

## Pater Noster

The finale of the feature film *Pater Noster* is to be filmed tonight on the piece of land ear-marked for Toronto's domed Stadium. As I approach one of the archaic buildings on the site, a service garage once used by C.N. to refurbish their freight cars, I am struck by an immense feeling of decay and tranquility, a feeling of quiet respect as if I was visiting a monument to a past era. Inside the warehouse-sized structure, however, the mood abruptly changes. There is a flurry of activity as crew members assemble a macabre stage, an unmannered collection of wood pieces lit ominously by a candle chandelier.

"What's going to happen here?" I ask a long-haired fellow standing nearby. "This is where the brother runs at the stage," he replies. "He thinks his girlfriend's son is hanging there (pointing to the stage), but it isn't the son, it's a midget."

The explanation is rather confusing, so I set off to find the director to get some clarification. David Mitchell is standing outside in an open area speaking with the line producer and an assistant. "I want him to look like the Wicked Witch of the West, you know, going down...down." David compresses his small frame into a ball on the ground, and glances up to make sure that the assistant has understood.

I introduce myself, and we are left alone to talk. "It's latin for 'Our Father,'" he says in response to my first question about the title. "I would consider it to be a young adults' film," he begins. "It works on two levels. It has the action which attracts some people, but it also goes deeper. It asks religious questions, questions of morality. The subtext of the film is a city out of control. Look at some of the major issues today. Look at all of the homeless people who are out on the streets of L.A. It's more pitiful than anything else. The theme of this film is that the strong will inherit the earth, and that greed and corruption are the products of weakness."

"This film cost \$1.3 million, all financed through pre-sales," he continues. "We're getting good production value for our money. Do you know that Daimien and I have never accepted a dime from Telefilm, and not a dime from the CBC. We can't have the CBC saying 'Oooh, that's too heavy for us.'"

Daimien Lee, the other co-founder of Rose and Ruby Productions, is the writer, producer, and one of the actors in *Pater Noster*. He and David have been working together for about ten years. They started at CTV with *Wide World of Sports*, working for Johnny Esaw. Many of the crew have been with Rose and Ruby for quite a while. For some, it is their fourth or fifth feature together. But this is a non-union set, and so, for another half-dozen kids, this is their first film.



• Director David Mitchell, near eyepiece, on the *Pater Noster* set, a film about a city out of control

I go over to the crafts table and get myself a cup of coffee. In the fading light, one can discern the silhouettes of broken concrete structures, decaying barrels, and moving people. Overhead, a flock of chattering seagulls pass by. It is all very Felliniesque.

"Quiet on the set please. Let's go, guys," shouts the first A.D., who goes by the name of Roman. To one side, a young lady in red overalls is struggling with a piece of cardboard, trying to direct the vapours from the smoke machine across the set. "Stick around, later on we're going to set someone on fire," whispers the second A.D. A great billow of smoke rolls across the stage as the actor, an older man wearing a grey trenchcoat, begins to speak. From where I'm standing, I can only make out strands of the dialogue, lines such as "The whole world is crumbling apart," and, "There's no good, Paul, no evil, only strength."

Halfway through the next shot the generator fails. From up on stage Roman shouts, "Anybody know any campfire songs?" Then, before waiting for a reply, he breaks into a rendition of 'Four Strong Winds.' The Soundman quietly sings the second line with him.

Outside, in the truck housing the generator, a large fan has been set to cool it down. A bunch of us gather, while someone on the roof of the truck pours water into the top of the generator.

It is a while later. The camera is tracking backwards, while the actor in the grey trenchcoat is advancing. I am standing next to the Soundman and one

of the few actresses in the film, Maria. "I worked with these guys in the last picture," she tells me. They're great to work for. They're interested in making movies rather than making money." As if to cast doubt on either eventuality, the generator promptly fails again. We are now completely shrouded in darkness, except for the light thrown from the fiery flame bars. We begin discussing the upcoming scene. "Yeah, on stage they're going to have a fight," says Maria. "See, the father is pitting son against son, brother against brother." On the dark stage, the man in the trenchcoat is practising a death grip on a younger actor. "That's supposed to be my fiancé, the good brother," says Maria pointing to the young man. "But what about the midget?" I ask. "The midget is in cahoots with the father," pipes in the Soundman. Maria is getting cold. As she walks away, the Soundman chuckles. "I don't know if you're going to get your article," he says. "You're going to have to write that there is no article because you couldn't see anything."

After 20 minutes, however, the generator is working again. A bearded giant is posted guard by the temperature gauge. "If it gets too high I'll shut her down," he growls.

After partaking in a dinner of chicken à la king and coleslaw, I finally catch up with Daimien shortly before he is to act out a confrontation scene with the good brother. (He plays the evil brother.) He is dressed in ragged clothing, and looks like some kind of marauding caveman with his bushy beard and mouth covered in fake blood. Despite the ugly

appearance, an easy charm and warmth radiate from him. We talk at one end of the service garage, while the rest of the crew is preparing to film an explosion sequence.

"This has been an awfully ambitious project," he tells me. "And everyone has responded extremely well to the pressure." We talk about the script, and about what makes a good scriptwriter. We talk about the wide pre-sale of the film, which includes distribution to parts of Europe, the United States, and Canada. We talk about the chicken à la king. When I mention the generator problems of earlier in the evening, Daimien gently brushes them aside. "These things are to be expected," he smiles.

Roman comes over and ushers everyone out of the shooting area. "This is going to be a big explosion," he warns us. A moment later, with camera rolling, a large pile of twisted metal and rotten two-by-fours explode into flame. The noise is deafening. It's time for me to go.

Outside the service garage, relics of the past sit patiently, consigned to demolition in order that Toronto might lay claim to a more cosmopolitan image. Behind me in the repair garage, a burst of simulated machine gun fire can be heard. Ahead of me, out on a misty Spadina avenue, officers from three patrol cars are diligently performing spot checks.

Phil van Steenburgh •