

Writer/director Lawrence Kasdan had tackled just about every genre, from thriller to sci-fi, and with his latest, *Dreamcatcher*, he gets to do horror.

WILDEST DREAMS

BY ALEJANDRO FERREYRA

This is just like my other movies... except for the alien invasion." That's Lawrence Kasdan's estimation of *DREAMCATCHER*, his adaptation of Stephen King's 2001 bestseller. Although it's hard to imagine Ned Racine—William Hurt's character in *BODY HEAT*—facing an assault by *DREAMCATCHER*'s baddies (he couldn't even handle Kathleen Turner), it makes sense once you realize that friendship is at the heart of the story. This is something Kasdan knows a bit about bringing to the screen.

The story goes as follows: four young friends (played by Jason Lee, Damian Lewis, Timothy Olyphant and Thomas Jane) perform the heroic act of saving a young mentally handicapped person from bullies and are changed forever by the uncanny powers they gain in return. Years later, the friends are overtaken by a blizzard on a hunting trip in the Maine woods where said alien force is hiding. The friends must first prevent the slaughter of innocent civilians by a military vigilante - played with crazed genius by Morgan Freeman - then defeat the creatures from another planet with the fate of the world in their hands.

Not the film you'd expect from the person who brought us *FRENCH KISS*. But then again, Lawrence Kasdan isn't about one genre, one face. This is the writer who brought Indiana Jones to life and the Millennium Falcon to Cloud City, as well as the

cast of pals facing Reagan-era America in *THE BIG CHILL* and the romance of *THE BODYGUARD*.

The director in him, though, was drawn to the humanity of *DREAMCATCHER* more than anything else—the mix of humor and horror that comes straight from the soul of the characters. It's what caught his eye as he planned to refocus his career.

"I inquired about [the rights to *DREAMCATCHER*] after I'd just done *MUMFORD*," he explained. "That was the end of a certain kind of movie for me. I want a real story, and Stephen King has always been known for that." Kasdan found out Castle Rock already owned the rights to the book and had King-adapting-veteran William Goldman working on a first draft. What they didn't have was a director. When they found out he

"It's a big, sprawling book, the first [King] wrote after his [2000] accident. There's a lot of that in it. You couldn't automatically see how it could be adapted because it was very rich. But [Goldman] had done some really important structural work before I came on, and one of the things Bill's great at is going right to the core of the story, the real spine of it. In the midst of the 600 pages are all these tangents that Stephen had gone off on. Bill had gotten it back to 'This is the story,' and that was enormously useful."

Kasdan, no stranger to the adaptation game after successfully bringing Anne Tyler's *The Accidental Tourist* to the screen, knew that he'd been helped enormously by Goldman's involvement. But the director, who's not a shabby writer himself, also recognized

Stephen King, the source's writer, would also be in the mix. He would read every draft and help Kasdan keep the story true to itself. Although the two never met face-to-face, several phone conversations allowed Kasdan to see King was very much behind him on this project.

"He was very charming and for me doing this. He didn't hang onto anything. He's not protective of anything from the book. I think that he writes so much that he forgets, like I do, what's in the book and what's in the movie."

Once the shooting script was finalized there was a sense of calm because the director knew that they were going into production. "I don't change it much after I do a draft," Kasdan admitted, "I know what I want to shoot." The focus shifted from

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wanted to get involved, they were thrilled and welcomed him to the project, as did the legendary scribe.

"Bill Goldman and I were friends already. I met him about ten years ago while we were in the Soviet Union on a trip sponsored by the Writers Guild. We had remained friendly. So when I came on, I was able to practically read his version right away." It was an unbelievable stroke of luck to have Goldman writing the draft. He had adapted *Misery* and *Hearts in Atlantis* (receiving a well-deserved Oscar nod for the former), both King books. That was important for Kasdan, who knew that translating the massive novel to the screen would be hard because it had a lot going on. Goldman was the one who could make it possible.

there would be a time where he would take over the scripting.

"There was an understanding between us when I came on. We would do a draft together that was him taking notes from me based on his first one and then he was going to step away and I'd write the shooting script." Kasdan maintains that it was very amicable, and that Goldman had been involved in the process all throughout the production, even staying on for a little longer.

"He saw the movie and each version of script," he noted, "and did [a second] draft and solved a lot of problems. We all agreed that would be his last. I would take it from there, adding aspects from the book that Bill was pessimistic about getting into the movie that I thought we could."

what was on the page to how would it play on the stage. *DREAMCATCHER*, the first horror film he's helmed, plays much differently than his other movies... or so you might think.

"There's really good humor in a lot of my favorite horror movies," said Kasdan, noting that *ALIEN*, *CARRIE*, and *MISERY* are films that use a subtle form of comedy in addition to their terror. "For me, there is no conflict between a horror movie and a funny movie. A lot of the humor in *DREAMCATCHER* comes out of the fact that these guys are in dire straits, and yet in the midst of that, they say some funny things, and they are aware that it is funny."

Wit was just one of the three aspects the director told his crew was essential to successfully bringing *DREAM-*

CATCHER to the screen. The second was the horror and lastly the emotional side, the relationships between the friends. "And I told them that one didn't take precedence over the other," Kasdan remembered. "It had to be all those three things."

It's obvious Kasdan knew what he wanted. An outsider to the genre, he recognizes the power it can have over its audience. He avoids horror films if he can, even though he understands how they work.

"I can't go to horror movies," he admitted. "I'm afraid. I don't like to be nervous around a bunch of strangers. The thing I find most uncomfortable is that you're going to be startled. That can be a painful thing. A good horror film makes you worry about that all the time. So after you're done with it, you should feel wrung out."

Kasdan knew who should play that part.

"Colonel Abraham Curtiss (who was called Kurtz in the book, a reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) is a military guy who has been chasing aliens too long. A really evil, crazy guy who doesn't think he is. Morgan Freeman was the only person that I talked to about the role. I went to see him to ask him, and he said let's do this." The veteran actor didn't disappoint. "He turned out to be more than I imagined. Morgan's the most incredible professional and gentlemen. The other actors were inspired by his commitment to the rehearsal. There's no temperament, he was easy with me, with everyone. He's a wonderful human being and I think one of the greatest actors on earth."

Tom Sizemore rounded out the cast

movie and a funny movie. A lot that these guys are in dire straits..."

That wringing would be, in part, the job of his actors. Kasdan knew that he had to put together a cast that could pull his "three-pronged attack" off. They needed to be funny and poignant, as well as physical. Lee, with whom the director previously worked with on MUMFORD, was a world-class skateboarder who could meet the demands of an action role, as could Olyphant, a former swimmer at USC. Lewis, who was in HBO's landmark BAND OF BROTHERS, also fit that bill. Jane, last seen pining for Cameron Diaz's attention in ONE TRUE THING, had proven his athletic prowess in 61*. So with those four cast (along with Donnie Wahlberg as the mentally handicapped friend Duddits), there was only one main role left to fill. From the moment he read the book,

and DREAMCATCHER headed into production. As with many King novels, this one takes place in the snowy Northeastern United States. Kasdan relished the opportunity to work in that sort of environment, despite its drawbacks.

"They made a miniseries of STORM OF THE CENTURY," the helmer remembered. "I thought that was really well done for TV. They did a good job with the snow, and I like the snow. I go to Colorado all the time and I find all the snow peaceful and ominous at the same time," Kasdan revealed. "It creates an atmosphere... a sort of hushed one that I love anyway. For that to be the setting of a horror film seems absolutely right. I'm drawn to it the same way Steven is." So to get that "atmosphere," he



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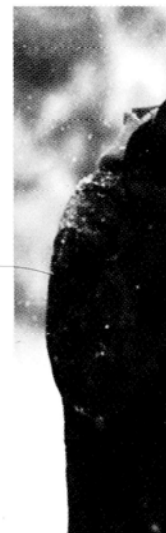
headed to Canada, letting Mother Nature lend an occasional hand to the film.

“We scraped by. One time we had to stop because the sun was out. You can’t shoot snow that way. The whole movie is overcast, there is a blizzard, so we were adding snow to a lot of scenes. But you can’t do a sunny day, so you have to wait for clouds to come in. Normally you wait for them to go away.”

“We were outside shooting in the woods for six weeks. The rest was onstage in and around Vancouver after that. But during those six weeks, you’re at the complete mercy of the weather. And it’s nerve-wracking.” Was this a case of art imitating life? The snow proved to cause as much tension to the crew as it did to the heroes of the film. As if Kasdan didn’t have that to contend with, there were the British Columbia nights. They came far earlier than he would’ve liked them to.

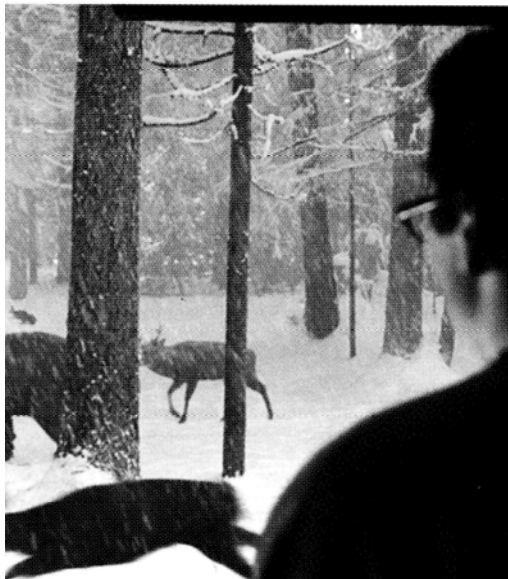
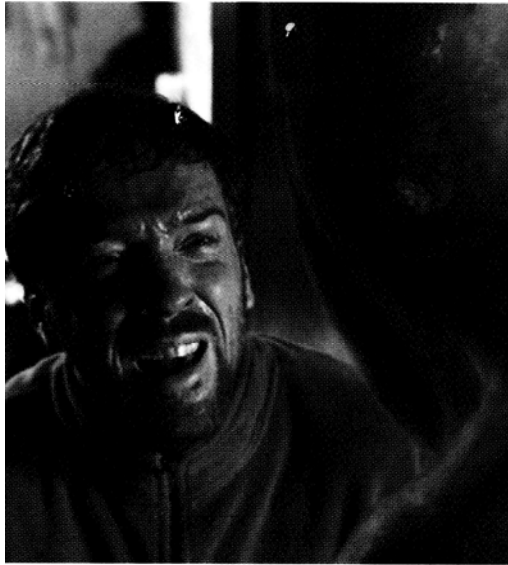
“I don’t sleep very well. The hardest thing for me is getting up early in the morning,” Kasdan explained. “I’d rather shoot at night anytime where I can get up at one in the afternoon after working all night. So for me getting up, it’s black and you’re going to work... it gets dark really early [in B.C.]. You’re rushing to get whatever light you can.” Except for those six weeks when they shot at night. The nights would dip to -27 below zero sometimes. It would have been trying enough dealing with just a regular size crew, but this is a big-time Stephen King film.

“It was freezing. You had a huge crew, a lot of extras, helicopters and vehicles working... it’s a lot of pressure,” he admitted. “There are days when you wonder, why is this the only thing I ever wanted to do? Things aren’t going right, or there are physical problems or logistical problems or time problems... Sometimes you think ‘Yeah, it’s great job, but it sucks.’”



DREAMSCAPE: Thomas Jane and Donnie Wahlberg (*top left*); Damian Lewis (*top right*); Tom Sizemore and Morgan Freeman (*center left*); Jane, Susan Charest and Timothy Olyphant (*center right*); Olyphant (*bottom left*); Lewis and Jason Lee star in *Dreamcatcher*.

DREAMCATCHER - DOANE GREGORY



But Kasdan stayed with it for 96 days. In the middle of post-production, this old hat discovered things have changed since he'd written "a couple of effect movies" for Spielberg and Lucas (which is like saying Picasso painted a couple of pictures). DREAMCATCHER used 420 shots, many of which employed monsters or some other effect. He realized the extent of visual effect's evolution since Indy ran from the boulder and Han jetted into hyperspace. "Since the time I was writing them, the effects business has changed so much... I mean the art of it. Nothing that was done on RAIDERS or EMPIRE is done today. It's all digital, and it's much easier to do amazing things." Kasdan went to ILM [Industrial Light + Magic] to make those amazing things come alive. "I brushed up against [ILM] all those years, but never worked with them, and it's really good fun," Kasdan said. "The surprise was when you're done shooting on a normal movie, you just go off and cut what you've got. But when you're done shooting on an effects movie, you're really starting on a second movie, because you're adding to all those shots. It's a lot of movie you're making after the fact."

Making a horror movie of his own may not have cured Kasdan completely of the fears he has about the genre, but maybe his pulse will race just a little slower the next time he sees one. After all, if you're going to confront a fear, you might as well do it in a big way. DREAMCATCHER stays true to his repertoire of doing big movies, as he's known for writing screenplays for films that have grossed over a billion dollars worldwide. Action, drama, romance, and now horror, Lawrence Kasdan isn't about one genre, one face.

"I like all kinds of movies," he says with the earnestness of a schoolboy, "and I want to make all kinds of movies." With a track record like this, he's well on his way. ■