

BRENDAN FRASER

DUDLEY DO-RIGHT

The versatile actor on fleshing out yet another Jay Ward cartoon fantasy.

By Joe Fordham

Meet GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE. Meet ENCINO MAN. Meet the tortured adolescent struggling to resolve anti-Semitic sentiment in his public school in WITH HONORS. Meet Clay, the lawn-mowing ex-Marine attempting to reconcile his own macho sensibilities and attitudes to love and death in the company of aging film director James Whale in GODS AND MONSTERS. Meet Rick O'Connell, romantic action hero of Universal Studio's high-tech remake of THE MUMMY. The impressive range and diversity of Brendan Fraser's roles have garnered the young actor the respect of critics, a broad audience appeal and a list of 15 films on his resumé to date—the latest of which is his portrayal of DUDLEY DO-RIGHT, his second incarnation of a '60s Jay Ward animated icon, which Universal opens August 27.

Fraser is as excited as anyone that Universal is also making a movie based on Jay Ward's classic, wacky cartoon duo ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE—even though he's not in it! As veteran now of two Ward flicks, Disney's 1997, \$100 million grosser GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE and Universal's DUDLEY DO-RIGHT, Fraser has kindly gone on record to offer his services to the ROCKY team. "I'm going to do craft services for it," he joked.

Fresh from his adventures wrassling mummies in the Moroccan desert for Universal's wham-bam remake of THE



Fraser and Sarah Jessica Parker as Nell, recreating the ambience of ROSE MARIE, Ward's inspiration for his '60s Saturday-morning cartoon spoof.

MUMMY, the normally soft-spoken Fraser lit up when recounting the most recent tales of Jay Ward's bumbling Royal Canadian Mountie. "Dudley is alive and well in Witsawana, Canada, with the diabolical Snidely Whiplash played by Alfred Molina," Fraser proclaimed. "By the way, between you and me and all the readers of *Cinefantastique*, Alfred Molina is the real star of DUDLEY DO-RIGHT. He's wonderful! A killer moustache-twidling performance. Hilarious! He's just... diabolical!"

In his pursuit of Snidely—"the worst bad guy ever!"—Dudley also encounters "the worst bad guy gang ever." With Sarah Jessica Parker rounding out the cast—ho, ho!—as Dudley's damsel in distress, Nell Fenwick, and Robert Prosky playing the now-retired Inspector Fenwick, everyone punned

and japed from a screenplay by Hugh Wilson, under the direction of Australian Scott Hicks (SHINE).

For those technically inclined, Fraser noted that his steed in the film, Horse, was given a little CGI enhancement to make "his eyeballs a little bit funnier and cuter, but there's not a whole lot you can teach a horse to do," he laughed, still somewhat delirious at the memory of the shoot. "Sometimes you get lucky, as we did in this film; although I think a few supernatural events actually occurred to help Horse with his performance, like the time we tried to get him to talk and another time I had to get him to bite my ear off with a carrot in my pocket. He runs away, you know, because things go really bad for Dudley. He loses his job, he loses his horse, he loses his outpost, he loses his girl and

he has a moment of self-realization, as pointed out by Eric Idle, who plays the Prospector."

This retelling of the Dudley legend bends the myth a bit for the post-T2, butt-kick-hungry audience. Fraser concurred: "Dudley gets a motorcycle and a machine gun and starts kicking butt. We've catapulted him into the '90s." Modern day accoutrements aside, Fraser kept his own chin for his venture into the ultimate in square-jawed heroism. "It was prominently displayed as best as I could." The movie has turned out as "a real merry romp," he said, inspired just as much by MGM's classic melodrama ROSE MARIE—the original source of all the merriment for Jay Ward's cartoon capers back in 1963—as by the cartoon itself.

"ROSE MARIE was a favorite film of Hugh Wilson's," Fraser noted. "We even recreated a couple of dance numbers that are a direct knock-off of the old MGM classic, with Indians and pigs in dinner theatre costumes." This was not the first time that Wilson had coaxed a dance performance from his nimble star, the first being Fraser's hot-foot swing session with Alicia Silverstone in BLAST FROM THE PAST." Fraser laughed at the experience, "Hugh now likes to boast that I am the only guy in Hollywood who can actually do all that stuff I list on the bottom of my resumé."

Fraser promised a marked difference between DUDLEY DO-RIGHT and its live-action predecessor GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE as a result of the



With Parker and Alfred Molina as the villainous Snidely Whiplash, who Fraser dubs as the film's real star in "a killer moustache-twiddling performance."

studios attached. Whereas *GEORGE* was Disney, *DUDLEY* is Universal, produced by John Davis, Joseph Singer and J. Todd Harris, the team responsible for Eddie Murphy's recent, bawdy reincarnation of *DOCTOR DOOLITTLE*. "The two films are worlds apart," Fraser noted, "although they were both inspired by the same guru, Jay Ward. *GEORGE* was an effects-heavy film that really required that support to create a jungle man who could swing through trees and smash into them without killing himself and still look funny. With *DUDLEY DO-RIGHT* we have focused more on the spirit of what Jay Ward presented in terms of genre satire, digging social commentary and subversive humor. I know for a fact that the Ward family is supportive and Ramona—who now runs her late father's business—is definitely a big fan of the film. I think *DUDLEY* carries on the torch of being in the spirit of Jay Ward's clever qualities."

Fans of the original series can also rest assured that the indispensable trademark breathless, earnest narration that informed all the cartoons also fea-

tures in the *DUDLEY* plan. "Bill Scott normally did the voice of the heroes," Fraser explained. "He did the original voice of George and Bullwinkle, and he did the voice of Dudley. If you listen to them back-to-back, they're really all the same; the reason being, as the family have told me since we've become quite close, they would write a script on a Tuesday, then on Thursday they would get together and read it over and over, just having fun with it, so by next Monday they'd have it finished and start again on the next. It was like

Fraser with Indian Chief Alex Rocco. His turn as Do-Right follows his star-making role as Ward's *GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE*, and horror hit *THE MUMMY*.



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doing little playlets all the time, there was an atmosphere like summer stock theatre, they were all playing the same part but in a different play."

In keeping with the grooving, no-rules Ward experience, the movie version of *DUDLEY* throws dramatic convention aside in favor of sometimes painfully cheap laughs. "Now and then we even have the Narrator and break the fourth wall, like we did in *GEORGE*," laughed Fraser. "At one point we even had the bad guys argue with the Narrator and he got mad and punished them." Anything goes in the Jay-rated world.

In many ways, Somers' proposed style for his vision of *THE MUMMY* seemed tailor-made for Fraser, allowing him to mine his natural sense of humor while simultaneously thrusting him into his first full-fledged action role. "I love the process of filmmaking," Fraser emphasized. "I find it fascinating that I'm an actor in the middle of a huge machine. It kind of gives me a front row seat. I love the challenge of doing my part, of choosing the moment for the effect you want. Technical things really don't matter in the end. It's just an actor and an audience, and it's just a job that I am thrilled to be in a position to take."

Now firmly established as A-

list acting talent, Fraser has found success has brought its own rewards in terms of the availability of projects. "To tell the truth, I'm finding fewer scripts are coming my way, just better ones. It's cutting out the fat." Undoubtedly one recent example of a higher quality project was *GODS AND MONSTERS*, Bill Condon's adaptation of Christopher Bram's novel *Father of Frankenstein*.

"The script was sent to me as 'Untitled piece, starring Ian McKellan'—that got my interest," Fraser remarked. "It was a compelling story set in old Hollywood about beginning life and leaving life, about fathers and sons, about creation and the metaphysical state, about the relationship between master and mentor, and it ultimately showed us how very human we are. It also incorporated the world of one of my favorite films of the genre, the classic *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*."

Although *GODS AND MONSTERS* and *THE MUMMY* are poles apart in their depictions of two classic horror icons, the projects can very loosely be seen to share a common bond in the sense that they are both examples of Hollywood's ability to reinvent itself. "I think, in a way, it's nostalgia and revisionist history," Fraser observed. "So much has happened this century and along the way these characters have given us guideposts. When the yuppies say they remember *GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE*, it gives them a real strong reference point to help us try and remember where we have come from as we look towards the new millennium; and I think there's enough difference between what these stories were then and what they are now that we can reconceive them. I don't think it's just a matter of Hollywood recycling characters." □