

Billboard

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HEADLINE: 'ALIEN AUTOPSY' PROVES QUITE LIVELY.

VIDEO RINGS UP HEFTY DIRECT-RESPONSE SALES

BYLINE : BY SETH GOLDSTEIN

NEW YORK--It came from outer space to hit it big in home video. That's "Alien Autopsy," a purported post-mortem of the UFO occupants killed in a crash in Roswell, N.M., in 1947.

Fox Television's broadcasts of "Alien Autopsy" in August and September garnered high ratings and sparked a consumer interest that Vidmark Entertainment has fanned into a sell-through blaze. TV series, such as Fox's "The X-Files," and an upcoming Time magazine cover story on UFOs have provided additional fuel.

"Alien Autopsy" sales, now approaching 100,000 units at \$19.99, could top 500,000 by early 1996. However, unlike hit movies, most of the action is taking place outside retail. Such key chains as Best Buy, Musicland, and Blockbuster have bought thousands of copies, but "Alien Autopsy" has been racking up its strongest numbers in direct response, according to Gary Goldman, president of Goldhil Home Media in Thousand Oaks, Calif.

"Nontheatrical often gets buried in stores," Goldman says. Goldhil's answer

has been to place "Alien Autopsy" in 20 mail-order catalogs, with an additional 30 pending. The names range from Rivertown Trading to Book-Of-The-Month Club, the latter of which reportedly will feature "Alien Autopsy" on the cover of a monthly bulletin to members.

In addition, Parade magazine will promote the program in its Nov. 26 edition delivered to 1.5 million-2 million homes in Texas and Chicago.

If the response warrants it," the promotion will be sent to as many as 36 million Parade homes each week. And Goldman is negotiating a newspaper insert that could reach 55 million households. "It's all a function of economics," he says.

It's also a function of the truism "seeing is believing." Goldman agrees with UFO enthusiasts that federal authorities covered up the Roswell incident, presented on the tape in "a very formidable way." He adds, "It was simple to go out to major accounts and tout it. No pun intended, but the response has been out of this world."

Catalogs are buying three to six times their normal quantities, Goldman claims, even though he pitched many of them on or after their fourth-quarter deadlines.

None of this is new to Goldhil, which has used similar end-runs around retail to sell 500,000 copies of "David Carradine's Tai Chi Workout" and 200,000 of "America's Greatest Roller Coaster Thrills." But demand could make "Alien Autopsy" Goldhil's best-seller. "These are few and far between,"

Goldman says. "Maybe two or three a year might qualify."

Fox TV and Vidmark are doing their best to keep the flame alive. Don Gold, VP of sell-through programming for Vidmark, says the network has scheduled a third telecast for Nov. 25, the night before the issue of Parade lands on doorsteps.

Viewers will see a revised "Alien Autopsy" containing new footage from a German source. Vidmark, which provided wrap-around footage to Fox TV for the original Aug. 28 broadcast, is the only one allowed to show the entire autopsy, however.

Gold says that parent Trimark Pictures acquired home video rights to its 70-minute edition after 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment passed. "We snapped it up. I knew I could do 20,000 units just in catalog." The latest direct-response wrinkle is a cross-promotion with Jami Marketing of Pearl River, N.Y. Jami advertises the tape on Dionne Warwick's 900-number Psychic Friends Network; Vidmark inserts coupons for three minutes of free Psychic phone time in the "Alien Autopsy" package.

Even though retail has been playing a secondary role, it's hardly a minor one. Blockbuster's five-figure order, taken when the program still lacked packaging, "was the biggest they've given our company," Gold says.

Best Buy has sold 60% of 4,000 copies at \$14.99 each. "It's done well for us," says video buyer Joe Pagano, who adds that sales might have been even better if the street date had been closer to the first Fox telecast.

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