



By
LAIR

Paul Verhoeven: *Black Book*

HOLLYWOOD — Over the years, Dutch director Paul Verhoeven has been accused of many cinematic crimes, but never of being dull or afraid to take chances. With a gift for making hugely successful futuristic action films like *Total Recall* and *RoboCop*, Verhoeven has also always shown a flair for the provocative and the controversial, as proven by *Basic Instinct* and *Showgirls*.

Now, 30 years after his acclaimed World War II film *Soldier of Orange*, Verhoeven, whose credits include *Spetters*, *Turkish Delight* and *Starship Troopers*, returns to his native Netherlands with *Black Book* (or *Zwartboek* in Dutch), a thriller about Jewish refugees and the Dutch underground set in 1944. In this exclusive interview, Verhoeven talks about making the film, his love of post, the editing process, and the Pro Tools revolution.

POST: What inspired you to go back home to Holland and make another film about World War II?

PAUL VERHOEVEN: "The script and my desire to get away from science fiction for a bit. I'd been working on it for many years and as co-author it's very personal, and I wanted to take a break from Hollywood and make a film in Europe that I feel is very important."

POST: The film deals with the treachery and betrayal that cost so many Jews their lives. Is it true that as a kid, you saw bodies on the street of hostages shot by the Germans in revenge for assassinations by the Dutch resistance?

VERHOEVEN: "It's true. My father and I were forced by the Germans to take another way home so we'd have to pass the bodies, and while it wasn't that bloody, it's an image that's stayed with me."

POST: How long was the shoot, and how tough was it?

VERHOEVEN: "We shot 85 days and while it's always hard with war films when you need to have planes and tanks and so on, you're so free to shoot what you want there without executives telling you it's too sexy or violent. The bad side is the financing, which is very tough on an indie film like this. We had several rocky moments wondering if it'd all fall apart, but somehow it all came together."

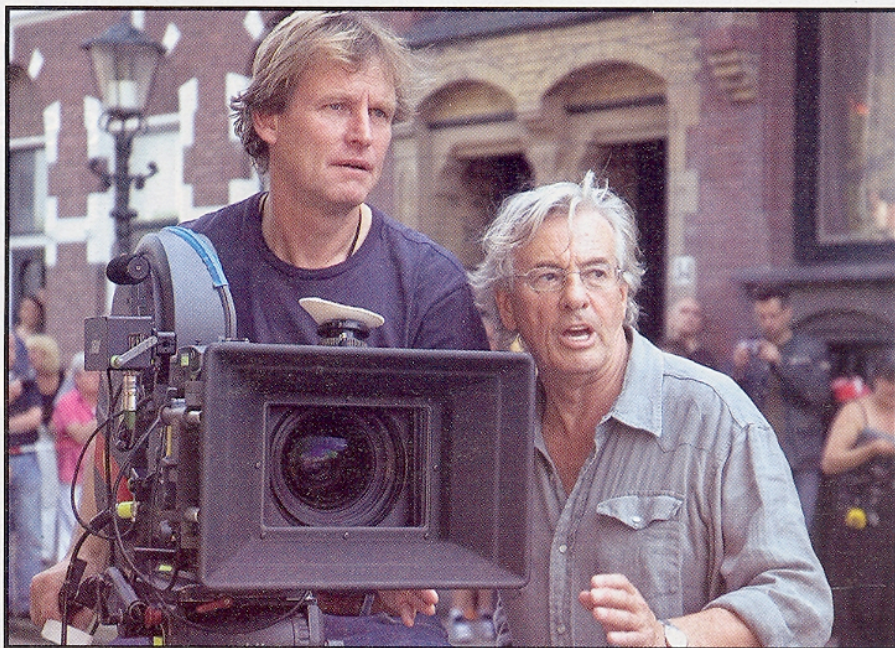
POST: How long was post, and where did you do it?

VERHOEVEN: "About four months and about 90 percent was done in London. We used Soho Images as our lab, and that's also where we did all the digital stuff, and then

now in post. You can do all that so easily."

POST: Do you like post?

VERHOEVEN: "It's my favorite part. Shooting a movie has never been something I love. Doing all the pre-production, casting,



Verhoeven (right, with DP Karl Walter Lindenlaub) on post: "Doing the pre-production, casting, storyboarding, scouting locations — that's all great, but once you start filming it's pretty much a nightmare! So post is where you get to go back in the sauna and relax and begin to make your film."

grading and then the prints. And all the digital visual effects were done by Sleeve-monkey Film in London and supervised by Hans van Helden. We didn't have that many digital effects and the whole budget for them was under 100,000 Euros (\$130,000) — and when you realize that my visual effects budget on *Hollow Man* was around \$15 million, this was peanuts. I wanted them to be as unnoticeable as possible, and they did a great job because most people won't be aware of them.

"There's a scene where a plane drops containers with parachutes to the resistance fighters, and it was too dangerous to shoot live, since no one could guarantee they wouldn't hit the actors, so all that was done digitally. And when you do a period piece like this, you need to do a lot of digital erasing on the horizon of elements that are too modern. For instance, in one of the boat scenes you could see all these modern tankers on the horizon, so we erased all that. That's the great thing about digital tools

storyboarding, scouting locations — that's all great, but once you start filming it's pretty much a nightmare! So post is where you get to go back in the sauna and relax and begin to make your film."

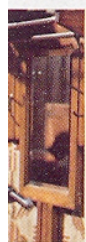
POST: The film has a lot of explosions and bombs — how did you do those effects?

VERHOEVEN: "There was talk of doing that stuff digitally but I always feel that you can't beat reality, so I used this great special effects guy, Harry Wiessenhaan, who's very experienced and who I knew from doing *Soldier of Orange*."

POST: You've done so many films, such as *Total Recall* and *Hollow Man*, with cutting edge visual effects, you must love pushing the envelope.

VERHOEVEN: "I do, but after doing two big effects movies in a row — *Starship Troopers* and *Hollow Man* — I wanted to get away from digital and keep it all as real as possible. So all the period planes, tanks,

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boats and so on are real.

"I still feel that a real plane is stronger than a digital one, and the impression it makes on an actor when it flies over can't be faked. Reality is always bigger, stronger and more powerful in general, so I'm a big fan of reality. Obviously if you're making *Spider-Man* or *Lord of the Rings* you have to use digital effects, but on this we did as much in-camera as we could, so when the plane bombs the farmhouse, it's a real plane and we really did blow up the farmhouse."

POST: You had two editors — Job ter Burg and James Herbert. How did that work?

VERHOEVEN: "We did most of the editing in Holland after the shoot, and Job cut in Amsterdam and James cut in London. They each cut different scenes and they get on very well, so they'd comment on each other's work. They used Avid so they could send files back and forth, so within a few hours they could send notes or even a different cut of the other's work, so it worked really well. For most of the edit I was in Holland, until we got into doing the sound, and then we used Soundelux in London."



effects were at London's Monkey Film, using modern technology on the horizon.

POST: How important is sound and music in your films?

VERHOEVEN: "For me it's all crucial, and this was very tricky as we had dialogue in Hebrew, Dutch, German and English, so the dialogue editing was especially complicated. We did all that in Holland because it's mainly in Dutch and they'd be better able to judge all the nuances of Dutch than the English. So if a take sounded phony, they'd spot it right away because they knew the language. Then all the sound mixing was done in London and the final sound mix was done at Shepperton Studios. After that, we moved to London for the final mix."

The Full Monty and *The Crying Game*, did a wonderful score, and we recorded all that in London. I feel that the best places to record scores and find great musicians are London and LA, and I always pay a lot of attention to the score, because good music can elevate a film considerably. I always feel that any image is open to interpretation, but with music you look at it in a very specific way, and if you want that, then music is very helpful."

POST: The film has a wonderful look. Did you do a DI?

VERHOEVEN: "Yes, at Soho Images. It's not cheap, but I think it's so important now in the way it lets you get exactly the look you want, and I wanted this to have that period look. It couldn't look too modern."

POST: You began your career back in the '60s. What are the biggest changes you've seen in post over the years?

VERHOEVEN: "Without a doubt, [Digidesign] Pro Tools. That's really revolutionized the whole audio process. Before you had magnetic tapes and something always went wrong. Now, you have far more control and it's far faster and easier to change things around. And in the mix you can manipulate the sound much better than, say, 10 or 20 years ago, and you can take all kinds of little elements you don't like and erase them so easily. So these digital tools have made life so much easier. You can produce a sound that is cleaner and far more dynamic and not corrupted by stuff, so I think that's all great for the artistic concept of sound and a huge advance."

"I remember when I first came to America in the '80s to make films and there was the new Dolby system, which made explosions sound really big and shocking — and now it's advanced even more. And of course, Avid has had a major impact in editing and the way you can play around with different takes so much more easily."

POST: So, do you think film is dead?

VERHOEVEN: "I think so, but I'm not so sure about the timeframe everyone's saying — that film only has two or three years left. The fact is, we shoot on film and then the film is scanned into digital. It's not dead yet."

end. So over 95 percent of the filmmaking process is already all digital. Would I shoot digitally as well, and make it 100 percent digital? I'm still not convinced that what I



Job ter Burg and James Herbert edited *Black Book* using Avid gear. Herbert worked in London while ter Burg was based in Holland.

with digital cameras is stronger and better than what you can do with film. But I think ultimately, yes, digital will take over from film. But I feel that it may take five or ten years, or even longer, before we abandon film for good."

POST: All the digital advances seem to be made for big sci-fi films. Will you be making other soon?

VERHOEVEN: "If I can find the right script and something completely different that doesn't fall into the area between *Total Recall* and *The Matrix*. It's got to be a new approach to science fiction that I haven't seen before and that's hard to find. I get a lot of scripts that are all post-modern thinking — what is the nature of reality? And for me that's very interesting since I already did it. Maybe James Cameron will find a new way. So you could say that me doing *Black Book* and shooting in Holland was a little bit like fleeing from science fiction."

POST: So what's next?

VERHOEVEN: "I'm working on two projects. One's based on a Russian novel *Winter Queen*, a sort of detective story set in St. Petersburg and London in 1876, and I'm starting scouting locations. The film title will be *Azazel*, which is the name of a Jewish demon. But it's another indie film, you never know if all the financing will come through."

"The other one is based on the novel *Paperboy* by Peter Dexter. [Director Pedro Almodóvar was going to do it, but he decided to stay in Spain. My old DP, Jan de Bont, is the producer, so that should be interesting.]"