Sequel Fever!

THE FLY II

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Dusting off his proton blaster, this Ghostbuster prepares to scare up new laughs.

By IAN SPELLING

It had been four long years since Bill Murray haunted movie theaters with *Ghostbusters*. But this past Christmas, Murray resurfaced to raise different spirits as Frank Cross, the curmudgeonly network president who tried to siphon every last buck from the pockets of holiday television viewers in *Scrooged*. In the tradition of Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*, Cross' life was forever altered by the appearances of ghosts past (David Johansen), present (Carol Kane) and future, each of whom instilled in him the true meaning of Christmas.

The opportunity to make *Scrooged* first arose well over two years ago, but Murray elected to wait and enjoy his free time. Finally, the desire to perform again hit. "But when I wanted to work, the scripts were just not good," Murray explains.

Then, he returned to the *Scrooged* idea. "We tore up the script so badly that we had parts all over the lawn. There was a lot I didn't like. To remake the story, we took the romantic element [Frank's relationship with his former girl friend, Claire, played by Karen (Steerman) Allen] and built that up a little more. It existed in the script's original version, but we had to make more out of it. The family scenes were kind of off, so we worked on that.

"We shot a big, long sloppy movie, so there's a great deal of material that didn't even end up in the film. It just didn't work. You tend to forget what was wrong. It's hard. I just figured that anyone who's good could step into this part and have a lot of fun with it. It's sort of a wicked character. The idea of making a funny *Scrooge* was an

IAN SPELLING, NY-based writer, profiled Martin Landau in issue #139.
Back off, man, Bill Murray is a Ghostbuster again!
inspired touch. That's what was appealing to me about it.”

After collaborating with writers Mitch Glazer and Michael O'Donoghue (who penned Saturday Night Live's first Star Trek spoof, published in STARLOG #14), Murray felt confident enough to begin shooting. Director Richard Donner (STARLOG #93, 97), who has helmed such diverse projects as Ladyhawke, Superman and Lethal Weapon, had never before dealt with an improvisational comedian as his leading man. Donner considered his task as simple or as difficult as keeping his star in control and positioning performers around him. As time passed, however, Donner discovered the true actor in Bill Murray.

“You don't direct Billy, you pull him back,” admits Donner. “Billy really became an actor to me during Scrooged. I had always thought of him as an entertainer. Now, having worked with him, I could see him playing a heavy. He's a good enough actor. You give him a platform, make him as comfortable as possible, and he comes at you in every direction. He did for me.”

Seasonal Spooks

Despite Donner's assertion that Murray came into his own during the Scrooged shoot, Murray himself claims to have learned more about the pressures of singlehandedly carrying an entire production. Ghostbusters starred Harold Ramis, Dan Aykroyd, Sigourney Weaver, Rick Moranis, Ernie Hudson and Murray, spreading the on-set responsibility among the leads. “Scrooged was harder [than Ghostbusters] because I was by myself, really. Even though there are a number of people in the movie, they only had cameos. They would stroll in for a day or two and split. I was there every day,” Murray notes, “and it was like flunking grade school again and again.”

Worse yet, Frank Cross evolved into a physically demanding role when Murray began sharing scenes with Carol Kane, as the Ghost of Christmas Present. Kane punched, pinched and pummeled Murray frequently.

The work frustrated the emotional actress, who, according to both Murray and Donner, melted into 20-minute-long crying jags at inopportune moments. As painful as the role was for Kane, Murray suffered more for his art. “There's a piece of skin that connects your lip with your gums and it was really pulled away,” recalls Murray of one encounter with Kane. “She really hurt me, but it was my idea to be physical and it was her idea just to hit me as opposed to pulling the punches.”

All work and no play? That's not true as David Johansen and Bill Murray are caught out of character and costumes in this candid shot on the Scrooged set.

Convincing Murray to again don his proton pack alongside buddy Dan Aykroyd wasn't easy. “I was the last holdout,” admits Murray.
A happier relationship will resume as Sigourney Weaver floats back into Murray the Ghostbuster’s life.

**Spectral Sequel**

Murray promises the wait for his next movie won’t be nearly as long as the one for Scrooged. “It’s not going to be called Ghostbusters II,” he reveals. “We’ll burn in hell if we call it Ghostbusters II. I’ve suggested The Last of the Ghostbusters, to make sure there won’t be anything like a Ghostbusters III. But the script is nowhere near ready, and we start shooting soon. [Filming, in fact, began at pre-stime, November 28.] Jeez, more pressure. We’ll figure it out…or we won’t.”

“I was the last holdout. They finally just waved too much money in my face,” laughs Murray. “I really didn’t want to do it for all the obvious reasons, but the reasons to do it were obvious, too. With Dan and Harold and Moranis and Sigourney, we really had a ball. That’s really the most fun I’ve had on a movie. It’s the most fun group to be with.”

“We weren’t so crazy about making money, or being desperate, and it worked,” he confesses. “Finally, Dan and Harold said, ‘We’ve got some ideas here. What do you think?’ We spent a couple of days talking, and they did have some amazing ideas for this story.”

Shortly before pre-stime, even Murray couldn’t confirm Sigourney Weaver’s participation in the sequel. In the years since the original Ghostbusters, Weaver (STARLOG #109) has established herself as a major Hollywood force. Based on her Academy Award-nominated performance as Ripley in ALIENS and the financial triumph of James Cameron’s film, producers consider the actress “bankable,” meaning she wins enough clout to see as controversial and uncommercial a movie as Gorillas in the Mist brought to the screen as a vehicle for her. Though Murray jokingly refers to Gorillas as “The Monkey Movie,” Weaver’s star has risen to the point where accepting a minor role in a Ghostbusters adventure could represent a poor career move.

“She’s not even in the cartoon, so I don’t know if she’s going to be in the film,” Murray says. “The original idea was that she would be in it. The ideas they sold me on to say, ‘OK, let’s do it,’ are no longer in the script. Sigourney was one of those ideas.”

“They’ve gone all the way around trying to figure out how to make it. I had to audition with some actresses, but we all like Sigourney. The only problem with Sigourney is she’s too tall. Naaah, I’m just kidding. She’s tall, but she’s not too tall. The problem is that you would wind up with a story that was tilted and like the Flintstone family. Sigourney and I would be this major thing and it would be hard to figure out how the Ghostbusters’ dynamic would grow. The sort of story they were writing ended up not really needing the other three guys.”

Fortunately, though, matters have been settled. Reached at pre-stime, Weaver confirms she will be in The Last of the Ghostbusters as “the female lead, as far as I know.”

Murray looks forward to the filming—sort of. “Oh, what the hell,” he sighs. “Even if it’s a dog, this sequel’s going to make money because so many people are going to say, ‘Let’s see if they ruined it’ or ‘Let’s see if it’s any good.’ It’s a creative process and that’s all that counts. We’ve got a few weeks yet,” Bill Murray notes. “It should be interesting.”