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## Polonsky Will Adapt Hubbard's 'Earth' Filming

By RAY LOYND

Abe Polonsky, who's spent the last few years in the groves of academe, has been signed by producer Bill Immerman to adapt L. Ron Hubbard's current best-selling "Battlefield Earth," which Ken Annakin will direct.

Polonsky, 73, whose career stretches back to his Oscar-nominated screenplay for "Body And Soul" (1947) and whose most recent writing credit was "Monsignor," is working daily with Annakin in breaking down a workable screen design from Hubbard's voluminous intergalactic sci-fi adventure (No. 9 on the New York Times' paperback list).

In fact, Immerman, exec producing under his indie Salem Prods. banner, plans two pix from the book, each tagged at \$20,000,000 and utilizing the same sets, much in the manner, said Annakin, that the first two "Superman" films were shot.

Annakin called the pricetag "realistic," said that Immerman has "all the preproduction financing from banking money" (both English and American), plus financing to make the first film and the rest "promised."

Two major foreign distributors, the director added, might also invest in the productions. Immerman has also talked to one Hollywood distributor.

The story, which takes place in the year 3000 and deals with efforts of a handful of surviving earthlings to overthrow an alien force, is scheduled to start production early next year in area surrounding Denver, Colo.

### Technical Assists

Filmmakers have already secured cooperation of NORAD (used in "WarGames") pursuant to script approval, initiated support from the Colorado Film Commission, and brought aboard special effects ex-

pert Richard Edlin from Douglas Trumbull's EEG outfit.

Next week Annakin will explore a further special effects deal with George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic subsid.

Central cast comprises three people in their early 20s, an American boy and girl and another girl who is Scottish. Latter is part of an 85-member commando team from Scotland, where comparative handful of planet's inhabitants were lucky enough to survive gaseous assault from alien power that wiped Earth out in the year 2000.

Hubbard, a certified mystery man who is also head of The Church of Scientology and is reported to be living on a yacht somewhere in the Caribbean, sold the film rights to Immerman through the Hollywood literary agency ASI. Neither Immerman, Annakin, nor Polonsky has ever talked to Hubbard. Nor, the trio says, do they, or the novel, have any connection with Hubbard's Scientology church or its Dianetics persuasion.

Hubbard has been writing adventure novels and pulp romances for decades. "I remember Hubbard as an amazing adventure writer," said Polonsky. "I got into this because I was approached to do it (through his agent Phil Gersh) and I've always had an interest in science fiction. I once adapted Arthur Clarke's story, 'Childhood's End,' for Universal but I could never get them to make it. They still own it."

### Ala Lucas

"Battlefield Earth," said Polonsky, is akin to the George Lucas stories insofar as it's "a marvelous adventure" but different from the "Star Wars" genre because "it has a point of view—it's about problems of today that are projected into the future."

"Everything people in the story are doing to earth—exploiting the planet's resources—are what we're doing ourselves today. First part of the book, which my script will focus on, is how human beings left on the planet learn how to cope and overcome the aliens, who are an extrapolation of the worst in all of

us."

Well-known blacklisted writer during McCarthy-era witchhunts, Polonsky endured the nightmare years of Red Hysteria penning scripts for tv's "You Are There" series under pseudonyms and assorted "fronts," as recounted, he said, in the film "The Front."

In the late 1950s he also worked with Tyrone Guthrie in Canada turning Yeats' translation of "Oedipus Rex" into screenplay form. While he was teaching screenwriting two years back at San Francisco State, he said the college's theater department used his and Guthrie's "Oedipus Rex" film while the film department was teaching his 1949 film "Force Of Evil."

He's constantly the subject of PhD theses: "If I'd been an ordinary screenwriter who stayed out of trouble nobody would have ever heard of me." As for peer honors, he said that when his nominated script "Body And Soul" lost out in the '47 Oscar race to "The Bachelor And The Bobby Soxer" he decided "to lose interest" in awards mania.

"Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here" (1969, which he also directed) brought Polonsky back to the screen for the first time in nearly 20 years. Subsequent credits (cowriting) included the films "Madigan" and "Avalanche Express."

### Visiting Prof

Last year he was a fulltime visiting prof at Tel Aviv University; at the same time, the U.S. Embassy there made a point of screening his old films. Did he consider that an irony in light of the blacklist?

"No, not irony. To me, the Embassy screenings last year are like the give and take in politics."

For veteran director Annakin, the project also represents a major challenge. His last film was the Australian-shot and boxoffice disappointment, "The Pirate Movie." His best known work is "Magnificent Men In Their Flying Machines," the British and French parts of "The Longest Day," "Battle Of The Bulge," and "Swiss Family Robinson."