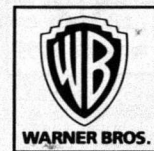


# A STORY OF TERROR AND SUSPENSE

# DEAD CALM



**T**he sea is calm. The air is calm. And John Ingram and his beautiful young wife Rae are calm. Relaxing on the deck

of their sailing yacht *Saracen*, the Ingrams are attempting to soothe the memory of a single rainy night many months before. An auto crash claimed the life of their young son and almost killed Rae as well. Little do they know that their peaceful, healing cruise is about to turn into a stormy, mysterious voyage.

Ingram (Sam Neill) is a career Royal Australian Navy officer. As he attempts to find tranquility with his wife Rae (Nicole Kidman) he spots a dinghy furiously being rowed away from a large schooner lying some half-mile to starboard. The other ship, the *Orpheus*, shows no signs of life.

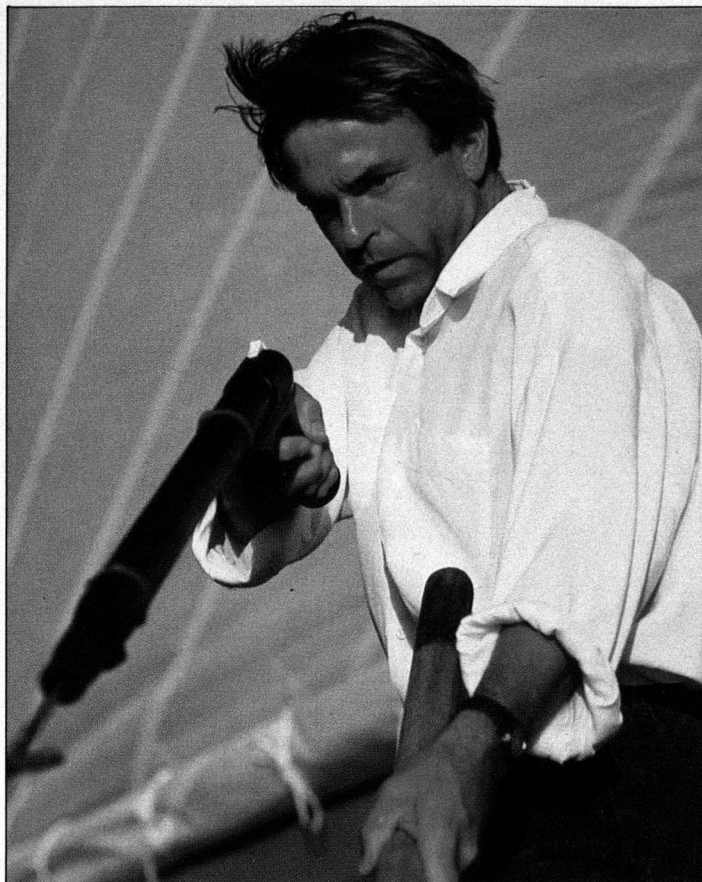
The sole occupant of the dinghy is Hughie Warriner (Billy Zane) a frightened young American who pours out his ordeal to his rescuers. His shipmates have all died, apparently the victims of food poisoning. Suspicious of the stranger's tale, Ingram rows out to the schooner and discovers that something much more horrifying and ominous may have occurred on the *Orpheus*.

As John races back up onto the deck of the crippled schooner, the second most devastating event of his life is in process. Heart pounding, head throbbing, John stares in anguish toward his own boat. On deck, Rae is screaming hysterically. Hughie Warriner is at the helm and the *Saracen*, under full power, is picking up speed in the opposite direction!

This is only the beginning of **Dead Calm**. This dramatic film is the furthest thing from serenity and peace imaginable. It is a story of terror, suspense and courage from director Phillip Noyce and co-producer George Miller, director of *The Witches of Eastwick* and one of the creators of the *Mad Max* film series.

**Dead Calm** is based on the book of the same name by Charles Williams, published in 1963. It was filmed over a 14-week period in the Whitsunday Passage area, northeast of Sydney between the Great Barrier Reef and the mainland of Australia. The cast and crew often stayed on boats for days, rather than coming back to shore.

According to lead actor Sam Neill "I'd never done any ocean sailing before this film. From the start, I, and



Sam Neill as John Ingram (top). Nicole Kidman as his wife Rae with the psychotic hitchhiker-at-sea Hughie Warriner, Billy Zane (middle).



a lot of the crew, got seasick every day. But after a few weeks, we started to fare better and worked together smoothly. Although it was very nice to work with this group of filmmakers, I truly can't say I'd jump at doing another role cramped up in boats at sea."

Neill has worked in some 15 countries throughout the world but he maintains strong ties with his New Zealand home, England and Australia. He is known internationally for such diverse roles as Harry Beacham, the polite sheep-farmer in *My Brilliant Career*; the devil in *The Final Conflict* and a lethal, womanizing master spy in *Reilly: Ace of Spies*. Neill has also appeared opposite Meryl Streep twice, in *Plenty* and recently in *A Cry in the Dark*.

**Dead Calm** deals with three themes, says director Noyce: one, betrayal, by a seemingly desperate hitchhiker; two, passion, between Rae and John; and three, Rae's own personal journey. A 22 year old Australian actress, Nicole Kidman, was chosen to play Rae, Noyce says. "We felt the audience could identify more with a young woman, because, in a kind of rite-of-passage, she goes from weakness to power, from girlhood to womanhood, from loss to regrowth."

Kidman's most famous role to date was in the Australian mini-series *Vietnam*. Besides catapulting her to public prominence, her work won her numerous awards, including Best Actress of the Year as voted by the Australian public.

For the role of the young ocean hitchhiker, Noyce said the filmmakers had a choice of numerous well known male actors. "But we made a conscious decision to go with an unknown. This way, he comes into the audience's lives as a real stranger." Billy Zane, a 22 year old native of Chicago was selected as Hughie Warriner.

**Dead Calm** has a history as intriguing as its storyline. Master dramatist, actor and filmmaker, the late Orson Welles actually made a film of **Dead Calm** in 1968. For a variety of technical and financial reasons, Welles' film was never released. George Miller was able to obtain the film rights to the book from the Welles estate. "But we were extremely careful not to follow in the footsteps of the master and look at any part of what remained of his film. We never even read the screenplay Welles shot."

— Nicole-marie Squires

