2014 is the 30th Anniversary of David Lynch's *Dune*

David Lynch's *Dune* premiered thirty years ago. Sometime in 1983, I was sitting in my studio, wondering where my next cheeseburger was coming from, when I got a call from Raffaella de Laurentiis' office. "We're making a movie of *Dune*. We think your paintings of Mars in the book, *The Grand Tour*, look a lot like Arrakis. Would you care to come out and talk about working for us?"

Of course I said "yes!" I was told that it would be for just a few weeks, "To see if we like you and you like us."
When I arrived at the *Dune* offices on the Universal lot, there were scarcely half a dozen people working on the film: David Lynch, Raffaella, fresh from *Conan the Barbarian*, who was the producer, Tony Masters, the production designer, and Mentor Heubner and George Jensen, the storyboard artists. My job, I was told, was to work from the script and Masters’ drawings to create large-scale paintings that would show what key scenes would look like in the final film.
Mentor Heubner, Tony Masters and David Lynch.

I was given a room, art supplies, a copy of the script and a sheaf of sketches by Masters. The next day I'd turned in my first production painting (shown in the banner above).

I was absolutely thrilled to be working closely with Tony Masters. He'd been the production designer on *2001*, which was the movie that was most influential on my choice of careers. Shortly after I'd begun work, Bob Ringwood joined the team as the costume designer. He'd recently completed the costumes for *Excalibur*. This was to be only his second feature film.

Apparently we all liked each other enough that I was signed on permanently.

About a month later, my wife, Judith, came out to visit. To pass some time while hanging around waiting for me to finish up for the day, she built a paper model of an Atreides ornithopter. Raffaella strolled in, saw the model and asked where it had come from. Judith said, "I made it." Raffaella offered her a job on the spot. Judith eventually not only created preliminary models of most of the spacecraft and sets, she contributed to their design. She was also instrumental in the design of the Guild navigator.
In addition to helping Lynch visualize the look of the movie, another key purpose of my paintings was to impress the film's financers. Over the course of the coming year, we had to periodically put on a dog-and-pony show, where we would fill a room with paintings, sketches, storyboards and models. For one of these events, Judith even modeled some of the costumes.

*The art department.*
Judith in one of the costumes.

After a few months the entire production moved to Estudios Churubusco, which was located in a suburb of Mexico City, where we remained for the year it took to create the film. By now the crew had expanded to include scores of artists and artisans. I eventually was able to add to my duties the design of many of the weapons and props, as well as all of the insignia, symbols, flags, etc. One job that gave me immense pleasure was coming up with the preliminary sketches for all of the matte paintings that appear in the film. These were created by the legendary matte artist, Al Whitlock. While we were still at Universal, he had graciously given me a tour of his studio, which to me was like a religious pilgrimage. I was flattered beyond measure when I saw the finished film and realized that Whitlock had followed my sketches to the smallest detail.

The poison detector I designed.

Everyone was both generous and gracious in spending time answering my endless questions and letting me hang around to watch what they did. The late, great cinematographer/director Freddie Francis would explain what he was doing while shooting a scene and let me look through his camera. Special effects wizard Emilio Ruiz del Rio was immensely patient in letting me watch him create his incredible hanging miniatures.
Emilio Ruiz del Rio.

Judith's favorite *Dune* story involves Kyle MacLachlan. We were watching Kyle do his screen test as Paul when Raffaella turned to Judith and asked, "What do you think of him?" Judith replied that she thought he'd make a splendid Paul Atreides...and MacLachlan got the part. To this day, Judith feels a little responsible for his career.

Judith and I left the production shortly after principal photography began. Almost a year later, after post-production had been moved to Los Angeles, I was asked back to create the matte art that appears in the film book sequences—especially the views of the planets as they are being described at the beginning of the film.

The first day of principal photography.
Judith and I had a wonderful time working on *Dune*. We enjoyed everyone we worked with almost without exception. I had and still have nothing but admiration for Raffaella and David and I made friends I am still in touch with today. Our memories of our year on Arrakis are still warm. If I was specially impressed with anything about working on the film, it would have to come down to two things. The first was the immense effort that when into quality and attention to the every detail. Nothing was stinted when it came to either of those. The second was the effort made to give the sets, props and costumes *history*. Things that belonged to Caladan, Arrakis or Geidi Prime reflected the culture, history and materials native to those worlds. The test of any costume or prop was to be able by its appearance alone tell what planet it came from. I think this philosophy went a long way into giving *Dune* its unique look...and it's a philosophy I've rarely seen employed in any other science fiction movie.

Having said all that, I have to say a few more words in defense of the movie, which has taken more than its share of criticism. (It might be worth pointing out, by the way, that Frank Herbert visited the sets at least one time—and even joined in on a *Dune* movie panel at the LA Worldcon—and was immensely pleased with what he saw—everyone had a copy of *Dune* somewhere close at hand and whenever a design question arose, the book was immediately consulted.)

There are certainly decisions Lynch made that I didn't care for too much. For instance, he seemed to equate villainy with bad personal hygiene. But he did adapt what is probably an unadaptable book and if he rang his own changes on it, he had every right to do so...and had the author's enthusiastic blessing besides.

But almost all of the failures of *Dune* can be laid not on the decisions that Lynch made but on what happened to the movie afterward. Universal made the decision to cut 45 minutes from the film. The argument was that a shorter film could be screened more often in a day, thereby earning more money. The problem was that what they ordered cut was narrative and character development. What was left was action—all too often disjointed—and no rationale for why it was all taking place.

There have been two or three attempts to restore the film, all of them by people whose good intentions outweighed their abilities...let alone their knowledge or appreciation of the film Lynch had tried to make. While it's great to see so many missing scenes, the overall results are simply embarrassing. And the entire problem is exacerbated by the fact that Universal's order to shorten the film came before all the special effects were completed. This means that even if the film were to be competently restored, there would still be key effects scenes missing.

Hopefully, someone will eventually not only replace all the missing footage with David Lynch's script firmly in hand, but will take advantage of CGI technology to recreate the missing effects as well. I am convinced that this would really be worth doing.