

WINNING THE STAR WARS

Getting chosen to direct a *Star Wars* movie is the sort of break for which most film directors would sacrifice not just their eye teeth but the whole gleaming set. So it is surprising, to say the least, to find that a relatively unknown British director, Richard Marquand, was picked by producer George Lucas to direct *The Return Of The Jedi*, the last in the first trio of pictures. (Keep calm, though – or utter despairing groans – there are plans for two more sets of three with different actors.)

Marquand, a modest and down-to-earth man of 40, admits that his name can hardly have sprung to mind when Lucas and Co were mulling over likely choices. A former BBC director, he is probably best known for *The Eye Of The Needle*, a respectable

if not exactly inspired wartime thriller. 'To be honest, I thought my agent was joking when he first suggested it, but I figured there's no harm in trying.'

The list of possibles was whittled down from 40 and when Marquand was eventually told he'd got the job he promptly headed for the nearest bar and got gloriously plastered on champagne. Two years later, he is as ebullient as ever, though slightly bowed with exhaustion after what he describes as the most tiring job he has done in his life.

'When I took on the job, I was worried that the relationship with Lucas might be difficult, but in fact he gave me far more

freedom than I ever expected. And Harrison Ford said on the first day of shooting, "You are entering a very exclusive club here".'

He is understandably keeping quiet about what fate befalls the principals this time round, but it's a fair bet that at least one of them is going to be thermically lanced into oblivion. What he has tried to do is open out the characters from their former comic strip personas, while keeping the special effects up to scratch.

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