

# Vista pair 'Bitten' by film success

By Robert Gira  
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VISTA — At the recent Mission Valley sneak preview of the teen horror-comedy film, "Once Bitten," two members of the audience were perhaps more terrified than anyone else in attendance.

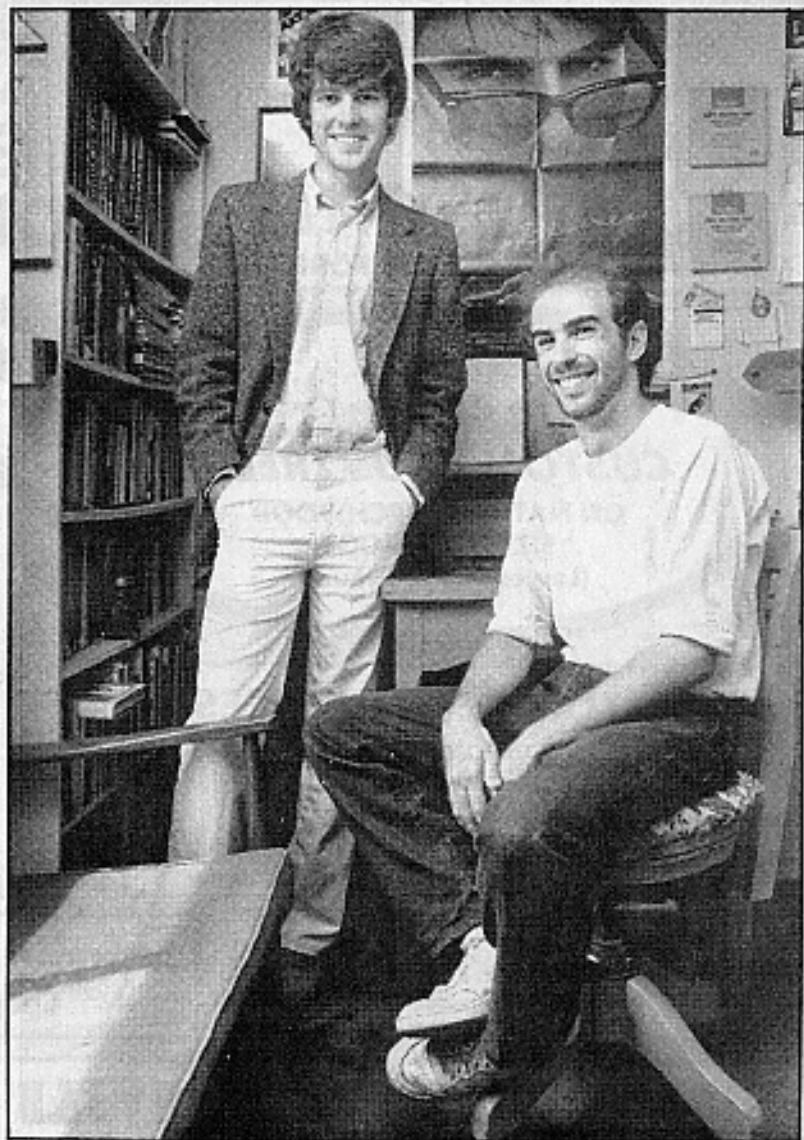
"We sat in the very back, near the door," recalled David Hines, who co-authored the movie with his writing partner, Jeff Hause.

The two 24-year-old Vista residents were needlessly apprehensive.

The film, which stars Lauren Hutton, Cleavon Little and newcomer Jim Carry, was well received, getting frequent laughs and, at its conclusion, appreciative applause.

Producer Samuel Goldwyn Jr. must have liked what he saw. The Goldwyn Co. has scheduled a nationwide release in 800 theaters on Nov. 15.

After pounding out six drafts of the scripts, haggling over story changes, and sweating out production, the two authors have good



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Vista High grads Jeff Hause, left, and David Hines, have co-authored and sold their first screen play.

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reason to be ecstatic, now that the \$3.2 million film is completed.

"The sneak preview was terrifying and wonderful at the same time," said Hause. "It's a thrill to see scenes you wrote actually up on the screen."

The story involves a vampire (Hutton), her butler (Little) and the teen hero (Carry). The action occurs in Los Angeles, much of it in Hutton's mansion, where she lures her innocent male victims.

The plot, embellished by the comic one-liners which Hines and Hause toss about easily in conversation, is a bit improbable. But the story of how the script was sold and the film made is almost incredible.

"It (the script) had been everywhere and no one wanted it," said Hines. "We had given up on it. Then we got a call that the Goldwyn Company was expanding production and they were interested."

The news came after a year and half of waiting. The two collaborators were already veteran screenwriters, even though they had not made a sale. In fact, they began writing scripts while still attending Vista High School.

They spoke with little enthusiasm of their initial effort, a script called "Heaven Sent."

"It had something to do with student body elections," said Hines, "and it was about as interesting as it sounds."

However, the novice writers were encouraged by English teacher Jeff Jones to pursue their offbeat talent for satiric humor.

"He encouraged us," recalled Hines. "He didn't make us shut up. He didn't snuff out our creativity."

After graduation, Hause and Hines continued to co-write scripts. They enrolled in film courses at Palomar College and worked closely with instructor Richard Peacock, polishing their writing skills and learning the nuances of film production.

The two writers, who admit to a tendency to procrastination, credit Peacock for his training and inspiration.

"He gave us the rudiments and pushed us," said Hause. "And he screamed at us when we needed it."

Peacock is far from astonished at the pair's success, however. "Anytime that anybody makes it in Hollywood, it's kind of a surprise," he said. "But it was evident to me that they had talent."

Their talent was complemented by a determination that led both writers to think of little else but their screenwriting efforts. Hause had enrolled as an art student at Long Beach State, but he dropped out when their writing job appeared. Hines worked at a series of part-time jobs, always concentrating on his

writing.

Though their scriptwriting approach has altered slightly over the years, one thing hasn't changed: they always work together.

"It started that Jeff was more visually oriented and I did the dialogue," said Hines. "But now it's evened out."

"We do our best work together," added Hause, whose work as a comic book creator earned him praise from underground cartoonist Robert Crumb and actor/director Rob Reiner when Hause was only 19.

Though they had written a number of scripts together, once Hause and Hines decided to break into Hollywood films, they took an unusual approach to marketing their material.

Instead of sending scripts to an agent, they decided to contact producers themselves. This effort did not bring immediate success.

"We spent a weekend in Hollywood, calling people," said Hines. "No one would talk to us."

But later at a party, independent producer Dimitri Villard did take an interest in the pair. He hired them to script some aerobics videos and then to take a shot at a low-budget epic called "Beach Bunnies in Chains." The latter was never produced.

"It wasn't such a great idea," Hine said, "to make a comedy about white slavery."

However, Villard eventually contacted the collaborators with a more viable film idea. This concept was titled "Night Life," and had something to do with a female vampire. And Villard provided more than the concept. He also offered some minimal pay to develop the script.

The offer came at an appropriate time.

"Dimitri called us at the lowest ebb of our lives," said Hines, admitting that the two had become discouraged. "I had mononucleosis and hepatitis. It was a life-saver."

Hause was then attending Long Beach State and Hines was living in Vista. The first draft, begun in 1982, was written in an unusual manner — by telephone.

That resulted in the "Night Life" script, which was quite different from what eventually became "Once Bitten." And it was a bit long as well.

"It was like the Ten Commandments," said Hines. "It weighed about 40 pounds."

Villard nonetheless saw something in the script and began to shop around. A year and a half of waiting ensued before the Goldwyn Co. agreed to buy the script.

Once the contract was drawn up, the real work began, as did the education of two young writers who were about to learn first-hand about the twists and turns of fortunes in Hollywood.

The Goldwyn Co. liked the script,

but they wanted a few changes. Thus, Hause and Hines sat down to some marathon writing sessions, producing the requested alterations.

The result?  
"We were almost fired," said Hines.

The first rewrite was a disaster," added Hause. "We were trying to satisfy two sides and we satisfied none."

After some tense meetings, the third draft was attempted and their effort was deemed an improvement, as were the next two drafts.

By the sixth draft, the writers had produced an acceptable shooting script. Then the film was cast and sent into production.

After a year and a half of grueling work, Hine and Hause were relieved and physically drained. But working on the rewrites hadn't been completely without reward. They were paid for their work and they even experienced a bit of the Hollywood scene.

For a time, they worked out of a plush office on the lot at Goldwyn studios — a room with a view.

"We could see the Hollywood sign — through the smog," noted Hines.

For their final script conference with the director of the film, the studio rolled out the red carpet, booking Hause and Hines into the expensive

Beverly Hills Comstock Hotel for the evening.

"The room they put us in was bigger than my house," said Hines.

Their arrival at the hotel was less than impressive, however. Nursing along Hines' ailing pickup truck, they treaded their way through BMWs and Mercedes into the valet parking areas, only to receive a cold reception from the hotel personnel.

"They tried to wave us away," said Hines. "Then the truck stalled. In fact, it stalled for an hour in valet parking. Then we knew we belonged."

Not all the evenings spent working on the project were as luxurious as the night in Beverly Hills. Both writers admit that their first sale has been a learning experience — and a bit of a disillusionment.

"You read about Hollywood all the time," said Hause. "It's just the shock of going through the things you read about. You're dealing with businessmen most of the time."

Said Hines: "You go to classes to learn about arts and craft, and then you learn that it's the money that counts."

Frustration, stress, and rage can be by-products of having a number of people tampering with creativity, both admitted.

Yet Hause cited some unnecessary haggling that they won't repeat on their next project.

"We learned which battle to lose and which to win," he said. "We'd fight for hours (in script meetings) over one tiny gag and then we'd learn the next day that the director cut the entire scene."

Hause and Hines admit that they grew up with a generation that considered "Animal House" the epitome of comedy. Their own attitudes, however, have changed considerably. Now, they say they appreciate many earlier comedies, including film classics like "My Man Godfrey" and "It Happened One Night."

According to Hause, there may be a trend back to these older comedies.

"It seems that Hollywood is going back to the well-written comedies," said Hause, who admires the work of early directors such as Billy Wilder and William Wellman, along with the efforts of more recent directors such as Albert Brooks and Rob Reiner.

Hines, whose varied tastes range from the films of Stanley Kubrick to those of Woody Allen, notes that the eventual progression for him and his partner is directing — as a team.

"We both think alike," said Hines. "I think it comes down to wanting to make sure that what you wrote gets

on the screen."

Since beginning their "Once Bitten" script, Hines and Hause say their skills have improved and they have gained discipline. But according to Hines, they've resisted some changes.

"We've learned a lot," he said. "But I still think we're really naive. In a way, I'd like to stay that way."

Hause, who still plans to earn his degree at Long Beach State, admits that, since the sneak preview, he's been riding a wave of euphoria.

"A lot of it has been terribly hard and back-breaking," he said, "and I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Both admit that luck — being in the right place at the right time — played a major part in their first big break. And Hines, in a deadpan fashion, offers advice to young, struggling writers looking for that some break:

Don't do comedy," he said. "We don't need the competition."