

there are now about forty of them, and they wanted to do an original television movie based on those characters. I was paid \$1500 for that task and suddenly I was a working writer.

But after awhile everything dried up and nothing was happening. It was kind of embarrassing. I'd see friends and they'd ask when my next show was coming on and I had nothing. Then I went to Hollywood for almost a year and nothing materialized. I returned to New York in defeat. But I continued to try and eventually sold some things and a few other shows materialized. I struggled along for a few years after that making a living, selling a script here and there. I had my first big break when I sold some scripts to *The Defenders* television show, and that opened the door for me because that was the number one show. Over a period of two and half years I wrote about nine episodes and that established me as a writer of some note. I also wrote episodes of *Espionage*.

Pretty soon other shows were calling wanting me to write for them, so I ended up returning to the West coast. I wrote the first episode of *Arrest and Trial*, a ninety-minute show that was really the prototype for *Law & Order*. Both produced by Universal. I also wrote for *The Fugitive* and *Rat Patrol*. I was doing very well and making a lot of money for the first time. I then thought of creating my own series, which lead to *Branded* with Chuck Connors, *The Invaders*, and *Cool Million*. So for a while there I was the hottest pilot writer in Hollywood.

Then I started writing feature film screenplays. The first one I wrote was *The Return of the Magnificent Seven*, the sequel to the original-starring Yul Brynner. The picture was a big hit, even bigger than the original because it didn't have a first run like the sequel. So then I had a successful movie under my belt and was able to sell some more scripts, *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*, which Mark Robson directed badly, and a Western called *El Condor*.

### How did you teach yourself the craft of screenwriting?

My basic education was going to the movies. I was always a movie freak since I was a little kid. I went to the movies and sat through them twice. I learned the techniques this way. I just assimilated it. I new structure and form and just inherently could do it. It was one of those things where someone can pick something up right away and just do it. When I was a kid, about eight years old, I was doing my own comic books. I used to draw sixty-page books, six panels on a page. I always wrote dramatic and intricate stories, something you would not expect from an eight year old kid. I spent countless days on each story. I worked out the plot and all the dialogue, it was not unlike storyboarding a movie. I took movie going seriously, I didn't go with friends. I went by myself and never sat in the children's section, which they had in those days. I wanted to concentrate on the movie, and you couldn't do that in the chil-

takes away from the mystery and magic of sitting there in your own world writing. If you can jump in at an interesting situation with interesting characters and let them take you for a ride, and allow the characters to come to life, then you can't wait to get back to writing the next day because you'll be excited at where they will take you. You're just like the audience, you're caught up in what is going to unfold. Every well conceived story will structure itself as you write it. I used to work very late at night until four in the morning. I would be so mentally exhausted that my subconscious was doing almost all the work. I'd get up the next day and read what I had written, and I would have little recollection of what I wrote.

### What is a Larry Cohen film?

I don't know. B films and A films can only be categorized twenty-five years after the picture has been made. You look back and say, "Which pictures do I remember, which really effected me, which were truly original and hold up over the years?" Strangely enough the pictures that really hold up after all these years are the so-called B movies. They were stark, hard hitting, lean and sometimes avant-garde in their own way. I sometimes referred to my movies as "quickies" because of the shooting schedule, we always shot them in eighteen days. Long days, fourteen-hour days. They were quick. We worked hard and fast, but I think that produced an energetic quality in the films.

### When you write, do budget concerns come in to play?

I never think about the budget. I really never worry about that when I'm writing a story. I write it as I have to tell it. I'm setting up to do a picture now that takes place in ancient Rome. I know that we will not have the ability to construct gigantic sets, so I have to write a picture that's feasible to make in the first place, particularly if it's something I'm going to direct myself. The most ambitious I ever was, was when we made *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*, which is a picture that takes place over a forty-eight year period and covers the entire life and career of Hoover. It required a lot of sets, costumes, old cars, and was a big undertaking that I never thought I would direct myself. But then it became apparent to me that if I was going to ever get it made I'd have to do it myself. So I just jumped into it. We didn't have the money to finish the picture, but I still started production in hopes of finding financing for the rest of it.

Well, for example, in *It's Alive*, almost all of the violence is off screen. So right away I assumed that's because of budget concerns?

I did it because it was more effective, not for budgetary concerns.