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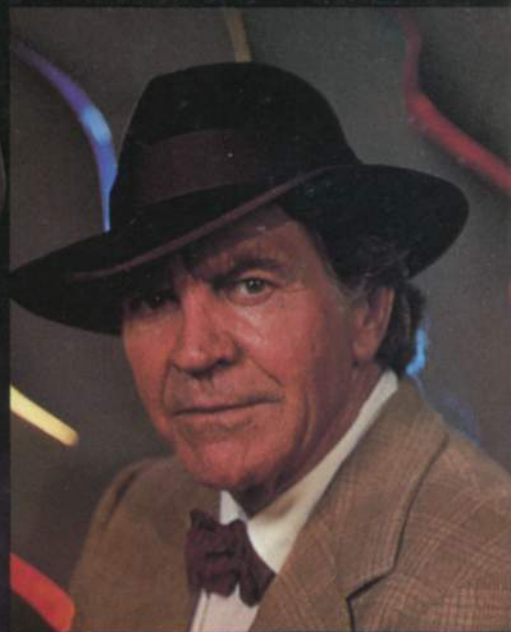
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Stalking the Supernatural with Director Ivan Reitman



By Randy and Jean-Marc L'Officier

Not every director can say that he brought an entire city to a standstill. While *Ghostbusters* wasn't the first movie that Ivan Reitman directed, it did offer him many new and unique opportunities. For instance, it gave him the chance to work in Central Park, which necessitated that it be closed to the public for several days. This in turn caused massive traffic congestion. When they were working, on Friday,

they caused traffic on Manhattan Island to be gridlocked for an hour.

Ghostbusters is a comedy aware of predecessors such as *Ghost Breakers*, (with Bob Hope), *Ghost Catchers* (Olson and Johnson), *Ghosts On The Loose* (the Bowery Boys and Bela Lugosi), *Hold That Ghost* and *Spooks Run Wild*. But it is very much sunk in the present day world of contemporary comedy. A film featuring Dan

Aykroyd, Bill Murray and Harold Ramis couldn't help but be current, especially with two of the three acting as the screenwriters as well. But the genesis of the project was not as simple as one might assume.

"Dan Aykroyd had written a script called *Ghostbusters* and he showed it to Bill Murray. They liked it and they decided that I would be the director of the film." Reitman had previously



(Top Row L-R) Harold Ramis, Dan Aykroyd and Billy Murray are in awe of the spectacular spook haunting the big apple. A Devil Dog haunts a New York apartment. (Bottom Row L-R) Sigourney Weaver finds herself living in Ghost Central. Harold Ramis, Dan Aykroyd, Bill Murray and Ernie Hudson go in for the kill. ©Columbia Pictures



SPIRITED REWRITES

directed Bill Murray in the highly successful comedy *Stripes*. "They sent the script to me, but I didn't like it at all," Reitman recalled. "I sort of hemmed and hawed about it. Then I sat down with Danny and started discussing what I thought we should do with it. He really liked the ideas. I also suggested that we get Harold Ramis involved as a writer and an actor in the film." Ramis was in the original syndicated SCTV, co-wrote *Animal House* and *Stripes* and directed *National Lampoon's Vacation*.

"That was last May," Reitman continued. "So we started all over again using his draft for certain incidents and characterizations. We really redid it pretty much from scratch."

"We worked all summer. Bill Murray came back from shooting *The Razor's Edge* in France and we started shooting in October. It's not the fastest film I've ever been involved in, but considering the size of the film, it's pretty remarkable.

"My focus on this movie was that it must work as a comedy about these three guys who go into business for themselves. That's what I think the story is about. These three very bright people make a job change and set up this very unique business. They even advertise on television with the slogan: *We're ready to believe you!*

"The film is about the problems of setting up a business, keeping their relationship together and the problems they run into," Reitman continued. But in transforming the first draft into the

final filmed version, a lot of new ideas were mixed with the old ones.

"Two of the major incidents in the films were originally in that first script. But they were reworked for the plot that we developed. His (Dan Aykroyd's) movie would have cost two hundred million dollars to make. It was more of a science fiction extravaganza than a comedy. I wanted to make a comedy that also had science fiction stuff and neat effects in it. But I felt that the weight had to be on the characterizations and the comedy rather than the other way around. I made it much more realistic in the process of changing it. I influenced the realism although they're the writers and they did all of the actual writing."

Despite Dan Aykroyd's excitement over his original vision, he didn't resist the advice that Reitman gave. "Once Danny and I finally sat down face to

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Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis are ready to believe you. ©Columbia Pictures

face and talked about it, he was the most excited advocate. He couldn't wait and he seemed very appreciative of the whole development of it.

"That first draft that came out of our discussions took about five weeks. We went off to Martha's Vineyard, stayed there two weeks and did another draft. Then we did still another draft after that which took two or three weeks. So we did three drafts in the space of two months. It was clearer where the movie was going with each draft and what the character differentiation was amongst the three of them. What the major plot incidents should be kept on shifting around. Also the science became clearer."

Reitman's friendship and professional relationship with Dan Aykroyd goes back several years. They first met when Reitman produced a live television variety show entitled *Greed*. Shortly thereafter Reitman produced *Spellbound* for the Toronto stage. *Spellbound* evolved into *The Magic Show*, a Broadway hit for five years. Following *The Magic Show*, Reitman produced another Broadway show, based on *The National Lampoon*. The success of this production acquainted Reitman with the magazine and eventually led to the production of *Animal House* (1978) which starred John Belushi.

Reitman followed *Animal House* with *Meatballs* and *Stripes*, both

starring Bill Murray. Reitman directed *Meatballs*, which was co-written by Harold Ramis, who also co-starred in *Stripes*. Then, in 1981, Reitman produced the animated sf fantasy picture *Heavy Metal*. This year, in addition to *Ghostbusters*, which once again reunites Murray, Aykroyd and Ramis, Reitman also produced and directed a musical magic show entitled *Merlin*.

SUPERNATURAL EFFECTS

Even while they were working on the script, they were all aware of the demands which the special effects would be making on the production. But they also knew that the time element was already working against them. "Right away, the studio was saying, 'We need this for next summer.' And it was already less than a year away. Michael Gross (the associate producer) contacted Richard Edlund. We'd heard that Richard was going to leave Industrial Light & Magic and set up a company here. I met him to find out what his plans were—I think this was already in June of last year—and he said it was true.

"I'd been through a little of this, so I had a pretty good sense of the scale to do it properly. It still cost more than we expected. But it seems to be coming pretty well for what's done.

"Fortunately we had storyboards on everything, so I had a good sense of how it would be layed-out. But we still don't know how everything is going to actually look until it's done."

Filming scenes in which important elements are shot by different people and added in later creates its own unique set of problems. "I think it was harder for the actors," Reitman explained, "because they didn't have anything specific to respond to. I always tried to give them as much visual information as I could, either from the storyboard or from key development drawings that we had made. And, to cover myself, I would do a number of takes that had a range of emotion, from more subtle to more broad.

"I also tried to assault the actors and extras as much as I could, with wind and cork stuff and paper! I feel that as much as their physical environment can change, the greater the effect and the more realistic the response of the actors."

One of the most bizarre creatures which the actors had to react to sight unseen was what can only be described as the Stay-Puft Man. This being, which is the major antagonist and resembles a giant marshmallow, was one of the more important things kept from Dan Aykroyd's original draft of the script. This outlandish creation was not only difficult for the actors to

imagine and react to, but for the director as well.

"It was what worried me," Reitman admitted, "because the film was very realistic until that point. As long as you accepted the theory as it developed, each thing led to the other quite naturally. But that's where it suddenly took a left turn and went way beyond. I kept worrying that it might not work. And, going into filming I still thought that it might not work. Now that I've seen it, I think it works, but I won't be able to tell for certain until I've seen it all complete.

"The reason that it stayed in, despite the concerns, was because we couldn't come up with anything that sounded as good. So we went with it. It's part of the risks of film making!"

QUIET IN THE CITY, THIS IS A TAKE!

The risks also included the possibility of offending the greater portion of a city by inconveniencing them. But how could one inconvenience a city the size of New York? Well, first you start by closing off Central Park....

"They weren't happy about that at all," Reitman revealed. "They felt that didn't have a good location manager. We should have been talked out of the location that we ended up choosing. It was right in the middle of three very important arteries. Quite apart from the Central Park West, which is a north-south flowing... that was relatively easy to close. It was the east-west, crosstown traffic, flowing through 64th, 61st and 67th, right in the area where we were shooting. We had blocked those up too and one Friday night we apparently gridlocked Manhattan Island for about an hour."

The New York City Film Commission had tried to discourage Reitman from filming in his chosen location, "But by this time it was too late," the director explained. "We were deep into building the big set that matched the exteriors and there was a lot of other money spent, specifically for that building."

John De Cuir, the production designer, built a set for the rooftop scene which was so massive that it created problems for other portions of



Sigourney Weaver lives in a very strange apartment building and Rick Moranis is a nerdy neighbor. ©Columbia Pictures

the studio. But Reitman felt that it was necessary. "It was appropriate to the story. I guess we could have built half of a rooftop and sort of tried to play the action that way. But it wouldn't have been that great a savings. Once you've built the scaffolding and everything, for the extra ten percent you might as well go the rest of the way."

But shooting on the huge set had its own unique disadvantages. "We couldn't shoot at any angle, but we had a fair amount of freedom. It was also so big that it took forever to light. I think there were only twelve Titans (special lamps) existing in the world and we used ten of them on the stage. During certain key scenes, no other filming could take place on the Burbank lot! So we tried to do it during the Christmas break time and we scheduled those days carefully so it would occur when there was no other filming. I think that the last time this kind of power was used was for the big set on *Close Encounters*, when the Mothership landed."

FAST, FURIOUS AND PRECISE

While they were not much over time or budget, the ever-present deadline loomed over them and produced some interesting results along the way.

"There was a lot of pressure. But I'm a pretty quick study and having been so involved in the development of the screenplay, I had a pretty good idea of where I was going with it. I was lucky in that I had an extraordinary support staff.

"I think (setting up a new special effects facility) made Richard Edlund's job more difficult. He had to build a company and get it up to working

speed. So it put them into a terrible crunch, getting this film ready. For us, it's a problem because it means we're rushed in terms of getting some of the effects done. There's 195 effects shots in the film at this moment. And, it was more expensive as a result of a lot of it going into the physical set-up, as opposed to into the movie itself."

They began to do the music for the film long before the movie was finished. This is an unusual procedure. "Elmer Bernstein started looking at footage in December, while we were still filming. We had reels cut together before we finished filming. He's been working on it and he's now into it very heavily. He's used to that kind of quick race."

Editing a film like this before most of the special effects are done also creates problems. Especially when you want to test the film to see how audiences react. "We have these sort of black and white slugs all over the place. They have just a plate or some crude line drawings in them. But one thing I learned from *Heavy Metal*, and to a certain extent from *Spacehunter*, is that the film better work without the special effects or you can forget it. Whatever inadequacies we felt in the work pictures of both *Spacehunter* and *Heavy Metal* didn't disappear when the film was completed. We always told ourselves that, 'Well, *Spacehunter* will work better once we actually see it in 3-D and it's all together with the effects.' Or for *Heavy Metal*, 'Once all the color and effects are in it will work better.' But it didn't. It worked basically just the way it did, only it was more polished.

"I screened *Ghostbusters* in its rough state, without any effects at all, except the mechanical ones that we did on set. I screened it to small audiences, just to see. I figured it was going to have to work as it is. It will only get better, but it better work right now. Fortunately it did. I found I'm no longer relying on the inclusion of everything to save me. My approach now was that it's got to work as a movie without anything and in its roughest form. Without special effects, audio effects, proper color balancing or music. If it works then, you know it's going to work."

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