



FINE YOUNG

How did little rich boy Hannibal Lecter grow up to be a cultured serial killer with a

WORDS **MATT MUELLER**

In the deep, dark recesses of Barrandov Studios, outside Prague, Hannibal Lecter is about to try on the first mask of his young life. Deliberately echoing the iconic face-muzzle Lecter wore in *The Silence Of The Lambs*, it's a ghoulish Samurai mask, red on the inside, black on the outside, which teenage Hannibal, 17 going on psycho, tenderly brushes with a cloth before applying to his face. He stares straight ahead in a ceremonial trance.

"Cut!" barks director Peter Webber, as wizened Italian producer Dino DeLaurentiis moves toward his director to spark a heated debate. Something about Webber's framing is bothering the 86-year-old legend, who looks every inch the heavyweight producer only minus an enormous cigar (he's

rationed now). Plus, he croaks, "We've got to fix the mask!"

"We've already talked about this," counters Webber testily. "Don't you remember the e-mail I sent you about it?"

This, apparently, is a reshoot of the mask scene *with* the new mask – the previous one was a bit rubbish. While Gaspard Ulliel, the 21-year-old French actor (*A Very Long Engagement*) plucked from hundreds of hopefuls to play the budding serial killer, waits patiently, the two men bicker before finally moving on to the next take. It's a crucial moment in *Hannibal Rising*, and the pressure's on to get it right...

Later, Webber (*Girl With A Pearl Earring*, although it was his work on 2001 TV drama *Men Only* that landed him the gig) will shrug it off as

just another day at the office. "The producer-director relationship is always like a marriage. You have your good days and your bad days. I'm not going to pretend that every minute has been love and kisses; we've had our moments, but they make for a better film."

"Dino's a legend," he continues. "He's made some great films, he's made some lousy films. He's worked with some great directors. He's fired great directors! He fired Nicolas Roeg and Robert Altman, so I'm lucky to have survived this long..."

With *Hannibal Rising*, DeLaurentiis and his buxom fortysomething lady-love Martha, also a producer on the film, are cashing in again on the franchise that's bankrolled their lifestyle, pension funds and then some in the 20 years since *Manhunter*. After knocking a once-classy



CANNIBAL

taste for human flesh and chianti? Total Film visits the set of *Hannibal Rising*...

saga off its Oscar-laden perch with 2001's *Hannibal* and 2002's *Red Dragon* (ironically, *The Silence Of The Lambs* is the only Lecter movie they had nothing to do with), DeLaurentiis and partner convinced reclusive novelist Thomas Harris to trawl his Lecter net once more.

Following in the wake of *Leatherface* being rationalised as the product of school bullying, we now get a feature-length explanation of why Hannibal Lecter ended up relishing (human) liver with fava beans. It's all the result of a grisly childhood trauma, apparently. Residing in Lithuania during World War Two, Lecter's family flee their castle home for a forest hunting lodge, where his parents are killed in crossfire and, eventually, his three-year-old sister Mischa is killed, cooked and eaten by a nasty pack of

'I picked up a few things from Anthony Hopkins. Blinking and stillness...' GASPARD ULLIEL

Lithuanian thugs led by Rhys Ifans' Grutas and his henchman Kolnas (Kevin McKidd).

"Their main ambition is to be accepted into the SS because they think they have great uniforms and do really mean things," says McKidd of the bad, bad men who eat Hannibal's baby sis. "They're sewer rats, basically." In other words, reprobates who deserve everything Hannibal dishes out to them later, when he seeks his revenge. It's always been Lecter's way: pick off the ones that no right-minded audience would think deserved any other fate than gruesome,

agonising death at the hands and mouth of a cultured cannibal.

As lifestyle motivating factors go, however, it's pretty crude and rudimentary, so we also get Hannibal's sexy, artistic Japanese aunt, Lady Murasaki (Gong Li), his uncle's widow who takes in little orphan Hannibal after the war. "He's raised by this weird lady in this insane relationship," says Ulliel. "She's between a mother and a mistress." Murasaki teaches him the ways of the Samurai and later, in medical school, he becomes obsessed by the workings of the human body.



Choke: one of Hannibal Rising's vicious death scenes.



Meat market: Gaspard Ulliel gets a taste for flesh as Hannibal; razor-sharp scalpels and squelching guts; young Hannibal goes head-to-head with one of the sadist cannibals who ate his sister.

Dream Much, Will?



Total Film chews the fat with original Hannibal Brian Cox...

On *Hannibal Rising*...

"It's Tom Harris' obsession and good luck to him. For me, though, Lecter always worked best when he was a mysterious character and you didn't know who he was. The guy's an enigma; I don't think he's a character that needs contextualising in that way. In the *Hannibal* book, everything was over-explained and it lost its sense of danger."

On Anthony Hopkins...

"People always say, 'How do you feel about Tony Hopkins?' The only thing I think about is, 'Wouldn't it be nice to earn all that money?' I was doing *X2* in Vancouver when somebody rang me up to congratulate me on my reviews for *Hannibal*. I said, 'But I'm not in *Hannibal*.' And they said, 'Oh, we know that. But every time Anthony Hopkins plays the part, they re-review *Manhunter* and you always come off better!'"

On *Manhunter*...

"I still maintain it's the most interesting of the Lecter films. After *The Silence Of The Lambs* came out, they put it on again as *Red Dragon: The Pursuit Of Hannibal Lecter* and it was the biggest TV movie ever. It remains a cult classic; its position is very clearly established. You wait – they'll be doing revivals of Hannibal Lecter over and over. It's a franchise."

Brian Cox spoke to Total Film at the 2006 Dinard Film Festival.

When it came to casting their juvenile Hannibal, Webber insists that it was a simple decision for him after trawling through hours of screentests. "I thought, this is the only person who I'm compelled to watch for two hours. He's got something really special about him. I felt the same way on *Pearl Earring* with Scarlett Johansson. And Gaspard's a bit crazy. There's something a little bit damaged about him, which is fantastic! You want that in an actor."

Ulliel studied Hopkins' performances in *Lambs*, *Hannibal* and *Red Dragon*. "I was free to do my own Hannibal Lecter, but I knew that the audience would look for some resemblances. So I had to feed the expectations." He read the books and watched the films over and over again, *Lambs* in particular. "Sometimes it was frightening because Anthony Hopkins is so amazing in his performance and I was not feeling really

confident. I tried to pick a few details and mix it to my own recipe. The major things were the blinking and his stillness." (Hopkins was approached to shoot bookends in *Hannibal Rising*, but the DeLaurentiis duo claim they decided it didn't fit; they won't say whether he simply declined the offer.)

While Ulliel's preparations were dark and lonely, including digesting reams of studies on and interviews with mass murderers, he says he found the shooting light relief by comparison. "You stay a little in his mind during the whole shoot, but I needed to have some fun at night," he says. "And it was nice to have all those killing scenes. They were fun. It was like a game."

But the final murder Hannibal commits in the film, where he bites a chunk of cheek off his only surviving adversary, was disturbing even for him. When Ulliel arrived on set, the prosthetic was



Night moves: Gong Li as Hannibal's aunt Lady Murasaki; Hannibal corners Rhys Ifans' sicko SS wannabe in the tub.



already on the actor's face, but it looked so real he couldn't tell. He was instructed where to bite and told to be extremely precise, otherwise he might get a real flesh morsel in his mouth. "I did it and it felt so real, the texture of the prosthetic was like a real cheek. It was creepy," he shudders. "He was yelling because I was tearing his cheek apart and there was blood spurting everywhere and then I spat out the piece of cheek. But that was cut; it was too much."

"I can't make the judgment about whether this film is more or less violent than the other ones," says Webber. "It is violent. We've got five or six particularly grisly and inventive murders! I'm not a great one for torrents of blood and all the rest of it, but we've had to get a few buckets out."

So after seeing Hannibal rise, is this the end of his on-screen antics or simply a new lease of life? The final verdict will be left up to moviegoers. As far as its makers are concerned,

'We've got five or six particularly grisly and inventive murders'

PETER WEBBER, DIRECTOR

there's plenty of scope for more. "With this idea we create a new franchise," Dino wheezes to *Total Film*. "There's a new actor, nothing to do with the older Hannibal Lecter and Anthony Hopkins. Here we finish when he escapes to Canada. But from Canada, he goes to America, he becomes a doctor. If this is successful, no question we do more..."

"I personally think that there's been a dwindling in the quality of this franchise," admits Webber. "I would never have had the nerve to do this otherwise. And I feel a personal responsibility to be not the person who buries it, but the person who revives it."

Hannibal Rising is released on 9 February and will be reviewed next issue.

Tall Back-Stories

Prequel pitches from Development Hell... Words: Andy Lowe and Mark Powell

Psycho Jr

Starring... The Scowling Child
Off Of The Omen remake

A tedious tale of suburban idyll is shattered when Mummy catches wee Norman trying on her pants, causing her to administer a frenzied spanking and a finger-wagging about how ladies' bits are poisonous. Our guilt-ridden little Oedipus flings himself onto his bed, blubbing into a



snowdrift of cuddly owls bought by members of his dad's birdwatching group in the wake of Mr Bates' recent

Jaws: Tiddler

Starring... The local Garden Centre
Billy-Joe Bunting, a chubby Amity pre-teen, hooks ducks like a pro at a dodgy local carnival and skips home with a cute little silver fishy in a bag. But within a week, the ravenous minnow has exhibited an alarming growth spurt after eating him out of fish food and, very nearly, boy fingers. Billy gets the mad fear and flushes him down the bog, then marches off to get his money



back, only to find the carnival has mysteriously moved on. Fast forward 10 years...

Paleoproterozoic Park

Starring... John Hedder as Ian Malcolm, Ray Winstone as John Hammond

Having created a floating cloud of minuscule anaerobic life-forms in his lab, young boffin John



Hammond opens a new amusement park where visitors pay huge sums to bob gently with the funny little creatures in a fume-filled chamber. Things become hairy when

one man gets several snagged in his pubes, but young chaos-theory smartarse Ian Malcolm realises, in the nick of time, that he need only fart and the entire gas-based ecosystem will collapse. Back to the drawing-board...

Star Wars: Episode Zero

Starring... A load of really tall nerdy actors with stupid names
Viscount Kwiff-Bnngaaaaaaal builds a lakeside fortress on Naboo to protect the fruits of his sub-aqua cake mines from a predicted cold snap. When it never happens, his workers begin to suspect he's hoarding all the cakes to impose higher tariffs, planning to replace them with droid labour when they complain. Seeds of mistrust are sown. Unions form. Unions without any vowels in their names. Looks like things could get nasty down



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Jules And Vincent: Pup Friction

Starring... Chris Rock as Jules, Justin Timberlake as Vincent
One summer vacation, freshman Vincent Vega is shocked by the revelation that his dorky friend Julian has dyslexia.



Determined to help, he spends hours reciting arbitrary Bible passages with his pal, eventually helping Jules pass his exams. But secretly, junk-food addiction is threatening Vince's own dream of winning the end-of-year Dance-Off and his tragic struggles with body-image see him turn to Uncle Skag. Then they start killing people and it gets good.

Prince Kong

Starring... Mr Chuckles

Holidaying on Lovely Island, a couple befriend a baby monkey. Having never seen any documentaries, they feed it chips and stuff. It gets a nasty tummyache, so they decide to find a vet and promptly leave by boat. But soon a storm capsizes them just off the coast of Skull Island and the soggy monkey – his DNA already utterly fucked by preservatives – is forced to swim



Crack Of Dawn Blvd.

Starring... Dakota Fanning as Norma

Norma Desmond's career is on the up-and-up and life is an endless whirl of brat-pack soirees with young director Cecile B DeMille and rising journo Hedda Hopper. Across town, young Joe Gillis dreams of a movie career – but his strict pop would rather he concentrate on the family business, a pre-school milk round. Then, one misty morning, a seemingly innocent yoghurt delivery forever changes young Gillis's destiny...



Memento: Third Party

Starring... Jason Donovan 10 Years Ago as Guy Pierce

Thrusting graduate insurance investigator Leonard Shelby is on top of his game: rising through the company ranks, bedding in with his foxy fiancée and winning loads of pub quizzes. But, a bit over-refreshed at his third consecutive Employee Of The Month piss-up, he slips while chasing his missus into the bog for a quickie and they both smash their heads on the seat. Slipping in and out of a coma, Lenny refuses to believe a word of it, convinced he'd only had half a shandy.



Taxi Learner-Driver

Starring... Ed Norton as Travis, Naomi Watts as the instructor, Lindsay Lohan as a loveable whore

Haunted by flashbacks of his recent service in 'Nam, twitchy young Travis Bickle struggles horribly with his driving theory test, staying up all night revising but never quite able to remember all those bloody road signs. During the practical, he nearly reverses into a passing road-sweeper, leading him to obsess unhealthily about who'd be cleaning up the crisp bags now had his instructor not made enforced use of the dual-control. *Really* unhealthily...

