SPECIAL FALL SF-TV ISSUE

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WONDER WOMAN
Episode Guide Plus
Full-Color Pin-Ups

GALACTICA'S
"BOOMER"
Interview with
Herb Jefferson

'BUCK ROGERS' THE 25TH CENTURY COMES TO TV

LOU FERRIGNO: The Hulk Speaks
My father was one of the few who were disappointed by the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,*" confides Don Post Jr. He made the pods and the body forms, and there was much much more detail there than you could see on the screen. Too much of it was photographed in the dark!"

Most SF and fantasy fans today know Don Post Studios as the makers of those expensive but excellent "over-the-head" masks and helmets from *Star Wars*—Darth Vader, Chewbacca, Storm Trooper and C-3PO. But the studio has been around since 1939, and in the past 40 years its craftsmen have assisted the motion picture industry in numerous famous projects—while at the same time making commercially available some of the most realistic and frightening masks ever to adorn teenager and adult.

We're talking with Don Jr. and others on the Post Studios staff. Don Sr., while still a consultant to the firm, is retired.

"When my father first started," says Don Jr., "there were real monsters around; he made masks of those. One of the most popular was Hitler." This was prior to the studio's involvement with motion pictures, when most of its products were for Halloween consumption.

"Our first head from a movie, under a licensing arrangement, was the Frankenstein monster—through Universal. This was in 1949. It sold for about $5, which wasn't really inexpensive, then." The mask was derived from a black-and-white movie, so colors had to be invented by Post. "He gave it a green face; and we've always thought that's what started the practice of using green skin for monsters."

In the 1950s, Don Post gravitated to the movie industry, where his talents were needed for what is now considered the Golden Age of B movies. "Oh, he did lots of things," Don Jr. strains, trying to remember. "There were the Tree Monsters in *From Hell It Came,* something with a

Above: Barry Crane, the Don Post Studios mold designer, works on the Nosferatu hands, which will be mass marketed by the company.

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DON POST STUDIOS
THE SECOND GENERATION

From Hitler and Frankenstein to Darth Vader and the Face-Hugger.

By DAVID HOUSTON
fungal from outer space, and he supplied the materials for the squid in Disney’s 20,000 Leagues.

“Remember that episode of Alfred Hitchcock Presents where the woman kills her husband with a frozen leg of lamb and then cooks the evidence and serves it to the detectives? I think it was called ‘Lamb to the Slaughter.’ Well, Dad made the artificial prop from a casting of a real leg of lamb. He brought the real one home, and we ate it.”

Others in the list of TV shows with contributions from Post Studios: The Night Stalker, Walt Disney Presents, Laugh In, Hogan’s Heroes, Ark II, The Outer Limits, The Twilight Zone, Streets of San Francisco and The Carol Burnett Show. And these movies, among others: Comedy of Terrors, King Kong (De Laurentiis), The Great Race, The Norliss Tapes and Orca.

“There were lots more, of course,” says Post, “but my father was just terrible about keeping records and photographs of his work. He figured that once a project was finished, he’d seen the last of it.”

John Naulin, the studio’s research and development manager, adds, “There have been a good 30 or 40 TV shows that were given permission to use our masks, and a hundred more that used them without asking.” An episode of The Hardy Boys that showed the lads in a rock festival at a Transylvanian castle is an example of the latter category.

“Basically,” Post sums up, “my father’s role in Hollywood was to handle projects too large-scale to be done on the studio lots; like the Body Snatchers pods. Back in the 50s there weren’t many studio makeup artists who could do prosthetics [artificial skin and body parts].”

The “Apes” Masks

Don Post has marketed Planet of the Apes masks and makeup appliances. Did the studio do any of the originals?

“No,” says Post bluntly. “Let’s clear that up. It’s not necessarily true that what’s for sale in our catalog represents work we originally did for films. My father and John Chambers [once a Don Post executive] had often discussed ape appliances, but Don Post did not originate them. John Chambers did. And we didn’t supply any of the heads for Star Wars. Rick Baker did, for the Cantina.”

How did the license with 20th Century-Fox for selling Star Wars masks come about?

“Boy, that took us by surprise!” Post muses. He thinks back. “We received a full-color brochure on Star Wars in December of ’76, with a letter from Fox asking us if we would like to produce the masks under the same terms as our Planet of the Apes licensing arrangement.

“We looked at that brochure and knew, just from the color stills, that this was going to be a successful movie. We didn’t want to appear too anxious, so we waited a day before calling Fox and telling them yes. It took Fox several months, though, to get around to issuing us the official agreement.” Meanwhile, the movie came out.

“I don’t remember exactly why, but I gave my ticket to the premiere to Bill Malone [artist-sculptor, owner-builder of Robby the Robot, independent filmmaker]. I’ve always kicked myself for that. Bill came back and said the movie would be a tremendous success, that those masks would sell like crazy.

“Our first ads were out. The movie opened on May 25, and the phones started ringing that very day. Thereafter, we must have averaged well over 100 calls a day from people wanting the masks.

“But we couldn’t convince our distributors. Their orders were small. And our tooling wasn’t ready for production until six months after the movie opened. As it turned out, the demand was easily 50 times what we expected.

“We had no idea sales would be so great. Darth Vader is probably the most saleable mask ever produced—by anybody. And I’d be surprised if any other ever matches it. I wish I knew how many we could have sold, if we’d truly been ready. It was a little like trying to fill a swimming pool with a tea spoon.

“We, Kenner and the other merchandisers were caught totally unaware of the real Star Wars potential.

“I think Star Wars merchandising has done several things for the industry in general. One, the big studios are now more willing to give merchandisers lead time. Two, there’s now much more security imposed upon publicists and the press. Three, studios now look upon merchandise as a more valuable adjunct to the film. And four, they’re now more interested in doing movie projects that have merchandising tie-in possibilities.”

(continued on page 51)
Recent Projects

Don Post should know. His most recent projects include reproducing the head and hands from Nosferatu—a German remake of the 1922 silent vampire classic—and several pieces from the SF horror hit Alien. Both of these movie spin-offs are building blocks for a new Don Post line of high-quality replicas, produced in limited editions for the serious SF-fantasy-horror collector.

Each piece will be largely hand-made and hand-painted, numbered and will come with a certificate of ownership.

Only 1500 of the Nosferatu sets will be made. The head and hands will come in their own museum-type display case (though it's a real mask, and can be worn). "We've turned out three, so far," Don says. "Princess Grace of Monaco has one. It's nice to find out the number of renowned people who recognize the cinematic mask as legitimate art."

Another Nosferatu is owned by Werner Herzog, maker of the new film; and another was recently completed especially for the ac-

tor, Klaus Kinski. Reportedly, when Kinski saw the Don Post likeness of his character, he said, "That is exactly my face!"

Bearing out several of Post's contentions about Hollywood's changed attitudes toward marketing, the first of the items from Alien, the "Face-Hugger," was begun long before the film opened. It was sculpted by Bill Malone, with assists from originator H.R. Giger, in a basement room at 20th Century-Fox, where all sketches, photos, tools and materials were kept under lock and key.

The Face-Hugger will be cast from natural Latex rubber and plastics. Although it can be worn—palm over the eyes, tail coiled around the neck—Post marketers expect it to spend most of its life in the plastic case, on a head-shaped form.

"These pieces are being made to last," Post asserts, "a lifetime and longer." The prices of them have not been firmly established yet, but Post classified the Face-Hugger (2500 will be made) as falling into the "$200 to $500 range."

The Face-Hugger is almost ready for casting, but there is yet much work to be done on the next Alien project: the head of the terrorizing adult. It will be made out of materials similar to those used originally, including the translucent skull, and it will "surely be priced from $750 to $1000." Post adds, still awed by the task ahead, "That head is three feet long!"

A third Alien figure is on the drawing board, "but it's too early to talk about it. We're not sure which way we want to go with it."

Masquerading

Thinking bigger still, Post harbors hopes that another kind of craze will develop. "We want to get away from the Halloween market and into all-season masquerading. Mas-querading has always been more popular in Europe and elsewhere than it has here. But there's hardly anyplace you can't wear a mask and costume. People are already begin-ning to wear them to discos. We want people to feel more free to express themselves," he adds, with a chuckle, "Imagine it! Turning every disco into a Star Wars Cantina."

As an adjunct to the Post line of masks, the masquerading public will soon find Don Post Studios makeup kits available. "It's a four-year plan," explains John Naulin, R&D man largely responsible for the program's development. "In the first phase, we'll come out with a kit of makeup and implements, complete with instructions and diagrams..." How to make a battered face, an old man or woman, a clown, etc. "In later phases, we'll supply prosthetics and go into the more complex forms of makeup. We'll end up with a complete course in theatrical makeup and a textbook."

The basic makeup, Naulin explains, is being manufactured to a special Post Studios formula, "and is really professional-grade stuff."

The makeup line is being aimed largely at "all those young people out there with a serious interest in makeup," says Post. He was once one of those kids himself. His college major was in theater arts, with a specialization in makeup and design. In 1968, following military service, he gave in to his "entrepreneurial instinct" and decided to join his father's company and make masks. For a decade, masks were his main thrust—until John Naulin decided to leave Universal Studios and join Don Post, bringing his idea for makeup kits with him.

As it is, says Post, "practically every person who heads for Hollywood aspiring to be a makeup or mask artist knocks at our door." With the makeup kits/course about to arrive on the market, he is likely to find himself even more of a doorman.

"I'll welcome it," he promises. "It's im-portant to keep new people entering the business."

Tor Johnson—Don Post's all-time best-selling mask.