

★ PREVIEW

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PETER
WELLER

AND
MADONNA

PLUS A
SIZZLING
SYBIL

DANNING
SUPERWOMAN
CALENDAR



Empire of the Sun is an anti-war story, not just of a single war, but of *all* wars and their effect on young, impressionable kids who are becoming adults—that very critical stage of a person's development. It is a personal human interest story woven within an epic tapestry."

The elements, as he describes them, form an ideal dramatic nucleus for a Steven Spielberg film. His latest project, the first he has directed since **The Color Purple** two years ago, is set against the exotic background of Shanghai during WWII as seen through the eyes of a young boy. Based on science fiction author J.G. Ballard's semi-autobiographical novel about his childhood experiences as a prisoner in a Japanese camp at Lunghua, the picture recounts the terrifying events witnessed by 11-year-old Jim Graham after the Japanese march into Shanghai on December 8, 1941, following their bombing of Pearl Harbor.

"I identified with and was inspired by Jim's character," says the 40-year-old filmmaker. "Jim is the youngest hero in recent literature. He's a survivor in a world that doesn't allow survival."

As the son of affluent parents who live in the British sector of Shanghai, Jim leads a very sheltered life, more devoted to model airplanes than school activities. Wary of the impending attack, Jim's family and friends prepare to evacuate the city, but, while fleeing in the streets, are separated. Forced to fend for himself, the inexperienced boy is rescued from starvation by two American seamen who survive by selling anything they can steal. Inevitably, they are captured and interned in a nearby prison camp.

Unlike others in the facility, Jim's spirit is not eroded by the ordeal, much of his time being spent running errands for his friends, the camp's commodities kings. With starvation and death an ever-present threat, he learns about the brutal world of reality, how to placate the guards, drink only boiled water and eat weevils for protein. When the war's end—and sudden freedom—thrust Jim on his own again, he is forced to relinquish his childhood, and enter the adult world, a place filled with disappointment and betrayal, a place where he has learned to survive.

Christian Bale, a 13-year-old British actor selected from more than 4,000 possibilities during a massive nine-month talent search, previously appeared in only one film, several TV productions and a number of commercials. Of all the places the film has taken him, however, his favorite is Spielberg's Hollywood office. "Disneyland

was fun," he says, "but I like Steven's office more. He has lots of arcade games, and you don't have to pay to play them—every turn is free!"

John (**Places in the Heart**) Malkovich and Joe (**La Bamba**) Pantoliano portray Basie and Frank, the Americans who befriend the vulnerable youth, while Miranda (**Dance with a Stranger**)


STEVEN SPIELBERG CREATES A POWERFUL AND POIGNANT EPIC OF WWII... EMPIRE OF THE SUN

Richardson, Nigel (**Chariots of Fire**) Havers and Rupert (**Gandhi**) Frazer appear in the supporting cast, which also includes more than 15,000 extras.

Empire's 16-week shoot employed almost 500 crew members working simultaneously in England, Spain and China, qualifying it as the first major Hollywood studio production to lense in the People's Republic. The monumental task of international planning and negotiation was accomplished by Spielberg and producers Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall, who had travelled to Buenos Aires, Vienna, Liverpool, Stockholm, Hong Kong and Lisbon in an exhaustive search to find a location which could double for Shanghai—before realizing no other city could match its unique beauty and blend of cultures.

Warned that permission to film behind the Bamboo Curtain would entail four years of red tape, the Spielberg staff short-cut the process to one year, and were granted access to China for three weeks. Because the territory was closed for 40 years, few Western films have been distributed in China; fewer still were the number of people who knew Spielberg's name. To rectify the situation, screenings of **E.T.**, **Back to the Future** and **The Color Purple** were held for the public and government officials.

Then, the painstaking process of duplicating old Shanghai began. "The city has



virtually stood still for almost a half-century," Marshall says. "We were able to shoot from rooftops, and perfectly match old photos." Streets that had only been closed once for filming (in 1959) were blocked off as the unit moved in; the effect was not unlike closing the entire length of Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. Signs and billboards were altered with traditional Mandarin lettering. The first day of production required 5,000 extras costumed as rickshaw men, street vendors, peasants, sailors and bar girls, all of whom swarmed across the Bund, Shanghai's main waterfront highway. Later, a similar number were recruited from factories and offices to reenact the mass flight from the besieged city.

Although the luxurious Tudor homes where Jim supposedly lives in the British quarter of the International Settlement still stand, they could only be used for exterior shots, since as many as 15 families now live in each. Interior lensing was completed in London. Meanwhile, 300 construction workers began building the extensive prison camp sets on the banks of the Gualalquivir River near Jerez in Spain, which was chosen because its terrain and weather were comparable to that of Shanghai.

Unfortunately, the effort was barely underway when the characteristically dry area was deluged with rain that continued for five solid weeks. Just before Spielberg's cameras were set to roll, however, the downpour subsided, and, with only moments to spare, was re-landscaped and immediately occupied.

The prison camp set covered 900 square meters, and included a pagoda, bunkers, a railway line with turntable and an operational 1,000-foot runway with hangars for the WWII planes which fascinate the film's young protagonist.

The American air raid on the camp used three U.S. P-51 Mustangs, collectors' items valued at \$500,000 apiece. Led by Roy Hanna, former chief of Britain's Red Arrows aerobatic team, the fighter planes provided a spectacular display of low-level flying. They were pursued by Japanese Zeros, the famed fighters developed by Mitsubishi during WWII. Tom



THIS PAGE:
American Mustang over Shanghai. Christian Bales observes the attack from the camp. The boy's parents explain the imminent evacuation. Reunion at war's end with a Japanese who saved his life.



Danaher, an ex-marine credited with shooting down the last Japanese plane the night before they surrendered, September 3, 1945, was in charge of the enemy aerial unit.

Because so few of the vintage fighters still exist, the film's high-flying dog fights and bombing raids were created with real planes and models, six "Zekes" and six Mustangs built to 1/3 scale at a cost ranging up to \$21,000 each. The replicas have 12-foot wing spans, and can attain speeds of 90 mph.

Since there is only one B-29 in the world capable of flight, Spielberg ordered a model of the super-bomber built. The result weighed 100 pounds, had an 18-foot wing span and was capable of 80-mph speeds. It had so many functions, six radio receivers and two transmitters were required to operate the model, which could duplicate any of the original sky giant's maneuvers.



All the action footage was expertly blended with the actors' scenes to generate a cinematic masterpiece equal to Spielberg's dramatic vision. Even the Chinese, whose techniques are rapidly catching up to ours, found themselves deeply involved in the celebrated director's work. A seminar, lasting an entire afternoon, in which he exchanged views with Asian filmmakers, aptly punctuated the end of the epic production.

"It was the most exciting three hours of my life," Spielberg admits with honest enthusiasm, "because film is the same all over the world—the most common language of our universe."

★ Milo Mitchell



Without his family, Christian Bale is swept into the massive evacuation.



THIS PAGE:
Allied air strike on Shanghai. Director Spielberg and his stars. Separated from his parents, Bale falls into Japanese hands. Facing certain death in detention, internees clamor to be moved to the prison camp.

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