

For filmmaker Frankel,
one popular novel offered
a devilishly delightful story

Fashion statement

By Diana Jordan

DAVID FRANKEL IS IN the dark in otherwise sunny Miami as he discusses a movie he directed, *The Devil Wears Prada*. There's a power outage, giving Frankel a moment to reflect on the light his film sheds on the enticing yet brutal fashion world.

"It holds a mirror up to all of us," says Frankel. "It manages to show how seductive and superficial things in life are, and why sometimes it's OK to give in to that."

Frankel is quick to say that the bestselling novel by Lauren Weisberger and his film adaptation "... are both really funny ... but at the end of the day it's not a morality lesson, it's a comedy." And he notes that Weisberger "embraced every frame."

In the book, a naïve but ambitious girl named Andy moves to New York and finds work in the fashion industry as the personal assistant to Miranda Priestly, the editor in chief of the fictitious *Runway* magazine. This is a job that—we are frequently reminded—"a million girls would die for." Except that Miranda (played by Meryl Streep) keeps Andy and another personal assistant, Emily, spinning with extreme demands and cruel consequences.

Frankel, who won acclaim for directing several HBO hits, including *Entourage* and *Sex and the City*, saw the book's Miranda as "a one-note, frightening, funny monster," but that character inspired him. He saw a very powerful woman who's got a dark side, capable of provoking love and hate. "That was the character that appealed to me, that you could paint a portrait of the contemporary media world with the character of Miranda," he says.

Frankel says Streep gives the film backbone. "She's able to play the comedy dramatically, and play the drama with a hint of comedy," he says. "You always feel there's something else on her mind, some depth, some sadness, some manipulation, some cruelty, some genius."

The film plays up the themes of loyalty, power and choice. Mesmerized by the glitter of her job,



Director David Frankel on the set of *The Devil Wears Prada* with Meryl Streep. At right, actress Anne Hathaway as Andy Sachs.

Andy becomes more loyal to Miranda than to her colleague Emily and to her friends. Andy does Miranda's bidding, complaining, "I had no choice."

Frankel uses the motif to resonate with moviegoers: "All of us have at one time found ourselves walking down the wrong path, slavishly devoted to the wrong person, and the movie recognizes how seductive that can be and the challenges of escaping that kind of situation."

For Frankel, it happened at his first job, working at a television syndication company. But he ignored the dangling show-biz enticements, instead spending his nights and weekends writing, and eventually forged a writing career.

Frankel finds the fashion world alluring. He worked closely with designer Patricia Field, appreciating her talent for using timeless fashion elements to suggest character. Field even created a signature bag for Andy, a distressed studded leather fringed bag.

His fashion sense? Frankel quips, "If it was a language, I could order dinner." It would be some dinner.

In the end, Frankel says, the film has a schizophrenic quality. Adoring fashion and rejecting it. Embracing thin people and rejecting them for trying too hard to be thin. Admiring power, but rejecting some of the sacrifices it takes to be powerful.

Frankel applauds Miranda Priestly, the devil in the book, because, in the movie, she stands for excellence. "If there are boundaries of humanity that get crossed in aspiring to excellence, is that not possibly a sacrifice that's worthwhile?" he asks. "It's a question ... the movie does stir that idea." **✪**

Diana Jordan reviews books and interviews authors for TV, the Web, radio and print.



Devil of a drawing

COSTCO IS giving away five *The Devil Wears Prada* DVDs and a replica of a purse designed by the famous costume designer Patricia Field that was used in the movie. To enter the drawing for these items, print your name, membership number, address and daytime phone number on a postcard or letter and send it to: *The Devil Wears Prada, The Costco Connection*, P.O. Box 34088, Seattle, WA 98124-1088; or fax it to (425) 313-6718.

No purchase is necessary. Entries must be received or postmarked by midnight, January 2, 2007. Void where prohibited. Employees of Costco and their families are not eligible. Winners will be notified by mail. One entry per household.

The Costco Connection

You'll find the movie adaptation of *The Devil Wears Prada* at your local Costco warehouse and on costco.com when it is released this month.