

HOLIDAY MOVIE PREVIEW

An essential behind-the-scenes guide to the season's 23 new films

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GARY OLDMAN IS

DRACULA

Inside Coppola's kind

FOR OFFICE USE

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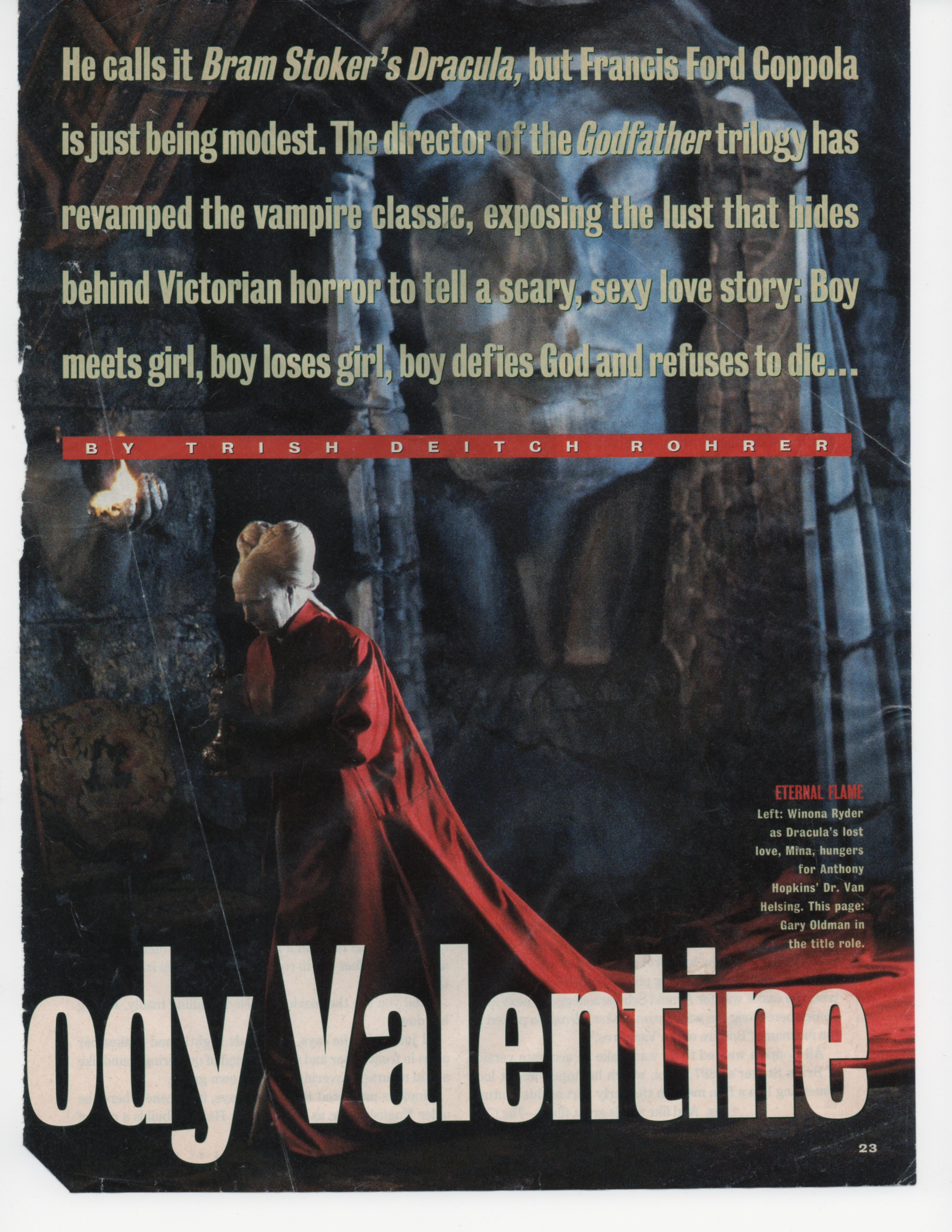
22

ACCENTUATE THE
O-POSITIVE:
Gary Oldman starts a
red alert in *Bram
Stoker's Dracula*



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Coppola's Bio

A woman in a red dress is shown in profile, looking down in a dark, gothic setting. The background is a large, dark stone wall with a window showing a blue-tinted scene. A small flame is visible on the left wall.

He calls it *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, but Francis Ford Coppola is just being modest. The director of the *Godfather* trilogy has revamped the vampire classic, exposing the lust that hides behind Victorian horror to tell a scary, sexy love story: Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy defies God and refuses to die...

B Y T R I S H D E I T C H R O H R E R

ETERNAL FLAME

Left: Winona Ryder as Dracula's lost love, Mina, hungers for Anthony Hopkins' Dr. Van Helsing. This page: Gary Oldman in the title role.

ody Valentine

IT WAS A RIVER of blood, flowing across the lot at Sony Studios one rainy day last year. Production designer Tom Sanders was in his golf cart when he saw it—thick, viscous, and terribly crimson—running down an alley between two hangarlike soundstages, along the main street, clear across the studio. “I wonder what show *this* is coming from,” he thought. *Hero* was shooting then, and several television programs, and the lot was teeming with people, all splashing around and complaining about the blood, which was everywhere. Then it hit him: It had to be coming from the film he was working on himself, Francis Ford Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*.

HOLLYWOOD IS a small, provincial town, where huge amounts of other people’s money are laid down on commodities that are about as predictable as a madman’s mood. It’s understandable, then, that anxiety would often run high here, and paranoid speculation be a favored pastime. Add to this mix a maverick director like Francis Ford Coppola and a \$40-million horror movie/love story where young, A-list actors and actresses are asked to vomit blood, eat worms, chop the heads off their lovers, be raped by beasts, fellated by women with fangs, and beg to die the little death with a vampire, and you’ve got pharmacies that can’t keep enough Prozac in stock and cellular phone bills hitting all-time highs.

There were the rumors, for instance, that Coppola had fired the respected Hollywood designer Dante Ferretti and hired a young nobody to start designing sets from scratch, just six weeks before shooting (true). That Coppola’s leading lad and lady, Gary Oldman and Winona Ryder, could barely stand to be in the same room together (true, for a while). And that, at the first test screening of *Dracula*, audience members were throwing up in the aisles (not true). Finally, just a couple of weeks before the movie was due to premiere, there was the rumor that Coppola had erected another castle on the Columbia lot and was starting production *all over again* (not true; the castle was for Arnold Schwarzenegger’s next film). Somewhere along the way, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* picked up the nickname “Bonfire of the Vampires.”

All Coppola wanted to do was make an accurate version of Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel, which he hoped might look something like a film made in the early part of this century.

And like all his great films—*The Con-*

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versation, *The Godfather* and *The Godfather, Part II*, *Apocalypse Now*—he wanted this one to be different from other, more conventional, Hollywood films: Rather than something slick, he wanted a soulful movie filled with magic. What he wanted to create was not the money-sucking monster Hollywood executives nervously—and sometimes fearfully—awaited (right through its opening on Friday the 13th of November) but, as Coppola calls it, “an erotic dream.”

THE DAY BEFORE Halloween 1992, Winona Ryder sits in a hotel room in New York City with her hands squeezed between her knees. She has just seen *Dracula* for the first time and she feels “shaky.” Suddenly the doorbell rings and it’s Anthony Hopkins, stocky, suited, and freshly shorn, who takes the tiny 21-year-old actress into his arms and twirls her around the room in a massive hug, her feet swinging, as daintily as feet can in combat boots, several inches above the carpet.

“Did you see the movie?” he says, smiling madly, setting her down.

“I just did,” she says, and bends slightly and shakes her arms in front of her and makes a kind of quivering sound like a paid mourner hovering over her own grave.

Hopkins protected Ryder, she says, in a scene where the older English actor, as mad Dr. Van Helsing, builds a ring of



fire around the young actress, playing the nearly undead Mina, to ward off Dracula's vampire brides. Ryder has a fear of fire, and she'd been dreading that scene for the entire shoot.

"The flames were sweeping in, and we're in the middle, and he's doing this whole performance, and I was crying," she recalls. "At one point his leg caught on fire, and I was putting it out. But Anthony was very protective; every time they cut, he would lift me up and hold me."

TRANSYLVANIA STATION

Left: Filming at Sony Studios in Culver City, site of the entire production. Below: Ryder in her accustomed spot on the director's lap. Bottom: A newly undeceased Lucy (Sadie Frost) has a coffin fit as Hopkins (center) and (l. to r.) suitors Bill Campbell, Cary Elwes, and Richard E. Grant look on.

Hopkins says, "Remember the rats?" and laughs uproariously.

"I did well with the rats," Ryder says of the scene in which Dracula escapes the bedroom where Mina has holed up by turning himself into an extended family of rats. "When it was over I stood up on that bed and I said, 'Yes!'" Ryder puts her thumbs up in the air, victorious.

"Winona has a fear of everything," Coppola says when he hears her stories about the fire and the rats. "But she *did* get on the bed and there *were* rats on it—that was her greatest day, and she was very proud." Then he smiles





LOVE HURTS

Top: Oldman, playing Dracula in his sensitive Prince Vlad mode, necks with a wayward Mina in turn-of-the-century London.

Above: The vampire shows he's a real animal as he feasts on Lucy.

sources that Winona Ryder thought he didn't like her. The young actress, you'll remember, had been scheduled to play Mary Corleone in *Godfather III* but dropped out at the last possible minute, leading the director to cast his daughter, Sofia, a move that subjected both father and daughter to what surely was devastating criticism.

So Coppola invited Ryder to his office, just to let her know he wasn't angry. The meeting must have gone well, because on her way out, she handed him a script of a movie she was interested in doing: a new version of *Dracula*, which *Hook* screenwriter James V. Hart had adapted from Stoker's novel. Three days later she got the call. Coppola was interested in doing it too.

THERE IS GREAT, METICULOUS method in Coppola's madness. After agreeing to direct *Dracula*, he started right in on storyboarding the thing—having an artist draw each shot in the film until there were about a thousand images that together told the story: how the vampire Dracula comes to 1890s London, 400 years after his beloved wife committed

and says, under his breath, "The rats were a mile away."

EARLY 1991: Having just finished *The Godfather, Part III*, Coppola began to hear from a variety of

suicide, only to find her reincarnated as Mina, the innocent young fiancée of Jonathan Harker (Keanu Reeves) and best friend to Lucy (Sadie Frost), a wild, libidinous girl whom Dracula ravishes and destroys while courting the woman he has crossed oceans of time to find.

Coppola took the artist's drawings and filmed them, creating a crudely animated version of the movie he wished to make. He set this to music, and added clips from movies like Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* as well as reproductions of works by such symbolist painters as Gustav Klimt, so that when he was ready to sit his designers down, he'd have some way to communicate the tone and mood and world he was hoping to capture. He asked the people designing his sets and costumes and make-up to think "weird."

"'Weird' became a code word for 'Let's not do formula,'" says Coppola. "'Give me something that either comes from the research or that comes from your own nightmares.' I gave them paintings, and I gave them drawings, and I talked to them about how I thought the im-

FIRST COPPOLA HAD AN ARTIST STORYBOARD THE ENTIRE MOVIE, ABOUT A THOUSAND SHOTS, THEN HE FILMED THE DRAWINGS AND ADDED CLIPS FROM *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*



Waits as Renfield

agery could work." In one of the art books that he showed his cast and crew, *Dreamers of Decadence*, he had underlined the sentence, "Our century is not moving towards either good or evil: it is moving towards mediocrity."

COPPOLA SENT HIS 27-year-old son, Roman, already assigned as second unit director, out to research how special effects were done in the early days of movies. Roman came back with a bag of magic tricks, including a hand-cranked Pathé camera made in 1905, which the director used, among other things, to shoot little snippets of Victorian pornography that appear when Dracula first finds himself with his teeth in the proximity of Mina's neck.

Because he was on a limited budget, Coppola made the decision to shoot the movie entirely on soundstages, but he didn't want to spend much of his budget on sets: He wanted Eiko Ishioka's dazzling costumes to be the sets, and the backgrounds to be, ideally, shadows, darkness, or maybe just a wall and a window. If he'd had more time to experiment, and the cooperation of his designers, he would have used projections—photographs thrown onto walls by a slide projector—instead of sets. "I used to talk to the crew," he says, "and get them excited, and say, 'Oh, we're not going to have a lot of big sets—we're going to have space and shadows and projections,' but, in the end, those people don't want to look like fools to their peer group. They want to get Academy Award nominations." Mainly, though, what Coppola wanted was to take the emphasis off the surroundings and put it on the performances of his actors.

OVER THE DRIVEWAY in front of Coppola's large Victorian house in Napa Valley last fall, the young actors who play Lucy's three suitors, Bill Campbell, Cary Elwes, and Richard E. Grant, hovered awkwardly in a hot-air balloon. Coppola had invited them, along with the other principal actors (including Tom Waits, who plays Renfield, Dracula's bug-eating thrall), up to his estate to begin to build a shared history on which they could draw when it came time to act.

"Francis wanted us to go ballooning together," Campbell says, "so we got up early in the morning—I know I had a hell of a hangover—and they brought the balloon right outside the front door of his place. But the cloud cover was too low, and all the balloon could do was go 40 feet in the air, still tied to the ropes. So we went up in the balloon just over the driveway and felt like three idiots. Cary had a top hat on, and Francis came out in a big old bathrobe, smoking a cigar, and

sat out on his front porch and laughed at us."

"These are young, professional actors," says Coppola, "many of them acclaimed, and spoiled, and what have you. So partly I'm the camp counselor: I have to always come up with some fun thing to get their interest, so they're not bitching about the costumes or something. I played games with them the whole time, and I sang to them. Winona sat on my lap through half the movie."

ALONG THE WAY, COPPOLA HIRED acting coach Greta Seacat to work with Frost and Ryder. "I brought in Greta," he says, "because I don't feel comfortable talking about a lot of sexual stuff to young girls. I've never been good at that in life, asking girls to take their clothes off." He shrugs and smiles. "So I very much wanted Greta, who's a woman I feel very comfortable with, to be my go-between—to help me ask these girls to perform in more erotic ways."

Frost says, "I was very frightened about the scene where Lucy's writhing there on the bed. So Greta said something like, 'Be an animal—imagine you're an animal,' and she took the emphasis off of being a woman."

"I'm never going to ask a woman to take her clothes off again for the rest of my life," Coppola continues. "I find it too hard. So then I tell my son, I say, 'Okay, Roman, you go over there and tell her she's got to take her clothes off.' And he says, 'I'm not going to do it.'" Coppola throws up his hands. "No one wanted to do it."

He was brave enough, though, to ask Gary Oldman to say mysterious things to Frost from behind the camera, while on the bed she imagined herself as something other than a woman. When asked what Oldman said, Frost comes undone: "He's, like, saying quite kind of sexy things, and, you know, trying to, um, something"—her face drains of color—"very unrepeatably."

Frost found an emotional connection with Oldman necessary for her work, even though she'd been afraid of the complicated actor ever since the day he, as Dracula, yelled at her on the set. Ryder could make no such connection.

"I love Keanu Reeves," Ryder says. "I really loved working with him, and I loved his character. But Gary was very, very different. He's English, and he's from a different world than I am. He's 13 years older than me. And also, aside from all that, the way he works..." She tries to find the proper words for something she clearly finds baffling and distasteful. "It was like I didn't know him, because he was doing his Dracula thing"—she rocks back and forth—"I still don't feel like I ever met Gary Oldman"—she looks pleadingly across the room—"but I feel like I met everyone else?"

For Coppola, the kinds of conflicts and anxieties that overtake young actors are old news: "It happens in movies. One month they're in love, the next month they're mad, the next month their boyfriend came back, 'and he said that she said this, and I'm not talking to him.' But that's like kids. I have kids. I know all about that."

COPPOLA'S PATERNALISM apparently gave out, though, the day he became so angry at some of his cast he shut the set down. "We were rehearsing the scene

"THESE ARE YOUNG ACTORS, MANY OF THEM ACCLAIMED, AND SPOILED, AND WHAT HAVE YOU," SAYS COPPOLA. "SO I PLAYED GAMES WITH THEM THE WHOLE TIME."



Reeves as Harker

in which Gary's dressed up like a bat, he's standing on the bed, everyone's in the room," he recalls. The scene wasn't working, he says—the lines weren't coming fast enough and the actors were having trouble looking as shocked as they were meant to. On top of all that, it was the first scene the senior English actor, Hopkins, and the young English leading man had together, and they were both doing a bit of showing off.

"They all like to preside over things," says Coppola, "and I think at that point there was a little of the young leading man demonstrating his spurs. Gary started saying"—here Coppola breaks into an exaggerated imitation of Oldman's self-described "posh" English accent—"Francis, you know, we're going to get the lines, and we'll do something...," and I just said, 'F--- this. I don't want to put up with that.'"

ONE DAY, OLDMAN SLIPPED in a pool of blood and banged his head, hard, on the floor. Another day, he had to be rushed to an emergency room when he had an allergic reaction to his latex costume. And once, makeup-effects designer Greg Cannom had to rip open the face of Oldman's bat costume when the actor became so claustrophobic he couldn't breathe.

Asked if he'd like to do another horror movie like *Dracula*, Gary Oldman pauses, "I think I might have to let the memory of this subside before I would do it again," he says. "Carrying around those costumes and those high collars and wigs, you have to have a reserve tank of energy just to act through all that rubber."

"Look," Coppola says, "if you make *Dracula* and people are not saying the guy who plays Dracula is fantastic, you're dead. And whatever people say about this film, they all say, 'Oh, this guy who played Dracula is great.' So a director's like a parent, and I just want to say good things about everyone: They did work hard, pampered as they are."

WINONA RYDER, FEELING ONLY slightly better after a few serious dives into a bowl of spaghetti and tomato sauce delivered by the hotel room service, says, "I had fun because the cast and a lot of the crew were very fun people. I mean, fun is such a f--ed-up word, anyway. I mean, what's fun? You can have a really fun time without being happy. But it was fun."

UP AT HIS WINERY IN NAPA VALLEY in September, a week before he's scheduled to deliver his finished film, while the sound people are madly mixing and the music people are frantically editing the score, Coppola is standing in baggy

shorts and Chinese slippers describing how filmmaking and wine making are similar.

"You get the source material"—he waves his hand out over acres of vineyards, the grapes almost ready for harvest—"and sometimes it's great, and sometimes it's not as great, and then you shmoosh it together"—he mashes the imaginary source material between his hands—"and then you select it, and edit it, and work with it, and, in the last stage"—here Coppola looks anxiously toward the barn where he knows several young people in jeans and summer smocks are locked in rooms working against the clock on the movie—"and in the last stage," he says, "you finish it."

COPPOLA SAYS HE DIDN'T CUT much out of his film. The MPAA asked him to trim some of the more explicit drawings of people making love in an illustrated version of the *Arabian Nights* that Mina and Lucy look at together, but that was it.

"It's true," says Coppola, "that when we previewed it, we had everything in, more than you would ever put in." He is talking about a room filling up with so much blood that Winona Ryder, lying dead on the floor, becomes completely submerged; a sequence in which Oldman, wrapped in a kind of caul, dissolves into a giant clot of blood; and another in which one of Dracula's vampire brides takes a real live three-week-old baby and rushes down a hall with it to find a place to suck its life away. "And I just thought, it's one thing to use blood as a metaphor, but it would confuse people if, for example, I submerged Winona in blood. I would be more excessive than many people, but I am trying to get them into the story, rather than overwhelm them in the first 10 minutes. I want it to be fun. And I wanted them to understand it." So those three scenes were trimmed.

THIS IS WHAT FRANCIS FORD Coppola is saying to himself, now that the film he has directed for the last year is finally out of his hands and into the hands of a community that both reveres and doubts him. He's saying: "Remember that anything that's really worthwhile, any work of art in any field, if it's really interesting, is going to be controversial. There are going to be people who love it, and there're going to be people who hate it. I'm a very successful director who has not had a lot of success the year the film is coming out. But I know that over the years, if it's worthwhile, it will live. And, ultimately, living is the real secret."

STANDING IN FRONT OF the enormous blank screen at the Ziegfeld theater in New York City, Francis Ford Coppola looks like a tiny man on the edge of a bright and empty universe. He has made a short speech to a preview audience in which he has talked about how and why his film came about, but he hasn't mentioned the troubles, the rumors, or the fact that it was in this very theater that he screened *Apocalypse Now* for the first time—to just this kind of jazzed but apprehensive audience—and got mixed-to-bad reviews. Instead he says simply that they should sit back and enjoy "Francis Coppola's version of *Bram Stoker's Dracula*." And then he jogs up the aisle as the lights go down, to the raucous sound of innocent applause. ♦

"REMEMBER THAT ANY WORK OF ART, IF IT'S INTERESTING, IS GOING TO BE CONTROVERSIAL," SAYS THE DIRECTOR. "IF IT'S WORTHWHILE, IT WILL LIVE."



Coppola on the set