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-chanpeau'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 exostulation 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..."
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 Shrank 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 lawn mower. 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 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."

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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. Comedians, 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 Shrank 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’ve 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 idiosyncrasies of a wood floor 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.”

The man who convinced Moranis to take on Honey, I Shrank 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 Finkelstein 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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gests, it's about parenthood," Moralis 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 Moralis' 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 gott
da to 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 col-
laborative 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 roll-
ing beneath Manhattan, and it all has to do
with a museum painting of Vigo the Car-
pathian, a battler who is gradually coming
to life.

Moralis speaks often about the impor-
tance 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 Edmon-
ton 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 peo-
ple 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 Moralis, much friendlier by now, in-
sists it hasn't been all that bad. After hear-
ing some evidence to the contrary, he ad-
mits, "In other words, then, this was like a
bad date."