

Total Film
ON SET!

THE DEAD ZONE

Those rotting, flesh-eating zombie hordes are back on the big screen after a videogame makeover. *Total Film* shuffled down to the *Resident Evil* set to talk console carnage with director Paul WS Anderson and play spot-the-bruise with action babe Milla Jovovich...

By Mark Salisbury

Trust me," says Milla Jovovich, "there's a lot of suffering that goes into wearing a tiny wet dress." She lifts the grey blanket that's currently covering her supermodel body, exposing an excuse of a red chiffon dress, minuscule panties, combat boots and, well, very little else. The point, of course, is to give *Total Film* a close-up look at the cuts and bruises she's sustained filming the movie adaptation of gorefest videogame *Resident Evil*. "I did some rolling on the grills which left marks here... and a big huge bruise there," she says, pulling down one side of her knickers to reveal a few more minor scrapes. By this point, *Total Film* is understandably speechless.

It's nearing the end of *Resident Evil*'s shoot here in Berlin and the 25-year-old Ukraine-born actress, model and sometime musician has spent the previous seven weeks battling blood-crazed zombies, undead dogs and an enormous, slimy monstrosity called "The Licker". Today Jovovich, who plays amnesiac zombie-hunter Alice, has been shooting a scene towards the movie's climax which involves the aforementioned Licker (a CG creation that'll be added later) trashing a subway train, complete with all the requisite pyrotechnics. As if that wasn't physically demanding enough, she reveals she spent most of the previous week underwater, working on scenes in a flooded laboratory set. "It was 16 hours spent in freezing water. I was pretty much half-naked and I had to dunk myself in 35, 40 times during the day." She puts her bruises away and sighs. "It's trying to say the least." →



Face/Off: Paul WS Anderson (right), with undead pals.



Weird science: the underground lab that will become a TOMB!



Face/on: Milla in make-up.



Bringing out the undead: Milla proves irresistible zombie-bait.

The movie version of *Resident Evil* has been a long time coming. Inspired by George A. Romero's *Dead* trilogy, the claret-drenched shoot 'em up first lurched on to the PlayStation in 1996 and, together with its four sequels, has shifted more than 16 million units. Soon after the release of the first game, the movie rights were bought by German production company Constantin, which commissioned a script from *Spawn* scribe Alan McElroy. "We said: 'This is gonna be easy!'" recalls executive producer Robert Kulzer. "A bunch of commandos go into a place, they shoot it up, blah, blah, blah. McElroy did a pretty good job. Then the second game comes out and all of a sudden your movie based on the first looks really dated and boring, and you say: 'What do we do now?'"

What they did was certainly inspired. They went to Romero himself, who'd recently helmed a Japanese ad for the *Resident Evil 2* game, and said: "Let's do the ultimate zombie movie." Alas, after a number of drafts, Romero and Constantin parted ways, unable to agree on a new direction. "With George we could have done a great zombie movie for a very limited audience," reflects Kulzer. "We couldn't have shown it in a regular theatre, or even on TV. It could have been a \$2 million horror pic, but not a big event movie."

So they opted instead to hire writer-director Paul WS Anderson, who'd previously directed *Mortal Kombat*—which, in the pre-*Tomb Raider* era, was the most successful videogame adaptation ever. Being a massive videogame fan, the British filmmaker had actually been pursuing the rights to the franchise independently, through his own production company Impact Films.

"I love zombie movies and no one's done a great one in a long, long time," he says during a break from ordering Milla to bruise herself. "I remember watching classics like *Zombie Flesh Eaters* and the Romero movies while growing up and being scared shitless by the whole

idea of zombies. You know, the terrifying prospect that your loved ones will not only come back from the dead, but will want to eat you alive. I loved the game, loved the genre, and thought: 'This is a movie I wanna make.'" When he found out that Constantin and Romero already owned the rights, he began writing his own undead script anyway, which, he says, "was very much a rip-off of *Resident Evil*. It probably would have got me sued..."

DAYS OF GORE

Once onboard, Anderson incorporated many of his own ideas into the version Constantin owned which, in keeping with the company's desire for a mainstream movie, was not going to be anywhere near as gory as the game.

"One of the things I learned from *Event Horizon* was that gore and terror don't necessarily go hand in hand," says Anderson. "If you have too much gore you lose the audience. They stop being terrified and start being revolted. Even if people play the game and enjoy shoving a shotgun up to a zombie's head and blowing it off, if you saw it for real, I don't think you'd like it."

While the previous *Resident Evil* scripts had stuck closely to one or more of the games, Anderson came up with the idea of a prequel, a movie that'd set up the *Resident Evil* universe and explain what went on before the events of the original game. This meant he could keep many elements from the games and also come up with a totally new set of characters.

"What we're trying to do is make a movie that works within the universe of *Resident Evil*," Anderson explains, "but which also allows us to give the fans a whole new adventure."

The problem with coming up with a new adventure, however, was that it meant coming up with a new kind of zombie. "Michael



Jackson kind of killed the genre," says producer Jeremy Bolt, who also appears as three different zombies in the movie. "If you put more than three people with any kind of zombie make-up in a row, you can't help but imagine 'Thriller' kicking in. The man has done such a disservice to the genre."

So how did they prevent their undead from looking like something out of an '80s music vid? "They're like the dead people in *The Sixth Sense* but grosser,"



"I told my agent: 'If there's ever a *Resident Evil* movie, I want that script!'" **Michelle Rodriguez**

The shootist: James Purefoy tools up.



explains Jovovich, grinning. "Some of them look like they had a car accident, with half their face coming off and stuff, while others just look as if they died of illness. But they all look really sick. The first day I worked with the zombies it was like when you see mould growing on your kitchen sink. I thought: 'I don't wanna get close to these people, they're dirty and spoiled. They look like an old cheese.'"

LADIES OF THE FIGHT

Despite her dislike of "old cheese" zombies, Jovovich was perfect for the lead role, mainly because she was herself a huge fan of the game. "I'd sit with my little brother for, like, five, six hours a day, and I thought: 'This would be such a great movie and I would be a great her, whoever she is.'" Indeed, Jovovich even went so far as to inquiring after the game rights herself, but eventually she got hold of Anderson's script.

"I had a great time reading it. I was, like: 'I want this part. My brother is going to think I'm God!' And I convinced Paul that I was the only person capable of doing it. But it's true – the fact is I've had experience. On *The Fifth Element* I did all the training I'd ever need for the rest of my life. It's like learning to ride a bicycle: once you learn how to kick, you can kick again. Plus, I'm really good with the guns. I love guns and I'm a really good shot."

Joining Jovovich on her zombie hunt is Michelle Rodriguez, the Latino dynamo from *Girlfight* and *The Fast And The Furious*, who stars as Rain, a kick-ass commando. Like both her director and co-star, Rodriguez was a fan of the game. "There aren't many good role-playing videogames out there, so when I got my hands on

Resident Evil it was like being in a Hitchcock film," says the voluble 23-year-old, pounding on the table in excitement. "That's why I'm here, because the game's just amazing to play. When I first met my agent, the first thing I told her was: 'If there is ever a movie being made of *Resident Evil*, I want that script. I don't care if I'm selling a hotdog in the damn thing, I'm going to be in there!'"

"Milla and Michelle are really sexy, but they're also convincing when they're firing guns and beating the shit out of things," Anderson says. "I love putting them in the same frame because they're so sparky."

Despite the bruises, the long hours and the unpleasant conditions, Jovovich says she's having a blast – and she also sees it as good practice. "I'm always thinking about the apocalypse and what would happen if the end of the world came and I survived," she says. "I'd need guns to make sure I could take care of my family and go out there and get food and more bullets. I thought I'd start now, getting a licence and building up like a major artillery in my basement. So if the time ever came I could survive. I'm telling you, I would be one of those people. I have the physique for it." Of that, there's no question...

Resident Evil is released on 21 June and reviewed on page 96.

I WAS A ZOMBIE EXTRA

Make-up artist and extra Barry Best on the art of playing a festering undead killer...

How did you bag the role of being a zombie? It's a great story to tell down the pub...

I was working for Animated Extras at the time, a make-up/animatronics company who were doing bits and bobs on *Resident Evil*. They just needed people to test the make-up on, and my face was right because I'm quite a slim build. Then Paul Anderson came in and saw the make-up tests...

Did you just copy other movie zombies? You do that whole shambling-walk-with-arms-outstretched thing...

I just kind of wandered around as though I was pissed off. I dragged my heels and tried to look really fucked off with the whole thing. That's all I did really, but they seemed happy so I stuck with it.

What kind of direction did Paul WS Anderson give you? Was it stuff like: "Drag your feet a bit and loll your head?"

I was being lead more by the choreography guy, but yeah, he would tell me to just go in and attack or whatever. Other than that I was pretty much left to my own devices.

Isn't it true, somewhat bizarrely, that your younger brother has also played an undead monster?

Yeah, my brother Brian is in *The Mummy Returns*. He's one of the mummies in the British Museum. If you watch the DVD you can see him bang himself right up to the screen. It was exactly the same thing – he was just working on some of the effects stuff in *The Mummy Returns* and fell into it...



As hard as they tried, the cast couldn't subdue the director.



Resident Evil 15

Calling all videogame spods... Still not got a girlfriend? Then go watch Milla Jovovich in this shoot-'em-up. Somebody's got to.

➔ Originally, George A Romero was slated to adapt Capcom's hugely popular videogame series. You could see the thinking, given Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* trilogy is the stuff of horror legend. But his ambitious zombie flick was axed to death in infancy, deemed too gory for mainstream entertainment. The production company demanded fresh blood, so to speak, and landed director Paul Anderson. No, not the guy behind *Magnolia* (if only), that's Paul T Anderson. This is Paul WS Anderson (as he now, laughably, likes to be credited), the guy behind *Mortal Kombat*, *Event Horizon* and – it gets worse – *Soldier*. The result is predictably stinky.

In a secret underground lab called The Hive, a dodgy genetic virus is on the loose. Suitably panicked, the scientific bigwigs have called in a military team to secure the facility before the crisis escalates. Only there are a few problems. First off, The Hive's central computer thinks the rescuers are intruders, not saviors. Second, the one person who can explain what's going on, Alice (Milla Jovovich), has temporary amnesia. And last but, as ever, by no means least, the facility's being overrun by zombie scientists with a craving for human flesh...

Fans of the games will instantly recognise the set-up, as the commandos get more than they bargained for (some slice 'n' dice laser beams are

Opens 21 June

Director

Paul WS Anderson

Starring

Milla Jovovich,

Michelle Rodriguez,

James Purefoy

Screenplay

Paul WS Anderson

Distributor

Pathé

Running time

100 mins

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- Street Fighter
- Mortal Kombat
- Zombie: Creeping Flesh

especially nasty) and the few remaining characters, including Jovovich's Alice and Michelle Rodriguez's typically tough-talking Rain, have to get out of the lab before the doors lock. In the gaming industry they call this "survival horror" and it ought to make for a memorable sci-fi actioner.

Ought to. Instead, Anderson digs up a cinematic corpse that no amount of last-minute editing surgery can reanimate. As corpses go, it's a good-looking one (more on Jovovich later), but only the most rabid *Evil* nut will be satisfied by the moribund action and straight-to-retail production values. The undead stalkers are particularly disappointing – slathered in unconvincing make-up they convey zero menace. But it's not simply the zombie-creators who are at fault. "WS" does them no favours with

"Milla Jovovich's sexy, high-kicking martial arts heroine stops it being a waste of time"

his flat, sterile direction. Showing only the faintest grasp of suspense techniques, he appears to think a sudden, villainous lurch into shot and a blast of music are all that's needed to generate flesh-creeping tension.

So why the seemingly generous two-star rating? Because Anderson at least has the good sense to stay faithful to the game, even finding space for those pesky zombie dogs and an end-of-level mutant "boss". And because he hired Milla Jovovich. For just as Angelina Jolie kept *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* from being a waste of time, so Jovovich's sexy, high-kicking martial arts heroine convinces you not to hit the "reset" button before the credits read "Game Over". Just.

Jamie Russell

Verdict

A faithful but gutless videogame adap. Paul WS Anderson's actioner shuffles along like a particularly dim zombie. Milla Jovovich's energy and sex appeal make it watchable, but for die hard fans only.



Resident Evil Predicted Interest Curve

