



Lunch with Randy Quaid

Natalie Edwards

When Astral, distributors of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, phoned and asked me, "Would you like to have lunch with Randy Quaid?" I said what you would say if you were invited to meet the 23 year old Houston, Texas actor whose sixth movie role was playing the epileptic pal of Duddy Kravitz. "Yes," I said.

What *were* those first five roles? His was one of the curious faces that appeared under the table trying to see what Barbra Streisand was *doing* under there in *What's Up Doc?* And he was one of the bullies who beat up Ryan O'Neil at the end of *Paper Moon*. In *The Lolly Madonna War* the whole script was originally shot from his point of view as the retarded boy, but to his bitter disappointment only a few scenes were retained in the film once it was "mutilated" by MGM. And he was the slump-shouldered rich kid who took Cybill Shepherd to the swimming party in *The Last Picture Show*.

Finally, for his supporting role as Meadows, the 18 year old nincompoop sailor in *The Last Detail* (80 per cent of which was shot in Toronto, incidentally; by the lake, at Camp Borden and High Park), he was nominated for an Oscar.

I expected to meet a gigantic, bumbling, soft-fleshed homey boy and instead encountered a lanky, trim, bearded male dressed in blue jeans and faded shirt. He gestured with big calm hands, observed me with sharp blue eyes, perceptive yet friendly, and in fact presented a whole demeanor so inoffensively informal and pleasurable that I soon forgot lunch entirely as we talked of different directors, and his background and various roles.

Then we got going on *Duddy Kravitz*.

He told me he'd read Richler's book (except for one scene) only to the point where his character comes in, and prepared himself with a complete background for Virgil Roseboro; a plumber father, a mother who worked in the local equivalent of Eatons, an east-coast northern attitude and neutral accent. Then at the last minute director Kotcheff decided he'd prefer Virgil with a Texan or Georgian accent, and "this threw my whole character off."

"I wouldn't have played him as extroverted or as good natured," he said.

He'd have preferred to inject a tinge of anger and accentuate the seriousness of Virgil's crusade to band epileptics together. This sub-theme of Virgil as an outcast because of his physical disability, which mirrors Duddy's feeling of being ostracized from WASP society because he is a Jew, isn't given much weight in the movie. "I would have played Virgil a

totally different way," said Quaid, "but that's what the director wanted."

As for the script; "I didn't like the script that much."

I noted that Richier's screenplay from his novel simplified the character of Duddy by having him say several of the comments he only thinks in the book; things that could or should perhaps have been intimated by camera angles or captured glances rather than bluntly stated which reduces the layers of the character.

He agreed. "Novel dialogue is a whole different thing. They should have had a screenwriter. In film it's what is unsaid that is often most effective. The script was too talky; not economical either."

"What do you consider a good filmscript?" I asked.

"*Magnum Force*."

As for Kotcheff's direction, he noted the use of vivid gestures and extraneous movement and deplored the lengthy shooting schedule which dragged out to 2 1/2 months, upping the projected \$600,000 budget to nearer \$900,000.

"My first memory is of waiting. We waited a lot. Do a scene, then back to LA and wait two weeks, then back for another scene, and four days' wait. It breaks up my rhythm. I like to shoot every day."

Like most actors, he'd also like to shoot in continuity, as he did in *The Last Detail* as it not only creates consistency in his own character but aids in developing subtle inter-relationships with the other characters in the film. Shooting *Duddy* wasn't like that. Almost his first scene was the truck crack-up, and after that he'd be in the wheelchair one day, and walking around the next.

Kotcheff also shot a lot of takes for each scene. "I don't like to go over 5 or 10," said Quaid. "That's ideal for me. I like spontaneous chemistry. That bedroom scene" (in which Virgil tells Duddy he is an epileptic) "was shot 28 to 30 times." As he said this I remembered that in that scene I actually felt Dreyfuss as Duddy didn't look tired enough!

As for his role as Virgil Roseboro, and future parts he might like to play, he commented simply, "I like to play characters that I would personally like as a friend."

He hadn't seen the finished film at the time we talked, but I imagine that when he does, despite the talky script and choppy cuts, he'll like it. Particularly Virgil. Anyhow, I did.

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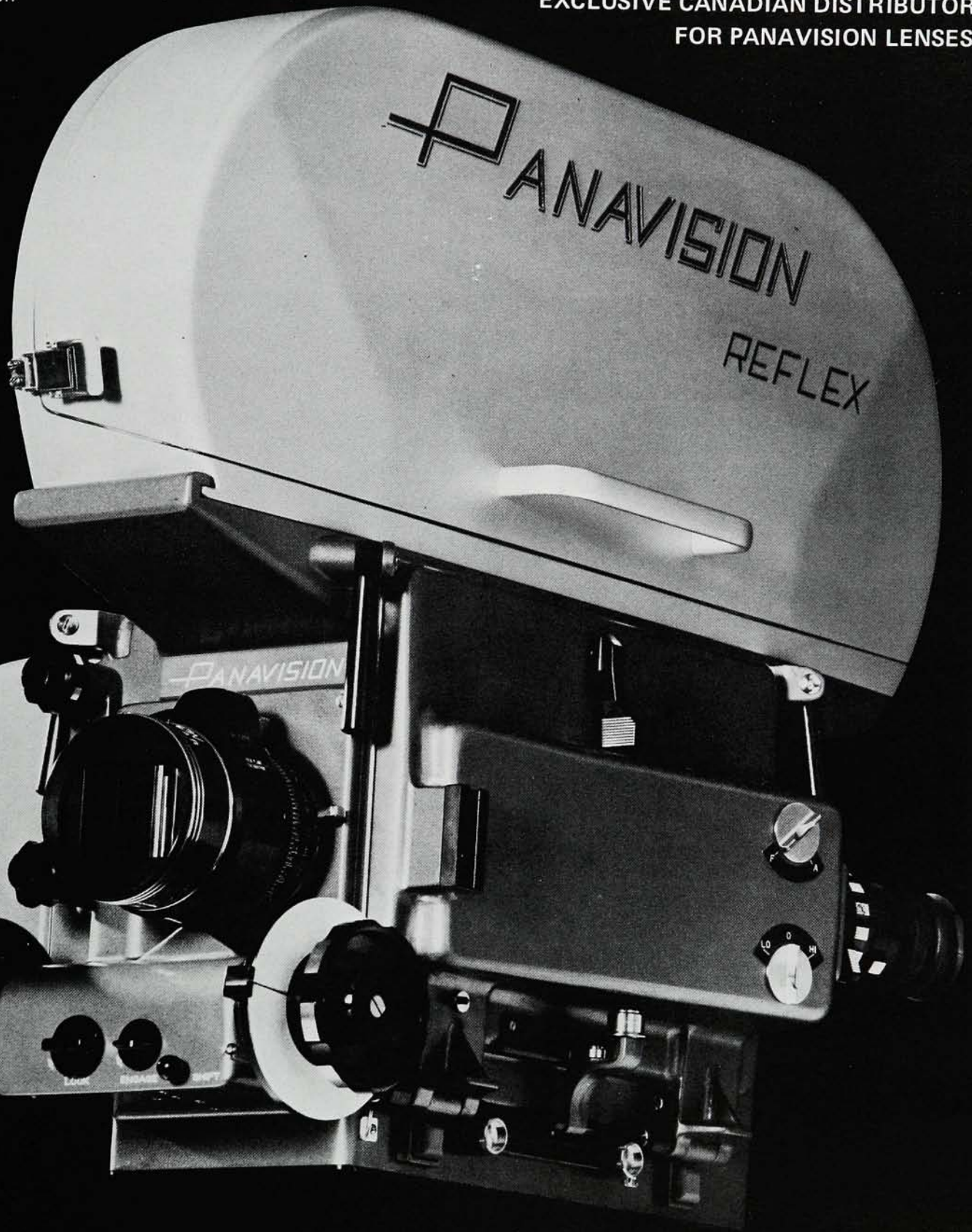
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