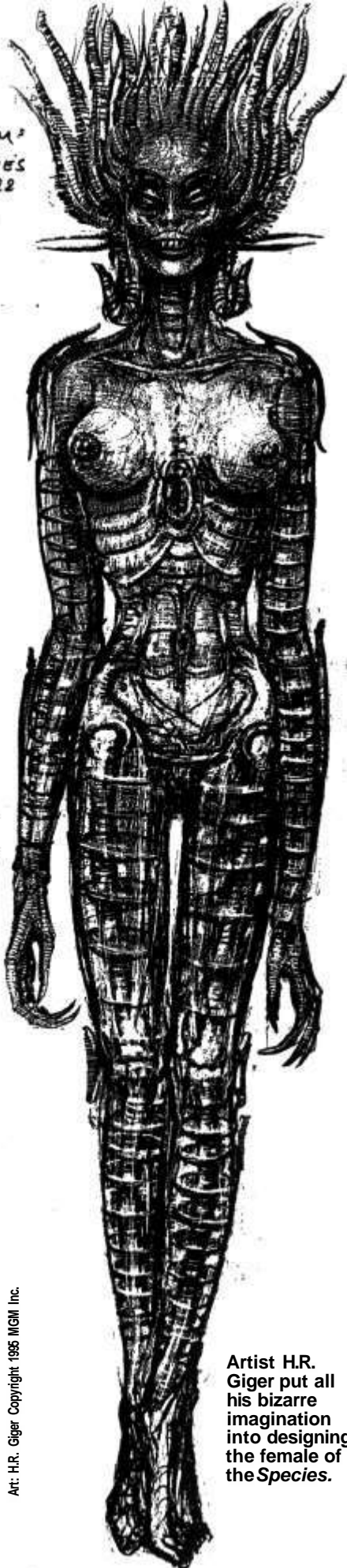


MGM?
SPECIES
NO 122
SIL



H.R. GIGER: SURREAL VISIONARY

"I always have to fight to keep the beauty, because people are afraid that if you don't make the monster ugly, it can't be scary."

By DAVE HUGHES

We...don't want to moralize or reproach anyone; we simply want you to get used to us and grow to love us."

—from Manifesto of Atomic Children
by H.R. Giger

Correctly pronounce the name H.R. Giger to someone (Gee-ger, like "eager"), and you will almost certainly get a blank look in return. Repeat it using the American mispronunciation (Geiger, as in "Geiger counter"), and almost every science fiction and horror fan will say the same thing—"Oh, you mean Geiger!"—before raving about the artist's work. Even outside the genres of the fantastic, explain to almost anyone that Giger is the artist who designed the terrifying title beast for the film *Alien*, and they, too, will know who you are talking about. They'll probably also give you a grimace or a shudder in the bargain.

In other words, although Giger is not quite a household name, his Oscar-winning designs for Ridley Scott's 1979 horror opus are unlikely to ever be forgotten. Fourteen years before Steven Spielberg and others made the world believe dinosaurs could once again walk the earth, the then 39-year-old Swiss artist convinced us that a creature more advanced, more adaptable, more terrifying and above all more *dangerous* than anything on Earth not only existed, but was coming to eat us. Now, Giger's artistry is helping to bring a new extraterrestrial terror to Earth with the release of *Species*, for which he designed the monstrous guises of the otherwise beautiful alien killer Sil.

Reached just after his 55th birthday, the artist admits that the day left him a little worse for wear. Was he celebrating heavily? "No," he chuckles, before continuing in his slow, deep and clipped Teutonic tones, "I was working in my basement with perocryl, which is like poison, and when I had finished, my

head, lungs and everything were in pain, like somebody had stuck something in my chest! I had no mask, you see, and I couldn't open the window because then the paint would never have dried."

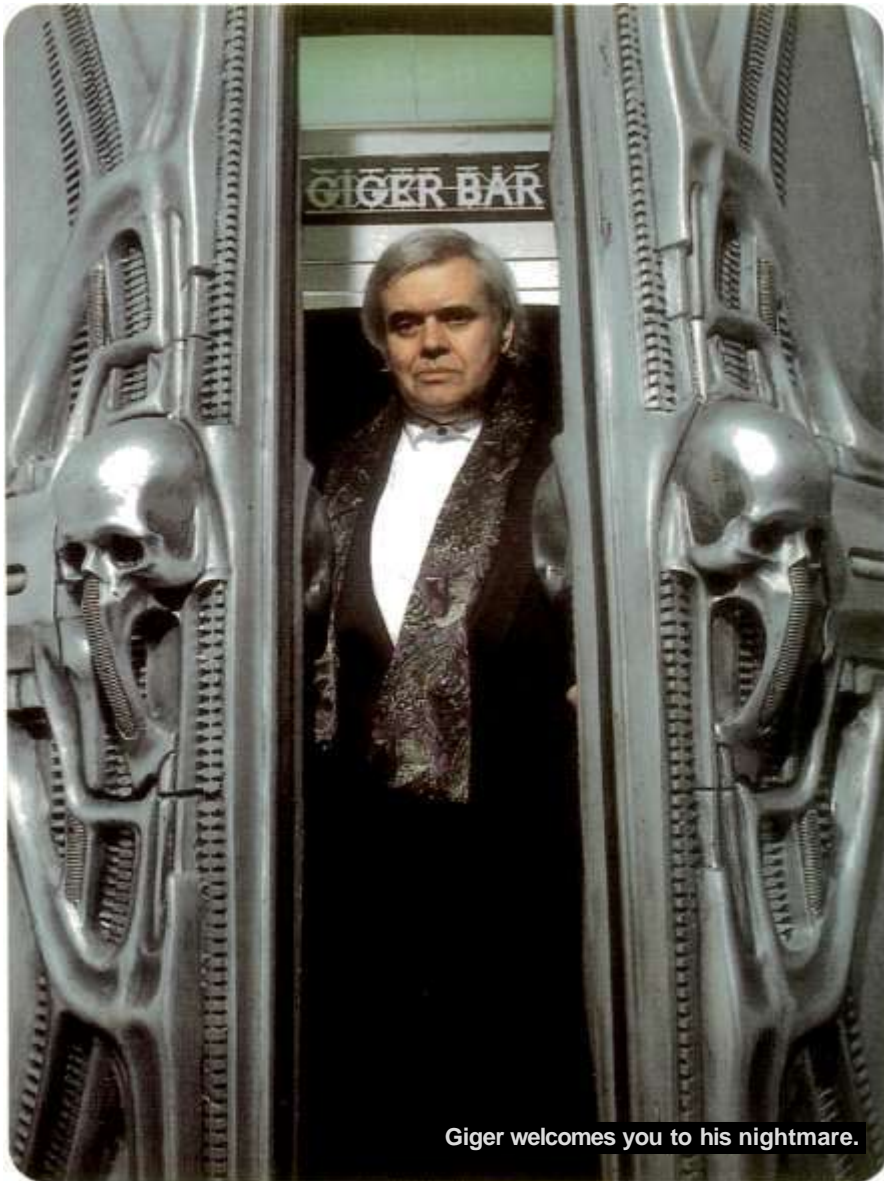
Assuring that he is now fully recovered from this unfortunate episode, the artist goes on to explain how he came to be involved with *Species*. "[Producer] Frank Mancuso Jr. and [director] Roger Donaldson came to visit me, having made an arrangement with Jim Cowan of Morpheus International, my publisher in Los Angeles," he recalls. "I was a little concerned because Donaldson had never made a science fiction or horror film, but I knew Mancuso had made some of the *Friday the 13th* films and a lot of other good movies, and he [Mancuso] promised he would call me every night to tell me how the movie was going, and he kept his word. He called me always at 2 or 3 a.m. my time, and we had very good exchanges of ideas. So that was very nice."

The producers further assured him that unlike on *Alien*, where Giger had essentially been limited to traditional man-in-a-suit methods, *Species* would involve a combination of actors (both in and out of costume), state-of-the-art computer-generated images (CGI) and three-dimensional models, blending the widest possible range of techniques into one hopefully seamless structure. "That is the real magic," Giger says.

The artist had already been impressed with Dennis Feldman's script, feeling that the title creature would give him the opportunity to create, for the first time, a *female* alien, a creature with

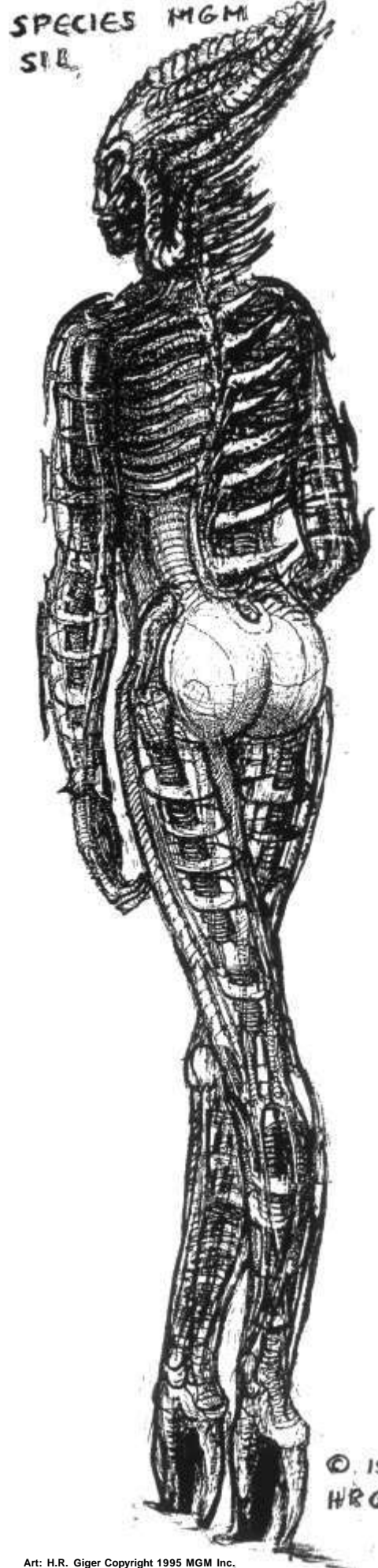
Artist H.R. Giger put all his bizarre imagination into designing the female of the *Species*.

Art: H.R. Giger Copyright 1995 MGM Inc.



Giger welcomes you to his nightmare.

Photo: Willy Spiller/Copyright 1992 H.R. Giger



Art: H.R. Giger Copyright 1995 MGM Inc.

the combination of beautiful form and grotesquerie—*belle et bête*—that can be seen in so much of his airbrushed work. This was important, he says, as he particularly wanted to experiment with a creature who was both aesthetic and deadly. "I always have to fight to keep the beauty," he explains, "because people are afraid that if you don't make the monster ugly, with a lot of slime and things like that, it can't be scary. Whereas I have always said that if you do a good enough design, it can be both elegant and horrific, and that the horror can come from the way it moves and what it does, not just the way it looks."

Born in Switzerland on February 5, 1940, Giger began work as an architectural/industrial designer at age 19, attending Zurich's School of Arts and Crafts at the same time. However, despite this early creative promise, the first artwork which might conceivably be classed as "Gigeresque" did not appear until 1963, when Giger was 23. Entitled

The Beggar, it depicted the disturbing image of an unnatural human arm-and-leg fusion (which Giger has since named "Armbeinda") proffering a hat as if to ask for money. As his school and local underground presses began to publish his surreal sketches, his bizarre style quickly earned him notoriety within the Swiss art world. By 1967, following the first of many exhibitions of his work, he had enough commissions to devote himself fully to his unique brand of art.

Giger's work first came to international attention with the 1971 publication of *A Rh+*, his first portfolio, and, two years later, his album cover design for the progressive rock group Emerson, Lake and Palmer. His American fan base soon increased dramatically, and it was not long before he became involved—thanks to a recommendation from none other than Spanish surrealist Salvador Dali—with gonzo filmmaker Alejandro (Santa Sangre) Jodorowsky, who thought Giger was perfect to conceptualize a film version of Frank Herbert's



This little engine could do anything it wanted.

Train Photos: Sascha Serfoezoe/Copyright 1995 MGM Inc.

epic science fiction novel *Dune*, which Jodorowsky intended to direct. Money proved difficult to raise for the ambitious project, however, and Giger's vivid, extraordinary designs for the project remained literally on the drawing board.

Nevertheless, it was as a direct result of his work on the stillborn *Dune* that he came to the attention of British commercial director Ridley Scott, who was set to follow his well-received feature debut *The Duellists* with a science-fiction thriller written by Dan O'Bannon. Developed under the unlikely working title of *They Bite!*, this movie made—if not altered the course of—motion picture history when it was ultimately released as *Alien*.

Unfortunately, Giger's ride through the turbulent world of film design since

Alien's international success has, as is widely known, been less than smooth. Following his triumph at the 1980 Academy Awards ceremony, the artist was surprised to find the film world's most prestigious accolade more of a curse than a blessing—at least in his home country. As he explains, "The Oscar was not very good for me in Switzerland, because the museums stopped taking my paintings and didn't invite me to do shows with other people. They thought I had sold out to Hollywood." In fact, nothing could have been further from the truth, for although several poor-quality films (*Galaxy of Terror*, *Deep Space* and *The Intruder Within*, to name but three) attempted to plagiarize his work for their

monsters—or, more usually, their video box covers—it would be another six years before Giger was officially involved with a film that made it into production.

This occurred in 1985, when MCM was preparing the sequel to Steven Spielberg and Tobe Hooper's smash hit horror film *Poltergeist*. Finally, Giger was engaged on a project that, at least on paper, looked worthy of his talents. Unfortunately, his conceptual designs for the film were far more ambitious than the FX technicians of the day—and, in all fairness, the film's budget—could accommodate, and as a result, Brian Gibson's *Poltergeist II: The Other Side* (1986) was a disappointment to audiences in general and Giger in particular.

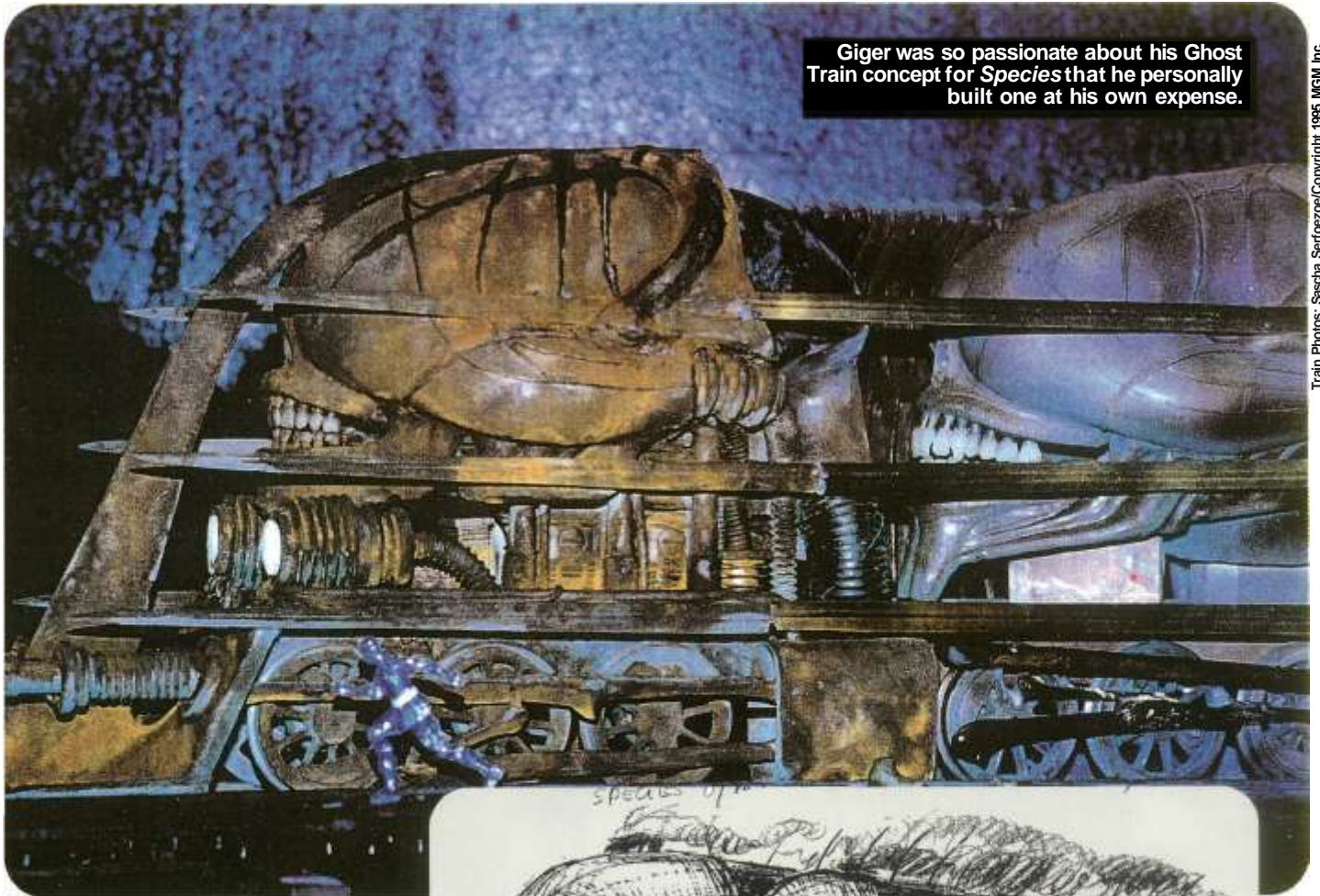
The same year, James Cameron's *Aliens* proved a far more popular sequel than Gibson's failed effort. Much to his regret, Giger was not engaged to work on the movie; instead, Cameron's close colleague Stan Winston was asked not only to slightly modify Giger's original *Alien* design, but also

"Because Sil gets hot when she is going to attack, she would be resistant to fire. So I told them, 'No flamethrowers!'"

build the newly-added Alien Queen herself, based on Cameron's own design (which Giger loved). Ultimately, the only credit Giger received was a token one for "Original Alien Design." Still, Giger considers *Aliens* one of the best SF/war/action films and enjoys it more and more with every viewing, even though it has somewhat emasculated his creature, turning the Alien from a near-invincible predator to cannon fodder for heavily armed soldiers.

As it happened, *Alien*³ director David Fincher agreed with this point of view, saying in one interview that he thought Cameron's film "worked because of the sheer scale and how little you saw of these fleeting glimpses in the strobes of the machine guns firing," but he saw his own sequel as an opportunity to "make the Alien scary again." In addition to the desire to rectify what he called "qualitative errors" made in *Aliens*, Giger had his own reasons for wanting to work on *Alien*³; since *Poltergeist II*, the artist had been involved in several other aborted feature films, including Scott's proposed science fiction film *the Tourist* and, for low-budget filmmaker William Malone (whose own *Alien* knockoff *Creature* featured a character named "Hans Rudi Hofner," played by Klaus Kinski), *The*

Giger was so passionate about his Ghost Train concept for *Species* that he personally built one at his own expense.

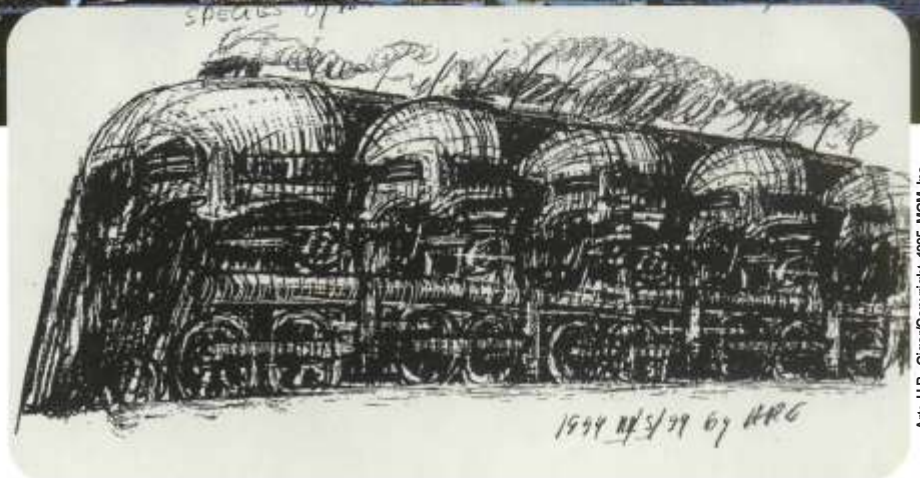


Train Photos: Sascha Serfozoe/Copyright 1995 MGM Inc.

Mirror, an ambitious horror film inspired by Giger's 200,000-selling art book *Necronomicon*. Perhaps a little *too* ambitious, as Giger explains: "It would have cost a lot of money to do it well. But Bill Malone usually makes his films on very small budgets, and I couldn't think of a way to do this one as a low-budget production." When Orion Pictures dropped *The Mirror* in 1988 as a direct result of the box-office failure of their George Romero film *Monkey Shines*, it seemed Giger was in for seven years of bad luck.

This continued in earnest when, in July 1990, Fincher and 20th Century Fox approached the artist and invited him to design several new lifeforms for *Alien*³, including an aquatic facehugger, a bovine chestburster and an all-new, quadrupedal version of the adult Alien. Fincher, already the third director to be officially assigned to the troubled film, implied that Giger would be given the same degree of control he had enjoyed on *Alien* more than 10 years earlier, and the artist had no reason to doubt him. He immediately began to work "like crazy," furiously sketching and faxing designs for a four-legged creature he described as "more elegant and beastly" than his original—"more like a lethal feline, a panther or something.

"[The] new creature is more sensuous and seductive," he told Britain's monthly



Art: H.R. Giger/Copyright 1995 MGM Inc.

Aliens magazine, "not at all monstrous or ugly. The lips and chin are better proportioned, giving the creature its more erotic appearance." Working on his own initiative and spending his own money to insure the film had his best possible input, Giger and his regular modelmaker Cornelius de Fries built several maquettes and a full-size sculpture of the new creature, offering further assistance to the production at only the cost of materials. By this time, however, contact with Fincher and his producers had been severed, and Tom Woodruff and Alec Gillis of Amalgamated Dynamics Inc. (ADI) had been engaged to redesign the Alien for the film. "When I heard that Woodruff and Gillis had their own version of the Alien," Giger laments, "I began to think that they didn't appreciate mine, and that they probably had

already sold Fincher on their ideas."

In fact, the final version of ADI's creature looks suspiciously like Giger's conception, yet despite having worked for six intensive weeks on every design aspect of the beast, the artist received only the "Original Alien Design" credit—suggesting that he had not been involved in the film at all and, unforgivably, denying him a second Oscar nomination and public recognition of his hard work. Once again deeply disappointed and hurt, Giger understandably decided to decline further film offers—unless he had an opportunity to work with a director (in particular, fellow Europeans Ridley Scott and Clive Barker, or taboo-breaking Davids Lynch and Cronenberg) whom he felt sure would give him the freedom to fully realize his bizarre and inspired designs on screen.

It was therefore a surprise to many of his fans when, in April of last year, the newly revitalized MGM announced the imminent production of a "suspense-filled science fiction thriller," *Species*, and that "renowned artist H.R. Giger" had agreed to conceptualize the title creature. Clearly proud that the *Speciesteam*—Donaldson, the Australian director of *No Way Out* and *The Getaway*, and Mancuso—had, thanks to a personal visit to Switzerland to meet Giger, managed to persuade him to come aboard the project, MGM president Michael Marcus described the artist's appointment as "an enormous coup." The parallels with *Alien* were obvious; could this be the first truly scary science-fiction thriller since that seminal, groundbreaking film?

The movie's story had many aspects that interested Giger. "I liked the fact that at the beginning of the story, the aliens send their DNA, like an egg, to Earth, as if they wanted their children to grow up here." Echoing the four-stage life cycle for his *Alien* creature, Giger also

saw Sil's many transformations as an opportunity to conceptualize a number of creatures around a central theme. For instance, when Sil is preparing to attack one of her victims, she goes through three stages, as the artist describes: "First, she turns a dark red color. Next, she starts to glow red hot, and we see her clothes and her hair burn up and fall down. Then she is completely transparent outside and black inside—like a glass body but with carbon inside. That," he adds with undeniable relish, "is when people die!" Sil's transparent body also added an intriguing twist, later in the story, where she becomes pregnant. "You can see that the baby is between her breasts, and in one scene she is trying to push the baby out of her chest. I saw it as an in-joke on *Alien*," he laughs.

Having agreed to conceptualize Sil, Giger embarked on a search for a young woman he could base his designs around. But finding someone to model for a creature like Sil, with the innocence of a child, the ferocity of a predator, the beauty of a woman and the cunning of

"If somebody offers me work on a movie, I don't wait until the contracts are done, or I will lose interest."



National Park I (1975) offers a glimpse of the menagerie that populates Giger's world.

Art Copyright 1975 H.R. Giger/Courtesy Morpheus International

H.R. GIGER '76
A. JODOROWSKY'S

an animal, was no easy task. "I was looking for someone about 6 feet in height, because she would need to be tall to have the strength to kill. I found a model here in Switzerland, Nadia, who looked very good; her face was much more in the direction of my Sil than the studio's, and she had a very big mouth, which I quite liked. She did not speak English so well, but I didn't think that would be a problem, because neither does Sil!" In any event, although Mancuso found Giger's choice to be a natural actress, the production had already settled on a Sil of their own, New York model Natasha Henstridge. "It was a pity about Nadia, but I hear Natasha has done very well," Giger says.

The artist initially prepared several sketches, but—largely due to his mis-



Giger painted another Ghost Train—a recurring theme in his work since childhood—in 1976 for an unfilmed Alejandro Jodorowsky version of *Dune*.

treatment on *Alien*³—"not so good that they could build Sil from them!" These early designs were approved, the contract was (eventually) signed and *Species* moved into a higher gear. By this time, although the studio had invited Giger to Los Angeles to supervise the puppet representations of his work—an offer he would normally have been delighted with—his mother had become very ill, and he was afraid to leave her in case she worsened. As it happened, she died shortly thereafter, "but it was important that I was there to hold her hand."

Meanwhile, to compensate for his missed trip to Hollywood, Giger tried to undertake the puppetry work at home in Switzerland, but found that his assistants did not have sufficient movie experience to make the preproduction models satis-

factorily. "They were not so brilliant," he admits, "and they don't know about Hollywood time pressures, so everything went wrong. What can I say?" he laughs. "We had a bad time!" Nonetheless, Mancuso and Donaldson were pleased when they saw what Giger had done.

Giger's fears that the design for Sil would be taken out of his hands at this stage were allayed by makeup FX designer Steve Johnson, apparently a big fan of Giger's work, who promised his fellow artist that Sil would be made to conform to his designs as closely as possible. He kept his promise. "In the end, I was very pleased with how it turned out," Giger says, clearly relieved that, for once, his conceptualization has not been unduly tampered with.

It is clear that some of the difficulties Giger has had with his involvement in Hollywood-bred feature films stem from his own artistic *modus operandi*. For obvious reasons, a talent such as his cannot function by being switched on and off at the whim of a studio executive; as with most artists, once inspiration strikes, it must be acted upon (or, in some cases, succumbed to); otherwise, the muse is lost. It is not unusual, therefore, for Giger to receive an inquiring call from Hollywood via his American agent and close friend, Leslie Barany, and then to produce 50 sketches, 10 maquettes and a short film before ink has even dried on contracts! Giger admits that this is a problem when dealing with Hollywood. "You know, if somebody offers me work on a movie, I



Giger's previous meldings of female and biomechanical forms, as seen in *Li II* (1974), made him a clear choice to design Sil for *Species*.

am always so enthusiastic that I don't wait until the contracts are done, or I will lose interest. I have to do it when I have the spark."

Another problem is that Giger's imagination tends to run away with him, a trait that has surely contributed greatly to his success, but one that does not seem to fit in with studio sensibilities. For instance, the more of Sil's character he created, the more he felt some scenes were not in tune with his depiction of the way she would act. "I had a lot of inventions and a lot of ideas for different things on this project," he says, "but they don't like it when I start changing the story!" Among Giger's own concepts for *Species* were the title design and, more significantly, one of Sil's "instinct dreams."

Since other members of Sil's species are unable to communicate with her, she has recurring, apparently instinctive visions that guide her in matters of pro-

"I liked the fact that the aliens send their DNA to Earth, as if they wanted their children to grow up there. "

creation and procreation; Giger's idea, a "Ghost Train dream" in which she sees a grotesque caterpillar-train with vacuum-cleaner arms sweeping up younger versions of herself, shows how her species eats. This scene—touching on the locomotive theme Giger has previously

explored for such aborted projects as *Dune* and *The Train*—did make it at least as far as the June 13, 1994 draft of the *Species* script, but its creator has no idea whether it appears in the final film. "I put a lot of money into building a 20-foot-long, fully working model train and station with tunnels, all in scale," he says, "and if they don't use it, I will be very depressed and will lose a lot of money. It was a big risk, but I had to do it—if I hadn't, they would have no train at all, and that would be a pity."

One other aspect of the film Giger hoped to influence was the attempt to destroy Sil by fire. "When you think about it, all American films seem to have some kind of showdown with fire—*Aliens* and *Alien*³ to name only two—and everybody seems to love flamethrowers. But with Sil, because she gets hot when she is going to attack, she would be resistant to fire. So on every fax I told them, 'No flamethrowers!' and eventually I made a very humorous drawing of a man with a flamethrower between his legs, standing over a kneeling woman with the fire going over her like..." He chuckles. "I called it 'The Flamethrower F**ker.' They made a T-shirt out of it, but I don't think they changed the movie."

At the time of this interview, Giger had not viewed the finished film, only an underwater scene and one of Sil's murders. "What I have seen so far is very good," he says. Overall, the artist knows he is in safe hands with Johnson and visual FX creator Richard Edlund. Certainly, *Jurassic Park* has perfectly illustrated that designers like Giger need not be limited by technology. "It is now a year since I worked on the film, and although Steve Johnson has been great in sending me tapes of finished scenes, I'm still wondering how it has come together and how much of my fingerprint is on the film," he adds.

Giger says that his experience working on *Species* has been his best since *Alien*—although he admits that that isn't saying very much—but he is reserving overall judgment until he has seen more of the completed movie. "So many things can make a film kaput," he says.

"You know? Bad cuts, bad lighting, bad dramatization, bad direction, whatever. At the end, you are only a small part of the movie. That's why every time I work on a film, I say it will be the last time." In fact, since working on *Species*, Giger has already worked on another film, designing a new

Batmobile for Joel Schumacher's *Batman Forever*, unfortunately, his conception ultimately went unused. However, he has recently devoted much of his time to the preparation of several new books.

"I have so many books coming out," he says. "I'm doing *H.R. Giger Under Your*

Skin, about people who wear Giger paintings as tattoos. They are my living museum! Morpheus is doing the *Species* art book and one called *Giger's Film Design*, which hopefully will include the Batmobile they didn't use for the film. Then Taschen [a German publisher noted for their artbooks, portfolios and posterbooks] wants to do a new book about my work. Taschen is a great publisher, the best for a very good price. They want to do a 240-page book, including all my favorite obsessions, among them the Zodiac Fountain, Garden Train and 3-D Magic Eye adaptations of my paintings. And when I have time, I continue to work on my own story, *The Mystery of San Gottardo*."

This latter title is a personal film project of Giger's which he has been working on periodically for more than five years. Based, intriguingly, on Giger's first-ever surrealist sketch—the aforementioned "Armbeinda" figure—the story centers on yet another species of Giger creatures, leg-and-arm combinations separated from their wheelchair-bound torso/head "parents," as part of a bizarre ritual inspired by the legendary Mythagora. The story, set in the Gottard mountains in 1920, is quite likely unfilmable, but that has not stopped Giger from showing such filmmakers as Clive Barker his elaborate idea.

"San Gottardo is full of mountains with tunnels going through," Giger



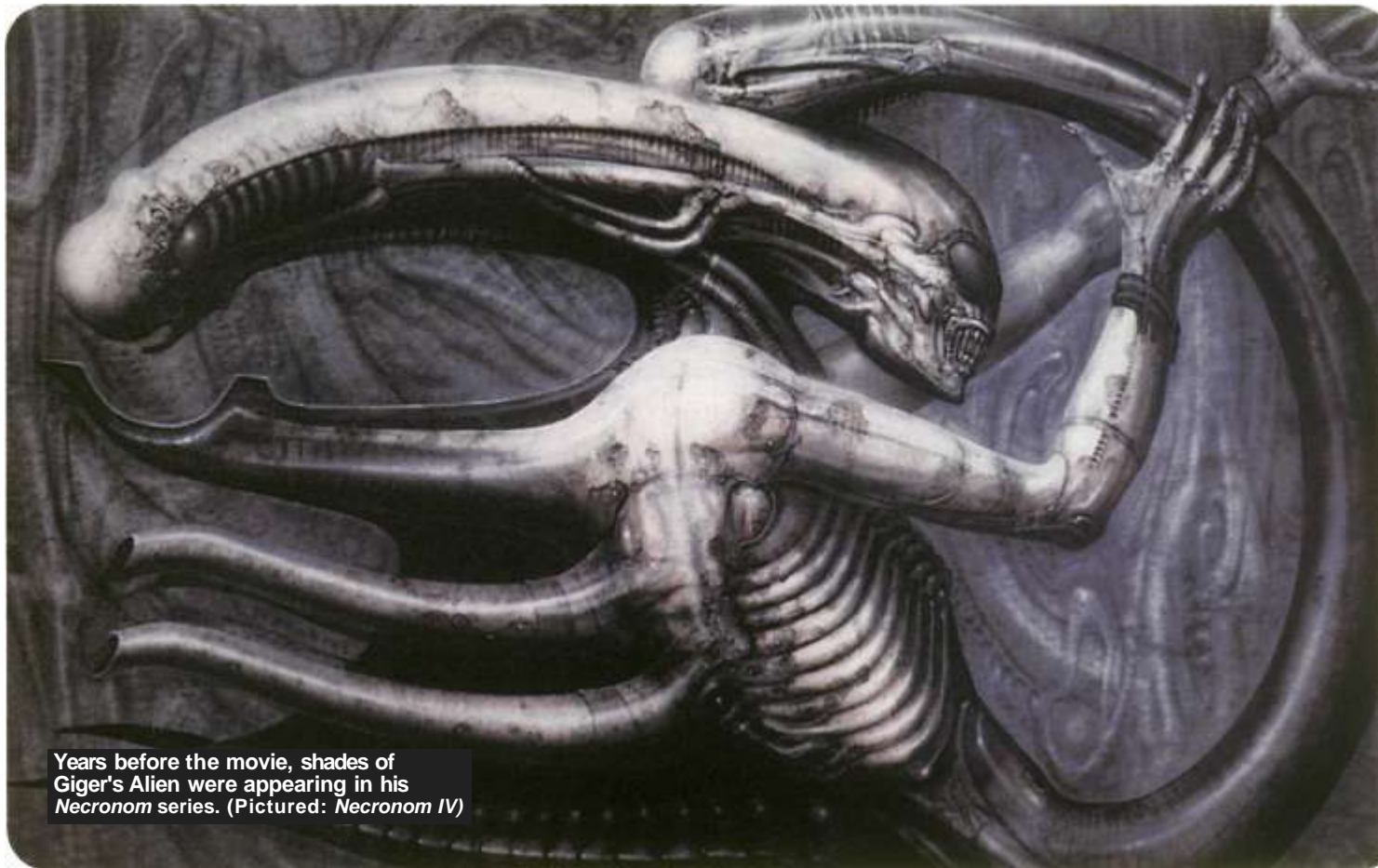
Sil's impressive profile, courtesy of H.R. Giger.

Art: H.R. Giger/Copyright 1985 MGM Inc.

explains. "During the Second World War, Hitler was storing his weapons in Italy, but he could have exploited Switzerland's neutrality by transporting them through these tunnels. It would be a great base for the military, as it is in my story. My creatures live in the foxholes, and when the military attempt to build their passage through Switzerland, they rise up and take command. It would be

very expensive," he muses, "but I don't care." Giger says that he has drawn all the storyboards for the film as a book, and that Taschen would be an ideal publisher. "The best thing is that I could give it to them exactly as I wrote it and they wouldn't change a thing."

If only Giger could find someone in Hollywood who would work like that, he would be as happy as he is talented.



Years before the movie, shades of Giger's *Alien* were appearing in his *Necronom* series. (Pictured: *Necronom IV*)

Art: Copyright H.R. Giger 1976 Courtesy Morpheus International