assistants around me so I could build the big alien creature full-size. At first, only Andy Schedler and two assistants were working for me on developing Sil, and I was paying them out of my own pocket. I always thought Mancuso would send us somebody with experience to help us and teach us state of the art Hollywood techniques. I felt the help would give us a chance to accelerate the fabrication and allow us to build the filming version of Sil here. In the end I spent the majority of the money brought in by the film on my own experiments in fabrication,"

TRANSPARENT

The first step in the process was to show that his transparent theory would work. It required him to work out the creature's psychical nature. "I felt this mysterious half-extraterrestrial woman should be psychically powerful and about 185cm (6'2") tall. Before I could work on Sil's transparent look I had to wait until I got the correct female model. First we cast the legs and body of a tall woman called Nadia, and then we cast the head from a Swiss model, named Nadine."

In his initial model design Giger inserted holograms into the limbs of the creature to demonstrate how the transparent element of the creature would enhance the overall design. However, with all the faxes, photos and videotape Giger provide to Mancuso, not to mention their

nightly conversations, Mancuso was never truly happy with Giger's three dimensional work. Several times Mancuso suggested Giger come to Hollywood to work alongside his people. However, Giger was unable to leave Switzerland.

SWITZERLAND

"I could not leave Switzerland because of the failing health of my mother, she was eighty-nine years-old. She meant much to me. I felt it would be her last summer. She lived in an apartment in Chur, and it is a long drive from my home. I would phone her many times a day and visit her at least once a week. My mother has always been there for me when I had any problems. She was a constant help to me, and I tried to do the same for her. She was always interested in everything I was doing and she often provided me with good advice. This was the main reason why I stayed here to design and build Sil."

LONG-DISTANCE

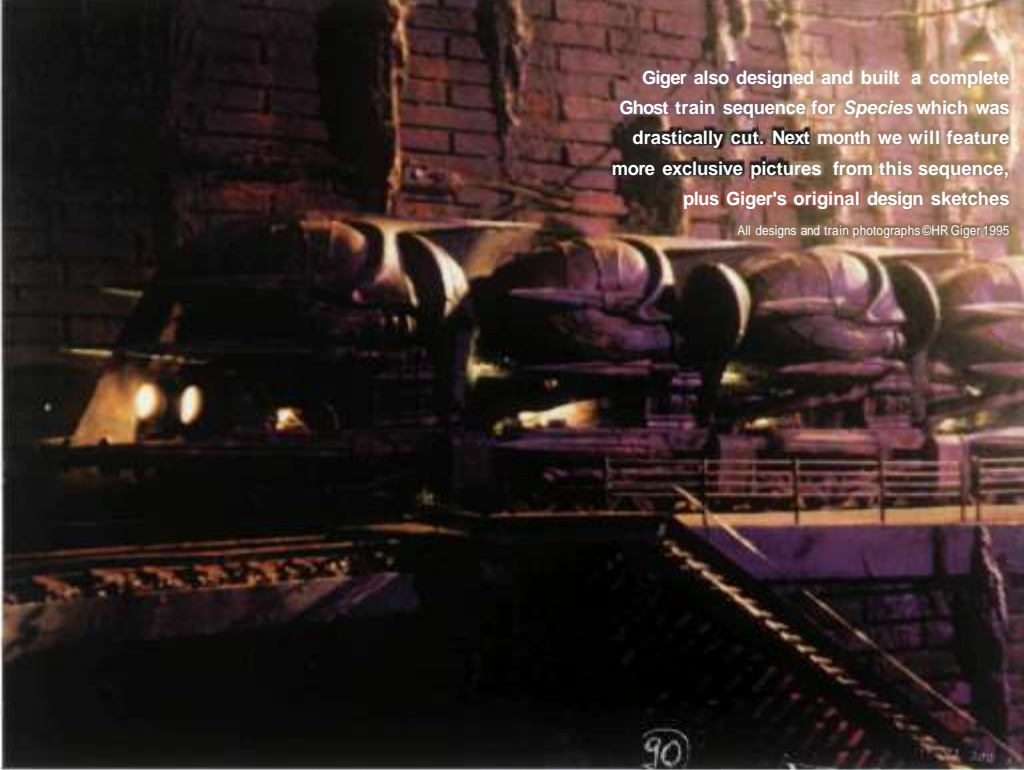
Did Giger find it artistically frustrating that, because of the distance between Zurich and Hollywood, other craftsman had to interpret his designs.

"I have worked on two other films from a long distance and was not satisfied when I tried to convince them on how to build my designs, or described to them how to fabricate my drawings and paintings the way I wanted. With *Species* I wanted the chance to build my designs as I developed them. I was constantly faxing Mancuso small drawings and sketches of Sil. This is an important part of the process. When Steve Johnson was



Giger also designed and built a complete Ghost train sequence for *Species* which was drastically cut. Next month we will feature more exclusive pictures from this sequence, plus Giger's original design sketches

All designs and train photographs ©HR Giger 1995



hired I also faxed and sent him many air-brush drawings, and we talked on the phone a lot as well. He and his crew did their best to satisfy me. One does not simply make a fully detailed painting of such a complex creature without a lot of thought and working on many ideas."

As a result of the rigorous demand of the film's pre-production schedule, and also acknowledging the fact that the craftsmen in Switzerland were just not as advanced in the areas of special effects, Giger called upon the help of Cliff Wallace and CFX studio, located at Pinewood Studios, in England. Accruing a considerable out-of-pocket expense, Giger sent them the materials to build a full-size Sil head. Admitting to the limitations of the finished design due to the pressures of the short time frame they were given to execute the fabrication of the bust, Giger tried to fix

certain elements he was unhappy with, such as the hair and the width of the mouth (which had to do with his ability to insert Sil's tongue). However, the exercise did prove that the transparent aspect worked, and that during the creature's transformation it would be able to have the orange glow Giger was looking for.

Inspired by ideas from Feldman's script, Giger envisioned Sil going through a three stage evolution when it came to revealing her alien self. "My original idea was that Sil's transformation from a tall, beautiful woman into a deadly monster take place in three distinct phases," Giger explained. "As she increases her temperature quickly she glows red hot, changing to a hotter looking orange glow. This causes her clothing and hair to burn off. Then she is completely transparent outside and black

inside, like a glass body with carbon inside. Second, sharp spikes, like serrated daggers come out from her elongated vertebrae, shoot out her back and we see that she is transparent. Last, we see her interior organs. When she becomes pregnant you can see her baby resting in the womb between her breasts." Unfortunately, like so much of Giger's innovative work, this transformation is not in the film.

In addition to Sil's knife like spines and hair with flames at the ends, Giger empowered Sil with a few other "functional" defences that he deemed "organic weapons"—snake-like tentacles, with hooks, that are located in her breasts.

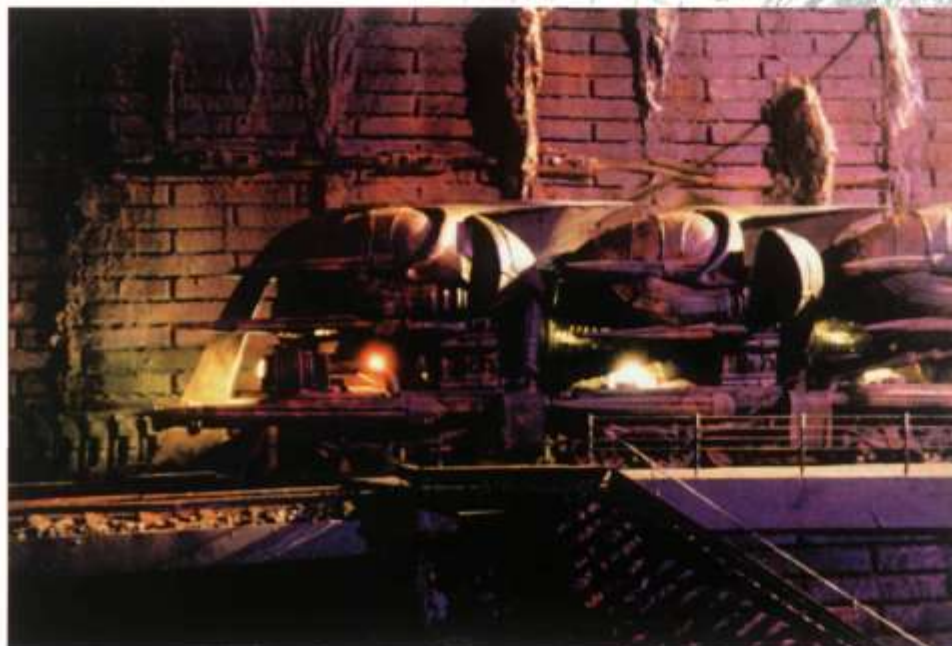
UNIQUE TONGUE

A fifth weapon Giger envisioned, a concept he had been working in *Alien*³, was Sil's unique tongue. I had the opportunity to see a cast of it first hand at his agent's (Leslie Barany) office in New York. I discovered that his agent had some input into the design. "Leslie is also a good friend and advisor," said Giger, "and we have long conversations every few days, during *Species* almost every day, about not only business but art and things that I am working on. He cares very much about the quality of my work and understands well what I am trying to achieve. In such relationships, it is natural for me to get good suggestions, which is something I am always open for. He sent from New York a shark mouth full of frightening teeth after I told him my idea for Sil's tongue. I carefully inserted them into the tongue I fabricated. I think this is an original and frightening tongue, and it's the most powerful aspect of Sil's face."

COMMUNICATIONS

In Giger's communications to the filmmakers, he not only sends detailed designs, in addition to conversations on how to implement them, he shows his understanding of the medium in the storyboards he sends along to illustrate how things can be used. Giger is an artist who does not try to dictate how something must be done, but shows how something can be done and hopes that these craftsmen are in-sync with his ideas and will evolve them.

"My original idea was that when she was to give her 'death kiss' her barbed, oversized tongue is able to go deep into the victim's mouth," he explained, "and then she vigorously pulls it back, *not* punching it *forward* as in the finished film, too much as I had already done in



The Sil costume as it appears in the film



Alien and Alien³. The tongue has rearward facing teeth which yank out whatever they are in contact with when it is retracted."

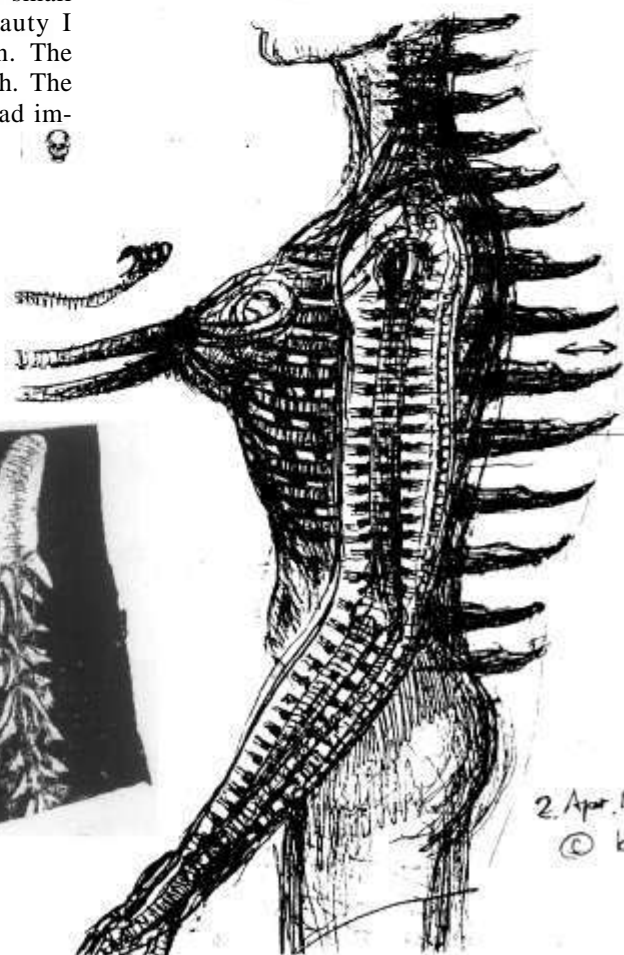
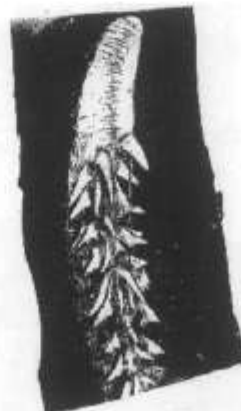
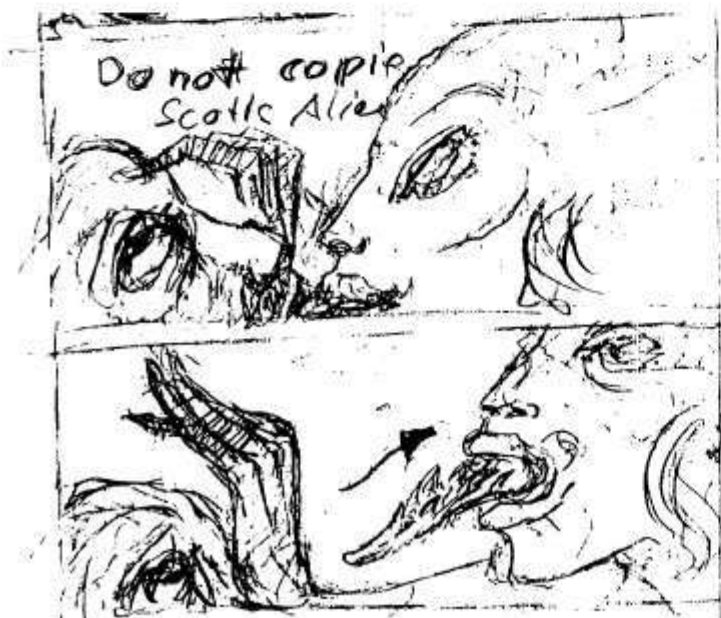
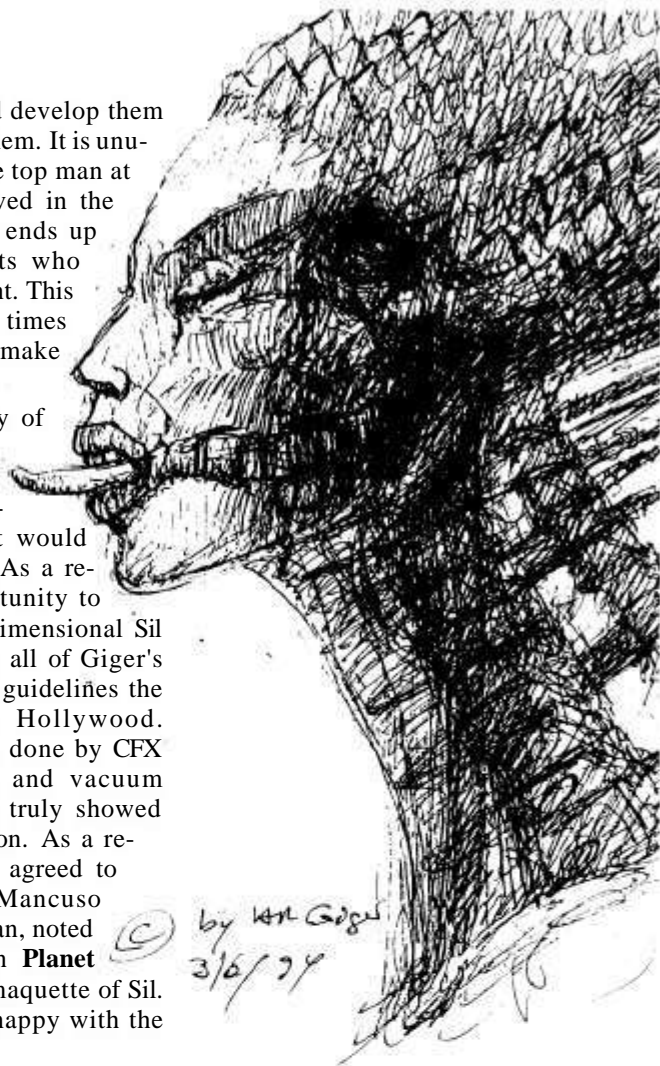
I've noticed that during our conversation Giger often used the word "fabricator" instead of effects artists or something similar. When I asked him why he replied, "I prefer fabricating specialists and not those who seek to express their own creativity with my ideas. If I have the chance to work things out for myself I want my assistants to do it exactly as I indicate and not try to incorporate their own ideas into it. It is rare to find a strongly talented artistic collaborator that I can admire, who also understands the logic of my work, like Steve Johnson, where I feel my designs and I are in trustworthy hands. That type of situation gives me the confidence and freedom to

fulfil my designs more and develop them more than I first imagine them. It is unusual in Hollywood that the top man at an effects house is involved in the actual hands-on work. It ends up being given to specialists who each have a particular talent. This is not good because many times it makes everything they make look the same."

Giger spent the majority of August 1994 trying to build his Sil, but he never quite realized the three-dimensional Sil model that would meet with his standards. As a result, Giger lost the opportunity to actually build the three dimensional Sil for the film, and utilizing all of Giger's work and experiments as guidelines the construction moved to Hollywood. Giger's models and work done by CFX were made of polyester and vacuum formed plexiglass, which truly showed the genius of Giger's vision. As a result the producers finally agreed to the transparency idea. Mancuso also contracted Tom Burman, noted for his prosthetic work on **Planet of the Apes**, to design a maquette of Sil. However, Giger was not happy with the results.

"I saw the photos of Burman's small scale Sil. It did not have the beauty I wanted to confer with my design. The head shape looked like a little fish. The fabrication was not at all what I had imagined."

Next month, more exclusive sketches and the secret of the Ghost Train!
Special thanks to Leslie Barany and HR Giger for arranging this interview



Giger's concept drawings for Sil (right) and the 'tongue' attack, (above) with model of the tongue