



# 1492: CONQUEST OF PARADISE

## **COLUMBUS SAGA MAKES FOR AN EPIC NEW FILM**

**I**t's been 500 years since Christopher Columbus led the crews of the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria to "discover" the New World. During that time Columbus has, at various times, been completely forgotten, resurrected as an exploring hero, and reviled as a villain who led a callous assault on an innocent New World.

Now, director-producer Ridley Scott — after venturing into the future with *Blade Runner* and *Alien*, and turning contemporary movie attitudes inside out with last year's road-movie hit *Thelma & Louise* — explores the complex and mysterious character of Christopher Columbus in **1492: Conquest of Paradise**.

Joining him is French acting phenom Gerard Depardieu, who after more than a decade of delighting European audiences was recently discovered by many North Americans in the comedy *Green Card* and the classic *Cyrano de Bergerac* (which earned him both an Oscar nomination and the 1990 Cannes Film Festival's best-actor award). Now he plays the

much celebrated Italian explorer in a film shot on location in Spain and the beaches and jungles of Costa Rica.

The three-country coproduction (England, France and Spain) was deliberately timed for release in October, to coincide with the exact month, five centuries ago, in which Columbus first sighted land after his harrowing trip across the Atlantic Ocean.

Sigourney Weaver is well-cast as Columbus's patron, the imperious

Queen Isabel, moving from the skinhead look she sported in *Alien* to the elaborate wigs and regal costumes of 15th-century Europe.

Depardieu and Weaver head an international cast that includes Armand Assante (*The Mambo Kings*), Frank Langella, Angela Molina, Fernando Rey, Tcheke Karyo, Loren Dean and Michael Wincott. With historians still fighting over what kind of man Columbus was, and society now reconsidering the effects of European explo-

ration on North America, Scott's epic is bound to be controversial. But, says Scott, "to understand Columbus, you have to understand his point in history."

Scripted by French political journalist Roselyne Bosch, the tale is told from the point of view of Columbus's illegitimate son, who sets out in the year 1510 to restore his forgotten father to his rightful place in history.

The story covers 23 years and portrays the explorer as a wily manager of his image — vain, outspoken and materialistic — who, after numerous run-ins with the Roman Catholic Church, was actually avoiding charges of heresy when he made his famous voyage.

In Scott's view, Columbus was "a grand raconteur, he has also been accused of being a grand liar. Yet his elaborations convinced both the Church and Crown to take this 'giant leap for mankind.' One also cannot deny the man the courage it took." In the end, says Scott, "I think he can be forgiven."

In October, **1492: Conquest of Paradise** will open in theatres across Canada.

— David Mills



**Top: European megastar Gerard Depardieu plays the man who started it all five centuries ago, legendary explorer Christopher Columbus. Left: Sigourney Weaver costars as his patron, Queen Isabel of Spain.**