

UK/SPECIAL EFFECTS

IMAGE ANIMATION CREATES CREEPY CRAWLERS

Ken Russell, never a director to curtail the cinematic enactment of his kinkiest violent/sexual imaginings, does not exactly enter new realms of grotesquerie in his new film, Vestron Pictures' *Lair of the White Worm*; on the other hand, fans of *The Devils* and *Gothic* will not be disappointed.

This contemporary adaptation of Bram Stoker's novel displays nuns impaled on stakes, the title creature squirming out of a pit, and a fanged snake lady spewing venom at a crucifix.

Executing the ideas of such a visionary director could be daunting, but designer Geoff Portass of Image Animation, a British special makeup and creative effects house, says Russell can be surprisingly amenable. The filmmaker employed the three-year-old company to create a seven-headed John the Baptist for *Salome's Last Dance*, and hired them again to bring *Lair's* more fanciful moments to life.

The first task was to design the worm itself. Portass says Russell's primary input had to do with the serpent's history: "He explained

that this thing had lived underground for 400 years, kept alive by sacrificial virgins, and never seeing daylight," recounts Portass. "So it would have to look fairly pale. What we did on the skin were lilac tones, with interesting colors underneath." Portass presented Russell with a range of eye renderings that fit in with the worm's color scheme, from which the director selected a "see-through" look.

"He wanted the eyes to look blind, so we didn't have to worry about any eye movement," says Portass. "Which was fortunate, since this was not a large-budget movie."

The worm, supposedly hundreds of feet long, was built in four sizes, from a small hand puppet to a model with a 2.5 meter high head. Three versions of the serpent were used for the scene in which it looks progressively larger as it slithers up a deep well, shot on a false perspective set. This scene climaxes with the worm rising up and snapping at the latest virgin-here the large model was raised on a forklift rig, with two jaw operators inside the head.

The British special effects house, Image Animation, created all the effects for Ken Russell's *The Lair of the White Worm*. The "viper-fangs" were created by fitting fang-shaped models of the actor's incisors directly onto the actor's teeth, holding them in place with a brace molded to the roof of the mouth.



PHOTO BY CLIVE COOTE

Portass provided "big, long viper fangs" for several characters, most prominently Lady Sylvia Marsh, the reincarnated cobra woman who lures the worm's victims. The fangs were modeled out of dental acrylic casts of the actors' incisors; each fit directly onto the appropriate actor's teeth, held in place with a brace molded to the roof of the mouth. Amanda Donohue—who played Lady Sylvia—could "just close her mouth without impaling her bottom lip," says Portass. To make her venom (a "greenish slime recipe") appear to shoot out of her mouth, a tube with a syringe and a small blocking nozzle was attached to the off-

camera side of her face. "When it came out it spat," says Portass. "We hit about 1.25 meters on one shot."

Portass describes Image Animation as a young outfit—both he and partner Bob Keen are 28, and few of the 15-odd employees are over 30. The company has already created special makeup effects for such films as *Lifeforce*, *Hellraiser*, and *Waxwork*, as well as Duran Duran and Kate Bush videos. Another recent project was the sequel to *Hellraiser*, titled *Hellbound*. In that film, a 4 meter high tentacle drills into the top of a man's head and picks him up.

JOHN CALHOUN

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AD INDEX

A DB Lighting System . . . . .	8	JCN . . . . .	42
Altman Stage Lighting . . . . .	17	Lancelyn Lighting . . . . .	47
Artifex Corp. . . . .	2	Lighting Dimensions International 89 . . . . .	21
Avolites Production Co. . . . .	CV 3	Ness Imports . . . . .	CV 4
CCT Lighting . . . . .	4	Nocturne . . . . .	20
Electrol Engineering . . . . .	46	Roscolab . . . . .	CV 2, 1
Goddard Design . . . . .	2	Siel 89 . . . . .	44
The Great American Market . . . . .	5	Strand Lighting . . . . .	21
Harlequin International . . . . .	28	Universal Manufacturing Co. . . . .	41
High End Systems . . . . .	29	White Light . . . . .	6