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The WORLD OF FANDOM Magazine

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 Editorial offices located at
 2525 W. Knollwood St. Tampa FL 33614-4334
 Send Correspondence To:
 P.O. Box 9421 Tampa FL 33604
 Phone (813) 933-7424 or 238-4643

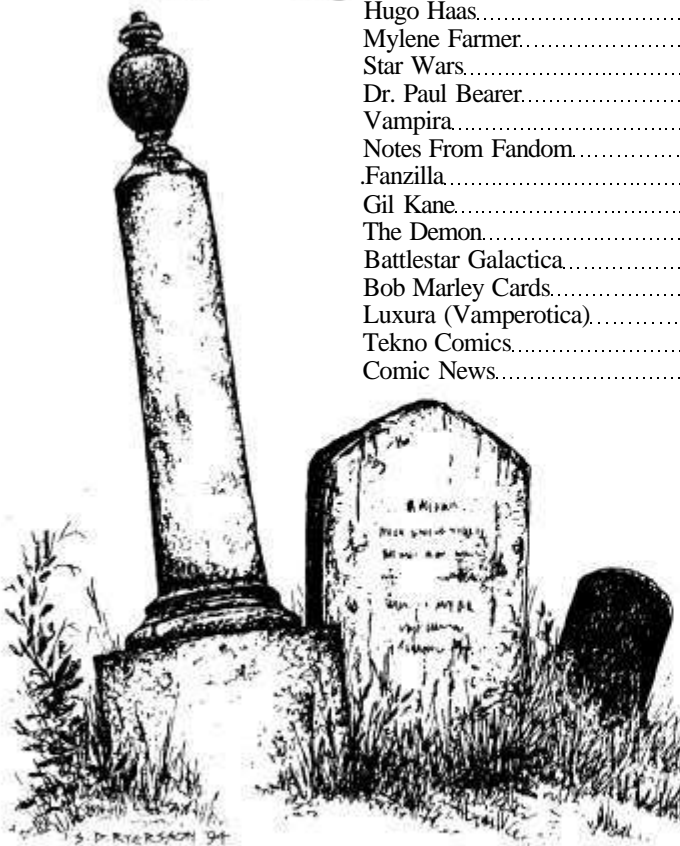
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 Photo: Louis Stalder

Contributors:

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|-------------------|------------------|
| Jeff Gaither | Allen Koszowski |
| Joe Mauceri | Sergio Rodriguez |
| Corey Knoetgen | Muriel I. Smith |
| Erick Alayon | Richard L. Hayes |
| Robert Rees | Glenn Hammonds |
| Dale Pierce | Glenn Andreiev |
| Eugene Ruble | Garland Hewlett |
| Jose Ortega | Jeff Fox |
| Kim Mygrant | J.B. Macabre |
| Scott D. Ryerson | Caesar Martinez |
| Ronald T. Fleming | Chris Paris |
| Michael Wynhoff | Joyce Steel |

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About The Cover:
 A 3 dimensional sculpture by H.R. Giger 1995 5'7"x4'7", 7 color silk screen. The faces are life casts of the principal, behind the scene personal from the film SPECIES, plus, the young and full grown actresses playing Sil. Limited Edition of 350. Signed & numbered by Giger. For info contact Leslie Barany at 212-627-7983. Some of the faces are of Frank Mancuso Jr., Richard Edlund, Steve Johnson, H.R. Giger, Natasha Henstridge, Michelle Williams, Roger Donaldson, Dennis Feldman, Andy Schedler, James Cowan, Giger's publisher and Leslie Barany.



Taking responsibility for the SPECIES

J.B. Mauceri - Macabre talks with director Roger Donaldson and special effects artist Steve Johnson

In 1974 a quest began to make contact with other intelligent lifeforms. Twenty years later NASA gets an answer back. The first part gives the formula for an enzyme that will help the human race make an unlimited supply of methane, a clean burning energy source. The second is a new DNA sequence to be combined with our own and the instructions on how to do it.

A covert government agency tests the enzyme and then tests the DNA. The result is a female child named Sil - they made it female because they felt it would be more docile. Growing and maturing at an accelerated rate, video of her sleep cycle uncovers something that is hiding beneath her human facade. A decision is made to terminate, Sil decides to survive and breaks out. Now the head of the project, Xavir Fitch played by Ben Kingsley, must assemble a team of experts to hunt her down and destroy her before she can mate. Michael Madsen plays Capt. Press Farley, an army specialist of search and destroy missions; Alfred Molina is anthropologist Dr. Stephen Arden; Forest Whitaker plays an empath with an innate ability to tap into the emotions of others; and Marg Helgenberger plays Dr. Laura Baker, the nation's top molecular biologist. The adult Sil is played by newcomer Natasha Henstridge.

SPECIES is directed by Roger Donaldson, who's directorial credits include "The Getaway," "Cocktail," and "No Way Out." The screenplay and story is by Dennis Feldman. Sil was designed by artist H.R. Giger and brought to life by effects artist Steve Johnson and XFX, Inc. **SPECIES** is produced by Feldman and Frank ("Friday the 13th") Mancuso, Jr.

Working at a hectic pace to finish the film for it's July American release, Roger Donaldson and Steve Johnson took some valuable time out of their schedule to talk with me about their work on this new sci-fi/thriller.

WORLD OF FANDOM: Considering your previous films, such as "No Way Out" and "The Getaway," how much of a different approach do you have to take on a science fiction film like **SPECIES**?

Roger Donaldson: It's quite a departure for me, and I guess that's why I decided to do it. With every movie I've done I've tried to go into areas that I haven't before. I've always enjoyed sci-

ence fiction, and when **SPECIES** came along I thought it would be a good opportunity.

W.O.F.: What was it about the script that you found particularly appealing?

R.D.: With every project that I've done there's been a hook that has made it stick out from all the other scripts I was reading at that time. With **SPECIES** there was a piece that the L.A. Times



The alien Sil designed by H.R. Giger and built by Steve Johnson and XFX Inc. ©1995 MGM.

had run three years ago on SETI, the search for extraterrestrial intelligence project, that NASA was running at the time. I found this a very interesting subject, and I saved the article in this "bright-ideas" box I have where I keep newspaper clippings, ideas I might have and things like that. When this project came along I was sure that I had read something about it, and I went through me box and there was the article. I guess that was the hook that made me say sure I'll do the movie.

W.O.F.: Not to say that you haven't dealt with effects in your previous films, but **SPECIES** deals with the designing, building and animation of a creature.

R.D.: This film really went into an area where I'd never been before. I hadn't done any digital special effects, and I hadn't work with the type of stuff that Steve Johnson specializes in, animatronics and that sort of stuff. There were lots of things to keep me really interested and helped me to feel like I was branching out into new areas of filmmaking that are becoming more

important on the digital side of the process. I don't think there is a movie coming out this summer that doesn't have at least one digital effect in it. I've always been interested in how technology effects filmmaking. I come from an area of filmmaking where I use to be a cameraman. When I edited "The Getaway" I did it on digital editing equipment, which I believe was the second feature, at that time, to be edited on digital equipment. Now every film is cut using digital stuff. I feel that computers are having such an impact on the film business that I wanted to be at the front of the pact on what is happening, rather than being at the back.

W.O.F.: Because this is an effects based film which comes together in the final stages of compositing, does it require you to do more storyboarding, or is there some new technical aid that you use?

R.D.: All of the special effects shots were all storyboarded. Yet at the same time, I tried to keep everything as open as possible to take everything into consideration. Some special effects work better than others, and that demands that you be able to think on your feet at times so you can keep what works, and take out of it what doesn't. I really feel that being able to think on my feet and solve problems as they arrive, as they always do in filmmaking, is one of my strengths. Some days you can approach things

with all the best intentions in the world only to have them not work out as you hoped they would. The flip-side is that some things work out better than you hoped. Overall, I like to know what I'm trying to do with a shot or a scene, but I also like not to be locked down to a preconceived idea of what a sequence will be that I can't take advantage of something that's working better than planned, exploiting it to its fullest potential or to minimize it if it's not going well so that it doesn't jeopardize the picture.

W.O.F.: **SPECIES** is a very unique project. It is being done under the new MGM/UA banner, produced by Frank Mancuso Jr. - who is a big fan of the genres - and you were able to bring H.R.

Giger on board to design Sil - the creature. The medium of film-making is drastically different from the world in which an artist creates in. What were the most interesting aspects about Giger's designs, and which aspects were applied and which were modified?

R.D.: I was in a fantasy book shop with my son, who is interested in all this stuff, and I was browsing the shelves when I came across *Necronomicon*, the book of Giger's work. I was aware of his work on the "Alien" films, but I had no idea of what his art was really like. I found the book at a time when we were trying to make up our minds as to the direction we wanted to take in terms of our creature designs. I paged through his images of these bio- mechanical, super-erotic creations and realized that this was the style of the creature in our film. I bought the book and discussed the idea with Frank Mancuso, and we both agreed that this could be the guy to give us what we want. We contacted him, and Frank and I flew to Zurich to meet with him. Giger was very enthusiastic about working on the project. That's sort of the way it came about..

W.O.F.: I would say, Steve, that the usual case on an effects project is you are allowed a significant amount of creative freedom when it comes to designs. Is it easier or harder to build something based on another artists designs, especially an artist like H.R. Giger?

Steve Johnson: First of all, I don't agree that this was the case at all. Giger definitely designed Sil, but he designed her in a very loose, fluid way. There was incredible room for interpretation. Beyond that, Sil is the lead character, but we probably did another sixty effects shots for the film. We created an incredible amount of creatures and effects for the film that had nothing to do with anything that Giger designed, other than us trying to emulate his style.

I would say on the contrary that my involvement with the creative forces on this film were heavier than usual. We went in and had meetings to talk about story ideas and do some brainstorming. I ended up with Roger Donaldson, Frank Mancuso Jr. and Richard Edlund being a real team writer, basically on the effects sequences, which is a rewarding process. They were really open to new ideas and I was able to come up with a lot of key sequences for the film. Again, on the contrary I was very much involved in the creative/design process. It wasn't like being handed a design to do, it was more like being given a springboard to jump off from.

W.O.F.: Roger, there are a vast number of effect houses in Hollywood. I think Steve Johnson is one of the most talented and under acknowledged artists in the field. From what I've seen it looks like *SPECIES* could be a big break for



Roger Donaldson sets up a shot on the set of SPECIES

him.

R.D.: Hopefully for Steve and for me. Steve, and all the guys he has working for him, are very enthusiastic, young, talented people who are, I think, are going to be the backbone of the industry to come. There are people with more experience, who are older and who have done things like "Jurassic Park" and films like that, but Steve is as cutting-edge as any of them, plus he's got the youth ambition and drive that I'm sure will put him at the forefront in a very short time. These guys live this stuff. Some of the effort they put in was extraordinary. They would stay up all night to get things ready for the next day. They didn't even bitch-&-moan, but made it feel that it was a pleasure for them to be doing it. That goes for all the people he has working for him, and it's hard to find that sort of enthusiasm.

W.O.F.: Steven, what do you think attracted the filmmakers to XFX, Inc. as opposed to someone like Stan Winston?

S.J.: Much of it had to do with my relationship with Richard Edlund, and the fact that there wasn't a lot of time to create a new relationship with an optical facility. The two visual effects aspects, my animatronics and prosthetic work, and the digital work need to be done hand-in-hand. My relationship with Richard Edlund was very attractive to them. It actually solves many communication problems between us, and them also. We were talking and dealing with each other constantly in pre-production, production and post-production.

W.O.F.: It seems that from the creative elements involved with the project, to the trailers and even the early poster designs that people will compare this film to the "Alien" series. What do you feel makes this project unique and do you feel cheated that some people are making these references so early on?

R.D.: First of all, the genre is the same. People are looking at the fact that H.R. Giger was involved with the "Alien" films. It is a legitimate point when you consider that they are in the same genre. However, the "Alien" films were set in space, in the future and in a very closed environ-

ment. *SPECIES* is set in present day Los Angeles, and the creature is something totally different from what the "Alien" creature was. There are probably some similarities. If you look at all of movies they are different, but there are things that are consistent to all of them in some way. There is a certain continuity to a filmmaker's work, no matter how different they are. I'm sure that exists with our creature in a way. To my mind it is a very different creature. It is a humanoid, where as the "Alien" was something that was basically an alien and didn't have a connection to the human race. The script dictated that this creature had to be humanoid in some way, and I think that H.R. Giger

has really done some of his best work in coming up with these designs. In some ways it is probably closer to his artistic endeavors than what he's done on the "Alien," which was sort of off to the side in a way.

S.J.: I think there is a lot of truth in that. Anything that is going to be based on Giger's design is likely to draw that kind of criticism. However, his design ethic is so original that he has no peers because no one does anything like him. I think it is going to be strikingly obvious that this is a Giger designed character. However, I think the major thing that makes this different is that this is more Giger than anything that has ever been done. For the first time it's a female character. All of the Giger designs that have been implemented in the past, also ripped-off in the past, were always male. If you look at his work ninety-nine percent of it is really erotic females. Sil is that, and for the first time it is a translucent character. The articulate models we built, and also the digital images that Boss Films did, have the ability to be seen through. That's a key element in all of Giger's designs. I think this is the truest Giger representation ever, and it makes me really excited. I think the technology has advanced to the point where I don't think it will even compare to the "Alien" films, especially when it comes to the general initial design concepts.

W.O.F.: From all of what you've explained, it would not be fair to say that your role was simply as a special effects designer. It seems that there is a lot of new technology that is being brought into play on *SPECIES*. How does this new technology redefine the boundaries of your work?

S.J.: We've done some things on this film that haven't been done before, and we've done some very simple things that haven't been done before, which are probably the most striking. For instance, we did an effects sequence we designed by working with Boss Film where worms are trying to grow out of a young female human version of Sil, before she transforms or grows older. It is one of the most single striking effects



The young human Sil starts to turn into something alien.

I've ever been involved with. No one is going to know how we did it, and it was amazingly simple to do. It shows the true magic of filmmaking in that there are two process that are joined together seamlessly, meaning digital C.G.I. and prosthetic makeup effects. It makes it a fresh and outstanding thing, and I love that. I like amazing myself, and this sequence does that and I'm real pleased.

It was also a chance to get involved hands on with the "Jurassic Park" style of C.G.I. integration with puppetry. Where as you use puppets for the closer shots and C.G.I. for the longer more mobile shots. It was a real learning experience in many aspects. We did push the envelope as far as what has been done and attempted before. It also helped to bring me up to speed with what is possible. I think now I'll know much more going into my next project.

W.O.F.: With the attempt by filmmakers to out do last summer's hits, it seems that films are being completed closer and closer to release dates. I can't remember a summer when I've been at screenings of work prints so close to release dates. How does this rush and working up until the last possible moment effect you?

S.J.: The answer is definitely yes. I think that I'm aided in that there are certain things I would never want to attempt physically in the real world. It's just as when makeup effects became accessible to audiences, then writers were able to think in boarder terms. I think the same thing is happening in the digital world. Now even more stuff can be accomplished on screen, therefore

more stuff can be written. At this point it is actually creating more work then detracting from it, from what I'm doing.

As far as being rushed, I think I've had an interesting relationship with MGM/UA on two films, one being SPECIES and the other being "Lord of Illusions." What has happened is that I think they've become more test orientated. They're testing films more and dealing with audience reactions more, more so then they have in the past, and acting on those reactions. With both films we've gone back long after post-production was completed and done new versions of certain scenes, as well as new endings and new effects. Always in that case it would be that we would have to get this new effect done for the next screening, which was something like nine days from the last one. You can say no, but it's like saying you can't test your film again. You have to figure out a way to do it even if it means running simultaneous twenty-four hour shifts for nine days to get it done. It's been an interesting aspect to all of that.

R.D.: Don't talk to me about that. It's the worst. I'll tell you, the screening you're seeing is not the finished print. We're still working on some of the stuff, and several of the green-screens still have other generations that are yet to come. Unfortunately everything comes down to the wire, but you have to show stuff to the press so they can write about it and publicize it. It's not going to be stuff that's going to change the movie in anyway, but we're still working on things. I've been working on this film for a year-and-a-half,

and it's everything to me. You want everything to be perfect. It's frustrating when you have to start showing it to people in its unfinished form.

W.O.F.: Roger, I understand you went with composer Christopher Young to do the score. I'm familiar with Chris's work, from "Hellraiser" to "Jennifer 8." What was it about Chris's previous work that made you consider him for SPECIES?

R.D.: Chris and Steve Johnson both fit into the same category. I interviewed and discussed this movie with everybody who was sort of able to do it, from the "up-&-coming" to the "veterans." I have this theory that some of peoples best work come at the beginning of their career and that often once they become established they tend to get a bit lazy, money hungry and their best work doesn't happen. In the case of Chris Young, it was really my editor, Conrad Buff- a great editor who worked with me on "The Getaway" as well , when we were talking about the film that Chris's name came up. When you show a film to a studio you try to present it as well as you can, and everybody throws temp-music in there to make it look as much like the real thing as possible. When we were temping this movie, Conrad came up with some Chris Young music. He'd worked with Chris on "Jennifer 8," and thought that I would really love this guy. He did a real hard sell on me. When I heard the music I realized that Chris's music was in the direction I wanted to go. I met with him, and like Steve Johnson, he had an enormous amount of enthusiasm and energy. Once I heard some of his other

music, nobody came even close to him, in my mind. I must say that he has delivered to me music that I think is as good as I could have gotten from anyone else, and a lot better than I would have. Chris was really pushed for time and he just worked so hard. I think he is probably at the forefront of being able to do good dramatic scary music.

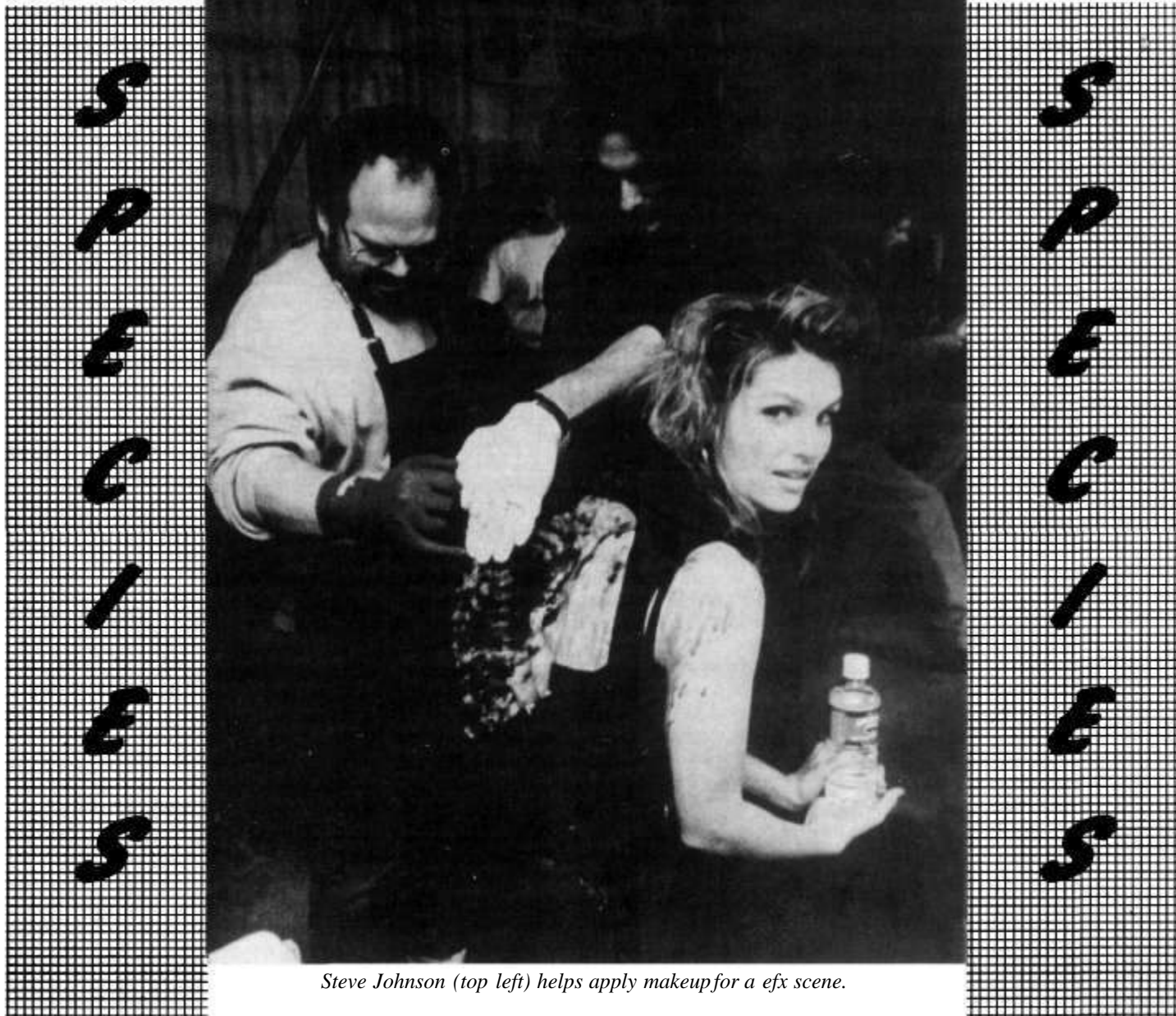
W.O.F.: Now that you've had a chance to work with this new technology and the genre, are there other genre projects you might consider making, that you might not have considered before or maybe something you've thought about previously, but the technology wasn't there?

R.D.: I would love to do a dramatic movie set in the future. I love the concept of science fiction. Most come out of an action base, where as I'd want to make a story about the potential problems that the future will hold and the solutions

required. I guess that's why the future holds so much interest for everybody. We look at the next hundred years as we consider what's happened over the last hundred. Everyone alive today would love to be there, and we know that we can't be there. That's why stories about time-machines hold so much fascination, because people would love to catch a glimpse of what the future has in store. Our wildest imaginations will not be able to take us there.

W.O.F.: **SPECIES** is part of the big summer-box office-release schedule. As a director, do you feel cheated because the film is coming out in this big rush, where as if they might have released it in the fall, or later, it might get more attention?

R.D.: This is a hard one. I applaud MGM/UA's audacity for bringing the film out then. The truth is that they feel the film is up to speed and that it is going to be discovered and not buried by something like "Batman Forever" or "Judge Dredd" that has a vast advertising campaign. I know that they're not going to be able to compete on that level. The only thing that will get this movie out of the "woodpile" of summer films is if audiences love **SPECIES**. I guess that's why we're desperate to show it to people like yourself. We hope you'll love the movie and get the word out there. Only if that happens will this movie survive. *Look for an interview with H.R. Giger in our next issue. Find out his feelings on SPECIES and see some of his sketches and more photos of the Giger designed creature called Sil by Steve Johnson!!! Don't miss this one folks or you'll be singing the blues.*



Steve Johnson (top left) helps apply makeup for a efx scene.