

Hollyweird

Hills company co-producing adventure film

By Kevin Brown
staff writer

A FARMINGTON HILLS production company is making a \$3.6 million sci-fi film starring Walter Koenig — known as Chekov to "Star Trek" fans.

Filming started about five weeks ago on "Moontrap," in a converted warehouse on Rochester Road south of Maple.

Koenig, minus the Russian accent associated with the "Star Trek" character he's portrayed in the movies and on TV, explains, "It's primarily an action-adventure film."

And it doesn't require an invasion from Hollywood to produce it.

Written by Tex Ragdale of Birmingham, "Moontrap" is produced by Plymouth real estate developer Jim Courtney and West Bloomfield lawyer Brian Manoogian.

Its backers say movie-making is cheaper in Michigan, and there's plenty of local talent on which to draw.

BOB DYKE, who runs Magic Lantern Productions, a Farmington Hills firm that produces TV commercials, is director and co-producer of the film.

"We've done a lot of Michigan Lot-to spots. Most of the commercials

'We've done a lot of Michigan Lot-to spots. Most of the commercials we've done have been done with special effects.'

— **Bob Dyke**
Magic Lantern Productions
Farmington Hills

we've done have been done with special effects," he said, during a break in filming.

Dyke, who is a sci-fi fan, was called on to produce effects for the movies "Harry and the Hendersons" and "Evil Dead."

"Bob is so outstanding on special effects," said Manoogian, who, with Courtney, looked on as the Michigan-based crew — about 100 are involved in the project — prepared for shooting a scene with Koenig, now donning a space helmet.

It was Dyke's reputation for special effects that helped lure financial backers to the project, Courtney said. But when Koenig was signed to star in the film, "The investors just loved it," Courtney said, breaking into a wide smile.



photos by CAMILLE MCCOY/staff photographer

Crew members discuss the filming of a scene in the "dissection room" on the set of "Moontrap," which will be shown in theaters next fall.

"A name just adds more credibility to your picture," he said.

THE DISTRIBUTION deal for "Moontrap," with Los Angeles-based Shapiro Entertainment, was cut mainly on the strength of Koenig's name recognition.

Filming should wrap up by the end of February, with the movie distributed to theaters this fall.

Koenig said he got involved in the project through screenwriter Ragdale. He calls the Detroit-area crew "very professional."

"I think the picture has a chance to do well. It will be a solid film. It could develop a cult following," Koenig adds.

Koenig, 51, who lives with his family in California, arrived for filming during the recent cold snap. "I've never worked here before . . . It was quite a baptism of fire, or baptism of ice."

Besides acting in the "Star Trek" movies — the next one begins filming this fall — Koenig has written the book "Buck Alice and the Action Robot," and screenplays.

In "Moontrap," he's playing an astronaut again. This time, he works for NASA, not the Federation of "Star Trek."

"It's set three years from now," Dyke explains. "Something is discovered in the Earth's orbit originating from the moon. They decide to take the final Saturn vehicle out of mothballs and go up and investigate it."

ONCE ON the moon, Koenig as Jason and Bruce Campbell of the "Evil Dead" pictures discover an alien robot race, and a lost earth civilization.

Leigh Lombardi, Koenig's love interest in the film, plays "Mera," a 14,000-year-old queen.

"I've always liked older women, ha ha ha," Koenig quipped. "In this one, I get the girl — Yay!"

Much of the filming during a recent visit took place in "the dissection room." It's a set made to look like the devil's unfinished basement.

Here, in compartments cut into a murky, gray wall, the aliens store

body parts that have been rudely ripped from humans. The robot-begins plan to assemble the parts as new beings.

"Start smoke!" Dyke calls out, and a fine white cloud forms on the set. A makeup man sprays water into Lombardi's brown hair; she's wearing a red and white space suit. A hydraulic "alien" robot lies face-down a few feet away.

Lombardi describes her character Mera as "a real strong leader," yet

feminine. In "Moontrap," she says, "There's no camp, no vamp, great attention to detail and great sets."

LOMBARDI, WHO has appeared on the TV shows T.J. Hooker and Love Boat and the movies "The Wild Life" and "Murphy's Law" says the local crew is "as good as anybody I've ever worked with."

A Katharine Hepburn fan, Lombardi said one goal would be to work with the star. Another would be to

start a "Mera Mania" craze.

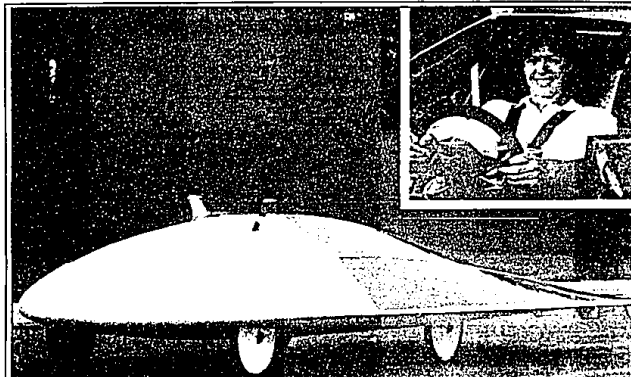
Now, the smoke machine starts up again. Someone applies touch-up paint to a robot's arm. An assistant director in a mini-skirt and leg warmers studies her clipboard.

"Everybody back here has to be real quiet," Dyke calls out.

"Standby to Roll n . . . Roll video — Action," he says. Koenig walks swiftly toward the camera.

"Cut," says Dyke.

"Great, that's a print."



Race to the sun

Molly Brennan (above), a General Motors Research engineer, Rhodes scholar and driver of the solar-powered race car Sunracer, will be one of the keynote speakers Friday at "Choices — A Seminar on Math, Science and Computer-related Careers" from 8:30 a.m. to noon. The program, at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington

Hills, is for Farmington-area girls in grades 6-9. Theresa Scott, an information specialist from NASA, also will speak. The program is co-sponsored by Farmington Public Schools' DELTA and Career Development departments and the American Association of University Women Farmington branch.

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