

Guinness was good for Rutger Hauer. It turned him into a multi-millionaire. For seven years he was the eccentric man-in-black, the mysterious Dr Who type figure, a big, bulging blonde, who through the popular television commercials boosted sales of the stout by 37 million pints a year. That's a lot of wallop.

Of course, Hauer would rather have been playing Hamlet.

But this is a most pragmatic man, an actor who has had 'the wheels turning' for a quarter of a century, a very large and restless chunk who has big hands and, when he wants, a smile to match. He turned 51 in January but says he is still playing make-believe.' Reality is something I can hardly cope with. That's why acting is so great. I can be a little clown and not have too much responsibility.'

He was dubbed 'the Paul Newman of Holland' when he first came to Hollywood but ,if you pause for a moment, as the country's only international actor he was also tulip land's Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson,Robert Redford, Marlon Brando and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Until Hauer appeared his country's best known exports were bulbs and beer. Oh, and Sylvia Kristel who made a career out of the 'Emmanuelle' films. Hauer has been more into violence than sex -- a lethal white-haired replicant in Ridley Scott's classic 'Blade Runner', the goose-pimple killer in 'The Hitcher' and assorted Nazis and terrorists.

Now, he says:' I am a millionaire and I don't need to work. I only want to do interesting things. Hollywood does not really exist anyway. It is a bunch of producers and distribution people who decided together with some agents what material is going to go. If you happen to be in it then your face is nailed to one character all over the world and they cannot see you in any other way. Perhaps because I was European I was allowed to do many different things.

'The frustrations are there but basically I create my own conflicts most of the time and I have to fight myself. I'm glad though that I'm not known for just one film but a whole body of work.'

He has extended his CV this year (1995) playing a mad monk in First Independent Film's 'Nostradamus' and a Nazi detective in American cable company HBO's 'Fatherland'. They were both projects he wanted rather than was 'persuaded' to do. In the TV mini-series adapted from Robert Harris' best-selling book -- what if Germany had won World War 2? -- he is, for a change, a hero.

Hitler is 75, JFK's father Joseph Kennedy is the American President and ' Germania ' is about to open diplomatic relations with the U.S. It is 1964 and Hauer's SS detective teamed with Miranda Richardson as an American journalist are caught in a tangle trying to expose the Final Solution -- the systematic attempt at extermination of the Jews. 'It's another take on Germans and Germany . Don't ask if you're being logical about it -- there are some holes but it's thought-provoking.

'We wander around the thought of what that would be like. What if we hadn't had 50 years of peace? It's a sort of stupid question if you have to answer it in two minutes but as a discussion it's wonderful. You go into a thought and make a left and follow it all the way down.'

Hauer -- he was author Anne Rice's first choice for the lead role in the film adaptation of her 'Interview With A Vampire' which finally, through Tinseltown tactics and politics, went to Tom Cruise -

- is reflective and contemplative. It is as if nothing will disturb him. In the 1970s he made 'Turkish Delight' and 'Soldier of Orange' with countryman Paul Verhoeven who is now a Hollywood director-in-demand following 'RoboCop', 'Total Recall' and 'Basic Instinct.'

There were a string of other films. But the Hollywood apple tempted them. Europe seemed small. With Verhoeven he moved across the Atlantic :

'We were accused of disloyalty and that sort of thing but I don't accept it. To me it's like children leaving home -- if you want to grow you have to move on....'

He moved. Fast. He ended up more sympathetic as the android than Harrison Ford's human cop in 'Blade Runner' and even gave the horrific killer John Ryder some charisma in 'The Hitcher'. He got to be the good guy in Sam Peckinpah's 'The Osterman Weekend' but, truthfully, the movie wasn't worth a wet Saturday afternoon. Far more successful had been his American debut as a clever, relentlessly ruthless terrorist being hunted down by Sylvester Stallone in 'Nighthawks'. It was not simple job.

'I had a lot of problems on that film, principally with Stallone. I had to fight him on the level of what I thought was good enough for the part and what he thought was good enough. I was very angry.. very aggressive, very alert, very awake. I don't think I've been more motivated or done better work.'

That is, until 'Nostradamus'. The film centres on Michel de Nostradame ( 1504 -- 1566) whose predictions have been studied by and mesmerised billions of people for more than four centuries. Every year more than 20 million people read and re-read the predictions of Nostradamus, a visionary who predicted everything from California earthquakes to the birth of Hitler.

French actor Tcheky Karyo --the agent who trained the leggy girl killer in 'La Femme Nikita' -- has the title role and British players like Amanda Plummer, Diana Quick and Michael Gough also ache for attention. But Hauer has the showy role of monk who may not have 52 cards in his pack:

'Actually, I don't think he's crazy but then I never think weird characters are crazy. I like the flavour of insanity and understanding guidance e that are both in the guy. Nostradamus is experiencing moments of doubts when he meets the monk and by embracing him and through his ramblings the monk tells him he is doing the right thing. I did my own prop for the role -- something to get attention! I wear an iron crown set with burning candles. The crown is basically a practical sort of thing,' deadpans the actor adding:' He's an inventor and he makes it so that he can see while having his hands free, like a miner, but you could also see it as a sort of aura. I enjoy seeing how people react to it.'

The reaction to him is still ambivalent. He chain smokes and commutes. For every Gaulois there seems to be a flight from his potato farm in Holland to his 52-foot sailboat the Marius which bobs in the waters of Marina-Del-Rey a few minutes drive from Los Angeles Airport . He likes the sea. He comes from a theatrical family but ran away from home to join the Dutch Navy. Then there was a spell in the Army. He didn't like that and got himself discharged 'for psychological unfitness.'

He went to drama school in Amsterdam , had a spell in Basle as a stagehand/heating engineer/actor and then returned to Holland to work with a theatre company. 'Someone suggested I might be better off in the movies. I walked away from it and basically created my own job..'

He became a European star with the television adventure series 'Floris' which got Paul Verhoeven's attention and Hauer the lead role in 'Turkish Delight' in 1973. He played a randy sculptor and the raunchy scenes -- which Verhoeven would expand on with Michael Douglas and Sharon Stone in 'Basic Instinct' -- were regarded as rather naughty those couple of decades ago.

At the same time Hauer was involved in a domestic drama. His first wife had walked out of their brief, early marriage with his daughter Aysha. He did not see his daughter until she was 17. He has been involved with the acclaimed painter Ineke Stein for 26 years and, despite being unable to have children, they have their own family trauma.

Aysha became involved with an Italian actor but when their relationship ended she left their six-year-old Leonardo who now lives with foster parents in California. Hauer wants to adopt his grandson but the international courts have proved more obstacles than judiciary forums. It is a subject he will not be drawn on. All you can get is a promise of talking when he has the result he wants which may be in April this year (1995) He's strong and silent on the subject.

It's the only time he returns to his quiet, detached Guinness image. It's a job he's thankful for. The brewery told his agent: 'We are looking for someone who physically would resemble a pint of Guinness, dark, cool and blonde and enigmatic... and he fits the bill.'

It has proved a presentable pension plan. But Hauer who has a petulant look because of that lower lip that droops, believes he has more to do than sip espresso and puff Gaulois. But, after all the years, this hybrid -- a man caught between Hollywood and Holland -- still seeks a niche.

'There seems to be a bigger need in Hollywood for people to stereotype. They want to put you in a box. It makes for short-term security I guess but the problem is that people don't come in boxes. We're more like bubbles of water.

'They always want to put me in bad guy boxes but playing villains comes easy to me. I find that people are fascinated by evil. They're totally paralysed by it and, as an actor, I'm not. Part of the freedom you have as a bad guy is that you can go anywhere especially if it's a psychotic bad guy. You can do anything you want. I think in my darker characters I go a little further than most American actors.

'I don't know why. Maybe it's because I'm not afraid of that side of myself. If I can get to play a monster on the inside I like it a lot. Because a lot of us are monsters on the inside.

'We just pretend we behave and then suddenly a fuse goes and we go nuts. Well, some of us do.

'I still feel my roots are in Holland and I still feel very much part of that culture. If you have a strong sense of identity I don't think you lose it. But travelling so much does change you. You get to see so many differences I guess your perspective does become slightly universal.

'It's lonely. I'm alone most of the time but that's just the way it is. I can't say I'm happy about it but it's part of what I do. When you're not really around very long people don't trust you to be there -- so they don't call you.

'You have to tell your friends that you are still their friends. You have to keep nourishing the people who care for you.

'There is just no discipline in my life. Everything changes constantly. And that makes it hard.

'I have a constant battle with the American Dream. This idea that you always have to make a billion dollars for something to be considered a success is... well, silly. People recognise me all over the world. Sometimes they are not sure why. And I love that. I like the fact that I'm not instantly known.

'It frees me to try different things as an actor. If you get too big you get locked in.'

But having said that Rutger Hauer is not your captive sort of man. 'Each character has a different set of rules and there is not a whole set of logic going on there. But that doesn't mean your instincts are always right. If I interpret them the wrong way I'll still wobble.'

So is it potato farming in Holland or superstardom in Hollywood for Rutger Hauer? He has several projects under consideration but, quite rightly, he suggests we consult Nostradamus. A couple made for each other.

See also

**Rutger Hauer, Memorable Antagonist in 'Blade Runner,' Dies ...**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/movies/rutger-hauer-dead.html>

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