

'Brainscan' - no signs of life

By Jennifer Gressett
The Battalion

"Brainscan" starring Edward Furlong, Frank Langella, Amy Hargreaves and T. Ryder Smith. Directed by John Flynn. Rated R. Playing at Hollywood USA.

The classic elements of horror meet virtual reality in a sad attempt to create a modern murder mystery called "Brainscan."

"Terminator 2" star Edward Furlong returns to the screen in yet another high-tech suspense thriller with a shallow plot.

Michael Briar (Furlong) is a high school teen-ager. Known to most students as 'weird,' 'different' and 'frightening,' he is the leader of the Horror Club. But after presenting "Death, Death, Death, Part II" to his club, the high school principal decides to have the club banned from campus.

In search of new forms of fear, Michael is then introduced to Brainscan, an interactive CD-ROM experience that promises to "satis-

fy even the sickest fantasies."

After he slips the disc into his computer, a voice invites him to enter a game that is "more real than reality." It isn't until the day after he plays the game that he realizes that the murder he committed in virtual reality may, in fact, have become reality.

As the nightmare comes to life, Michael has to continue the game. The police are looking for a murderer and there are witnesses that need to die. The hypnotic spell he has fallen victim to has made him the local killer in his quiet hometown. Is it just a fantasy, or has it become reality?

Advanced film and video technology bring this computer-aged film to life. Created at Hollywood-based Sidley Wright MotionWorks, the film includes both computer-generated images and prosthetic effects. Highlights include melting characters formed through computer-generated morphing techniques.

"We tried to put together a team that would teach us, in fact, how to do those advanced special effects," producer Michel Roy said.

"And we are very happy with the results."

Roy kept the special effect theme in mind when he cast Furlong as Michael.

He said he knew he was the teen-ager for the part the first time he heard him read. It was Furlong's "kid-next-door" quality and vulnerability that helped him to develop the role of Michael, Roy said.

Another well-cast character was T. Ryder Smith, who plays the "Trickster." The guide and mastermind behind Brainscan, the Trickster is what Smith said he envisioned as a type of "psychic Frankenstein."

With make-up that could win the scariest Halloween contest, the Trickster is another example of the creative additions to the movie.

Without computers and creativity, though, it's just another horror flick. All of the elements of horror are there: a shallow plot, a few shady characters and a lot of blood. Whether this will go down in history as a real horror flick, I don't know. But I'll bet it returns with an even cheesier sequel soon.

This sometimes enables law officers to link an object or person to the scene of a crime. Bryant has been working on and off in forensic palynology for 10 years.

"The field is not flooded," he said. "Unfortunately, most law enforcers only use palynology as a last resort."

But Bryant said he thinks it should be used to solve cases more often.

"It doesn't always work," he said. "But when it does, it's on the money. It's a great way to discover where drugs come from. With drugs like heroin or others we can find out the source."

Bryant said he got involved in forensic palynology purely by accident.

The government was doing their honey subsidizing program which was basically paying people to grow bees to keep crops pollinated, he said.

During this time, the price of American honey was much more expensive than that of imported honey, he said.

"But certain unscrupulous people, to get big bucks, began selling honey from Mexico," Bryant said, "and calling it honey from Texas."

Bryant said he received a call from Washington explaining the problem and asking him if there was anything he could do.

"They made a contract for me to

analyze a number of samples looking for pollen not present in the U.S.," he said. "Six percent of the samples turned out to be bogus or non-domestic."

Later on, Bryant said he received a phone call from a policeman who had heard a lecture on palynology.

"This sheriff from a West Texas county called," Bryant said. "He had a strange case of a dead Latin man that had been found on a highway. The man had his hands and feet cut off and had been stabbed 21 times. After 6 months they still couldn't identify him or even find out where he came from, but they were looking at Mexico."

After Bryant tested the dirt and pollen from the dead man's clothes, he determined that the pollen on the man probably did not come from any place further south than Lubbock. Thus, Mexico was ruled out.

So, he said, the tests narrowed their search to an area between Lubbock and Kansas City.

Bryant has been involved in several other cases and said he enjoys helping to unravel unsolved crimes.

"The best part is that you get to play Sherlock Holmes," he said, eating a peanut — shell and all. "It's the satisfaction of using your own knowledge and the idea of solving the unsolvable."

Dr. Bryant

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Pollen samples

Among the things found in coprolites, Bryant said there are plant crystals, bones, feather hair, eggshells and pollen.

Pollen has been called "nature's fingerprints" Bryant said, and with good reason. In an article Bryant co-wrote, he explained that these tiny plant parts, both modern and fossilized, are helping law enforcement officials to solve some crimes. The technique is called forensic palynology.

Pollen and spores (palymorphs) extracted from case evidence can be used to reveal geographic origins.

Bike-to-Work (and School) Day on Friday

Ride your bicycle to Freebirds World Burrito for a free burrito

By Kevin Cochran

Why did over 1,000 people in Austin get recognized for peddling their bikes to work recently? They participated in Austin's annual Bike-to-Work Day.

Bicycle commuters in Austin and elsewhere realize the benefits associated with bicycle riding. Commuting to work by bicycle relaxes the central nervous system, improves mood and sharpens mental activity, while commuting by car raises blood pressure, lowers frustration tolerance and fosters negative moods, a University of California study found.

An estimated 50% of all automobile travel in the U.S. is for trips of less than five miles, which is also the most polluting distance for short car trips because the engine is cold during short trips. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, every 1% reduction in short car trips results in a 2% reduction in carbon monoxide pollution. A national study by the Netherlands also estimates that each motorist who uses a bike instead of a car for trips of three miles or less will save at least \$500 per year—and save society road maintenance and other costs.

"Current trends such as global warming, traffic congestion and

dependence on imported oil necessitate focusing on the bicycle as part of the transportation solution," says the U.S. Transportation Study Board. By commuting by bicycle more often, you can help Texas A&M be part of that solution.

This Friday the Brazos Valley Cyclists (BVC) chapter of the Texas Bicycle Coalition will host Bryan-College Station's first annual Bike-to-Work (and School) Day. Participating restaurants will be serving free breakfasts to encourage you to commute by bicycle. In addition, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Freebirds will serve you a free regular burrito when you ride your bike to the restaurant on your way to or from school or work.

Be sure to register for prizes and sign up for the Bike Day's ridership count. For more information on Bike-to-Work (and School) Day, call the BVC Hotline at 690-0570.

When at Freebirds, look for the Bicycle Update Board which highlights progress in our mission for a bicycle-friendly Bryan-College Station.

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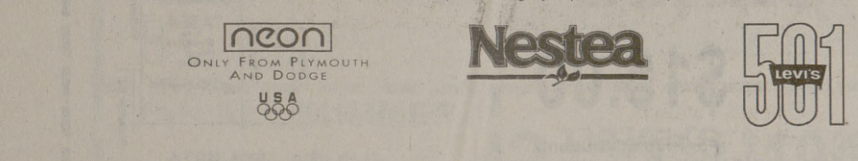
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