

come face-to-face with...a demon from hell? An alien from space? A waiter from Schrafft's? Damned if I can tell. Based on an F. Paul Wilson book, *The Keep* wastes a fine cast (Scott Glenn, Jürgen Prochnow, Ian McKellen, Gabriel Byrne) while playing like *Alien* on downers.

The director returned to scenes of crime with his next film, **MANHUNTER** (1986, Warner, R, \$14.95). This adaptation of the Thomas Harris best-seller *Red Dragon* has gained a cult rep as the better of the two films that feature the character of Hannibal Lecter. It shouldn't be oversold, though: It's creepier but less flashy than Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*. William L. Petersen plays another terse Mann's man, an ex-detective with a knack for thinking like a serial killer, but it's Tom Noonan who burns up the frame as Petersen's primary prey, one of the freakiest madmen Hollywood has ever given us. Still, Mann's aural/visual aesthetic rules the movie; you'll never listen to "In-a-Gadda-da-Vida" without locking the doors again.

The director pulled a 180-degree turn with his version of James Fenimore Cooper's **THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS** (1992, FoxVideo, R, \$14.98). Surprise: It's his best movie. Not as coherent as *Manhunter*, *Mohicans* is a pleasant reminder that you don't need coherence when you've got iconic stars like Daniel Day-Lewis and Madeleine Stowe, an intoxicating score, and viscerally cinematic forward momentum. Yes, *Mohicans* turns the French and Indian War into an MTV love story—but it's still better than the book.

Given that successful artistic stretch, it's disheartening to see Mann retrench into a crime thriller—and not even a fresh one at that. Essentially a remake of his 1989 made-for-TV movie *L.A. Take-down*, *Heat* is most notable for its moods: From the noonday chaos of the opening armored-car robbery to the doom-ridden showdown between cop Al Pacino and criminal mastermind Robert De Niro, Mann puts you into a scene with a specificity no other working director can match. Unfortunately, home video cripples Dante Spinotti's wide-screen photography, forcing viewers to pay closer attention to the script and performances.

They don't measure up. De Niro is fine and taut as a man fully alive in his isola-

tion, but Pacino is at his merry-rotweiler worst, while Val Kilmer and Jon Voight, among many others, don't have the time to do more than posture and move on. Mann fashions brilliant cinematic parts here—De Niro pulling his team out of a nighttime heist when he realizes the cops are watching, the two stars meeting in a

diner—but the parts don't create a whole. "I gotta hold on to my angst," says Pacino's character at one point, and in a funny way, that reflects Mann's willful opacity. His movies preserve angst, all right, but too often at the expense of his art. *Heat*: **B-** *Thief*: **B** *The Keep*: **D** *Manhunter*: **B+** *Last of the Mohicans*: **A-**

IAN MCKELLEN OF 'RICHARD III'

MAD DOG AND ENGLISHMAN

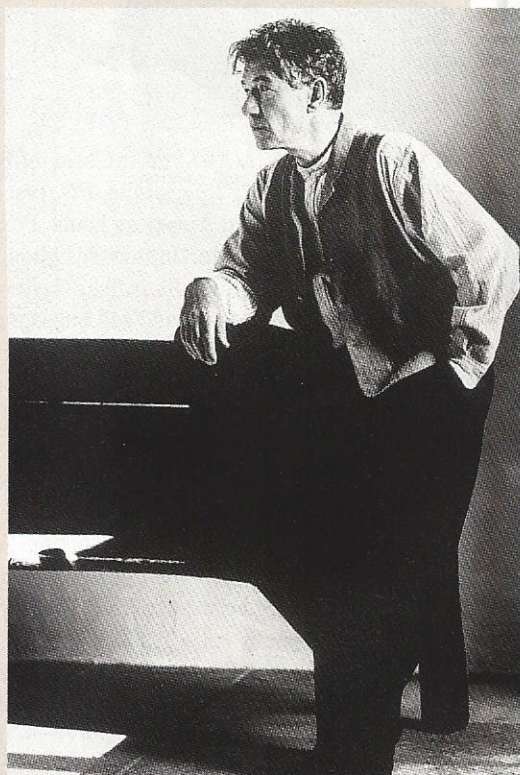
SHAKESPEARE'S QUEEN ELIZABETH says it best: Richard III is a dog. Embodying the Bard's ruthless king-to-be in the latest screen treatment of *Richard III*, Ian McKellen—with his droopy cheeks, leathery complexion, and vicious growl—is the wickedest celluloid cur since Cujo.

Richard's canine characteristics did not go unnoticed by McKellen, who also exec-produced and cowrote the Oscar-nominated film, available on video this week (see review on page 76). "In an early draft of the screenplay, every time Richard appeared, you heard an *arf, arf, arf*," laughs the 57-year-old British actor, whose latest film role is as *Cold Comfort Farm*'s melodramatic preacher, Amos Starkadder. "We were going a bit far." McKellen's primary goal was to bring Shakespeare's formidable text down to earth, transporting *Richard III*'s narrative to the more accessible 1930s. "The more believable their world is, the more we're likely to relate it to our own lives," reasons McKellen, whose own interest in British politics led him to cofound the gay-rights lobbying organization the Stonewall Group in 1989. "I hope nobody would come out of *Richard III* without thinking 'What is this guy I'm voting for really like?'"

A good question, but futile in the case of the enigmatic Richard. Sir Ian (he was knighted in 1991)

has made him at once endearing and repulsive—stuffing his mouth with chocolates, wine, and cigarettes before flashing a dastardly smile. "I regard *Richard III* as the most brilliant Shakespearean film ever made," says John Andrews, president of the Shakespeare Guild, which presented the actor with the Guild's first Golden Quill award on May 20. "I think it's going to have a life of its own."

That's in part because of the sneaky asides McKellen delivers throughout the film. Just before accepting his crown—the achievement Richard's been anticipating his entire life—he glances at us and says with faux arm-twisting hesitation, "I'm not made of stone." It's a performance some critics contend should have been rewarded with an Oscar nomination. Or at least a Milk-Bone. —Dave Karger



THE PLAYER: McKellen was key to the Bard update

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