

SHOOTING FROM THE HIP

An interview with Richard Terry

If resourcefulness is the mark of a great cinematographer, then Richard Terry is a name to watch for the future. While he has only been Director of Photography on two features - with both, at the time of writing, still seeking distribution deals - his flair speaks for itself and his enthusiasm is pretty self evident, too.

A keen film fan from childhood, the 33 year old spent much of his childhood working backstage in theatres near his Devon home, befriending actors and learning something of their world. He studied photography at school, and remained an enthusiastic watcher of movies never thinking he might be involved, until a travelling holiday caused him to stumble across the Cannes Film Festival in the mid 80s.

"It was the year that *Birdy* and *The Emerald Forest* were screened," he recalls. "I actually conned my way in there by pretending I was an English actor whose pass hadn't arrived. Then on my second day I had all my clothes and baggage stolen - camera, money, the lot. I found a burnt out old boat to sleep in, wrapped myself in polythene each night. Luckily I met a girl whose father was mayor of a little village outside of Cannes, and he lent me a smoking jacket. So I'd go to all the screenings and all the parties, a complete nobody, and it was that experience that confirmed this was the business I wanted to be involved in."

Starting out as a runner, with a view to choosing the role to which his talents might best be suited, Terry found himself making the momentous decision much quicker than he expected.

"I got a job working for Limelight Productions. I worked for Andy Morahan, for a company called Big Features. We did one



of the last Wham pop videos, and it was on that job that I met cinematographer Mike Southon. Andy was moving to another company and asked if I would be his full time runner, and at the same time Mike said I could be his camera trainee, but it would be completely unpaid. So I had the choice of a job that paid, or working with the camera. I went the camera route."

Influenced by Southon's fond tales of the BBC training he got at Ealing Studios, Terry relentlessly pursued a place at the famous old studios, eventually being given a month's work as a contract assistant. The job exceeded his wildest expectations.

"Joining Ealing was like joining a creative RAF," he enthuses. "Coming in to look at a blackboard and being assigned a job, told which cameraman you'd be with, and having to get your equipment. It was like being sent on a mission, and you could literally be sent anywhere in the world."

"As a film assistant you're focus pulling and loading your own film, you have to think ahead, have the right filters and you're

always changing stocks, always trying to imagine what the cameraman might need so they're never waiting for anything.

"To actually be able to function in those fast thinking environments you need to have a system and that was the great lesson for me. It helped me realise that you needed a form of discipline and a military style system so that if there are mistakes you're always covered. That backbone of structure and discipline that I learned at the BBC allows comfort and freedom for creativity to flourish."

It certainly proved invaluable training for Terry's two forays into feature films. First there was

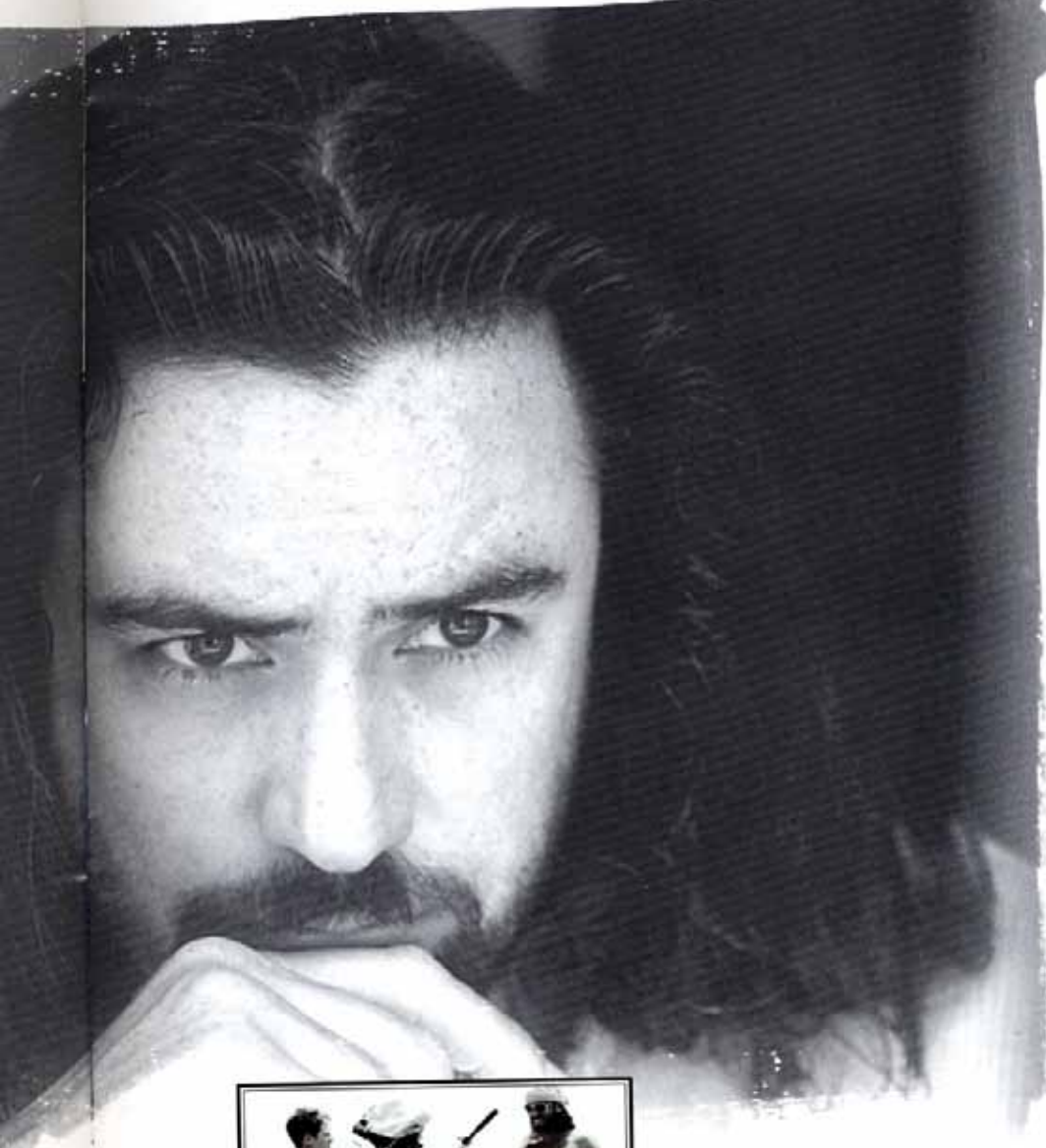
Wonderland, not to be confused with the forthcoming Michael Winterbottom movie of the same name. Directed by Ben Hardement, it stars Scott Neal and the late Kadamba Simmons, and was shot on location in India. This posed a series of challenges for its rookie Director of Photography.

"I got this phone call inquiring about this 16mm Aaton I used to co-own, and when I spoke to them they explained there was a production about to take place in India. I asked if they needed a camera operator, and they said they did. So I went to see the director and producer, and they said they were actually looking for a DP who could operate as well.

"At that point I would have just about had the confidence to operate on a film like that, but lighting it too was quite daunting. But this was my big opportunity, so I went for it. We got on really well, talked about the film and the influences on it, I asked what kind of equipment I could take over. They told me it would be on Fuji Super 16, though they did want cinema distribution."



Photos: inset top, Richard Terry with *Wonderland*'s director Ben Hardement; above three stills from *Wonderland* including the familiar Burt Kwouk



If he was naive to the harsh truths of low budget filmmaking, Terry was blooded very quickly when he was told that he could not take any lights with him - because of the excess baggage cost - and that there wouldn't be a dolly due to the jungle location.

"As a safety precaution I took some rolls of reflective material from a lighting company, and a couple of staple guns," he chuckles. This, added to the silks that he had sewn together in local markets, enabled him to shoot Hardement's fantasy feature entirely without artificial lights. Nor could the production afford to send film back for processing, which meant Terry had to bring it all back from India himself, never knowing if there had been any hairs or scratches ruining the shots. Thanks to the vigilance of his camera team it was perfect.

And his next project was no less demanding of his ingenuity either. *Brothers*, which was also shot on Fuji, is the story of a group of friends who each reach a life changing crossroads in their lives while on a booze soaked Greek holiday. Written by Nick Valentine and Martin Dunkerton, directed by Martin and co-produced by his brother Julian and Joanna Garvin, the film is another triumph of dogged determination over low budget filmmaking trauma.


"We actually didn't have a proper continuity person or a first assistant director on *Brothers*, so to actually get a film like that finished is a bit of a miracle. But what I loved about working on a project like this is the openness of someone like Martin. He gave us the opportunity to bring things that we could use to each scene.

"For instance, we had lunch before shooting this dialogue driven scene between a couple of the characters. I'd just had a swim, and was lying in a hammock and looking up into the trees, and I wondered why the scene couldn't be like this instead of sat around a table. Ten minutes later that's how we filmed it, with the characters in the hammock."

Using brand new Fuji F64 daylight stock for the film, Terry has shot a crisp and beautiful looking movie, one that sells his talent as much as the idyllic looking location. His ambition for the future is to combine feature work with more documentary projects, though he is not too proud to work again as an operator. He does, after all, cite Mike Roberts as an inspiration. So while his dream of being involved in film has come true, Terry stands at an exciting crossroads in his own life.

"I want to be part of the storytelling process," he adds. "I want to work on brilliant scripts with great creative teams, for us all to pull together and create a structure so that we can really enjoy working in a comfortable environment."

"So far in my career any work I've had has just been through word of mouth, leading one job to the next. But now I want to start directing the course of my career." ■ ANWAR BRETT

 *Brothers* and *Wonderland* were both originated on Fujicolor Motion Picture Negative



Photos from left: Richard Terry with *Wonderland*'s director Ben Hardement; with focus puller Alex Reed and again in various locations including shooting *Brothers* in Greece (top)