

# "REIGN OF FIRE"

## PRODUCTION INFORMATION

In present-day London, 12-year-old Quinn inadvertently wakes an enormous fire-breathing dragon from its centuries-long slumber. Twenty years later, much of the world has been scarred by the beast and its offspring. The dragons are extremely intelligent, highly evolved... and they don't like sharing the planet. As a fire chief, Quinn (CHRISTIAN BALE) is responsible for warding off the beasts and keeping a small community alive as they eke out a meager existence. Into their midst comes a hotshot American, Van Zan (MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY), who says he has a way to kill the beasts and save mankind – a way Quinn's never seen done. Directed by Rob Bowman ("The X-Files"), "Reign of Fire" fuses a medieval past with a post-apocalyptic future in this exciting tale of adventure and survival.

Touchstone Pictures and Spyglass Entertainment present "Reign of Fire," directed by Rob Bowman from a screenplay by Gregg Chabot & Kevin Peterka and Matt Greenberg and a story by Gregg Chabot & Kevin Peterka. Producers are Richard D. Zanuck, Lili Fini Zanuck, Gary Barber, and Roger Birnbaum. Jonathan Glickman is executive producer. Buena Vista Pictures distributes.

## ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

In the exciting new film "Reign of Fire," several talented and pedigreed filmmakers combined their talents to create something new: a post-apocalyptic dragon film.

"The great thing about 'Reign of Fire' is that it provides a very realistic scenario, a grounded scenario, for a very fantastic notion," notes director Rob Bowman, who had previously directed and produced countless memorable episodes of television's "The X-Files," as well as the highly successful 1998 big-screen adaptation of the television series. "To me, projects like this one work the best when you have something realistic for the

audience, to ground them in reality. If you show them real people who are dealing with real problems, and then show that it's because of the dragons, then the audience will be as afraid as the characters are.

"It seems like there are a lot of special-effects films that just throw their effects at you, like an all-you-can-eat banquet," Bowman continues. "I wanted to do something different: take a big idea – a big, special-effects movie (we have over 130 visual effects shots), but restrain ourselves a little bit, and make it more about the people on the ground than the dragons in the air, then we could really make a great movie."

"We've all talked a lot about creating as much reality as possible," says Christian Bale, who plays Quinn, the stern, resolute leader, determined to keep his charges alive. "That was what I wanted to do from the very beginning, and when Rob explained his vision, it was as if he'd read my mind. I couldn't wait to come on board."

"The dragon fights are spectacular, sure, but you also give a damn about the people on the ground," says Matthew McConaughey, who plays Van Zan, the hotshot American leader who calls himself a dragonslayer. "If the movie had a cartoon style instead of a style based in reality, I think that might get lost."

"'Reign of Fire' is like nothing you've ever seen before," notes producer Gary Barber, who serves as producer of the film along with his Spyglass Entertainment partner, Roger Birnbaum, as well as Richard D. Zanuck and Lili Fini Zanuck.

"It's visually exciting and clearly unique," Birnbaum continues. "The fact that it starts off in present day is one of the key elements to making the story work."

"What's appealing about 'Reign of Fire' is its originality," adds co-producer Dean Zanuck. "No one has ever seen dragons matched against modern battle equipment like tanks and helicopters. With its uniqueness, it really stands out from the pack."

"The type of movie I grew up watching – the movies I loved as a teenager, learning to make movies – were always realistic," Bowman concludes. "It's easier to be swept away. I mean, as an audience member, once you come to the movie, you're willing to suspend your disbelief – you want to see the dragons. It's up to me to keep their trust."

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The film, shot on location in Ireland, combines state-of-the-art digital effects to present an original vision of a world decimated by dragons. “With all the varying elements – from the casting to the locations to the production design to the CGI to the practical effects – I can honestly say that this has been one of the biggest films I’ve ever worked on,” says producer Gary Barber.

## ABOUT THE STORY

The film opens in present-day London, where 12-year-old Quinn, exploring his mother’s construction site, accidentally awakes a centuries-old dragon, who proceeds to destroy everything in sight.

Twenty years later, much of the world has been destroyed by the dragon and its offspring. Quinn is now a fireman – a most important job in a world where everyone watches the sky for flames. Quinn, with his confidant, Creedy, oversees the castle and a small group of humans eking out a meager existence. The dragons attack often, and the number of humans is dwindling. “Every time you see a dragon, you know there’s every chance that you’re going to be dead within a couple of seconds,” says Gerard Butler, who plays Creedy.

Quinn’s methods are to wait out the dragons – if humans can survive as the dragons die off, they will be able to start anew in future generations. “The dragons are getting hungrier – they’ve pretty much decimated the planet and there’s not much left for them to eat,” Bowman notes. “So every time there’s a person running around, it’s extremely dangerous. You’re 150 lbs. of steak. You don’t go outside unless it’s absolutely necessary, and when you do, you keep one eye on the sky.”

Enter Denton Van Zan, a hotshot American who claims to have a way to kill the beasts. Quinn doesn’t believe it... until Van Zan and his ragtag group of “archangels” demonstrate their skill. Van Zan has come to Quinn’s castle to recruit manpower for an attempt to kill the original dragon in London – a bull from whom all the dragons originate.

“It’s not that the dragons are evil,” says Matthew McConaughey, who should know – after all, it’s the job of his character, Van Zan, to fight the

beasts. “They’re more Machiavellian. They’re just doing what they have to do to survive, even if that means getting rid of mankind along the way.”

Quinn thinks that a run on London is a suicide mission and he refuses to risk the lives of his charges by committing such a foolish act. However, before long, Quinn is forced to confront his own inner demons and take a stand.

## ABOUT THE DRAGONS

“The first reaction I had when I finished reading the screenplay was, ‘Wow, what do the dragons look like?’” says director Rob Bowman. “And the answer was, we wanted to make them as vicious, as organic, and as scary as we could.”

The job of turning Bowman’s vision into a living, breathing beast fell to visual effects supervisor Richard Hoover and co-supervisor Dan DeLeeuw. Both are veterans of effects-heavy films; Hoover is an Academy Award® nominee for his work on the effects of the summer blockbuster “Armageddon,” and has also supervised the visual effects on “Unbreakable,” “Inspector Gadget,” and “Jungle2Jungle.” DeLeeuw has lent his considerable skills to such films as “102 Dalmatians,” “Bicentennial Man,” “The Rock,” “Mighty Joe Young,” and “Crimson Tide.”

“The thing that Rob told us at the very beginning was that he wanted to make a dragon that was stone-cold real,” says DeLeeuw.

“It wasn’t enough to portray something evil and malevolent,” Hoover notes. “If the environment and the beast don’t jibe – if they don’t seem like they can be part of the same world – well, the audience is so sophisticated that they’re immediately taken out of the picture. Rob presents our real world in the movie, so we worked hard to create a dragon that could fit into our world.”

To do that, Bowman, Hoover, and DeLeeuw borrow elements from nature. “We spent a lot of time trying to figure out how we wanted the audience to respond to the dragon,” Bowman says. “We designed it to move on the ground like a leopard, with the sound of a cobra about to strike; the skin of an alligator, but the spine of a serpent. The idea was that the audience would then bring pre-set

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reactions to the dragon – that they would have the subconscious reaction, ‘Jeez, I’ve seen that in National Geographic’ – and be naturally, innately, afraid.”

The dragon has a compact, lithe body, with enormous, folding wings, allowing it a graceful flight through the air. “There was a whole process where we figured out how we wanted it to fly,” Bowman notes. “Did we want it to flap, or fall out of the sky, or glide through the air? Okay, we want it to glide. Well, then, you can’t have a large torso and small wings – the wings have to catch enough air to support the body. And that’s when the serpent design of the torso came in.”

The dragon’s body is covered in thousands of scales that use state-of-the-art computer animation to achieve a new level of reality. “What’s great about the scales is that they ride on the surface of the dragon’s skin,” DeLeeuw notes. “As the skin moves, the scales pull apart, the gaps separate, and the scales don’t deform or stretch.”

“If we had just painted them, it would have looked like a rubber suit,” Hoover adds. “Instead, they can tilt up, overlay each other, slide apart, and reflect light, just like a real reptile’s scales.”

“I didn’t want the dragon to breathe fire,” Bowman points out. “I mean, if fire came out of its mouth, it would burn its mouth. So how were we going to do it? Well, it turns out there’s an African beetle that blows two opposite chemicals out of its rear end, and when the two touch, there’s a flame. That’s its defense mechanism.”

“Then, I was watching a nature special about cobras – it showed this cobra spitting, and I thought, ‘That’s how we’ll do it,’” Bowman continues. “The dragon has glands that squirt out the opposite chemicals, and they touch about 15 feet in front of the mouth, and that’s where the fire is.”

“The biggest thing – and the thing I had no idea about when we started this process – was that you’re basically building an animal from the skeleton on up,” Bowman says. “I thought it was much simpler – draw the dragon, the guy puts it into the computer, and you’re done. No. You have to build every bone, every muscle, every gland, every toenail... it took me nine months to make one dragon.”

But the work of creating the dragon and making it look realistic wasn’t all done in front of a computer screen.

Hoover was on the set and would represent the dragon as Bowman constructed his shot. “Matthew and Christian would give their input, and I would give the dragon’s input,” he says. “I’d say what I thought the dragon would be doing... I tried to see the dragon as a character. Y’know, ‘where’s my close-up?’”

“About a week after filming started, we showed Rob a piece of film that showed a dragon walking through a smoky, black, moody environment, so we all had that image in our head what that was going to look like,” notes Hoover.

“Once we had decided on the shot, I’d get technical,” Hoover continues. “For example, okay, the dragon is going to land and then sneer at Matthew. Well, with the dragon’s 150-foot wingspan, that’s going to blow up all this dirt, blow all these fires around. Sparks would be going everywhere. Matthew’s clothing has got to blow back. We had to do all that on-set and you had to think of all of them right off the bat, which is difficult, because there’s nothing there... but if you don’t do it, no one’s going to believe that the dragon did land there.”

“The true challenge of this picture has been in combining the physical and visual effects worlds,” says executive producer Jonathan Glickman.

## CASTING THE FILM

To cast the film’s four main roles – the hotshot militant, Van Zan; the tough, resilient Quinn; the strong, beautiful Alex; and the resolute, sarcastic Creedy – the filmmakers looked for actors who could reinforce the vision of lending as much reality to their roles as possible. In each case, an actor was cast that was not, perhaps, the first that one would think would suit the role, but in the end, played the part pitch-perfect.

Matthew McConaughey, a veteran of mega-blockbusters including “A Time to Kill” and “U-571” and such independent, character-driven films as “Dazed and Confused” and “Lone Star,” plays the hotshot American who finds himself at Quinn’s castle,

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trying to recruit men in what may be humanity's last effort to kill the dragons.

"Everybody has a picture in their head of Matthew McConaughey," says executive producer Jonathan Glickman. "We wanted to twist that a little bit. We definitely wanted an American for the role – and Matthew's about as American as you can get – but he's also playing a different type of role than he's ever played before." In fact, Van Zan's head is shaved, he is covered with tattoos, and his body is rippled with muscle.

"Matthew turns in a stellar performance in this film," says producer Roger Birnbaum. "He's already shown how well he can carry an action film, and he's really going to surprise people when they see 'Reign of Fire.'"

"He's every inch an action hero," adds producer Gary Barber. "He's an all-American guy who brings a real movie star quality to the role."

"The idea of kicking some dragon ass really appealed to Matthew," says co-producer Dean Zanuck, "and we thought that it was a perfect opportunity for Matthew to demonstrate his chops in an intense actioner... which he certainly did."

"I don't like to call Van Zan a dragonslayer – it sounds too much like a wizards-and-warlocks movie," says Bowman, "but, I think if you were to ask this guy what he does, he'd say, 'I kill dragons.' He's very matter-of-fact in that way."

"We always knew that in order to take on the dragons, Van Zan was going to have to be a beast himself," notes McConaughey. "But the question was, how do we make him a strategist? How do we make him a great leader of men?"

"I did study some personalities from history – Patton, for example," McConaughey continues. "It gave me an idea about the 'never dig in, always plan offense' attitude. Van Zan is a man who always and only does what's necessary."

"Some people might describe Van Zan as a mercenary," says Christian Bale, who plays Quinn, "but the crucial difference is that Van Zan absolutely believes in what he's doing. He doesn't see himself as a gun-for-hire; he sees himself as being on a mission from God."

Bale, an intense, introspective actor who has received rave reviews for his performances in such

diverse films as "Empire of the Sun" (his first starring role, at age 13), "Velvet Goldmine," and "American Psycho," plays Quinn, the reluctant leader of the castle. As a child, Quinn's encounter with the dragon woke the beast, and his firsthand experience has taught him that the dragons are dominant and not to be trifled with.

"It was important that we had an actor who didn't seem weak or afraid of confrontation – we needed someone who was impassioned, a survivalist with a strong persona. And we knew Christian was not only a brilliant actor, but someone who could portray those emotions," notes Glickman.

"On top of his natural charisma, Christian is able to get under the skin and completely disappear inside his roles," says Birnbaum. "You leave the theater thinking that he IS that guy, and that's when you realize that he's a damn fine actor."

"He's stoic and strong, yet very sympathetic," adds Barber. "Christian always makes the audience believe in his plight."

"The thing about Quinn is that even if he does take a defensive position, he's not weak about it," Bowman notes. "He's one of the last few people alive out of six billion, so there's got to be something special about him. He's the tough schoolmaster, the taskmaster; he's got to be able to manage some extreme personalities in some very extreme situations."

"I thought that the best kind of actor to play that would be a rising star, who maybe hadn't made a huge splash yet, who could take risks," Bowman continues. "When I'd made my decision, I went to Germany to convince Christian Bale to take the part."

"When I read the script, I thought if it was done with a certain approach, with a certain amount of realism, it could work quite well," Bale remembers, "but I had to be sure that the director shared my view, so I just wanted to listen to what Rob had to say. And he's very straightforward; I asked him about the kind of movie he wanted to make, and it was as if he'd read my notes. We were completely on the same track."

"Quinn feels a huge sense of responsibility and guilt," Bale notes. "He feels that because of his own curiosity and sense of adventure, he basically caused

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his mother's death – not to mention humanity as we know it. He's become something of a reluctant leader at the castle.

"I think the basic difference between Quinn and Van Zan – apart from the fact that Quinn's not psychotic – aren't that great," says Bale. "They become adversaries in the movie, but it's less that they disagree about what they want – survival and defeat of the dragons – and more that they can't agree on the means to achieve that goal."

"Since they have the same goal, the trick is not to make it about bickering," Bowman adds. "It becomes about their different philosophies – Quinn's stand-and-hold method versus Van Zan's offensive approach. I think we've found a way for those philosophies to come alive, and Christian and Matthew both made their characters real."

"Izabella Scorupco plays Alex Jensen, who's really the odd woman out," Bowman notes. "She's the pilot, and because she never leaves the chopper, she's got a much higher life expectancy than anyone else on the crew. Not only that, but as the one who gives the rest the thumbs-up to go, she's basically signing their death warrants. She's extremely attached to the men on her crew, but every day, she tells them to jump, and every day, they die. She's perpetually broken-hearted about that."

"I thought it would be an interesting thing to take somebody who had a few extra points of good looks and knock them down a couple of notches," Bowman laughs. "I put big circles under her eyes – poor girl, her mother's never going to recognize her."

"Not only is Alex a pilot, but she's also a scientist," Scorupco notes. "She probably knows more about the dragon's biology and how they breed than anybody. But she's also tough, without losing her femininity."

"To her, the Archangels are her family," Scorupco continues. "I mean, Van Zan is their boss, their leader; for Alex, it's emotional when she's with the guys in her chopper. Their life expectancy once they drop out of the helicopter is something like 17 seconds. She knows it's the last time she's going to see some of them, but there's no time for her to get emotional, because, well, it's war. You just have to go on, continue with the next step."

"What's great about Izabella is that she's not one of those done-up beauties – everything about her look is very natural, very real," says Glickman. "We had to have somebody who would fit into this world – we obviously couldn't have somebody who needed to spend an hour in hair and makeup to achieve their looks. Not only that, but she's wonderful at action and can emote with the slightest gesture. I think she's great."

The final piece of the casting picture fell to Gerard Butler, who plays Creedy, the right-hand man to Quinn.

"Creedy is the guy who keeps Quinn honest," says Bowman. "Creedy is the one guy who has Quinn's ear, who can tell Quinn that he's not seeing things quite correctly. That's a pivotal relationship, and Gerry Butler plays it in a way that knocks Quinn off his gloomy self. It was brilliant."

"Gerry was a true find," says Glickman. "Rob's instinct was to cast someone who had yet to break out in American movies, and when we met him, we all thought, instantly, 'This is Creedy.'"

"I'm the enforcer at the castle," Butler says. "If we are going to survive as a group, then discipline has to be enforced, and that's Creedy's job. He calls it like he sees it."

"Also, I've got all the funny lines," Butler continues. "I think that Creedy is still shocked to be living in a world overrun by dragons, even twenty years on. In that way, he's like the audience for the movie – 'this is ridiculous, it's dragons.' I get to supply a little comic relief."

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Besides the visual effects team creating the dragons, several groups were responsible for presenting a vision of a world destroyed by dragons as true-to-life as possible. This included the production design team, headed by Wolf Kroeger; the Special Effects team, headed by Dave Gauthier; and Nick Gillard's stunt team.

A 25-year movie stunts veteran who has recently coordinated the stunts for such high-profile action blockbusters as "Star Wars" Episodes I and II and Tim Burton's "Sleepy Hollow," Gillard faced an all-

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new challenge on “Reign of Fire” as he prepared for the Archangel sequence. The film’s central sequence, follows several members of Van Zan’s group as they jump out of a helicopter to try to kill a dragon.

“Normally, when you shoot an aerial sequence, you shoot it with 16mm film and then ‘blow it out’ to 35mm. But ‘Reign of Fire’ is shot anamorphic, so our cameraman had to wear the 35mm camera with a 40mm anamorphic lens on the head.” The cameras were enormous and extremely heavy.

“The cameraman wore a surgical neck brace, just to keep him from breaking his neck from the weight of the camera when he pulled open his parachute. We also had a little parachute inside his helmet, so if he got into trouble he could take off the helmet and throw the camera away, and it would come down safely.

The stunt doubles for the sequence were prepared for their work. “Two of them were ex-SAS (Special Air Service) soldiers – they had jumped out under combat conditions with weapons,” Gillard notes. “They’re the best guys to get – they’ll always give you 100%.

“But for the most part, I try not to use doubles,” Gillard continues. “We make it safe for the actors to do their own stunts and only use doubles if it’s absolutely necessary. Matthew, Christian, and Izabella are all pretty physical.”

In the fight sequence, McConaughey and Bale fought for themselves. “I have all the heart in the fight, but Van Zan has all the skills,” says Bale. “Matthew and I really went for it, and we clocked each other a couple of times. And there was a head butt – Matthew headbutted me for real, and everybody said it echoed on the castle walls and sounded like a watermelon being smashed. I was dazed for a few seconds, but it’s all there in the movie, and obviously, it’s better because it’s real. I didn’t mind it, and I don’t think Matthew did, either.”

“My involvement on this show has particularly been with the fires on the set – the real fires,” notes Dave Gauthier, special effects supervisor on the film. “Rob called me up in the middle of the night – 2:30 in the morning – and asked me to take the job. He had two missions for me: to give him as much practical fire on the set as we could handle, and to make it all safe.

“I’ve done several projects of this scale, but knowing Rob and the kinds of things he likes to do – and how big he likes to get – I did a little research before coming to Ireland,” continues Gauthier, who had previously served with Bowman on “The X-Files” television series. “By the time I got to Ireland, I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to do, and then we put it together – namely, the Dragon’s Breath apparatus.”

The Dragon’s Breath creates an enormous amount of heat, as it shoots several hundred gallons of liquid propane at 200 pounds-per-square-inch through two three-inch nozzles, throwing fire 175 feet. “We’re creating millions and millions of BTUs in an instant,” Gauthier notes. “We have to be very wary.

“I’m not trying to burn the world,” Gauthier notes. “I only need to burn what the camera sees. So I’m in close communication with the director and the DP and the cameramen. We know exactly where their frames are; we determine how close to an actor or stunt people we can get; and lastly, we test it ourselves, to make sure there’s not too much heat, and we go from there.

“There’s nothing that pumps people up more on a set than when we have a lot of fire,” concludes Gauthier. “You never know how people are going to react to fire... and everyone has a smile on their face – it’s spectacular.”

The two main sets – the castle and the London finale – were designed by Wolf Kroeger, who has lent his expertise to nearly 30 films and designed the striking productions of “Enemy at the Gates,” “The Last of the Mohicans,” “First Blood,” and “Popeye.” The castle was built in the Poolbeg section of Dublin, which is along the waterfront and just across from Ringsend.

“Wolf did an amazing job,” concurs Matthew McConaughey. “All the sets are actual size, and everything is burnt out, barren... what that does for the actors is it makes our job easy. We can just walk on the set and we know the world we’re supposed to be in. When you’re on set on some overly lit soundstage, you can do it, but being in a real space without a roof definitely helps get me on my game.”

Joan Bergin, an Emmy nominee for her costume designs, was responsible for costuming the actors,

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and notes that the director wanted costumes that would fit in with the reality-based environment and look of the film. “It wasn’t going to work to have the archangels spread their arms and have these huge wings come out,” she says, “but there is a small wing that aerial cameramen use when they jump, and the wing freezes them just for that second. So I took that basic thing and built on that.”

“Usually, I’ll have to design five or six different costumes for each character, to develop that character over the course of a feature film,” Bergin continues, “but in this picture, Christian has one costume, two sweaters, through the whole thing, and the riding coat, and everything just collects dirt and grime as the picture goes on. So I tried to capture a sense of style that one often associates with Englishmen – just the way they wear their clothes is stylish.”

“Van Zan and his crew are the true warriors,” Bergin continues. “They’re called the Archangels, and I wanted them to look like angels as they came out of the sky, so I gave them the blue costumes. It’s a heavenly shade.”

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

The director of “Reign of Fire” is Rob Bowman, a twenty-year veteran of television directing. He was part of the brain trust behind “The X-Files,” the hit television series, and in 1998, Bowman made the leap to feature film directing by helming the feature film version of the series.

“Right from the beginning, we wanted Rob Bowman,” says Birnbaum. “We’re huge ‘X-Files’ fans, and we knew for this movie that we needed the guy who made us want to believe.”

“Rob’s an extremely skilled director,” adds Barber. “The actors trust him, the crew trusts him, and the producers know they can count on him to deliver his vision.”

“One of the reasons we wanted Rob so badly was that, as he showed time and again on ‘The X-Files,’ he’s so adept at creating a level of suspense,” says producer Lili Fini Zanuck. “We all remember ‘Jaws’ – how those canisters popping up could sometimes be more frightening than the shark itself.”

It’s a rare gift for a director to know he can create tension without resorting to showing the beast popping out of the shadows every other minute, and Rob does it so well.”

“The most important thing that Rob brought is a template – from his work on ‘The X-Files’ – of extraordinary events set in a realistic tone. It’s fascinating to watch him get interesting yet realistic performances from all of the actors. When we talk about movies we like, we talk about movies where you care about the characters more than the special effects – ‘Jaws,’ ‘Alien.’ And Rob has brought that sensibility here.”

“I’ve got to say – Rob is one of the most dexterous directors I’ve worked with,” says Matthew McConaughey. “He’s absolutely confident about what he wants, what kind of shot he can get, and he knows the story and the tone well. But he’s also a big kid out there, loving his job, playing with his toys. It’s great to see that combination.”