

SPARKS FLY IN UNDERBELLY

SOMETIMES CRIME DOES PAY. RODNEY APPEYARD TAKES A WALK ON THE SEAMY SIDE AND FINDS GUNS, EXPLOSIONS AND A LOT OF FUN IN THE THIRD INSTALMENT OF UNDERBELLY.

PHOTOS BY JAMES POZARIK

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SCENES FROM UNDERBELLY



KINGS CROSS, SYDNEY, 1989. A time when bent cops and criminals mixed together. A time when honest police fought to take back control of the most infamous strip in Australia.

Underbelly is back and while it may be the same crimes, it's done by all new criminals.

Shawn Seet, who directed a number of episodes in *Underbelly: The Golden Mile*, says the latest instalment is more complex than the first two series.

"It is much more intriguing and the thing with *Underbelly* is it's never formulaic. You always have to come up with new ideas to keep it fresh. Some characters will carry over from

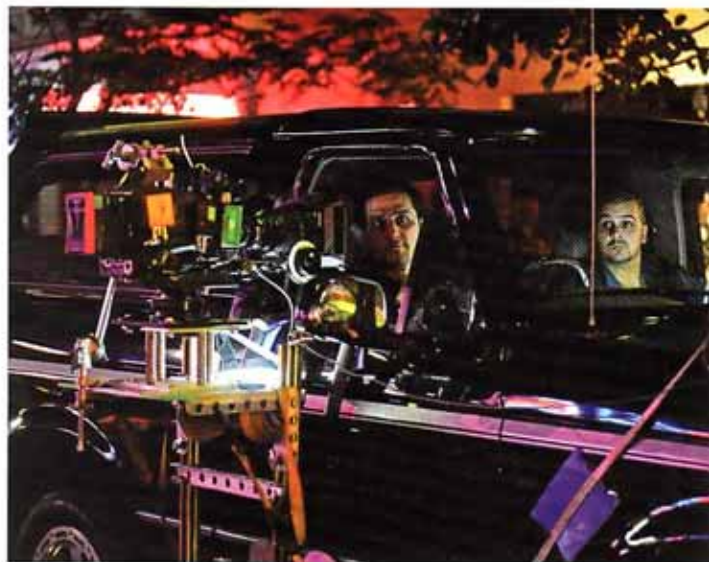
other series, but in this one, there'll be a whole new batch of characters."

He adds that the physical effects and explosions are very important when it comes to dramatising and stunning the audience.

"David Trethewey, from *DTEFX*, provided the police armoury and weapons for a few raid scenes in the series," adds Seet.

"Those effects help to make the scenes more authentic. If there is a whiff of bullshit then the whole thing falls apart. The great thing is David trains everybody up in the handling of weapons.

"Simple things, like teaching somebody how to hold a gun properly can help to make the scene more believable



EDITOR'S LETTER



RODNEY APPELYARD

Special effects took centre stage over the last few months thanks to the hype surrounding *Avatar* and thankfully they didn't disappoint.

Sometimes big movies that boast stunning visuals are a let down because the stories get lost in the action.

But the great thing about *Avatar* is that it was strong in every area. And unlike many other examples of 3D characters (excluding Gollum and King Kong), *Avatar's* performers were convincing enough to suck people into the heart of the movie.

In this issue, we talk to Oscar winner John Rosengrant, from Legacy Effects, about how he created the designs for many of *Avatar's* 3D characters.

Although he is traditionally a practical effects artist, he has no qualms about helping the CGI guys to break new ground when it comes to entertaining the audience.

Post-production house Weta has not only been busy on *Avatar* recently.

It also had its hands full bringing Peter Jackson's visions to life in *The Lovely Bones*, although the effects created for this movie were totally different, if not equally as beautiful.

However, the surreal imagery created for this movie have not been welcomed as warmly, and many people think they were a bit too self-indulgent.

But that's the great thing about Jackson – he's willing to take a risk.

One thing is for sure, the visuals he created for this movie have never been seen before and will be hard to copy again.

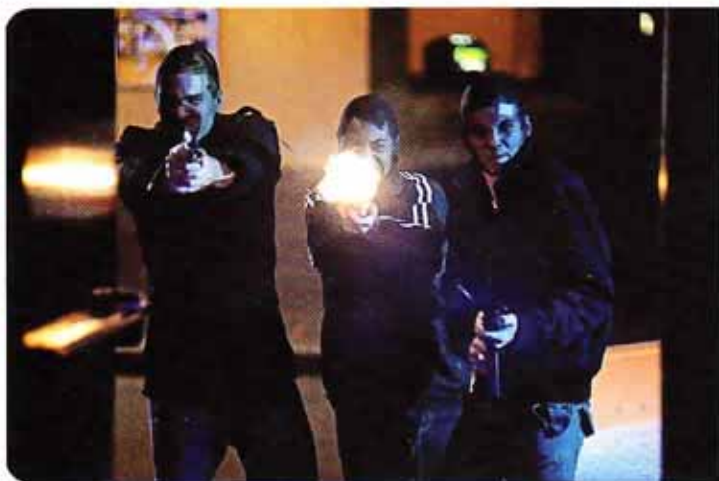
Although the film has its critics, it's also won over many fans who fell in love with its storyline and stylish effects.

This month, we also take a look at the effects created for *Daybreakers* by our Aussie crew.

The resourcefulness of the artists on this project was truly remarkable.

The effects are perfectly polished and make the film look like a multi-million dollar blockbuster.

On top of that, we tell you what to expect in Russell Mulcahy's new film *Bait*, which will shoot in Queensland, and we speak to one of the artists who put the bang into the third series of *Underbelly*.



to the viewer. It helps them to believe they are watching a real event.

"I saw David set up explosions to go off at the front of a nightclub, although I didn't direct that particular scene.

"It involved two rival gangs heading off each other at gunpoint from opposite sides of the road in the middle of Kings Cross.

"Machine guns were involved and it was awesome."

Seet says that these scenes lift the whole production unit.

"It reminds you of why you are doing the project," he adds.

"Knowing you have an expert

on there that has worked on *The Matrix* and *Superman*, it gives you plenty of confidence that the scene is going to work. I love working on *Underbelly* because you get to tell some bizarre stories and sometimes you need to invent some non-conventional ways of storytelling."

Trethewey says he had to be creative with how he set up the explosions for the machine gun scenes (one was in a residential property and the other was at a commercial establishment) because of budget constraints.

"You have to rely a lot on your experience rather than having the

time and money to test things out, like you can in movies. You have to tell the director that this is what you are going to get on the day, full stop – so more trust is definitely needed.

"We still have to make it look amazing. Exterior shots of the machine guns were filmed, along with other guns blasting away. And then we cut to the interiors that were shot to pieces. So we ended up with some really good sequences. Being able to pull that off with limited resources is very satisfying."

He adds that TV is less visual than film because it's a smaller format.

Drama between the characters is crucial.

"But what the effects do essentially is lend it colour, emotional truth and they give it some life and movement.

"The story is about people and the

effects help to set the scene, as well as heighten the drama. You can show a man banging away with a machine gun outside a building, but when you cut to the inside and show the carnage and people being hurt as a result, that gives it an extra emotional boost."

He says that it was difficult to set up the effects, but he worked closely with the director to get the right dramatic tone.

"There is a teddy bear that gets a good beating, to add to the emotional impact.

"The props were chosen carefully with the director and production designer to get the right style for the place.

"You try to make it as realistic as possible, which involves including as many smashable things in the shot as you possibly can. If it's a



dining room scene, you set it up as if it's dinner time.

"For example, you could have a flower vase there, so all the petals get shot up and the vase gets smashed to create a powerful visual impact.

"Petals come apart really nicely and you want to create as much mess as you can.

"The scene could include a wedding photograph or an important memento. Personal effects can say a lot. Those ideas come up in pre-production.

"It's then down to the art department to create them and then we blow them up."

For one scene, he had to include 30 tiny explosions, such as bullet hits.

Some explosions are as small as a

matchstick head, but others are as big as a five cent piece.

Safety plays a big part when it comes to setting up bullet hole explosions.

"You have to prepare the padding in a way that won't hurt the actor but still provides the effect of the bullet hit coming through.

"You've also got to prepare the wardrobe correctly, as well as the hit on a solid plate that is going to deflect all of the energy from the explosion away from the actor.

"So you need to pad them up properly.

"Getting it right can be as simple as making sure a coat doesn't flap over a bullet hit at the wrong time, and you have to make sure it doesn't

get seen on screen either."

Trethewey has a lot of time for the directors who work on shows like *Underbelly* on TV in Australia because of the limited resources they have to deal with.

"Everybody from the top down in TV has to be flexible in the way they approach the production. They have to adapt very quickly to changes as they occur on set.

"The director in particular has to know how to get the emotional feeling of the scene across and how you can best do that because it will

not always be a perfect world.

"Very few prima donnas survive in TV direction because they can't meet the production deadline."

Although the story is well written and based on true events, both the director and Trethewey say that something would be missing without the well organised physical effects that help to make the action spill out of the screen and into people's lounges.

Check out Inside TV on page 12 for an interview with *Underbelly* writer and producer Peter Gawler. ⑨



Inside the Australian VES

Visual Effects Society (VES) member and Fuel employee Trish Graham opens up about how the society is tackling the growing interest in 3D films and what lies in store for 2010.

As the Australian Section of the Visual Effects Society enters its second year, the film industry both here and abroad, is absorbing the phenomenal success of the 3D film *Avatar* and wondering if it signals a shift in film-going expectations.

Some pundits have expressed the view that 3D cinema could draw audiences – which abandoned film for games and online content – back to a new more experiential or 'event' cinema.

In view of the level of interest in 3D film and post-production technology and its implications, the Australian VES will be holding a series of practical 3D workshops with the Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS).

The workshops will explore new 3D developments and the implications for both physical and digital production.

The Australian VES welcomes the opportunity to work closely with the other Australian guilds and film practitioners on the development of new film production techniques and their impact on how we tell stories.

Other Australian VES events

planned for 2010 include specialist screenings, Q&As, professional master classes, inter-disciplinary workshops, student events and an award ceremony to honour Dr George Miller's contribution to visual effects.

The Australian VES kicks off this year with a 'sneak peak' at the contenders for Visual Effects Society Awards in the highly contested categories.

And this year, for the first time, Australian VES members were called upon to be nomination judges for the Annual VES Awards.

In speculating about the prospects for Australian film in 2010, the

high value of the Australian dollar continues to present challenges for the visual effects industry, which has traditionally depended on US offshore production coming to Australia.

But the VFX industry can take heart in the recent release of the film *Daybreakers*: the film-makers represent a growing trend in the Australian film industry that embrace world-class VFX and CG animation and genre projects that connect with domestic as well as international audiences.

**Trish Graham
Outgoing Secretary/Treasurer
Australian Section
Visual Effects Society**