

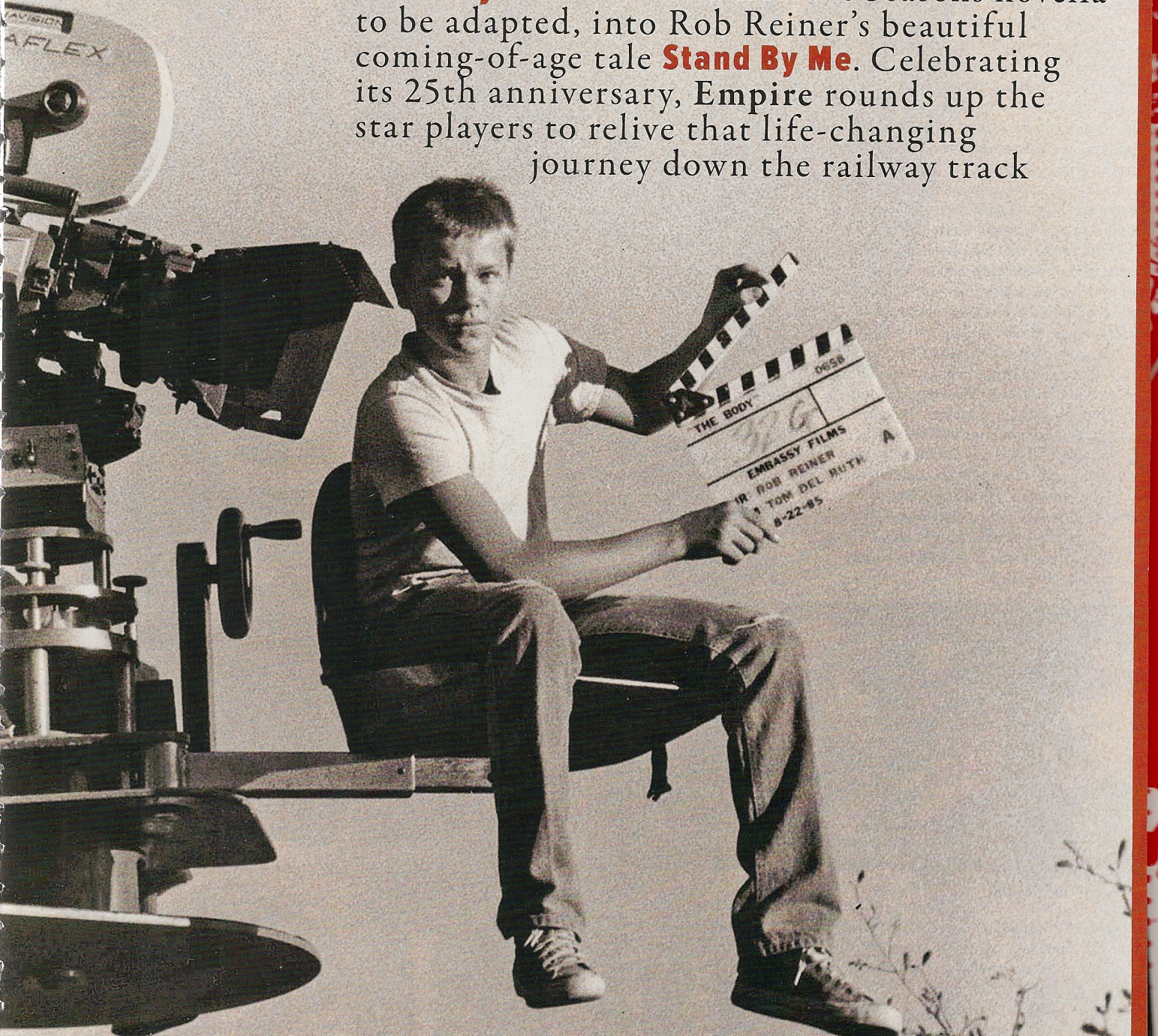


FALL
from

Words: Owen Williams

INNO

The Body was the first Different Seasons novella to be adapted, into Rob Reiner's beautiful coming-of-age tale **Stand By Me**. Celebrating its 25th anniversary, Empire rounds up the star players to relive that life-changing journey down the railway track

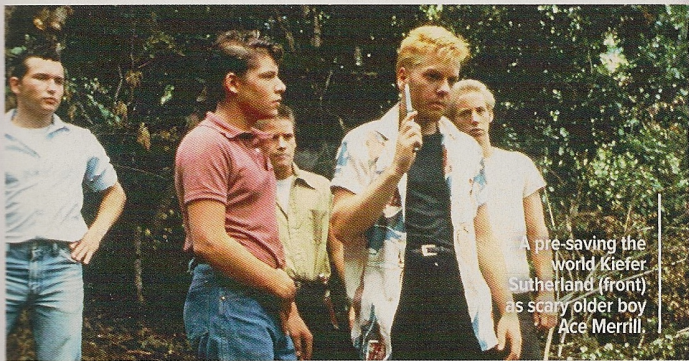


CENCE

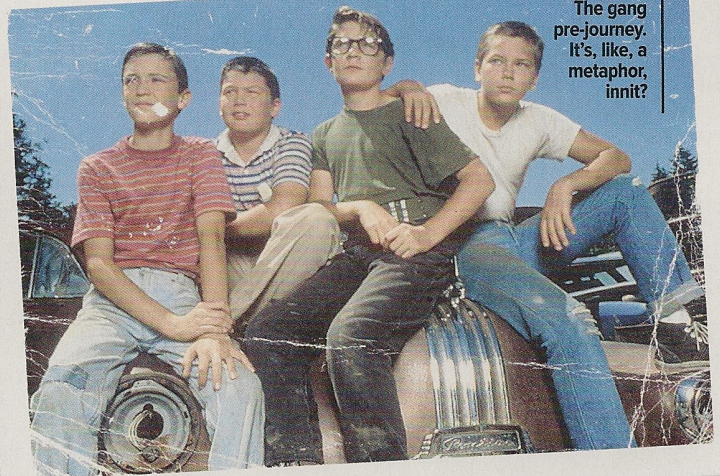
BEGINNINGS

STEPHEN KING (AUTHOR OF THE BODY): The Body was written directly after Salem's Lot; I always finish a big job with just enough gas in the tank to blow off one good-sized novella. I wanted to find a string to hang a lot of the childhood experiences that I remembered on. A lot of them were funny; some of them were kinda sad... I needed to have a reason for these guys to go somewhere and do something, and I came up with the idea of them going down the train tracks. Most good stories about boys are stories about journeys.

ANDY SCHEINMAN (PRODUCER): Rob Reiner had made Spinal Tap for Norman Lear at Embassy, and Norman was looking for something else from him. Rob asked if I'd like to be part of something, and he was far ahead of me in terms of his career, so I said yes, on the condition that working together didn't mess up our friendship. And we've now been working together for 30 years! (*Screenwriters*) Ray Gideon and Bruce Evans had found The Body and optioned it from Stephen King and brought it to me. And Rob thought it was really interesting and that maybe he would like to direct it. We had Adrian Lyne on course to do it at that time, but he also had a zillion other projects lined up, and said he didn't mind if we took it elsewhere. So then we gave it to Rob. It needed knocking into shape, but Rob found a way to make it better and change the focus of it.



A pre-saving the world Kiefer Sutherland (front) as scary older boy Ace Merrill.



The gang pre-journey. It's, like, a metaphor, innit?

ROB REINER (DIRECTOR): I spent about four days riding around LA trying to figure out what the hell I'd agreed to do! I had no idea what the movie was about; it was giving me migraines! They were really good characters and good situations, with good dialogue, but there was no focus to it. But once I hit upon making Gordie the focus of the piece, then it all started coming together. Andy and I went in with Ray and Bruce and we completely overhauled it around Gordie.

KING: For me, I felt that Gordie was the narrator, and if there was a hero, a tragic hero, it was Chris Chambers. I was more interested in seeing Chris through Gordie's eyes than I was in seeing Gordie himself.

SCHEINMAN: Having all that stuff about Gordie's father having lost his "good" boy and

having to still live with the "bad" one, and the effect that has on Gordie, is a much more powerful, dramatic through-line. The focus became the son not appreciated by his father, which it wasn't in the novella. Then when Gordie breaks down at the end, it's a great epiphany moment.

REINER: It was very atypical Stephen King. The book is called The Body, and we changed the name because we felt that would give people the wrong impression of what kind of film this was. When we added the Ben E. King song to the soundtrack, we realised Stand By Me was the perfect title. We stripped out all the horror elements from the book.

SCHEINMAN: We de-Stephen Kinged it!

REINER: It's very telling that in the book of

Misery, Paul Sheldon fakes burning the book and actually goes ahead and publishes the new Misery novel (*Reiner's film version has him really burn it*). It was Stephen King basically making a story about a guy trying to break away from the kind of writing that he'd become successful doing, and at the same time being scared that his audience would leave him. For me, it was hard to break away as a situation-comedy actor in America to become a director; I understood those kinds of creative restraints. I think he felt he always had to put some of that horror stuff even into something like The Body, which really was just a coming-of-age story about boys going on an adventure and the bonding of the friends and the strength that you get from friendship. It's not about moments of horror.

BFI (10, KOBAL) (2)



Boys in the wood, (from left) Wil Wheaton, River Phoenix, Jerry O'Connell and Corey Feldman.

Chris around the campfire, about the milk money, and the scene at the body with Chris where Gordie says his dad hates him. Those were the tough scenes, right off the bat, and I remember feeling really intimidated by that. I didn't know how to cry in an audition. I asked my agent about it and she told me that it wasn't important: it just mattered that it was honest and there was some kind of emotional connection to what was happening.

FELDMAN: I was the accidental tourist of film. I was literally going from one number-one movie to the next, and it wasn't like there was some great plan. I was just a kid doing my work and I got very lucky. I went from Friday 13th: The Final Chapter, which nobody expected much from and it turned out to be a number-one hit, then straight into Gremlins, which of course was Spielberg [producing] so we knew that would be a big one, then right into Goonies. I always remember sitting in the waiting room at the audition, and this very pushy, aggressive stage mom was there, and her kid said he wanted to be in a Friday 13th movie, and she looked at him and told him, "Those movies are crap and

which is an opinion I've pretty much maintained to this day.

FELDMAN: I was quite corrupted on that film. I was a very innocent young boy when I entered that phase of my life, but I kissed my first girl while we were making that movie; I drank my first alcohol; I smoked my first weed; and I smoked my first cigarettes. It was River and I mostly. We became very bonded, strong friends at that point, moving into that next chapter of our adolescence together. The other two didn't really hang out with us after-hours as much. River and I were more adventurous... We used to go to this under-18s nightclub with all these local kids, and older kids would come by and bring us 40oz malt liquors for a raised fee. I remember chugging one straight down to show that I was cool and I could drink like a big kid, and getting so incredibly drunk and just kind of stumbling around the town, and actually across the railroad track and thinking, "Wow, I'm really in the movie right now! Is this reality? Am I Teddy or Corey?"

"It was the first really successful adaptation of my work." Stephen King

CASTING

REINER: We very much cast the kids based on who they really were. We saw hundreds, but the ones we chose were all pretty evident immediately.

SCHEINMAN: River Phoenix made us cry, and the others were just kids. They were all good, but River was extraordinary.

REINER: River Phoenix was very obvious when he came in. He was an exceptional kid; he was kind of like a young James Dean. He had all the qualities. And Corey Feldman also was the only person that came in that had the kind of angst and anger that Teddy has.

FELDMAN (TEDDY DUCHAMP): Don't forget I'm professionally insane. More so even than Charlie Sheen.

REINER: Jerry O'Connell came in and was Vern. I took a real flyer with him because he was the character, but he'd never acted before and I didn't know if he actually could.

JERRY O'CONNELL (VERN TESSIO): I walked into the room and saw Rob Reiner, and I said, "Wait a minute, you're Meathead from All In The Family!"

REINER: And then Wil Wheaton was the perfect prototype for how I envisaged Gordie. He was like this very sensitive, sweet kid who would ultimately go on to become a writer.

WIL WHEATON (GORDIE LACHANCE): I remember at the audition I read the scene with

nothing ever becomes of those people and they do nothing with their lives"! Somebody smacked her on the arm, like, "Shhhh, look over there!"

REINER: For the most part we cast the older kids for their experience. They're in the film much less than the younger kids, although more than they're in the book. We wanted to build it to this kind of face-off with the two of them at the body.

KIEFER SUTHERLAND (ACE MERRILL): That character is only really there to push them from point A to B. Rob was really clear in telling me that. He was just a bully. The driving force between Wil and I is that I've taken the hat that his brother gave him. My initial instinct was to put the hat on, but Rob said it didn't matter that much to me; I'd never mess up my hair.

WHEATON: I really liked all of the older kids. They were all extremely kind to me. I enjoyed being around them very much. I've heard the others say that they were absolutely terrified of Kiefer Sutherland, and I don't recall feeling that way at all.

O'CONNELL: I was scared of that dude...

COMING OF AGE

WHEATON: I don't recall any of us having a problem with the language, because — spoiler alert! — that's how 12-year-olds talk when their parents aren't around. I remember I didn't really have a strong opinion on the smoking either. I know at the time I thought it was pretty gross,

THE TRAIN

REINER: We used very long lenses to make it look like the train was right behind them, when in reality it was so far away, they were not very scared at all. I ended up having to actually run the train past them, saying, "Look how powerful it is; imagine this hitting you!" And then still, again and again they couldn't do it and I finally got really mad. It was a hot day and the grips were dragging this camera down the dolly track and they were getting exhausted. And finally I said to the kids, "Listen! You kids! These guys," and I pointed to the grips, "they're getting tired! They're getting mad and they're getting upset and you know why? BECAUSE YOU'RE MESSING UP! And if you're not frightened of the train that's going to kill you, you'd better be frightened that I'M going to kill you!"

WHEATON: Jerry and I were just sobbing, because it was the only time we'd made Rob mad. And he was like, "Quick! Roll the cameras!" And afterwards we both ran to him and he hugged us and told us we did a great job. So Rob Reiner is more scary than a big train; more powerful than a locomotive. It was the only time he got angry like that, which I guess is pretty remarkable considering he had three months working with 12-year-olds.

O'CONNELL: That's not me acting on that train trestle; that's all Rob Reiner.

THE LEECHES

FELDMAN: Jerry and I got into a bit of a fight that day; he was annoying me. I was just disgusted with the whole affair, because this thing was a man-made pool, and it was supposed to give us great comfort that it was clean and built and we weren't just jumping into a real swamp. But the only problem with that equation was that it was built at the beginning of pre-production, which was, like, three months before we actually used it! So basically they dug out the ground, put plastic layering on the bottom so it was insulated, and then filled it with clean water. But clean water three months later in a real forest is a real swamp! We were basically neck-deep in dirt and muck and bugs and crew-members' cigarette butts.

O'CONNELL: I was from New York. It was the only time I remember thinking, "These guys are way too Hollywood."

THE DEER

KING: I worked very hard on the deer scene, because I didn't want it to be corny; I didn't

AT THE BODY

SCHEINMAN: In the book it's River's character who picks up the gun and holds it on the older boys, but we changed that to Gordie as part of the whole shift in focus moving him to the centre. When we showed the film to Stephen he told us he loved it, and that he wished he'd had Gordie picking up the gun. It's not a little thing; it's the moment where he moves ahead of the River Phoenix character and becomes Stephen King.

WHEATON: I never felt pressured that I was the 'centre' of the film, and I'm glad I wasn't aware of it: it would have been paralysing. I just worked with Rob to make that moment as real and as chilling and serious as it could be.

KENT LUTTRELL (RAY BROWER, THE BODY): I was 20, and my college roommate told me they were looking for short people to be stand-ins in this movie. I thought he was making fun of me! I had no idea how it would impact my life.

WHEATON: Monty Westmore built a head to go onto a dummy, and it really looked like a dead kid, but it wasn't photographing right. And just purely by coincidence, Corey's stand-in bore an

"It was like a coming of age for me too, as a filmmaker." Rob Reiner

want it to be like a velvet painting. I wanted it to be as true as possible and to have as much texture as possible. Some of the kids' experiences are horrible, and some of them are funny, but I thought that there ought to be at least one that was sort of transcendent.

WHEATON: The deer didn't want to walk away. You can't really train a deer. So they had all the members of the crew banging pots with sticks, just to make noise to make the deer move. So I'm sitting there, supposed to be enjoying this pastoral, idyllic, beautiful, peaceful moment, and just off camera there's maybe a dozen crew-members making as terrible a racket as the woods has ever heard.

LARDASS HOGAN

REINER: We didn't really feel we had the room to include any more of Gordie's stories from the book; as it was, we had to stop the film to do Lardass Hogan. I always said you can stop a narrative if you've got a great production number, and we thought we had one there. What a mess! We had a combination of blueberry pie filling and large-curd cottage cheese. We had a few days wading around in that awful stuff.

ANDY LINDBERG (LARDASS HOGAN): His name's David! I thought I was auditioning for Vern, but then I realised, "Ah, I'm the throw-up kid." It was a fat suit though; I wasn't really that large! To this day I can't eat blueberry pie...



Train-track terror for our heroes!

uncanny resemblance to it. So they just put blood and guts and stuff all over Kent!

LUTTRELL: It was the first time I'd been involved in a film. I ended up training in stunt-work and stagecraft; I went to LA and became a stuntman!

WHEATON: I remember thinking, "Suck my fat one!" was kind of a corny line, but I asked Rob and he said, "Yeah, but Gordie reads those true-crime detective magazines, and that's the way the tough guys in those magazines talk." I've gotten a lot of mileage out of "biggest one in four counties" over the years. I tell people it's actually true, but that the counties are non-contiguous.

25 YEARS LATER

FELDMAN: It's such a great movie. It's an art piece. It's an honest film. It's something with real



Tracks of our tears: The film's poignancy is thrown into sharper relief by River Phoenix's untimely death.



Gordie gets his gun...

valour. It really touches people in an emotional way; it strikes audiences to the core. It's very poignant. I feel like it would be more original of me to say that it's dull and boring and leave me alone: it's 25 years ago already! But I think anyone who said that about Stand By Me would have to be officially, legally proclaimed stupid.

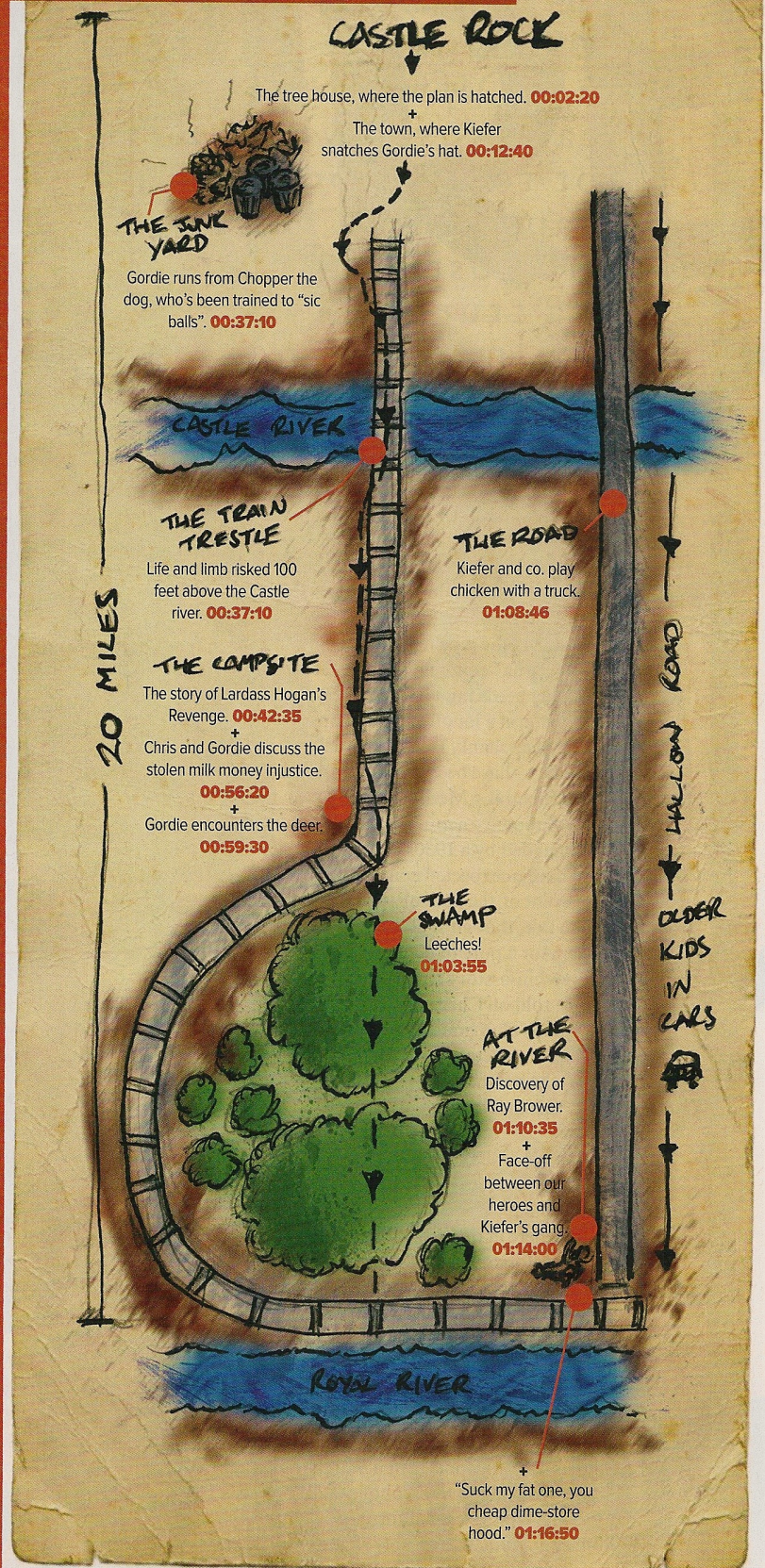
WHEATON: I remember it extraordinarily fondly. I went back there a few years ago and that thing they say about things seeming smaller, and at once familiar but totally foreign, was completely true. Brownsville, which is the town that was dressed to be Castle Rock, looks exactly the same. We went to the visitor centre and they had these maps in a number of different languages to all the Stand By Me locations.

SCHEINMAN: I remember people coming up



THE JOURNEY

From the tree house to the body...



to me after it came out and saying, "I love that movie; it's exactly like my life." And I'd ask if they grew up in a small town in the country and they'd say, "No, I grew up in Manhattan!" It touches everyone, because the emotions are the same regardless of where you come from.

O'CONNELL: When you watch it now, and River disappears at the end, it's kind of chilling. It's got a much deeper meaning than was initially intended.

KING: It was the first really completely successful adaptation of my work.

REINER: It was a very big time in my life. I don't really have a favourite movie of the ones I've made, but I would say the most important movie for me, by far, was *Stand By Me*. It was the first movie I made that was a complete reflection of my sensibilities. When it became successful it was a tremendous validation for me; it reassured me that audiences like the kind of thing that I like, which is really to combine humour and drama in a character-driven story. I named my production company after it. You never know you're making something that's going to have staying power. You're just making a movie. But I knew I was making the movie I wanted to make. Even though I was in my thirties it was like a coming of age for me too, as a filmmaker.

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Stand By Me: 25th Anniversary Edition is out on Blu-ray on August 8.

The Breathing Method is the only Different Seasons story not to have been adapted, and the foremost example of a true rarity: unfilmable King...

“WE’VE NEVER GIVEN

any thought to making it,” says Rob Reiner of *The Breathing Method*, whose Castle Rock production company has been given first dibs on all Stephen King works since the release of *Stand By Me*. The final ‘Season’, the ‘Winter’s Tale’, is the runt of the litter, both in terms of length and clunkiness, remaining unfilmed with seemingly no adaptation in the pipeline. “It just didn’t resonate with any of us,” continues Reiner. “It was more typical Stephen King-type stuff: very dark and very horrific in a lot of ways. The ones we’ve done — *Shawshank*, *Hearts In Atlantis*, *Dolores Claiborne* — have been the atypical ones.”

The Breathing Method of the title is a revolutionary neo-natal technique recommended by a 1930s physician, which turns out to have unexpected continued effectiveness in the event of the patient’s death. It’s a quirky enough tale, though slight, but part of its problem for a potential adaptor is its odd story-within-a-story structure, which places it as a tale told on Christmas Eve at a mysterious gentlemen’s club housing a library of works that exist nowhere else. It’s a portmanteau set-up, but the portmanteau only contains one story. Perhaps the way to a movie version would be to include further stories from other King collections, told by other club members, à la *Cat’s Eye* or *Creep Show*. But those are not the most popular King films...

Elsewhere in the King canon there are more unfilmed stories, but fewer than you may think: King’s ‘Dollar Babies’ policy of making the adaptation rights to his work available for a single dollar to budding screenwriters means that there are countless short movies and film-school projects out there, many of which almost never see the light of day. There are at least half a dozen versions of *The Boogeyman* (from the *Night Shift* collection) alone. And if you thought that *Grey Matter*, about an alcoholic dad who turns into a self-reproducing amorphous blob, was unfilmable... you’re probably right, but it exists all the same.

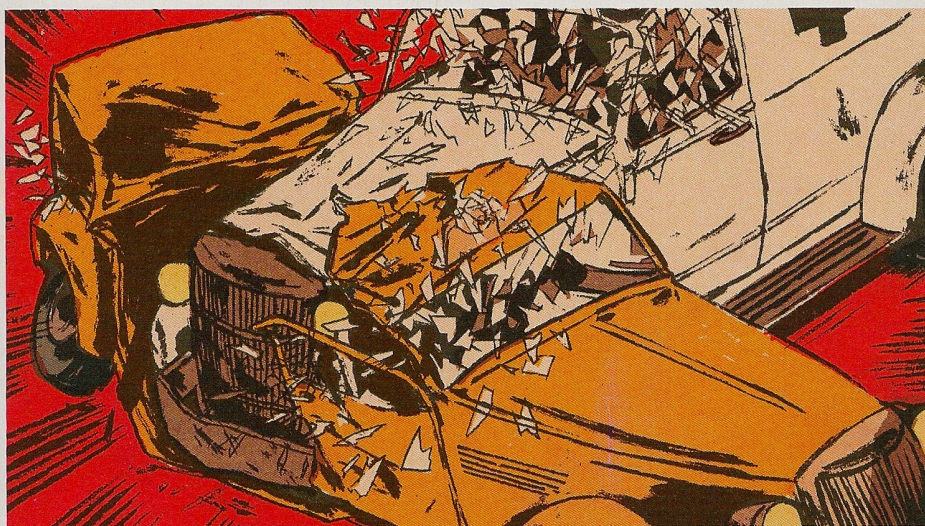




DIFFERENT
SEASONS

a
WINTER'S
TALE

Words: **Owen Williams**
Storyboard Illustrations:
Patrick Leger



“It was more typical Stephen King: very dark, very horrific.” Rob Reiner

Of the King novels yet to reach the big or small screen, most are sufferers in Development Hell, rather than especially problematic. Anyone who’s seen Lawrence Kasdan and William Goldman’s film of *Dreamcatcher* — the insane post-van accident fever dream of space viruses and alien “shit weasels” — will realise that the doorstep size and frequent utter strangeness of some of King’s work has, for better or worse, generally not deterred filmmakers in the slightest.

Ron Howard is currently attempting to get the colossal *Dark Tower* saga going at Universal, as an ambitious joint film trilogy and TV series. WAMC was financing a French animated version of the fantastical *The Eyes Of The Dragon* in 2000, until the rights lapsed.

Wrong Turn director Rob Schmidt struggled for a while with *Insomnia*, and tells *Empire* that the difficulty was “convincing [studio] executives that audiences will go to theatres to see a geriatric leading man... It’s a tough sell”. The *Talisman*, *Bag Of Bones* and *Under The Dome* are all in development as TV mini-series. And Frank Darabont is at the early stages of prepping dystopian endurance test *The Long Walk*, which he says “will be low budget and stylistically similar to *The Mist*”.

The Stephen King film we’ll *definitely* never see though is *Rage*. An early (1977) novel written under King’s ‘Richard Bachman’ pseudonym, it’s the story of high-schooler Charlie Decker, who one afternoon sets fire to his locker, shoots two teachers dead and takes his class (who disturbingly all begin to migrate to his cause and bare their souls) hostage. The book has been directly linked to a number of high-school shootings in the US, causing King to take the Kubrick-like step of withdrawing it himself.

“The Carneal incident (*Michael Carneal killed three students and wounded five others at his school in 1997; a copy of *Rage* was found in his locker*) was enough for me,” says King. “I asked my publisher to take the damn thing out of print, and they concurred. If that book is acting as any sort of accelerate, if it’s having any effect on any of these kids at all, I don’t want anything to do with it, regardless of what may be the moral and legal rights and wrongs. Even talking about it makes me nervous.”
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