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## Blast From The Past

### Director Joe Dante Can Identify With His Characters In 'Matinee'

February 10, 1993 | By Steven Rea, Knight-Ridder/Tribune.

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In director Joe Dante's "Matinee," John Goodman stars as Lawrence Woolsey, an entrepreneurial filmmaker in the William Castle-Roger Corman mold, and newcomer Simon Fenton is a 15-year-old monster-movie devotee growing up in Key West, Fla. It's October 1962, and Kennedy and Kruschv are playing the high-stakes game of chicken that would become known as the Cuban missile crisis.

At the time of that historic showdown, Dante, who grew up in Morris County, N.J., was "about the same age as the lead kid in the movie, which puts me in the unique position of being able to identify with him and the Lawrence Woolsey character who I've now grown up to be.

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"Sure enough, that weekend, everybody thought the world was going to end," Dante says.

"Matinee" is both a coming-of-age tale and a celebration of low-budget scare-fare the likes of "Tarantula," "This Island Earth" and "The Creature From the Black Lagoon."

The project enabled Dante to direct his own black-and-white horror flick: "MANT." The movie-within-a-movie, in which a radiation mishap transmutes a guy into a giant insect ("Half man . . . half ant . . . all terror!"), deploys authentically cheesy special effects and gloriously bad dialogue.

"Keeping a straight face was hard enough," reports Dante. "We shot it in five days just like Lawrence Woolsey probably would have. . . . The special effects are probably a little better than they would have been in a comparable movie, it was really a labor of love, because I grew up on those pictures."

A Corman protege who went on to direct "The Howling," "Innerspace" and both "Gremlins," Dante hopes that his next film will be "Termite Terrace," a project he and "Gremlins" and

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"Matinee" screenwriter Charlie Haas have been gnawing on for years. But the property-based on animator Chuck Jones' accounts of the Looney Tunes cartoonists headquartered at Warner Bros. during the nascent days of Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig-still hasn't been green-lighted by Warner execs.

And unlike other scripts, which you can walk over to another studio, "Termite Terrace" has to be made at Warner Bros. "I'm afraid so," says Dante. "It's not like you can take it somewhere else and make it about Woody Woodpecker."

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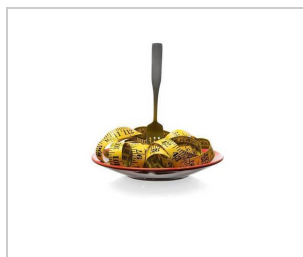
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