When fans decry the current spate of remakes, they forget that sometimes a true gem can emerge from Hollywood redoing past classics, a picture that surpasses the original. Case in point: David Cronenberg’s 1986 version of THE FLY, a redux of the ’50s chestnut about a scientist who invents a teleportation device that has a dire consequences when his atoms are accidentally scrambled with a house fly’s. On the occasion of THE FLY’s 25th anniversary last month, Fango exclusively spoke with the film’s executive producer, none other than legendary funnyman Mel Brooks. (Watch for a Fango Brooks scoop on his new horror flick, THE PIZZA MAN, later this week.)

FANGORIA: When did you first become associated with the remake?

MEL BROOKS: Well, there was a fellow working for me, Stuart Cornfeld, who now works for Ben Stiller. Stuart said that THE FLY, which was owned by Fox where we were working, was a great idea to remake, but not in the fashion in which it was originally made-that is, a guy steps into a teleportation chamber and bang! He’s a fly. I said, “What are you talking about?” And he said something about metamorphosis…“Well, it starts with him eating sweet stuff and maybe putting 16 spoonfuls of sugar in his coffee, which is bizarre, and it’s because of the teleportation [experiment], because obviously he doesn’t know why, he doesn’t know he’s becoming the fly yet.” And he doesn’t even know that there’s a creature called Brundlefly on the horizon. At any rate, that was the secret. That was the trick. That was the genius of it. He would slowly, but surely, become a fly. It started with maybe fingernails going away and then you’re taking off an ear and there are fly hairs on his back. It was just gruesome, terrible, scary and brilliant. And I got very excited about it and backed it. Right from the beginning, I thought it was a great idea and I already had started my company, BrooksFilms, and I had done THE ELEPHANT MAN. So I was prepared. The problem was to keep my name away, keep “Mel Brooks” off it, because it’s Pavlovian. You see “Mel Brooks” and you’re ready for a wild

comedy, like BLAZING SADDLES. The trick was to have a very low profile.

FANG: Considering the great reviews THE FLY and THE ELEPHANT MAN got, did you ever regret not having your name front and center?

BROOKS: No, I never regretted it, because I knew there'd be trouble.

FANG: Were you a fan of the 1958 film?

BROOKS: It was actually pretty bad. It was good and silly. It was very good in terms of a scary concept that was amazing. The little fly with the head that said, "Help me, help me…," I think was Southern. He said, "Hey-ulp me." I told [actor] Cleavon Little that story in the middle of shooting BLAZING SADDLES when he had the gun to his head, and he actually says, "Help me, help me." So we had fun with the [original] FLY. It was good for some aspects of it-the teleportation going wrong and…"bang!"

FANG: Talk about the casting of your version.

BROOKS: Jeff Goldblum was remarkable. [HIGH ANXIETY co-writer] Rudy De Luca made a movie called TRANSYLVANIA 6-5000 with Jeff. Jeff asked to use his girlfriend, Geena Davis, who was in that too. We didn't know who she was, but we saw some film on her and Rudy said she's really good, so we did a little test and we all agreed that she was terrific. She was very talented, so we got lucky and she was the lead. And I was lucky to hear her dialogue on one of the rough cuts of the movie, and I said, "I think that we should use that on the poster." Be afraid. Be very afraid.

FANG: Were any other actors considered for either of those parts?

BROOKS: To begin with, I was thinking that maybe [Brundle] should be a very handsome guy, a really handsome leading man. So I offered Pierce Brosnan the script first, because Fox wanted a star. He was a big star [on TV's REMINGTON STEELE]. So I can't say I got Jeff right away and thought he was the right guy. I went along with Fox and thought a handsome guy [was the way to go]. I was so lucky when Brosnan turned it down. That's called taking a good bounce. Brosnan's a wonderful actor, and I'm sure he could have done it, but every time he sees me he says, "Why didn't you tell me THE FLY was so good?" I say, "Pierce, please. I didn't know myself till I saw it."

FANG: Goldblum was largely known for comedy at the time and this was a real departure for him. Was there any reluctance from Fox to cast him?

BROOKS: I beat them into it. They were happy.

FANG: Also originally there was a different director, Robert Bierman, and a different FX person, Christopher Tucker, attached to the film, but then that all changed for various reasons. How would their vision been different from David Cronenberg's?

BROOKS: Cronenberg was just born to do it. Stuart said that and then I saw every film Cronenberg did and I said, "Yes, you're right, he's born to do it." And not even that, budget-wise, it was a slam-dunk. We got it made in Canada, because of Cronenberg, which was half the cost. The American dollar was a $1.50 compared to the Canadian dollar then.

FANG: So you got to watch all of Cronenberg's films before he was signed on. What were your impressions?

BROOKS: I thought he was crazy and very brilliant and very talented. And very brave.

FANG: Cronenberg told me he wasn't responsible for the script's gruesome moments. When he decided to rewrite it, he really amped up the characters and worked on the relationships.

BROOKS: God bless him, because we needed that. We needed that solid support that he gave. He agreed that Chris Walas was the guy [for the FX]. That was the key to the success of the picture. It was not only Cronenberg; it was Chris Walas.

FANG: Did you visit the set while they were shooting?

BROOKS: Oh, yeah, I was up there in Toronto a lot. I lived there for a while so I could stick my two cents in.

FANG: What were some of those two cents?

BROOKS: I would sometimes say to Cronenberg, "You've done it three times, you don't have to do another take. It's good, it's really great, get on." I'd generally be patting people on the back, telling them how good they are, like a coach on the field.

FANG: Do you remember any particular scenes that you saw being shot or any FX moments that stood out while you were there?

BROOKS: Yeah, you know the teleportation was really scary. Really scary. And at the end, when he becomes almost totally a fly and she lifts the shotgun, but she couldn't do it, just made

you cry. And he lifts the shotgun. It was so brilliant, it must have been Cronenberg…I don't even remember if it was in the script. That's an incredible scene. And the one thing that really killed me was [Brundle] vomiting that acid to dissolve his food. I'm a horror fan and I love great horror films, but that was just a bit much.

FANG: When the film opened 25 years ago, it was a box office sleeper. It hit number one and took people by surprise. It remains Cronenberg's most successful film.

BROOKS: I get the most successful! Richard Benjamin's most successful film is MY FAVORITE YEAR. David Lynch's most successful film is THE ELEPHANT MAN. Cronenberg's most successful film is THE FLY. Graeme Clifford's most successful film is FRANCES. And they're all BrooksFilms. So I'm responsible, in some way, for these guys making their best films under my tutelage.

FANG: I was on the set of THE FLY for three days back when it was shooting in '85, and I remember thinking it was going to be something special.

BROOKS: Every time Fox complained about the cost, I said, "No, no, it's a bargain. Everything here is a bargain." And we never went over budget. The most money I ever spent was on SPACEBALLS, which was $22 million. Most of my stuff was like BLAZING SADDLES-$2.2 million. YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN was $2.4. I mean, just peanuts.

FANG: THE FLY came in at $15 million.

BROOKS: I think it was. But that was further along. We made that in '85 and averages budgets were in the 20s, and that was just for sexy little comedies. And here we're doing a massive film.

[redacted]