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EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

Army of Dark

**On the set of
Sam Raimi's
finale to the
Evil Dead trilogy**

by Michael Jonascu

Photography by Melissa Moseley

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It's too cold to be summer in Acton California, even at 2 a.m. The mercury has plunged to the middle 50s, and the *Army of Darkness* crew shiver in the light breeze. Acton is about 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles, and the shooting schedule has been so intense that some of the crew, living in trailers, have not left the set in three weeks. An enormous fiberglass and wood castle, some 40 feet high and 140 feet long, stands dimly illuminated by a 12K light, hanging high in the air from a construction crane, like a moon in some low-budget version of the solar system. The lamp was more than enough to attract tens of thousands of confused, circling moths that interrupted shooting and caused general misery until someone had the inspired idea of releasing bats into the night air. In a few days the moths



"It's the adventures of Ash, in his
quest to live through another sequel."

BRUCE CAMPBELL



Ash travels through time to battle the Deadites in medieval Kandor.



Director Raimi loves horses.

were replaced by bloated bats, and shooting became much easier.

Army of Darkness is a Universal release, but it's being executive-produced by Dino DeLaurentiis. Strange bedfellows. Stranger yet, it is a sequel to the cult horror classics *Evil Dead* and *Evil Dead 2*, but will be released only as *Army of Darkness*, with no mention of its more outré antecedents. Stranger still is its modest \$11-million budget, its ambitious special effects and its incredible and seemingly interminable 100-days-plus shooting schedule. Most incomprehensible of all is why on earth director Sam Raimi and producer Rob Tapert would make a lower budgeted, less prestigious film after their success with *Darkman*, Universal's fourth most profitable film of 1990.

High on the castle wall, near the big turret, Raimi and stuntman Chris Doyle are having a polite disagreement over the best way to set Doyle ablaze and kick him over the castle wall.

Just another of the charmingly surreal discussions to be heard on the set.

"You changed it on me during that last rehearsal," Raimi says. "You have to take the kick full on in the chest. You turned before you went over." Doyle gives a different view of how he should be immolated and

dropped. The tension is palpable for a moment, then dissipates as an accommodation is reached. The cameras roll, "Action" is called, and a burning Chris Doyle goes over the edge of the castle to the padded crane that is waiting to catch him.

Army of Darkness is the story of Ash (Bruce Campbell), the most luckless man ever to wield a chainsaw against the Legions of the Undead. Brutalized in *Evil Dead*, mutilated in *Evil Dead 2*, in *Army of Darkness* Ash is hurled back in time to medieval Kandar, where with the help of mail-clad knights, he must find the Necronomicon (book of the dead), dispatch the seven doll-sized copies of himself, destroy his Hyde-like alter ego, save the girl, fight off a host of battling skeletons, winged Deadites, pit monsters and find the way back to his own time. True to the form of the previous pictures, more than one of these Herculean tasks don't quite go his way.

Comic-book handsome Bruce Campbell sums it up more succinctly in his trailer. "It's the adventures of Ash, in his quest to live through another sequel." Campbell, who is also coproducer, seems sanguine about the picture. "This will pull me out of the low-ball exploitato kind of film into the medium-ball exploitato kind of film," he says wryly. This is his third and perhaps final

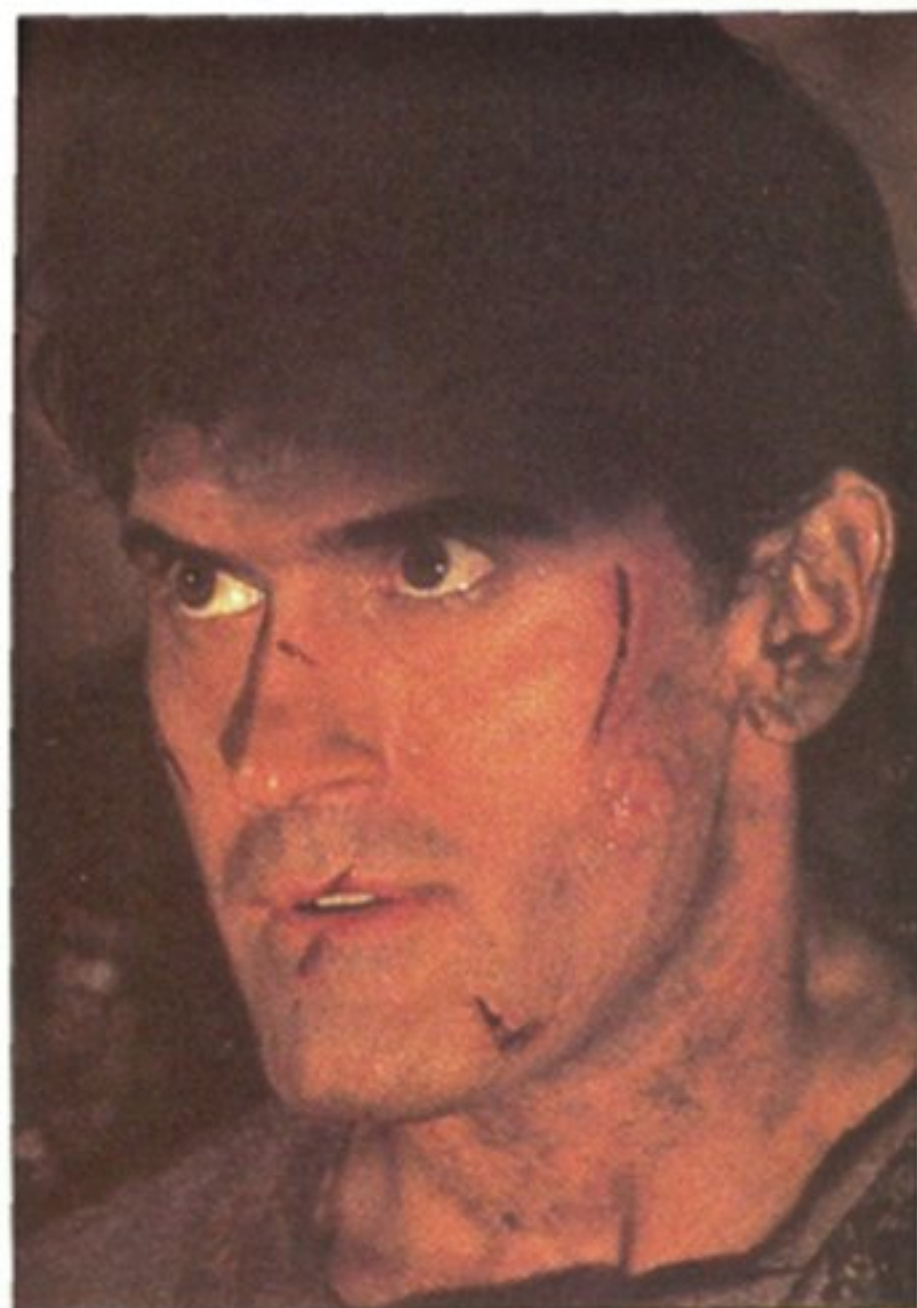
incarnation of the human-punching-bag-turned-hero, but with its Universal tag for domestic distribution, the film will give him exposure he's never had. "Coming out through Universal, they can only go so small," Campbell says. "They go,

"Horses are good for two things: burgers in Europe and Elmer's glue. You just can't talk to them."

SAM RAIMI

"Okay, let's give it a small release. A thousand theatres." This exposure should help eliminate the common confusion between Campbell and *Rocketeer* star Bill Campbell, who was erroneously credited as the lead in *Army of Darkness* in one of the trades. "Whoops!" Campbell replies. "At least they got half the name right." Campbell cuts the interview short to go rehearse a sword-fight.

A month later at Introvision International studios in Hollywood, the cast and crew are into the 73rd day of shooting and even though the dog days of the production are upon them, morale seems good.



Bruce Campbell stars as Ash.



Ash (Bruce Campbell) enlists the aid of the people of Kandar.

Introvision provides front-screen projection and matting techniques that integrate live actors into miniature sets and plate footage from other locations in an "in camera" process that avoids the costly and notoriously fickle blue-screen process. The effects are literally done with "mirrors" and range from startlingly good to somewhat cheesy.

At the moment, Bruce Campbell is standing in front of a 30' by 20' Scotchlite front-projection screen. On a video monitor he can see the Vista-Vision plate footage of the scene he is being matted into. A giant version of Ash sits in front of the fireplace log that the lilliputian Ash, Campbell is now playing, hides behind. In an intricately timed sequence, Campbell plays a capering, vicious miniature of himself against the previously shot gigantic projection footage. The giant Ash sees the tiny Ash and, pretending to yawn, bumps the log he is hiding behind and knocks the puppet Ash into the fireplace, burning him alive. The timing is a hair off between the

plate footage and live-action, but the next take is good enough to print. After a couple more "That was perfect. Let's do one more." takes, Raimi decides the shot is finished, and everyone moves to the A stage, where the reverse angle of the entire scene will be shot.

Producer Rob Tapert sits behind the desk of his remarkably unpretentious office at the Introvision stage. The whole feel of the production is down and dirty. The money must be going up on screen, because it sure isn't being lavished on the accommodations. Tapert answers some of the questions about the strange nature of this film. Like why, for instance, do they need a hundred shooting days? "That's the most important thing at the end of the day," Tapert says. "Sam, as a director, needs time. The shots that he does take time; the rehearsals he does take time. It's not that he's slow, I mean he's working every second; it's just that it's intricate stuff. We needed the hundred days cause we have puppets and big makeup effects and

horses and pyrotechnic explosions to the extreme . . . it's a big extravaganza. We'll trade out a lot of things for more time." One of the things he's willing to trade out of is a highly experienced crew. "We've hired very good people who are working at a higher level than they previously were—and we get the compensation of them doing the next job up by them working for a little under the going rate."

Between shots, a troop of four prosthetically enhanced Bruce Campbell look-alikes walk down the hall. More than one crew-member has been fooled into believing they were addressing Campbell from a short distance. One of the doubles, "Deke," says that even before the makeup appliances, people often confused him for Campbell, and close-up the effect is uncanny and startling.

The next shot is on a small stage. Three KNB Effects Group animatronic skeletons are marching past the camera. One of the sinister bag of bones is playing a fife made

out of a human leg bone, in a grisly parody of the famous Revolutionary War painting. A metronome beats out eerie cadence as the cadre of effects technicians, led by Howard Berger, operate the bony, cable-controlled fingers of the musical dead. The script is full of this sort of whimsy, and according to all accounts, *Army of Darkness* will have nowhere near the sheer gore of the two previous films. "We have to come out with an R contractually," Campbell says. I remind him that *Evil Dead 2* was also supposed to be R-rated, but was released unrated because of its extravagant violence. "Different story. We were coming off the heels of a blood bath, remember? It (*Evil Dead*) was one of the bloodiest movies, ever made. This time, if you decapitate something, it's just 'poof' dust."

Later, at dailies, Raimi, Tapert, Campbell and editor Bob Murawski go over the previous day's shooting. One particularly good shot is of a group of animatronic skeletons marching in front of a hundred desiccated foot soldiers and spectral war wagons. A money shot that pays off. Raimi picks and chooses three different types of "select" takes: "Sam Selects," his personal favorites, the one's he'll most likely use in the finished film; "Universal Selects," which are takes often cut together and given sound effects to impress the less technically minded execs at Universal; and "Dino Selects," which are specifically chosen to please Dino DeLaurentiis. The process of coordinating and shipping the selects is confusing and hellish for the editing staff, but the end result is a minimum of second-guessing and interference by the people controlling the purse strings.

After dailies, Raimi has a few minutes to answer questions. He is a pleasant, soft-spoken, moon-faced man, with a genial smile. It's been a long day and he fidgets with the buttons of a speaker phone as he talks, accidentally calling up a dial tone, now and again. He explains that the first part of the shoot, out in Acton, was the most difficult. "The only hard thing was the night

photography, not getting any days off for weeks on end and working with horses. They don't do what I tell them. Horses are good for two things: burgers in Europe and Elmer's glue. You just can't talk to them."

When asked why he decided to honor his commitment to DeLaurentiis, one of the more reviled men in Hollywood, after the success of *Darkman*, Raimi's reply was simple and maybe just a little ingenuous. "Well, Dino and I had an agreement that we would make this picture together, and even though *Darkman* fortunately made some money, I had to stick to my agreement." Raimi went on to add, "I'm happy I did, because this is a picture where I'm not tormented creatively. The studio leaves me alone, and I'm able to function freely and come up with wild and kooky ideas—and nobody says no. My hat is off to Dino, that is to say, if I had a hat, because Dino has really supported me and allowed me to make pictures which might not be the widest appealing pictures, but that at least—we think—will be the most entertaining to the audience."

Tapert agrees. "I think we prefer working with Dino or with private financing or more independently, and we're willing to sacrifice some money from our budgets or our salaries, to have an overall more enjoyable time making movies, because life's too short to . . ." Tapert trails off, not wanting the thought to drift into some platitude he'll be sorry for later. Tapert goes on to explain that *Army of Darkness* won't be associated with the two previous *Evil Dead* films because of the larger release Universal will give the picture. The general feeling is that Universal doesn't want to be immediately associated with two very violent, unrated pictures. Tapert continues, "I think the fans, like *Fangoria* fans and film fans will go see it anyway, and Universal will push Sam. 'From the Director of *Darkman* comes . . .'"

From the director of *Darkman* comes another shot, where a giant Ash steps on a sharp nail held up by a demonic mite Ash. The carnage will go on for another month, and morale will probably stay pretty good and sometime next summer *Army of Darkness* will find its way to 800 or a thousand screens.



Sam does not throw like a girl.