

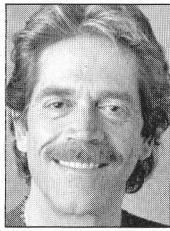
'T3' pair ink Herzfeld to helm 'Evermere'

By MICHAEL FLEMING

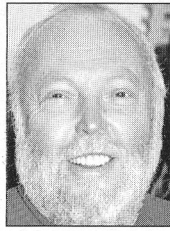
As they brace for the opening of "Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines," producers Mario Kassar and Andy Vajna are moving toward another trilogy. They've signed director John Herzfeld for "Evermere," the potential tentpole at Sony Pictures.

Originally scripted by David Goyer and James Robinson and bought by the producers in a million-dollar deal in 1998, "Evermere" is a fantasy about a 17-year-old orphan who discovers he is the heir to the throne in an alternate universe. He's called back there to battle his evil uncle, who has declared himself king. Project was hatched by "Blade" scribe Goyer and Robinson, a DC Comics veteran.

C2 principals Kassar, Vajna and Joel Michaels said that even though Herzfeld's resume consists of the gritty contemporary dramas "2 Days in the Valley" and "15 Minutes," they



Kassar



Vajna

liked his vision for the film. Goyer, who'll exec produce with Stuart Cornfeld, is now getting ready to direct "Blade 3," so Kassar and Vajna have Kevin Paturka and Greg Chabot polishing the script with Herzfeld. The producers are hopeful the epic will continue the momentum generated when Warner Bros. opens "T3" domestically on July 2. Sony is handling the film in foreign territories.

"It's a great coming-of-age story, with the otherworldly potential of 'Harry Potter' and 'Lord of the Rings,'" said Vajna.

Kassar added: "The economics of these kinds of movies rely on merchandising, videogames and the interaction between real and

fantasy world, and the creatures there lend themselves to that. Now that we have gotten through 'T3,' we're ready to move forward."

"Evermere" can't be any riskier to the former Carolco partners than resuscitating the "Terminator" franchise. They paid \$8 million to get the "Terminator" rights held by

Carolco in the bankruptcy liquidation, then doubled their exposure to get the rest from Gale Anne Hurd, who held 50% because James Cameron pledged his half to her for \$1, as long as she didn't replace him as director on the original film.

Cameron had planned his own "T3" installment, and he and Fox execs were unhappy when Kassar and Vajna surprised them when they came calling with the rights. Director and studio passed when the producers recouped some coin by making early distribution deals with Toho Towa in Japan and VCL in German.

"Theoretically, it shouldn't have made a difference, because our first call was to Jim and Fox," said Vajna. "For whatever reason, it didn't happen and we had to get independent financing, which was a much more difficult process. None of the studios were interested in the early stages, with no Cameron and no Arnold Schwarzenegger. All Mario and I had were these rights, but we were just not going to take no for an answer with Arnold, and everything changed when we got Intermedia and Jonathan Mostow on board."

The duo said they were never really worried about the financial exposure they faced, and stopped worrying completely when Schwarzenegger came back to his signature role. These were, after all, the guys who ran a company that invented offshore-funded risk-taking with hits like "Basic Instinct" and misses like "Cutthroat Island."

"It's like that Pacino line from 'Godfather 3': 'Every time I think I'm out, they pull me back in,'" said Kassar. "Since Andy and I got back together, we've tried to look at things more cautiously, which is a function of maturity. But as you can see from 'T3,' we still like to roll the dice sometimes."

The producers hope 'Evermere' will continue the momentum created when Warner bows 'T3' on July 2.
