

# FOCUS

## Into the future

William Gibson, *Cybergod*, discusses the latest film adaptation of his futuristic stories

BY JOHN ZAOZIRNY

VANCOUVER (CUP) — A ring of journalists sit in a hotel room around their interview subject and with pens poised and tape recorders rolling, eagerly anticipate any pearl of wisdom that might roll out.

Sitting in front of them is famed author William Gibson, who regards the entire situation with a bemused, slightly weary expression as he sits, stooped over, on the edge of the couch.

Normally Gibson is nearly impossible to get a hold of and even harder to get to talk. But today, one of the world's foremost science fiction writers is just as enthused and eager to be here as the reporters, and he's more than ready to talk.

The Vancouver resident wants to discuss the latest film adaptation of his work, *New Rose Hotel*. Starring William Dafoe and Christopher Walken and directed by Abel Ferrara (*King of New York*, *Bad Lieutenant*), the film is based on Gibson's short-story collection *Burning Chrome*.

*New Rose Hotel* is about two men who try to manipulate a young girl into the heart of an isolated scientific genius — a scam that will make them rich if they succeed. But as in all of Gibson's stories, nothing goes just as planned.

"There are these human beings trapped in a world that

consists of nothing but hotel suites, nightclubs, and board rooms," Gibson says of the two main characters, played by Dafoe and Walken.

"And there's no exterior world. These guys never get to the street. They seldom go there. In the end, they just go there to die. They're like specialized organisms who live in hotel suites. I think there's one scene in a mall, and that's kind of like the wilderness for these guys, being in a mall."

The film, which recently played at the Vancouver International Film Festival, isn't Gibson's first foray into the film world. Those with long memories and Keanu Reeves fascinations will recall the movie *Johnny Mnemonic*.

Gibson has also had some experience with television, last year writing an episode of the conspiratorial *X-Files* in which two hackers attempt to transform themselves into artificial intelligence on the Internet, only to have their computer take on a life of its own.

And he appeared onscreen in the Oliver Stone-directed TV miniseries *Wild Palms*, when he was introduced as "the man who invented cyberspace". Indeed,

creator of the idea of cyberspace is how most people think of Gibson.

"The sky above the port was the colour of television turned to a dead channel," reads the first sentence of Gibson's 1984-book *Neuromancer*, which helped usher in the new literary world of Cyberpunk — a new science fiction sense of dystopia and corporatization.

By depicting an imaginary city where people lived on the edge of humanity in a world of drugs, prostitution and hustling, Gibson created a vivid world that captivated readers with its style, its description and, most of all, its possibility of becoming a reality.

Gibson's body of work influenced films long before any of his novels were adapted for the big screen — although the results were less than spectacular.

"There's a whole shelf of really low-budget sci-fi movies that I look at and think, 'yeah, I know what they've been reading.'

"And I kind of like that, it's kind of cool. Each one always has one really great moment. That was really what I wanted *Johnny Mnemonic* to be. I wanted it to be all of the really great moments in all of the really bad science fiction movies that I've watched over the years. A

dangerous strategy."

While all of Gibson's stories are set in the future, his vision of the future has changed over his career.

Yet the stories *New Rose Hotel* is based on are as relevant as they were when he wrote them 15 years ago, Gibson says.

"It's a lot closer to the world of 1998 than any of my short stories," he says.

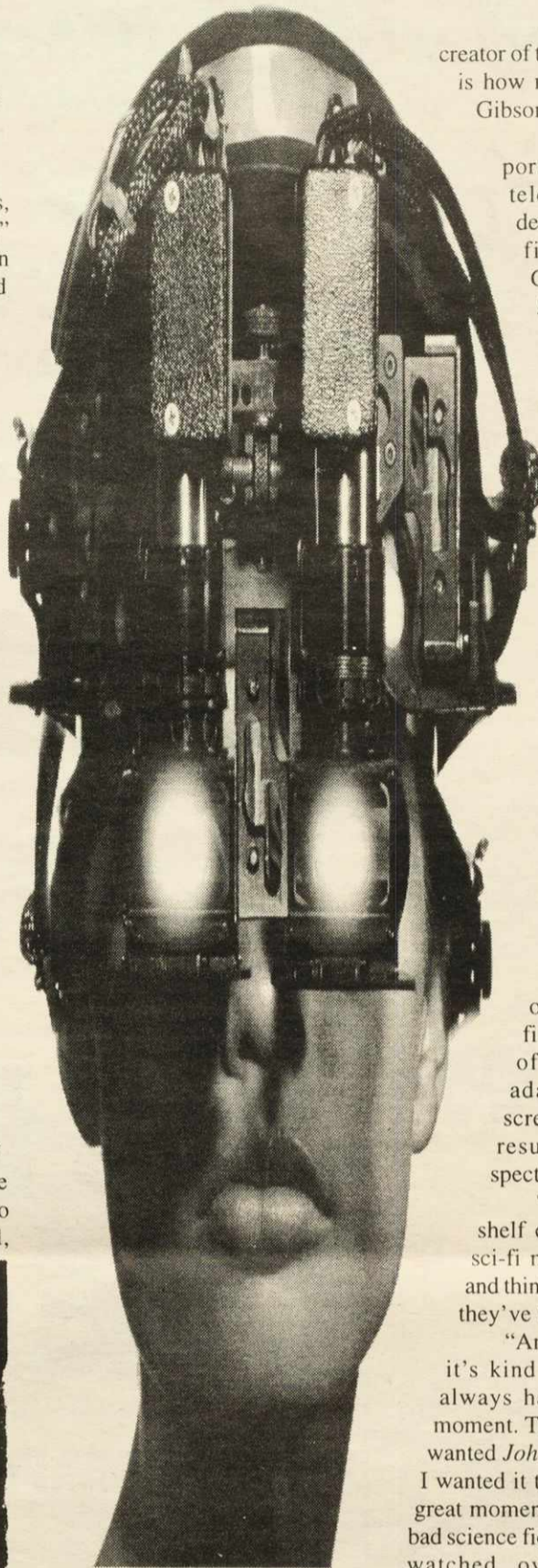
"One of the things that's pre-supposed but never mentioned in *New Rose Hotel* is that global capitalism is the only game in town. When the story was written, the Soviet Bloc was still very much a going concern and Marxism was still a going concern... but that's not really true anymore, there is no driving force in the world except global capitalism, except for a few oddball, holdout places.

"If you want to find the places where you'll find guys like those in *New Rose Hotel*, you'd have to go to Moscow and look at the hustlers who are over there eating the heart of the former empire ever since the gates opened. It's the same guys."

But for all the times Gibson has been labelled a pessimist, he sees himself as an optimist.

"I used to think that I was way more optimistic than anyone gave me credit for, because at least I was proposing that there was going to be a future for human beings. At the time I started writing this stuff, I had grown up all my life in the psychological shadow of the idea that if the right button was pressed, everything would end forever. That was the psychological state that people my age inherited and it began almost when we were born.

"That sounds more unbelievable than science fiction in today's world. If I made that up, nobody would believe me. It was such a weird thing. I thought it was kind of a radical assumption that there would be this future."



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