

# THE BACK PAGES

tv

Sexy, sexist  
'Mad Men'

P.78

taste

Delicious  
corn smut

P.80

film

What not to say  
to Costner

P.81

music

Songs used  
as torture

P.82

help

Libraries that  
lend out people

P.83

feschuk

A surcharge  
will apply

P.85

film

Among the summer blockbusters, it was just a blip. *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, a hokey family adventure starring kid-friendly Canadian Brendan Fraser, got tepid reviews and made just a modest dent at the box office—crushed by *Hellboy II* on its opening weekend. Based on a 19th-century classic by Jules Verne, it may be shallow—the kind of movie Disney used to make when Walt was still alive—but it plumbs new depths of cinema, and not just because its characters travel thousands of miles beneath the earth's crust. *Journey to the Center of the Earth* is the first live-action narrative feature to be shot and projected in digital 3-D. And if the champions of this new technology are right, it could herald a revolution in moviemaking on a par with the introduction of sound or colour.

Wait a minute. If anyone is going to believe that, 3-D first has a huge image problem to overcome. And it's not just about the clarity of its visuals, which are now quite astonish-

ing. No, the issue is 3-D déjà vu. Stereoscopic cinema has been around for more than a century in various forms. Before Hollywood settled into its enduring romance with digital special effects, a fringe of the industry indulged in a reckless infatuation with 3-D, like a teenager experimenting with bad acid. The first big 3-D craze swept through cinemas in the 1950s. Moviegoers put on those silly cardboard glasses with the red-and-blue Cellophane lenses, and got a headache as blurry monsters and wayward breasts leapt from the screen. 3-D became synonymous with B-movie kitsch. The fad peaked in 1969 with *The Stewardesses*, a soft-core porn movie that was 3-D's biggest box office hit—and fodder for a string of SCTV parodies presented by Count Floyd's Monster Chiller Horror Theatre, from *Dr. Tongue's 3-D House of Stewardesses* to *3-D House of Cats*. "We're dealing with 100 years of bad publicity about 3-D," admits Joshua Greer, CEO of RealD 3D Inc., the world's leading supplier of 3-D technology. "Everyone thinks it's spears and yo-yos in your face and cheap cardboard glasses."

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HARRIS

But the big money in Hollywood is gambling that the new and improved in-your-face

cinema can shed the B-movie stigma. And A-list directors are signing up. A dozen major 3-D releases are due in 2009. They include Steven Spielberg's animated feature *Tintin*, Robert Zemeckis's motion-capture remake of *A Christmas Carol* (starring Jim Carrey), and James Cameron's live-action space thriller *Avatar*—the first dramatic feature by the Canadian filmmaker since *Titanic*. DreamWorks mogul Jeffrey Katzenberg, meanwhile, has declared that from now on all the studio's animated movies will be made in 3-D, although they'll be released in 2-D as well.

What's made this boom possible is digital projection. Traditionally, 3-D movies have been shot on 35-mm film using dual cameras—to simulate the binocular vision of our eyes—and shown with dual projectors. The coloured glasses allow each eye to see just one side of the offset images, filtering out the other; it's the brain that composes the 3-D illusion. But calibrating two film projectors can be imprecise, and the glasses also bleed some colour from the image. Digital 3-D is shot with dual video cameras, and the edited

plastic wrap, and red and blue markers.

But TV is also girding itself for the more sophisticated digital 3-D. Already Samsung has quietly sold over one million televisions with 3-D capability, even if many of those buying them are unaware of it—the "3-D Ready" sticker is just one more baffling high-tech label. Television manufacturers are currently enjoying a sales boom, so they're not exactly rushing to tell consumers that their brand-new flat screen plasma model is obsolete because it's, uh, too flat. But 3-D may well be the new HD, if viewers can get beyond the psychological barrier of wearing glasses. "When you look at sports on 3-D TV, it takes your breath away," says Sandy Climan, CEO of 3ality Digital LLC, a production company devoted to producing live-action 3-D. "We can do sports in 3-D and we can do it live."

There is, of course, the same chicken-and-egg issue that HD originally faced. "There was a time when the networks decided to bank HD footage so when HD became a reality they would have it available to release," says Climan. They're not doing it yet. But 3ality's founder, Steve Schklair, maintains that broad-

# 3-D INVASION

**The new glasses say it all. Movies are undergoing a revolution some say is on a par with the advent of sound. BY BRIAN D. JOHNSON**

movie is stored as one large computer file that is loaded onto a single, idiot-proof digital projector. The result is an image of uncompromised clarity. And in place of the flimsy cardboard glasses, the audience wears groovy plastic shades that look like jumbo Ray-Bans and fit over regular glasses. Their polarized lenses block certain wavelengths of light, allowing each eye to filter out the footage intended for the other eye.

Now television is getting into the act too. This weekend the Disney Channel and Starz Entertainment will air the *Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus Best of Both Worlds Concert Tour* in 3-D. Although it played in digital 3-D in theatres, it will be broadcast in the old analog format, which requires the red-blue glasses. Reverting to vintage low-tech, Starz is pitching it as a paste-and-scissors craft project: kids can go to its website and learn how to make their own glasses with cardboard,

casters can adopt 3-D even more easily than HD. "HD was a more radical shift in terms of expense. You need no change to the broadcast infrastructure to put 3-D on the home television." The first 3-D Blu-ray DVDs will be available by Christmas, he adds. And 3-D video games are already on the market.

If an event like the Super Bowl is broadcast in 3-D, that could be the tipping point. James Stewart, a Toronto 3-D filmmaker, says, "the Super Bowl pushes so much of the big screen TV market. And once you see it in 3-D, you'll never watch it in 2-D again. It's better than being in the front row." Which is what some critics said about *U2 3D*, the first stereoscopic concert movie. The film's producer, 3ality Digital, had originally planned a 3-D IMAX movie about the NFL and even shot test footage of the 2003 Super Bowl. Schklair said the NFL was wowed by the results. But as the

project stalled, 3ality decided to make the U2 movie instead, and refined its technology in the process.

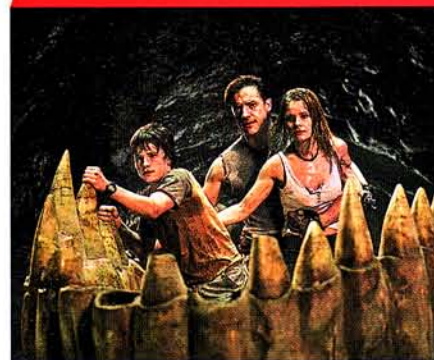
Now Schklair is in negotiations with European and U.S. broadcasters to produce live stereoscopic broadcasts of sporting events. "Sports," he says, "is going to be the prime mover of 3-D TV." He predicts that a European broadcaster may embrace the medium before the Americans, but that a U.S. network will stage a live 3-D broadcast of a sports event by the end of the year.

But for the time being, 3-D's most active



DIRECTOR James Stewart says 3-D will go beyond thrill rides like *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (left)

**'Once you see the Super Bowl in 3-D, you'll never watch 2-D again. It's better than the front row.'**



arena is the big screen. IMAX has been showing 3-D in theme parks ever since Michael Jackson teamed up with Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas to make *Captain EO* in 1986. In the 1990s, Universal Studios made a virtue of vertigo with 3-D cinematic rides based on *Terminator 2* and *Spider-Man*. James Cameron took the IMAX 3-D format underwater to shoot the Titanic's graveyard in his documentary *Ghosts of the Abyss* (2003).

In recent years, 3-D has consistently outperformed 2-D at the box office on a per-screen basis. Director Roberto Rodriguez made the first breakthrough at the multiplex with *Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over*, which employed Cameron's patented camera system. Although it was the second sequel of a tired franchise, and audiences had to wear the cheap cardboard glasses, it was the most lucrative of all three *Spy Kids* movies, grossing almost \$200 million worldwide. The studios took notice. The next year Warner Bros. distributed *Polar Express* in 2-D and 3-D IMAX versions; it grossed \$45 million on just 84 IMAX screens. Then Disney trotted out *Chicken Little* (2005) and *Meet the Robinsons* (2007), the first animated features to get a general release in RealD digital theatres.

Meanwhile, a California firm called In-

Three is converting 2-D movies into 3-D with a technique it calls "dimensionalization," not unlike the colourization of black-and-white. Graphic artists isolate every object in the frame and construct layers of imagery. Costing up to \$120,000 a minute, it's an expensive process but it has proved profitable for Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas*, which will be re-released in 3-D for the third year running in October. In-Three is also fleshing out the zombies in a dimensionalized *Dawn of the Dead*, due out next year. And it has received glowing testimonials from the likes of Spielberg, Peter Jackson and George Lucas—who hopes to re-release all his *Star Wars* movies in dimensionalized versions. In-Three executive Neil Feldman insists the process is no gimmick: "Our idea is not to intrude and make you conscious of the 3-D. What we do is surround sound for the eyes. We try to convince you that you're on the set."

For filmmakers, that extra dimension of depth introduces a whole new world of creative and technical hurdles. Even armed with the new technology, some can't resist employing the old B-movie gimmickry—specifically screen-piercing effects that lunge into the audience. In the first few minutes

of *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, a scientist gooses the audience with a retractable tape measure that slithers into the theatre. It's a gag. But with stereoscopic cinema, the rectangular screen becomes a box—a virtual proscenium stage—and by breaking the fourth wall, the suspension of disbelief is shattered. Even in live theatre, which is naturally three-dimensional, actors break that wall between their world and the audience at their peril.

It's easy to forget that 2-D cinema, like painting and photography, already incorporates the illusion of 3-D. It's called perspective. And it works. When the Lumière brothers premiered the first motion pictures in 1895, some audience members fainted and others ran from the room at the sight of a locomotive steaming towards them. Ever since, whenever we question a movie's believability, the lack of stereoscopic depth is the least of our concerns. From the shower scene in *Psycho* to the erupting creature in *Alien*, 2-D movies have made us jump out of our seats. When a dinosaur shocks us by bolting out of the screen in *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, it seems all too easy—suspense reduced to a glib carnival trick.

Whether making B-movies or theme park films, 3-D directors tend to favour the pointy end of the third dimension. They prefer to ambush viewers with phallic novelty rather than lure them in. Even though *Journey to the Center of the Earth* is literally about depth—about plunging into an abyss—this terrestrial womb is a vagina dentata, a subterranean sea cave stocked with flying piranhas the size of pit bulls. Yet the most convincing shots are the more passive vistas, like the scene of a boy suspended high above a chasm on a floating bridge of magnetic rocks.

Filmmakers seeking respectability for 3-D

tend to be embarrassed by the genre's addiction to lurid effects. "You have the power to really invade people's space," says Stewart. "But do you want to do that? You have to be very careful about how often you poke people in the face. The new philosophy is all about creating this immersive environment." *Immersive*. That's a word the 3-D community adores. In a Toronto editing suite, Stewart showed me a car commercial that he'd shot in 3-D for Japanese dealers. There were no eye-popping effects. In fact, the footage was quite prosaic. Driver opens door. Camera peers into car interior. Aerial shot of car on the road. But in immaculate 3-D, it was strangely mesmerizing.

Stewart says he recently screened *U2 3D* for an audience that included director David Cronenberg. "He said he would love to see his horror films in 3-D. And I told him he should dimensionalize them." However, like many 3-D acolytes, Stewart believes the medium will spread beyond horror, action and animation to invade every form of filmmaking. "People always say, 'Why would you shoot *My Dinner with Andre* in 3-D?' But that film was all about giving you the feeling you were sitting at the table, and you'd feel you were even more at the table. After about 10 minutes of watching a 3-D film you really shouldn't be aware of the 3-D."

Hollywood, meanwhile, has grabbed onto 3-D as a spearhead to drive the digital conversion of theatres, which the studios are keen to accelerate. By distributing movies as computer files rather than manufacturing and shipping celluloid prints, they can save an estimated \$1 billion a year. And unlike celluloid, which deteriorates every time it spins through a projector, digital copies of movies remain pristine. Even piracy is not a concern—bootlegging a 3-D movie is just not feasible, at least for the time being.

But installing digital projectors, at about \$70,000 a pop, is a costly proposition for the theatre chains. And 3-D technology is at least another \$25,000. Currently only 600 of North America's 36,000 screens are digitally equipped. Two major U.S. theatre chains, Regal and Cinemark, recently announced plans to install up to 1,500 RealD screens each. But to comfortably release a blockbuster like Cameron's *Avatar*, Hollywood needs a threshold of at least 5,000 digital screens. And with hundreds of millions in 3-D production under way, for studios like Disney and DreamWorks the rollout of digital 3-D theatres is not happening fast enough. What's holding it back is a deadlock in negotiations between the studios and the theatre chains, which are seeking a deal by which

the studios would compensate them each time a digital movie is delivered—to cover the cost of converting cinemas.

The digital makeover of the multiplex is inevitable. "It will eventually trump 35 mm," says Ellis Jacob, CEO of Canada's Cineplex chain. "Digital isn't going to change the moviegoer's experience dramatically—most people can't tell the difference. But 3-D is a significant shift." Of Cineplex's 1,350 screens, 41 are now 3-D equipped, and by the end of next year Jacob expects that number to rise to 175. "There's a lot of opportunities with concerts and sporting events," he adds. "A Raptors

"The Apollo 11 mission is utterly predictable. But there's a four-minute sequence of Buzz Aldrin coming down the ladder of the spacecraft and bouncing on the moon, and we see kids watching it with their mouths open."

Steve Schklair, however, believes that if 3-D is properly executed, it can be edited just like 2-D. The secret, he says, is smoothing the shifts in depth to make edits comfortable for the viewer. Both *Fly Me to the Moon* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* have some jarring transitions, and I felt eye strain after both screenings. But Schklair says not one of the 300-plus reviews of *U2 3D* men-

**'What we do is surround sound for the eyes. We try to convince you that you are on the set.'**



KIDS RELISH the 3-D novelty of *Hannah Montana* (left) and *Fly Me to the Moon*



game in 3-D would be awesome."

Video, especially sports, is devoted to reproducing reality with unmediated precision. But cinema has an aesthetic tradition of abstracting or heightening reality. And some 3-D filmmakers—like Belgian director Ben Stassen, who made the upcoming animated feature *Fly Me to the Moon*—believe the format should co-exist with 2-D, not replace it. But Stassen still thinks 3-D is the biggest thing to hit movies since the talkies: "There's been just one revolution in the history of cinema. That's sound. The transition to colour was an evolution, but it didn't transform the language of cinema. 3-D is a new language."

Stassen argues it will bring radical changes to the grammar of filmmaking. The current fashion for rapid cuts, for instance, poses problems. "Fast-moving action sequences," he says, "are really hard to capture in 3-D. You get more strobing. You can make people physically sick. 3-D is intimate. You are the fly on the wall watching the scene happening around you." Which literally describes his heroes in *Fly Me to the Moon*—flies hitching a ride on the Apollo 11 moon rocket. "I never would have touched it in 2-D," he says.

tioned eye strain. "If you're editing from one point in space to another point in a single frame—1/24th of a second—your eyes have to snap around in their sockets," he says. "3-D became comfortable to watch when we learned how to control the depth."

The new 3-D technology has also been used by NASA for repairing the space shuttle and scanning the surface of Mars, by the military for aerial surveillance, and by medical science for scanning the human body. But of course, there's another obvious application that those trying to dignify 3-D would rather ignore: porn. *The Stewardesses* originated as a hard-core porn title and was re-edited in a softer version for wider release. (It's now being remade as a 3-D teen movie due out next year.) And although Schklair's company doesn't touch porn, "I can tell you that not a day goes by when we don't get a call about it," he says. "Porn was the killer application for VHS and the Internet. I'm sure that when there's a home delivery system, porn's going to seem awfully dull if it's not in 3-D."

Hang onto your hats. Once 3-D penetrates porn, and a dimensionalized *Deep Throat* sequel is out on Blu-ray, we'll never see the end of it. M