

# Entertainment Outlook

## Bixby's Hulk bites the dust

### STAR SPEAK



FRANK SANELLO

The Big Green Fella bites the dust in "The Death of the Incredible Hulk," a TV movie airing on Sunday, Feb. 18, on NBC.

Bill Bixby, who played the Hulk's alter ego, Dr. David Banner, in the series and two TV movies, returns to star and direct. Former Mr. Universe Lou Ferrigno is also back as the not-so-jolly green giant.



Bill Bixby

The original show had a successful run on CBS from 1978 to 1982, and the two TV movies about the Hulk earned big ratings.

In "The Death of the Incredible Hulk," Banner falls in love with a beautiful terrorist (former Miss America Elizabeth Gracen) and tries to cure himself of turning into the Hulk in stressful situations.

Bixby, now 56, looks a good 15 years younger than his actual age. Early on, his good looks helped launch his career. He began modeling in his late teens.

After a slew of TV commercials, Bixby was cast as the perplexed young man who played host to the

original E.T. on the popular sitcom "My Favorite Martian." That was followed by a more mature role in the series "The Courtship of Eddie's Father." He also starred in the series "The Magician" and "Goodnight, Beantown."

It was during "The Courtship of Eddie's Father" that Bixby was encouraged to start a second career as a director. Besides episodes of that show, his numerous directing credits include "Rich Man, Poor Man - Book II" and "Three on a Date."

Bixby is currently developing another TV series in which he would play a medical doctor.

**Q.** The previous "Hulk" movies cleaned up in the ratings. Why are they killing off the big guy in this one?

**A.** Nothing successful on television is ever closed off. I don't want to give away the ending, but let's just say 'death' is a relative word when it comes to TV.

**Q.** I can't help but notice that you're sitting on a cushion. What happened?

**A.** I hurt my back while I was running through a field during shooting of the film. I have to see a chiropractor two times a day. I think it was really the strain that did it. Besides acting, I also directed and served as executive producer on the show.

I worked seven days a week, shooting six — and on the seventh I did all my producing chores. Whew! I get winded just thinking about it. Imagine what it was like actually doing all that. But I loved every backbreaking — literally — moment of it!

**Q.** Why do you think that years after the Hulk series went off the air, the TV movies remain so popular?

**A.** We never talk down to the audience. It was never just a kid's show. And it remains popular around the world. I was in India and turned on the TV, and there was Dr. Banner meta-

morphing into the Big Guy.

**Q.** What question are you most often asked about the Hulk?

**A.** When he's changing into the Hulk, people want to know why his shirt and shoes rip off, but never his pants. And I say, "Because we're on TV."

**Q.** Was there any reluctance on the part of the network to casting a former Miss America with no acting experience as your romantic interest in the film?

**A.** Elizabeth Gracen — she won the title in 1982 I think — is going to be a major star. The network did resist casting her. They said, "Don't we need an actress for this role?"

But I was so bowled over by her screen test and her natural talent. I said, "What she doesn't know, she can learn on the set." Actually, there wasn't that much to teach her. She turned out to be a natural!

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