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'Doomsday' at Rogue

'Pitch the first snapped up by Rona'

By ADAM DAWTREY

Rogue Pictures, Universal's Gotham-based genre unit, has joined forces with L.A.-based Crystal Sky Pictures to back "Doomsday," the next project from British writer-director Neil Marshall.

Pitch is the first snapped up by Rogue president of production Andrew Rona since he joined from Dimension Films four weeks ago.

"Doomsday" is described as a futuristic action thriller with political overtones, set in northern England and Scotland.

Rogue, which is taking worldwide rights to the pic, is bankrolling development of the script under an aggressive deal to move rapidly toward production next spring in the U.K.

Crystal Sky, headed by chairman Steven Paul and president Benedict Carver, brought the project to Rogue and will act as producer. It has an option to finance 50% of the \$15 million-\$20 million budget as an equity investment.

Precise details of the plot are being closely guarded. Rona said, "It's in the vein of 'Mad Max,' set in the near future, when the world has become a very intense place to live. A disaster threatens the future of mankind, and a team of people have to stop it."

Marshall has earned his growing reputation with two low-budget horror movies -- his 2002 debut "Dog Soldiers," about an army unit menaced by werewolves, and his critically acclaimed sophomore movie "The Descent," about a group of women who come across something nasty on a caving expedition.

Latter, released over the summer in Blighty and picked up by Lions Gate for the U.S., won rave reviews but faltered at the U.K. box office because it opened the day after the real-life horror of the London tube and bus bombings. Lions Gate is holding back the U.S. release until mid-2006.

Carver and Marshall's U.K. agent Marc Helwig pitched "Doomsday" to Rona as soon as he arrived at Rogue. "I saw 'The Descent' and immediately went into dealmaking mode," Rona said.

"This really represents what I want to do at Rogue, taking a bet on an exciting new filmmaker and giving him a chance to step up in terms of budget and scope," he said.

"Doomsday" is also the first project initiated and set up by Carver since he joined Crystal Sky from Screen Gems early this year.

"The aim for Crystal Sky is to get into business with up-and-coming filmmakers," Carver said. "This deal is a major endorsement of him by an important U.S. distributor."