

# ONFILM

SEPTEMBER 2011

\$7.10 INCL GST

NZ'S SCREEN PRODUCTION INDUSTRY MAGAZINE

ONFILM.CO.NZ



## Better the Devil you know

Behind the scenes with

Weta Workshop on *The Devil's Rock*

**PLUS**

Annual training and education guide

Four little interns on *Two Little Boys*

NZ On Screen hits the waterfront

9 421902 251047





Gina Varela in *The Devil's Rock*. Images: supplied.

# By the DEVIL I was tempted

Paul Campion's new horror film *The Devil's Rock*, in release this month, is a tale of demons, Nazis and things that go "splat" in the night. *Onfilm* talks to Weta Workshop prosthetic effects artist Sean Foot about his handiwork.

It's a perfect setting for a horror film. While on a trip to Guernsey in the Channel Islands in 2009 to screen his short film *Eel Girl*, director Paul Campion spotted an abandoned World War Two German observation tower. Teaming with producer Leanne Saunders and working with British writer Paul Finch, he came up with a story involving war, witchcraft and the Nazi obsession with the occult.

Craig Hall and Matthew Sunderland star as soldiers on opposite sides – Hall, known for roles in TV's *Outrageous Fortune* and Taika Waititi's *Boy*, plays New Zealand officer Captain Ben Grogan, and Sunderland, best known for his lead performance in *Out of the Blue*, plays Nazi officer Colonel Klaus Meyer.

Gina Varela (*Xena*, *Sione's Wedding*) plays the demon, an expert in manipulation, who takes on the form of someone known and loved by her victims in order to seduce and kill them. Varela went through her own hell, involving hours of paint, latex and other preparations to appear as the demon seductress.

Working for Weta Workshop, prosthetic makeup artist Sean Foot was the lead technician on *The Devil's Rock*. His work involved the demon prosthetics, various splatter "gags" and war wounds. While it's commonplace for filmmakers to only reveal a monster in the later stages of a story, this demon is on screen for a long time and had to be believable.

The demon designs were quite



Craig Hall (with firearm) and Matthew Sunderland.



detailed, says Foot. "All of that came from Paul Campion. He's a designer down at Weta Digital as well. He did all the designs for it and he was quite specific about what he wanted. I went down a couple of roads design-wise but he always pulled me back, he had quite a precise vision about what he wanted. I went down the road of putting more texture and form into it, but we always went back to that more elegant kind of look. And it did work really well, it looks quite stunning."

With only a limited budget to work with, Foot did most of the work himself. "Richard [Taylor] basically handed the entire job off to me. I did all the sculpting and mould-making; I made the teeth and everything. There were a couple of other people that ran foam and transfers for me and a few other bits and pieces, but 80% of the job I did every aspect of."

"There were the wings at the back—they're torn off wings, like wing-stumps. And she has all these brandings over

her; there were about 15 or 16 of them, all over her back. They're symbols of demons, names and stuff. The idea was that she'd been attacked by other demons and they'd branded her."

Foot says Varela was "awesome" and lovely to work with, although her work was arduous. "She had an extreme job to do," says Foot. "It was a four or five hour makeup job. Obviously she's naked the majority of the time, so there's quite a lot of sensitivity towards that aspect of it."

Weta technicians Dordi Moen and Jade Jolly did a fantastic job of taking care of some of the more delicate aspects, he says. "Dordi looked after Gina on set and oversaw a few things."

Varela went through three days of full makeup. "They were really long days," says Foot. "It took a couple of hours to get it all off too; they were 16 hour days for her. It was quite exhausting work, especially when she had to stand there for three to four hours getting painted in the morning. We got





Gina Varela undergoes a full head and shoulders casting with Weta Workshop's Sean Foot, Richard Taylor and Frances Hawker. Director Paul Campion films the event. Images: supplied.

it down to about two and a half in the end, we had a few extra people come in and lend a hand."

Her makeup was a fairly standard foam latex job, he says, but prosthetics artists also use a lot of silicones these days. "They're incredibly tricky but they move really well and they look like skin. So it's gone more towards silicone these days. The transfers we put on Gina are another thing that's come up in the last few years, and they work quite effectively."

*The Devil's Rock* is not just a horror, it's a wartime setting as well, and making the job more intense was the fact that there were so many other "gags" going on. "We were doing three to four gags a day. There was the guy with the gun down his throat, there were bullet wounds. There was so much stuff to look after."

As well as live actors, there were the dead bodies to deal with. Foot had the gruesome task of making all the dead bodies, body parts, bullet wounds and

all sorts of bruising makeup. "There was also a lot of character stuff with the other actors, with Matt Sunderland and Craig Hall," he says. "Craig had a bruised eye for most of it. Davina LaMont was the head of makeup – she's an incredible makeup artist and I couldn't have done it without her. She's so onto it with continuity – there were so many continuity issues with blood and bruises and things like that."

Foot's resume stretches back around 20 years to the early 1990s. After completing the 10-week Joe Blasco makeup course in LA, he came back to NZ and landed his first big job with Weta founder Richard Taylor, working on Peter Jackson's 1994 film *Heavenly Creatures*.

"Way back then, there was only really Richard and Shane Radford and a couple of other people that were doing it. So I was quite lucky to hook up with Richard and go straight onto *Heavenly Creatures*, then *The Frighteners*, *Hercules* and *Xena* as well."

Of his time working on *Lord of the Rings*, Foot says, "I was doing Sean Astin's feet for 90% of it."

Foot says *The Devil's Rock* is pretty much the first gore film he's worked on. "We did a lot of that stuff on *The Last Samurai*; I did all the wound prosthetics on that, so it was kind of similar. But yeah, this was the first with the full-on blood and guts thing."

"There was one funny bit with the operation on the bullet wound," he says, "where he puts the pliers in, to pull the bullet out. That was right at the end of the day and I had to take the wound off Matt. Paul was like, 'I want to do this shot in 20 minutes' and I was 'well, I need half a day to glue it on a body or paint it up properly'. He said, 'No, I need it in 20 minutes' so I ended up sticking it on the side of a bucket, cutting a hole in the bucket and just painting the bucket. I got it back to him in about 20 minutes, we shot it and it actually looked quite effective. So it was pretty much glued onto the

side of a bucket and I was holding it underneath. It was pretty funny; there was a lot of 'fly by the seat of your pants' stuff in there."

Computer generated effects may be popular these days, but Foot maintains that directors still like to be able to see something on set. "A lot of directors don't enjoy CG because they don't have as much control," he says. "With practical effects, on the day they can look at something and they can see how to shoot it, and from what angles it looks good. Neill Blomkamp, who made *District 9*, he loves practical effects. And Peter Jackson is very much the same."

"You get a certain style and a certain look from having practical effects. CG is wonderful, but it does leave you a little bit cold. It's definitely a style thing that they're only just getting to grips with now. There are too many choices, they can put in too many things and lose the subtlety."

Locally made horror films don't come up that much, especially horror films that don't just play it for laughs. "I was talking to the actors about it. You can take it one way or the other; you can ham it up or you can take it as a serious subject. All the actors are amazing – Matt Sunderland, I've never seen anyone like him, that guy deserves a huge break. You're put in a ridiculous situation but if you play it seriously it can work really well. Look at a movie like *The Thing*; I've just been watching that again. It's an ensemble cast, put in a ridiculous situation."

"It was interesting talking to Rob Marsh, the DOP," says Foot. "We approached it like an international movie. I don't know why the New Zealand industry isn't making more movies like that because there is a market for that kind of thing. We were looking at it for the international marketplace, a certain marketplace, and aiming towards that."

As for landing overseas work, Foot says he's never really felt that way inclined. "It's quite difficult to work in the States, even getting work permits – and you end up being a small fish in a big pond. We get to meet and work with international crew through Weta, you get to work with a lot of those people anyway."

Foot is looking forward to spending the next year working on *The Hobbit*. "I've moved up and down the country my whole life, following the industry around. I'll hopefully base myself in Wellington and stick around here. I'm enjoying working with Weta, I'll try and stick with them as long as I can." ●