

Paul Campion began his career as fantasy/horror illustrator. After completing a Masters Degree in Computer Animation, he moved to New Zealand to work on Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy. Before directing, Paul created digital effects on films such as *Constantine*, *Sin City*, *30 Days of Night*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Clash of the Titans*. His two short films; *Eel Girl* and *Night of the Hell Hamsters* won a raft of awards and he's just completed his first feature film, *'The Devil's Rock'*.

The Devil's in the Detail

by Stewart Who?

Were you a Tolkien fan before working on *The Lord of the Rings*? Yes, huge. I was doing my Masters Degree when the film version was announced. I remember telling everyone I was going to work on it, even though I had no idea how I was going to do it. The scene with the Balrog was always my favourite bit in the book - I have a small Dungeons and Dragons lead figure of the Balrog I painted when about 10 years old. When I got to work on the film, the first thing I asked to work on was the Balrog, which I painted the textures for and worked on for about 6 months.

You completed a Masters Degree in Computer Animation, was it hard to go back to school? Quite the opposite! I knew exactly what I wanted to achieve from the course which was to break into the film industry. Living in your own home, having a bit of money in your pocket, not being a naïve first year and the subsidised bar made it a pleasure. Not that there was much time to enjoy all that, as we worked incredibly hard on that course - often working 12 hour shifts on the computers with half of the course having to work 8pm-8am for months on end. People from

that particular course are known as the Bournemouth Mafia as we end up working at the same visual effects companies all over the world. Lots of my friends from Bournemouth ended up working on *Lord of the Rings* and a few have stayed on and now live here in Wellington.

***The Devil's Rock* is your first feature. What's been the biggest lesson you've learned?**

To trust your cast and crew. Directors don't make films, the actors and crew are the ones who actually create it. You need to step back and let them do their jobs.

Did the fact it's a period film (*World War II*) present a new set of challenges for you?

As my first feature film, the whole thing was a new set of challenges at every stage, but for a period film, the trickiest thing is getting the details correct - costumes, weapons, props, locations etc. I did months of research on the history of the SAS and the SBS (the Special Boat Service) in WW2 and German occupation of the Channel Islands. In the end, you try and do the best you can with the budget you have.

You came into contact with a 250-year old book of black magic...did you have even a moment's fear that you might dredge up an evil spirit? I've already made one film about demonic summoning and Ouija boards in *'Night of the Hell Hamsters'*. In fact, when we were scouting for the locations for that, we ran into a few problems because people didn't want a real Ouija board used in their homes - which is why we changed it to a child's alphabet toy instead. On this film, the schedule just happened to work out that we were filming a black magic ritual on Friday the 13th and came out unscathed (so far!).

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When was the last time a horror film scared or impressed you?

The Swedish vampire film 'Let the Right One In'. It's an incredible horror film – a tender love story, creepy as hell at times, sad, funny, disturbing and beautifully acted and filmed and stylishly gory. I also saw The Human Centipede recently, which I really enjoyed – its reputation is far worse than the actual film. If you can handle the concept, it's just a pretty standard horror film. I was surprised at how restrained it was, given the subject matter and how easily gratuitous and exploitative it might have been in the wrong hands.

What is it about the horror genre that appeals to you?

Good horror films create a reaction in the audience, they should all create an emotional state – tension, fear, revulsion sometimes and quite often humour. If your audience isn't reacting, then you haven't hit the right mark. Being scared and entertained is part of human culture, going all the way back to ghost stories round a campfire – it's a bit of escapism, people enjoy being scared and feeling the thrill of a small slice of terror, knowing everything will be safe afterwards,

just like a rollercoaster ride.

As a director, horror films are a good way to break into the industry – you can usually make a half decent film on a very low budget that will make it's money back eventually and there's always a market for new horror films. They also give you the opportunity to get really inventive with your camerawork and play with lighting and editing in a way that other genres don't allow you to do. Some of the biggest directors out there - Sam Raimi, James Cameron, Peter Jackson, even Steven Spielberg started off learning their craft on low budget horror.

Has working in special effects affected the way you view films - is it harder to suspend your disbelief?

I used to find it tricky to watch effects driven films, as I was always trying to figure out how it was done, especially pre-computer graphics, when special effects were a lot more inventive. Nowadays it's almost all CGI and I know how it's all done, so I can just switch off and enjoy the story. The current problem is I'm picking the films apart trying to work out how

the director has filmed the scene, how many cameras were used, what coverage have they used etc.

What do you make of the torture porn genre?

Not a fan at all, but it does say a lot about human nature when films such as Saw and Hostel made so much money and Saw in particular is still spawning sequels. My feeling about onscreen violence is that it either has to be justified as part of the story, or it depends on the genre of the film. You can get almost as bloody and gory as you want with a horror film that involves monsters – vampires, zombies, aliens etc, because you have to suspend disbelief to enjoy the film. Watching a bunch of zombies rip someone in half (no matter how technically well done it is) becomes slightly ridiculous and you have to laugh at it.

However, when it's straight horror, with people inflicting violence on other people, I think it's far better to show less and let the audience's imagination fill in the rest. On the other hand, Steven Spielberg often has horrendous acts of violence in his films – the knife fight in Saving Private Ryan and the killing of the female assassin in Munich are

two examples where the extreme violence is justified and necessary to the impact of the scene.

What is the cheapest special effect you've used to greatest effect?

The levitating possessed hamsters in Night of the Hell Hamsters. They were hanging from a fishing rod, using fishing line, with me standing off camera trying to lift them up behind the actress. We did think about digitally painting out the lines in the shots, as they're clearly visible, but it seemed more fun to leave them in. Audiences really love those shots because they're fun and not trying to wow anyone with expensive flashy digital effects.

What was the black stuff in the bath that Eel Girl sat in?

In the film industry it's known as methocyl – but most people would be more familiar with it as KY jelly. We used 45 gallons of the stuff, which we kept specially heated so the actress didn't get cold sitting in it for hours. I sat in the bath at the end of the shoot for the crew photo and I can say sitting in 45 gallons of warm KY jelly is a very pleasant experience. All kinds of potential fun to be had there.