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STARLOG

THE SCIENCE FICTION

AUG
#145

STAR TREK V
Meet Spock's
brother, the
laughing Vulcan

**Rick Moranis
steals
GHOSTBUSTERS II
& HONEY, I SHRUNK
THE KIDS**

FREE!

Cyberpunk
star
William
Gibson's
latest
book
(see page 74)

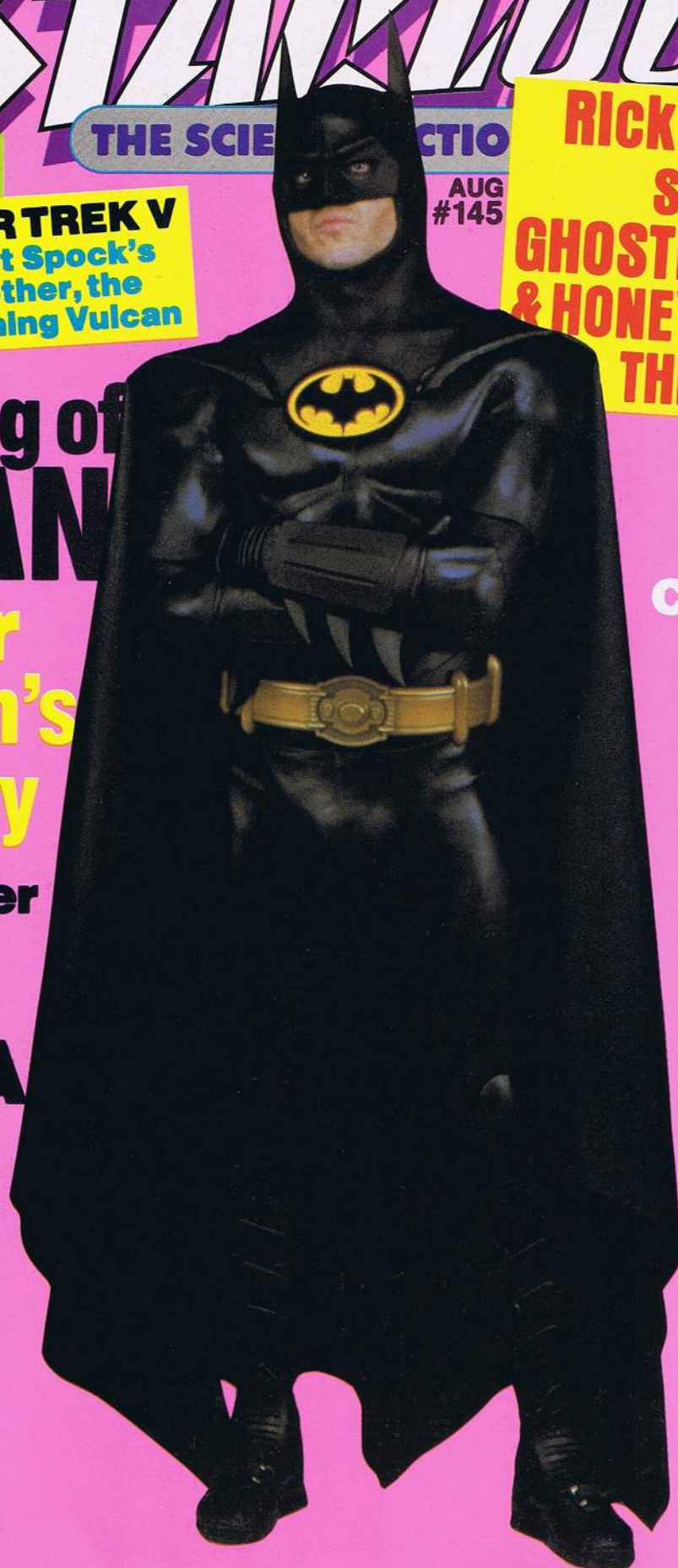
**LICENSE
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speaks



Michael Keaton
is Batman

COMEDIAN



By JAMI BERNARD

Even funny guys have bad days. Rick Moranis has two new movies: *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, in which he plays a goofy scientist whose miniaturization machine inadvertently does what many parents would like to do to their own kids with a frying pan, and *Ghostbusters II*, in which Moranis reprises the role of Louis the accountant, who has since gone to night school and become a lawyer and organizer for the team that wants to de-slime the Big Apple. The SCTV alumnus almost single-handedly salvaged Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs* as the over-chapeau'ed Dark Helmet, he had a green but bloody thumb in *Little Shop of Horrors*, and he has a TV pilot in development and a new infant in the house. Still, even funny guys have bad days.



This is one of them. "Oh, #&%!" is the first thing he says in a telephone interview that gets worse before it gets better. The expostulation is caused by a spilled can of soda on his end of the line; the spirit of the interview remains dampened long after the soda has dried. Heaven help the interviewer who asks Moranis to describe his character in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, the SF comedy from Disney now

in release. "Now there's an original question," he replies—and, because he later complains that interviews don't accurately reflect the tone in which comments are made, let's be clear: Moranis says this with dripping sarcasm. "I'm *not* going to answer that because that is the one question I really hate."

Surely Moranis is kidding. He *must* be kidding, because there are *plenty* of questions that he really hates. ("Tell me about

under

GLASS

Rick Moranis reveals how he shrunk some kids and sized up the Ghostbusters.



the special FX in *Ghostbusters II*?" "What about the special FX?" ("Do you want to hang up and start this again?" "No, I want us to *hang up*.") To be fair, Moranis later apologizes, citing too many interviews, too little time and misleading stories in the press, all the while doing a good impression (remember, he can do Woody Allen, Dick Cavett and Merv Griffin) of a guy with Once Burned, Twice Shy Syndrome.

Small Talk

In *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, Moranis plays physicist Wayne Szalinski, whose electro-magnetic shrinking machine reduces his two offspring (Amy O'Neill, Robert Oliveri) and some neighboring youngsters (Jared Rushton, Thomas Wilson Brown) to a height of about a quarter inch. "He has invented this machine which will revolutionize science," explains Moranis. "While he's away one day, the kids accidentally get up in the attic following a stray baseball,

and the machine goes off, and *poof!* They're miniaturized. And that gets us into the movie."

After Wayne throws the tiny tots out with the trash, the kids have to make their way home through a dangerous jungle of Redwood-sized blades of grass (urethane foam and optical fibers, although ostrich feathers were considered at one point for leaves) and such gargantuan menaces as a lawnmower. Transportation includes a giant bee and a friendly ant made of latex foam core covered with horse hair, requiring up to a dozen operators. Former ILM art director Joe Johnston makes his directing debut, backed by special FX supervisor Peter Chesney.

"Most of the movie is cutting between the adventure the kids have, trying to get across this backyard, which at their size represents a four-mile trek, and me trying to look for them," says Moranis. "For most of the film, I don't really play with the kids, I'm playing either with something added in blue screen later, or something that will be matted together.

"I'm getting very used to this," Moranis admits. "I've been working with things that haven't been there for years and years. This is something that people are doing more and more of, and it's something that you must concentrate on. It's just another style of acting. It's not any harder or easier than anything else. In *Ghostbusters*, I have a scene where I'm being chased by a dog that isn't there. Or in *Ghostbusters II*, I have a page-and-a-half long conversation with Slimer. As I'm talking, I'm leaving holes for something to be added later."

So when Wayne Szalinski blithely spoons up his Cheerios, all he sees are Cheerios. But in the finished movie, there are tiny children swimming for their lives amidst Cheerios the size of Saturn's rings. (The Cheerios are played by textured inner tubes; the 16,000 gallons of milk is chlorinated water, pigment and a food product thickener.) Was it hard to be funny on an empty set, looking down into a bowl of breakfast cereal?

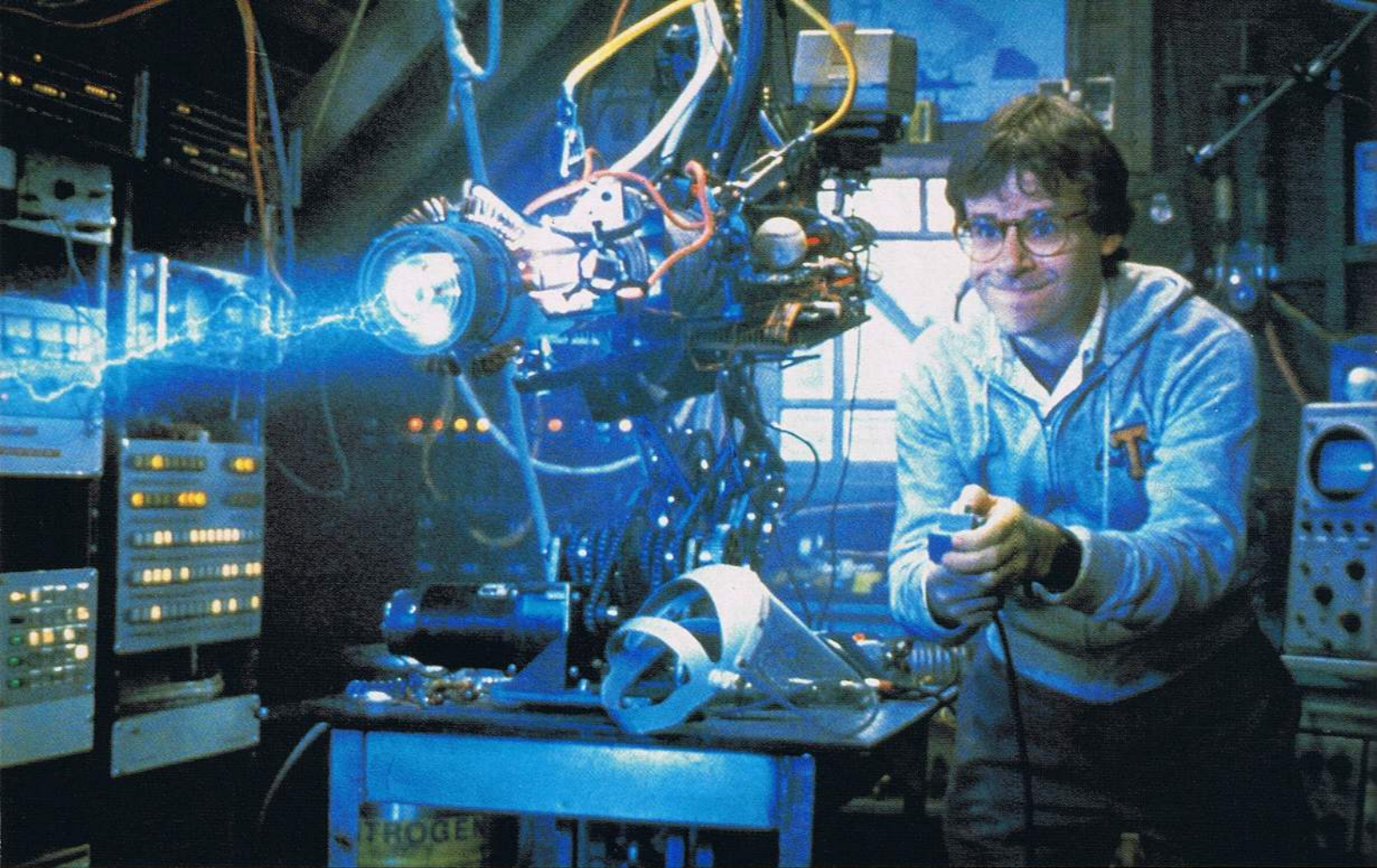
"Well, especially in a movie with special FX, the comedy to a great extent is going to be determined later by editing and pacing and so many extraneous factors, it's not like being funny in a stage situation or a stand-up situation," says Moranis, who actually performed stand-up once upon a time and hated it. "What you try and do is perform technically accurately and put as much character with however much reality basis you can give it—and then you pray. Also, in a situation like that, you may do three or



Some Mafioso spirits intervene to help win Tully's first case for the out-of-work Ghostbusters—Venkman (Bill Murray), Stantz (Dan Aykroyd) and Spengler (Harold Ramis).

four takes of various reactions that get printed, and the editor and the director are going to decide months later which reaction suits the moment the best way. So, in certain instances, a performer is really not that in touch with what the final product is going to be, especially in an effects situation."

JAMI BERNARD, columnist, critic and reporter for The New York Post, has contributed to People, Billboard, Video, COMICS SCENE and FANGORIA. She profiled Jim Henson in STARLOG #142.



As a scientist, Moranis doesn't mind shrinking kids, but as an actor, he takes offense to shortening movie titles like *Honey, I Shrank the Kids*.



Look out, world, Louis Tully wants to become a Ghostbuster, too.

Ad Libs

Not knowing how funny "funny" is going to be when it winds up on the screen seems to cause Moranis less anxiety than not knowing how funny "funny" is going to be when it winds up in print. After giving numerous "funny" interviews, when he was "younger and greener and more glib," Moranis has turned over a new leaf. Goofing on subjects like movie caterers (as he did in STARLOG #86) is a thing of the past. No more playful sparring with reporters. Come-

dians, Moranis feels, should be funny only when they're being paid to be funny, and should watch their backs at other times.

All right, he does say something funny, but he does it so reluctantly, he makes it sound like something out of an historical compendium of late 20th-century humor. "I wasn't available for *Commando*, so they got Arnold Schwarzenegger."

Context being important to Moranis, be advised that this lone one-liner is told during a discussion of Moranis' nerd image. Although he doesn't only play nerds—"I do

sleazes, weasels, geeks, goofs," he reminds—he says he really *is* a nerd in real life. "I'm a short guy and I wear glasses, and people, I guess, think that means that you look nerdy. It's sort of unavoidable for me. When I did Dark Helmet in *Spaceballs*, the note for the character said he wore this gigantic helmet. He was Napoleonic, he was fascist. And the press came out and said I was playing the nerdy leader."

It takes more than wearing a pen-pack to be a nerd; it also takes a certain amount of social unease. Does that also apply to Moranis? "It depends on the situation." Are there social situations where he feels really uncomfortable? "This one, *right now*. I feel very uncomfortable trying to come up with an answer for that question."

What he *doesn't* feel uncomfortable about is appearing in movies that don't turn out too well, as long as they're fun to make. He hated doing *Streets of Fire*, mostly because he was not allowed to improvise, and he disliked the finished product. But while he found *Spaceballs* the Movie "inconsistent and messy," he found *Spaceballs* the Experience a great deal of fun (STARLOG #119). "I still had a great time doing it. I really separate the experience of doing a movie from the final product. I really put a tremendous value on the experience of doing it, which determines to a great extent how I choose my projects."

Which is why, if for no other reason, he

loves *Ghostbusters* and its sequel, now in theaters. "Everyone was, though five years older, five years funnier. The atmosphere on *Ghostbusters II* was exactly the same" as on the set of the first, with comrades in comedy Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis and Ernie Hudson. But Moranis wouldn't do a sequel just for the sake of doing a sequel. "Personally, I would do a sequel to a movie that I had a good time on"—a category that includes *Little Shop of Horrors* (which he discussed in STARLOG #113)—"whereas I wouldn't do a sequel to *Streets of Fire*."

As for *Honey*—"I love the way they shorten the titles to one word," says Moranis, and let the record show that his tone of voice clearly implies that he does *not* love this kind of verbal shorthand, and to make his point, he sarcastically calls *Ghostbusters II* simply *Two*—Moranis says filming on *Honey, I've Shrunk the Kids* went smoothly but that he hated the Mexico City location. "They were very careful with the water and those things, because everything you've heard about Mexico City was *true*. Being down there was pretty frightening. It is absolutely the most polluted place you can imagine. There were days I woke up in my hotel room, and I swore I was sleeping in a garage. The air in my room felt like a car was idling there overnight. The Mexican people are wonderful. They're just in this unfortunate time and place, living in this overpopulated, terribly polluted valley with an inversion layer that has 40 million diesel engines pumping terrible fumes into it."

Moranis and the other adults got their scenes over with early and went home, leaving the younger actors to finish up on the oversized sets. "There was this gigantic version of the floor of the attic where my miniaturizing machine is. You saw all the knots, the hardwood, the heads of the nails, and all the idiosyncracies of a wood floor



Janine (Annie Potts) and Louis (Moranis) do their bit to promote the *Ghostbusters*' return.

that you would never imagine were there until you saw it blown up that big. Also, there were these huge, 15-foot tall blades of grass, and soil and ants."

Spaceballs Photo: Copyright 1987 MGM Entertainment

Even as the head honcho of *Spaceballs*, Moranis (here with George Wyner) was unable to escape his nerd image.



The man who convinced Moranis to take on *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* was Jeffrey Katzenberg, the Walt Disney Studio exec who never takes no for an answer and concludes many of his deals on his car phone while driving to work at 6:30 a.m. "One day, the phone rang and it was him. He told me about this movie and about the kind of film he wanted to do. I read the script and looked at my kids—well, at that time I had one kid—and thought, 'What the heck.'"

Last Chat

At the moment, Moranis has two shrunken kids of his own—well, they're little, anyway, one still in diapers and one nearly out of them. He and his wife live on Manhattan's Upper West Side, and Moranis currently has an office at MGM/UA, where he has a TV development deal in the works, a pilot about "a married couple who allow an academic institution to document their lives." The pilot was co-written with Ken (Airplane II) Finkelman and is being considered by ABC. Moranis also has a movie script of his own, a comedy ("God, I hope so") that he isn't ready to discuss.

And he has a role in his first non-SF based movie since *Strange Brew*, *Parenthood*, directed by Ron Howard. "As the title sug-

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Moranis

(continued from page 33)

gests, it's about parenthood," Moranis says. "Steve Martin is the star. It has a remarkable cast, Jason Robards, Dianne Wiest, Mary Steenburgen, Tom Hulce, Martha Plimpton, Keanu Reeves; can you believe these names? It's a story of people coping with being a parent and a child in today's culture."

Parenthood is due this summer, like *Ghostbusters II*, in which Moranis' Louis Tully takes a more active role on the paranormal team. "He winds up running the business for the Ghostbusters, using his legal and accounting skills. Somebody's gotta do the books."

As in the first *Ghostbusters*, the actors used the script as a "blueprint" and developed their characters from there. "That's how [director] Ivan Reitman works. It's very collaborative and fairly improvisational in terms of looking for jokes and action."

In *Ghostbusters II*, the team reunites when poor Dana Barrett (Sigourney Weaver) finds her baby stroller taking unplanned cruises along the Upper East Side (she has been married and divorced in the intervening years). A river of slime is roiling beneath Manhattan, and it all has to do with a museum painting of Vigo the Carpathian, a baddie who is gradually coming to life.

Moranis speaks often about the importance of collaboration among writers, actors and technicians on movies. But will he ever again have the creative freedom he once had with his Canadian *confreres* in *SCTV*?

"That was a unique situation," he observes. "I know why it was good and why we can't do it anymore. When you're young and hungry and green and you're in Edmonton and you're on at 12:30 at night, and your producer is letting you go way over budget, and you have seven people who are competing with each other but also have a common goal, which is to break out and become rich and famous—you're gonna get good stuff. As soon as the network realizes, 'Hey, this is good, let's put this on in prime time,' it's over. Because now you have people flying up to Edmonton telling you, 'No, no, no, no, this should be a close-up, don't do that.' Suddenly, they're measuring that which shouldn't be measured."

And to explain, perhaps, why some of his colleagues end up in tepid movies: "When you take those same seven people, and you give them agents and lawyers and business managers and accountants and you throw them in Hollywood, and their salaries are competing, and the studios want them to do this and this and this, you've perverted it, you've corrupted it. It's over."

So is the interview. There is some debate over just *how* awful the past hour has been. Rick Moranis, much friendlier by now, insists it hasn't been all that bad. After hearing some evidence to the contrary, he admits, "In other words, then, this was like a bad date." ❄

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