



**BOWIE: STARMAN AND THE SILVER SCREEN**

# The Hunger

Often lambasted as an exercise in style over content, Tony Scott's take on the vampire genre is indeed a little showy, though given Scott's background in TV commercials it's perhaps not surprising. Pop-video clichés from the 1980s abound: doves fluttering among drapery, Bauhaus singing 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' in a goth club, soft-core lesbian scenes and even a rollerblader grooving to Iggy Pop amid dry ice. But despite this *The Hunger* has dated surprisingly well. Catherine Deneuve is convincing as a centuries-old vampire in modern New York, and David Bowie turns in an unusually understated performance as her doomed lover. The influence of Nic Roeg is in evidence here, in particular that of Roeg and Donald Cammell's *Performance* and the Bowie vehicle *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

**Ronnie Hackston, *Sight & Sound*, December 2004**

As Ridley Scott was preparing *Blade Runner*, a script came to his agent for a film called *The Hunger*. Ridley's agent is also Tony's, and as the one Scott was busy the project was suggested for his brother, who had been working on a screenplay called *My Dog's on Fire* by David Peoples ('very strange, set in the year 3000, basically about gangs of kids called Mousepacks patrolling the streets of New York'). Tony Scott, who in partnership with Ridley has been making commercials ever since he emerged from the Royal College of Art, created two films for the BFI Production Board but has otherwise found his career thwarted by the collapse of two major productions, cancelled at the last minute – one for Paramount, the other for Filmways. He met Dick Shepherd, head of production at MGM in the era of *The Goodbye Girl*, *Fame* and *Clash of the Titans*, by the time-honoured process of sitting next to him in a plane, and when Shepherd saw a reel of his commercials ('What really got to me was the Hovis and the Lee Cooper jeans') there was no problem with *The Hunger*, which turned out to be a Shepherd project.

As it happens, *The Hunger* is a film about accelerated ageing and the hunt for eternal life. Based on a novel by Whitley Streiber (who wrote *Wolfen*), it stars Catherine Deneuve as an immortal being masquerading as human, who drifts through the centuries in parasitical symbiosis with a succession of lovers. Her current partner, played by David Bowie, discovers that he has reached the limit of the extended youthfulness his mistress has been able to confer upon him, and begins to decline rapidly into senility. They find in New York a specialist in gerontology (Susan Sarandon), who is researching the possible reversal of the ageing process, and she is drawn into the ménage with interestingly horrific results.

Scott admits cheerfully that the death-in-life theme has always fascinated him. Both his BFI films, *One of the Missing* and *Loving Memory*, poised their central characters on the edge of death, and for *The Hunger* the shells of unburied corpses preserved in an eerie semi-death at the Mexican town of

Guanajuato (and in attendance at the credits of Herzog's *Nosferatu*) were a particular inspiration. Echoing *Blade Runner*, *The Hunger* includes references to progeria, an appalling disease whose ten-year-old victims have the physical characteristics of people in their seventies, and to the centres which already exist for life-prolongation. 'We place the Susan Sarandon character in a "sleep clinic" modelled on those places in California where they believe that through sleep pattern and diet you can stretch your life by 15 to 20 years. There's one in Austria, where they actually recycle your blood.'

There could be other cross-references between the two Scott films by the time *The Hunger* is finished. Both productions have their allusions to ancient Egypt, both indulge in symbolism by means of a white dove (and with equal risk), and both have been shot through the gentle haze of smoke that seems to be a Scott trademark and which guarantees stunning quality of camerawork. Both films are themselves replicants of a kind, shot-for-shot simulacra of the detailed storyboards which the Scotts, each a brilliant designer, prepare in advance, drawing out their films on paper like miniature *Heavy Metal* comic strips. Above all, both films rely on a wholly modern artifice, the often invisible application of special effects to impersonate reality. For *The Hunger*, the puppetmaster is Dick Smith, who in 35 years has altered states for everyone from Dan Curtis to Ken Russell and for everything from *The Cardinal* to *The Exorcist*. Linda Blair's revolving head, Marlon Brando's jowls in *The Godfather*, De Niro's bloodbath at the end of *Taxi Driver*, Katharine Ross' 'double' in *Stepford Wives*, Smith has faked them all. Turning David Bowie into a 200-year-old for *The Hunger* has been no more daunting than making veins burst from the faces of the contestants in *Scanners*.

'The quantum leap,' says Smith, 'has been in the last dozen years. Now everybody wants make-up illusions, and the technical and chemical developments have come up with the materials for us to do the job. We discovered, for example, that the cleaning fluid trichloroethane causes foam latex to swell, and so we could raise words on Linda Blair's skin in *The Exorcist* or make an actor's face burst open from snake venom in *Death Bite*. It's no problem for us to make any kinds of limbs and do anything to them. We can make entire people if need be. Make them wholesale.'

**Philip Strick, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 1982**

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## THE HUNGER

*Director:* Tony Scott  
*Production Companies:* Richard Shepherd Company, MGM/UA Entertainment  
*Producer:* Richard A. Shepherd  
*Production Manager (New York):* Alex Ho  
*Production Supervisor:* Terry Clegg  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Loretta Ordewer  
*Production Co-ordinator (New York):* Ingrid Johanson  
*Location Manager:* Gerry Levy  
*Location Manager (New York):* Peter Pastorelli  
*Assistant Directors:* David Tringham, Michael Stevenson, Debbie Vertue  
*Assistant Directors (New York):* William Hassell, William Eustace, Roger Pugliese  
*Screenplay:* Ivan Davis, Michael Thomas  
*Based on the novel by:* Whitley Strieber  
*Director of Photography:* Stephen Goldblatt  
*Director of Photography (New York):* Tom Mangravite  
*Additional Photography:* Hugh Johnson  
*Camera Operators:* Bob Smith, John Palmer  
*Camera Operator (New York):* Michael Stone  
*Special Effects:* Graham Longhurst  
*Monkey Effects:* David Allen, Roger Dicken  
*Additional Electronic Music/Effects:* David Lawson  
*Editor:* Pamela Power  
*Production Designer:* Brian Morris  
*Art Director:* Clinton Cavers  
*Art Director (New York):* Vicky Paul  
*Set Decorator:* Ann Mollo  
*Set Decorator (New York):* Janet Rosenbloom  
*Scenic Artist (New York):* Beverly Miller  
*Costume Designer:* Milena Canonero  
*New York Costumer (Men):* Al Crane  
*New York Costumer (Women):* Beverly Cycon  
*Wardrobe Supervisor:* Brenda Dabbs  
*Wardrobe Master:* Kenny Crouch  
*Make-up Supervisors:* Jane Royle, Ann Brodie  
*Make-up (New York):* Paul Gobel  
*Special Make-up:* Anthony Clavet  
*Make-up Illusions:* Dick Smith, Carl Fullerton  
*Opticals:* Peerless Camera Company  
*Music:* Michael Rubini, Denny Jaeger

*Music Arranged and Supervised by:* Howard Blake  
*Sound Recording (New York):* Dan Neroda  
*Sound Mixer:* Clive Winter  
*Sound Mixer (New York):* John Bolz  
*Sound Re-recording:* Bill Rowe, Ray Merrin  
*Sound Editor:* Peter Pennell  
*Sound Effects Editor:* Campbell Askew  
*Special Assistant (Los Angeles):* Angelo Pacifici  
*Studios:* Shepperton Studios

## Cast

Catherine Deneuve (*Miriam Blaylock*)  
David Bowie (*John Blaylock*)  
Susan Sarandon (*Sarah Roberts*)  
Cliff De Young (*Tom Haver*)  
Beth Ehlers (*Alice Cavender*)  
Dan Hedaya (*Lieutenant Allegrezza*)  
Rufus Collins (*Charlie Humphries*)  
Suzanne Bertish (*Phyllis*)  
James Aubrey (*Ron*)  
Ann Magnuson (*young woman from disco*)  
John Stephen Hill (*young man from disco*)  
Shane Rimmer (*Jelinek*)  
Bauhaus (*disco group*)  
Douglas Lambert (*TV host*)  
Bessie Love (*Lillybelle*)  
John Pankow (*phone booth youth 1*)  
Willem Dafoe (*phone booth youth 2*)  
Sophie Ward (*girl in London house*)  
Philip Sayer (*boy in London house*)  
Lise Hilboldt (*waiting room nurse*)  
Michael Howe (*intern 1*)  
Edward Wiley (*intern 2*)  
Richard Robles (*skater*)  
George Camiller (*Eumenes*)  
Oke Wambu (*Egyptian slave*)  
Kent Miller, Fred Yockers, Susan Hunter, James Wassenich, Allan Richards, Hilary Six, Carole-Ann Scott (*cadavers*)

USA 1983

97 mins

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk)

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