Not since SHOCK WAVES have so many underwater zombies been slogging through murky water to menace the living. Here on the Toronto set of RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE, a group of soggy ghouls have emerged from a flooded stairwell at the LA County Correctional Facility, where film series heroine Alice (Milla Jovovich) and her allies (including game hero Chris Redfield, played by PRISON BREAK’s Wentworth Miller) are holed up and scrounging for weapons. According to APOCALYPSE producer Don Carmody, the scene being shot takes place in the “end of the middle third of the film,” and Fango is here to witness some killer undead action.

Said action takes a noisy turn, however, necessitating the distribution of earplugs to all those observing when Miller fires dual guns at a ghoul. The zombie screams and lunges at the human survivors, before flipping completely backward and into the water after being aerated by bullets. Fellow stunt creature Danny Lima observes his brethren’s abuse.

“My job has already been done,” Lima tells Fango. “I was hooked up to a cable, heading underwater, and on a cue that I couldn’t hear—I had to basically feel my way along—I came flying up behind one of the actresses and grabbed her, and then pulled her stuntperson into the water. Today’s one of the highlights. Hopefully they’ll use it in the trailer.”

According to producer Jeremy Bolt, despite the morning’s terrifying siege, the toughest part for the RESIDENT EVIL team was coming up with this compelling midsection for their action-horror film. The story opens where EXTINCTION ended three years ago: the zombie-ravaged Earth is largely desolate, and Alice and a gaggle of her clones head to Japan to settle a score with the

evil Umbrella Corp., which precipitated the collapse of civilization. “Interestingly, I would say the biggest challenge in these movies is not the beginning or the end, it’s the middle bit,” says Bolt, who produces the RESIDENT EVIL flicks with Constantin Film, Davis Films, Impact Pictures and distributor Screen Gems, which releases AFTERLIFE on September 10—in both regular and IMAX 3-D. “We always have great beginnings, and we generally have pretty awesome endings. It’s the middle half hour that is difficult. We ended the last film with a great way to begin another film: She’s coming, Alice is on her way to Japan, Chairman Wesker [Shawn Roberts] better beware.”

“The whole opening sequence is the clones,” adds fellow producer Robert Kulzer. “It’s a big action sequence, a lot of fighting, really cool stunts. Alice still has her superpowers at that point, so you get a lot of cool stuff—flying and psychic blasts and things. Just all-around doing things that normal people couldn’t do in real life, even if you’re a crazy bad-ass. But then it’s good, because once we get to the real Alice, she’s on her own, and she is just a person again.”

For Anderson, who wrote and directed the first RESIDENT EVIL and scripted and produced the subsequent sequels, the chance to guide wife Jovovich again and further explore her mysterious character served as an AFTERLIFE enticement to call the shots once more. Further bonus: rebooting the series and helming the new film in three dimensions. “3-D can pull you into these underground spaces, or push out these grotesque mandibles of the undead,” says Anderson of his use of the cinematic gimmick, and also divulging a new addition to his human monsters’ repertoire: the zombies’ mouths spring open with Gigeresque tentacles and fangs, an image straight out of Capcom’s RESIDENT EVIL 5 game. “It’s a very, very exciting tool to be using and applying to the RESIDENT EVIL franchise, and I do feel that using 3-D is part of the reinvention of the franchise. Some elements have stayed the same, but certainly, in terms of speaking as a director, my arsenal has been beefed up big time with 3-D. There are a lot more opportunities for me to scare the living daylights out of the audience.”

The incorporation of 3-D into the RESIDENT EVIL universe is just one facet of keeping Alice’s adventures in horrorland fresh and exciting. ”We’re very, very responsible, so we get the biggest bang for our buck,” Bolt says, “but also, we see that in today’s market, to have a franchise, to

have a title with a pre-existing awareness, is tremendously valuable. And rather than simply milk it for as much as you can, you need to grow it and evolve it, nurture it, and that means you need to feed it, and you need to spend money on it, and you need to protect it. This is one of the reasons Paul has always been very involved in the postproduction of all of the films. He writes them and he really cares for them. In return, we’ve all felt that each movie is worth giving a little bit more to next time, which is the reason we’re on number four and, frankly, hopefully, there will be another one.”

Bolt and Anderson are on the same page where this subject is concerned: “I’ve always felt it’s important for a franchise, if it’s going to be successful over time, to reinvent itself and evolve,” the writer/director notes. “You can’t just deliver the same movie over and over again. That has been the basis of our movies. The first one was a very tight, claustrophobic story set within one location over a very limited period of time. The second movie became more expansive in that we had the whole of Raccoon City to play with. The third movie kind of explored those wide-open desert spaces. So each movie has delivered a different kind of landscape and horror. And, you know, with this movie and the use of 3-D, I really see that we have the capability to do that even better. These claustrophobic spaces are so much more effective in 3-D, because I find 3-D is a very immersive tool in cinema.”

And then, of course, there are the zombies themselves. This time, the living dead are the province of makeup FX creator Paul Jones, who created the Nemesis character in APOCALYSPE and is a veteran of the HELLRAISER and GINGER SNAPS movies. Jones and his team have designed several new species of ghouls for AFTERLIFE, including burrowing ones, the massive Axe Man and the aforementioned underwater zombies and maw-opening Majini. In addition to variety, there will be volume…

“There was a day we did where we were contemplating using 300 zombies, but it wasn’t feasible in the time we had, so we started off with 50, then we went to 75, then we went to 100, then 150,” Jones says. “It seems like a lot until you cram them shoulder to shoulder and it doesn’t fill up much space at all. So luckily, with a fabulous visual effects department supervisor [Dennis Berardi of Mr. X], they’re going to multiply zombies *à la* 300 or GLADIATOR. So instead of armies of Romans, we’ll have armies of zombies.”

Lest we expect two hours of rotting flesh or a retread of previous EVILs, Bolt sets us straight. “RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE is going to be a very different horror experience than some of the other films,” he promises. ”There is going to be a lot of blood…and also a lot of beauty.”

Well, with Jovovich as star, it’s hard to argue the latter.

Beginning July 6, keep checking Fangoria.com for more exclusive and extensive RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE coverage, right up to the film’s September release date. And see the all-different set visit in FANGORIA #296, on sale in August.

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