

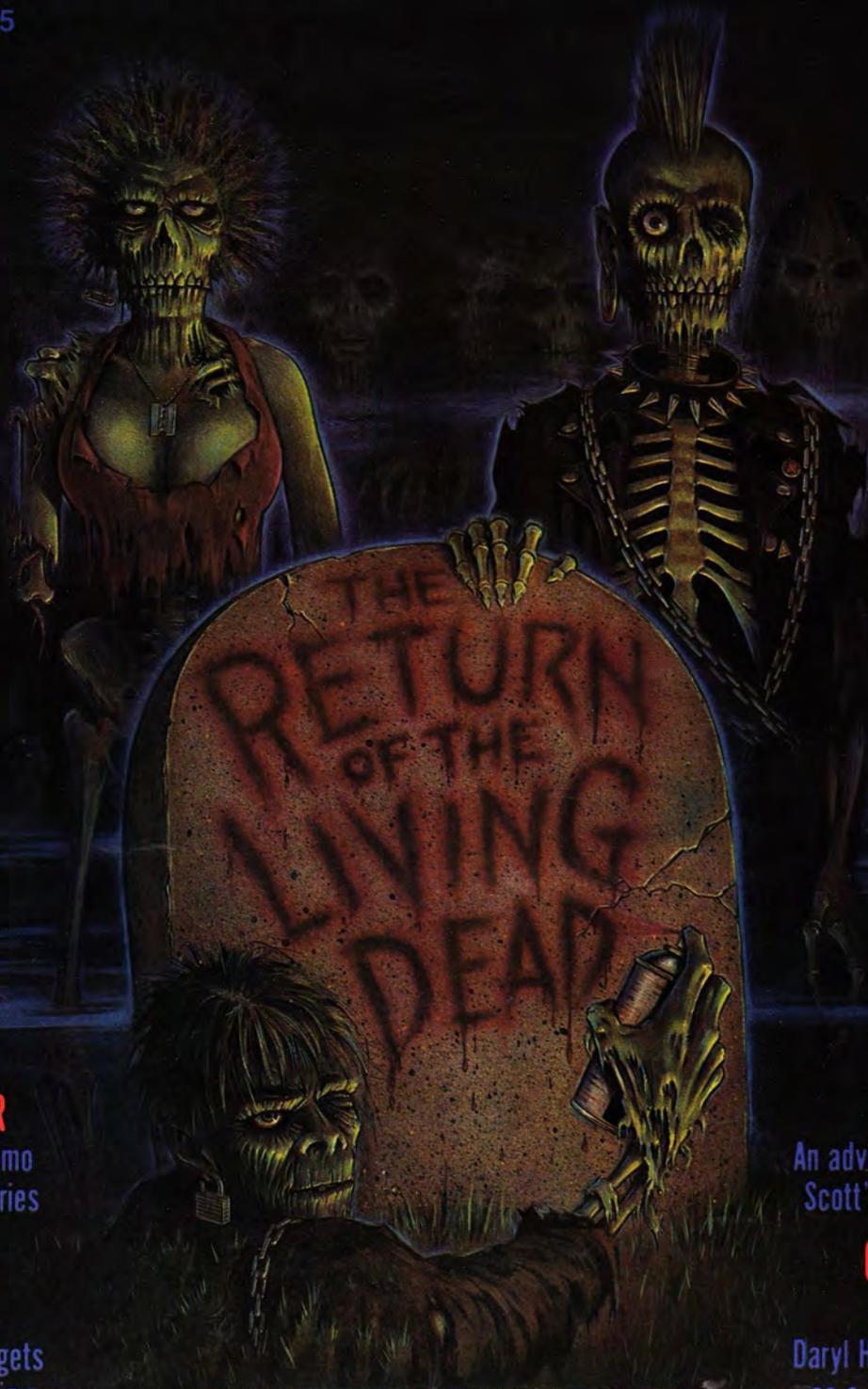
CINEFANTASTIQUE

October 1985

Volume 15 Number 4

\$4.95

CAN \$6.95
UK £3.50



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FRIGHT NIGHT

Film director Tom Holland revitalizes vampire genre

FRIGHT NIGHT

Tom Holland, author of *PSYCHO II*, makes his directorial debut and revitalizes the vampire genre.

by Charlotte Wolter

If first-time director Tom Holland has his way, *FRIGHT NIGHT*, which opened August 2, will bring new respectability to a tradition he genuinely reveres: the vampire film. "The last gasp of the genre was the parody, *LOVE AT FIRST BITE*," he noted with scorn. "THE HUNGER was so ashamed of its genre that it didn't even mention the word vampire. They were terrified of it. This film is the first modern retelling that stays faithful to the conventions of the myth. The vampire is very contemporary, but still subject to the laws of the genre."

Holland, who wrote *PSYCHO II*, is an intriguing character in an industry of professionally interesting people. A former actor in soaps (*LOVE OF LIFE*, *A TIME FOR US*) and over 200 commercials, he is a Phi Beta Kappa UCLA graduate and a member of the California Bar.

No stranger to the blue-collar world of genre films, Holland has also scripted such modest works as *CLOAK AND DAGGER* and *CLASS OF 1984*. "I never start out to do them," claimed Holland. "It's just that they are the entry-level jobs in the business. I consider myself a writer of psychological suspense much more than I do horror. In *PSYCHO II* there are some carefully chosen horrific images, like the knife in the mouth, but generally it was a dialogue and character film."



Christopher Sarandon as vampire Jerry Dandridge, in makeup by Ken Diaz.

Jerry Dandridge, the film's vampire, is portrayed by Christopher Sarandon, whose extensive credits include the Stratford Connecticut Shakespeare Festival and numerous on- and off-Broadway appearances. Sarandon's preparation for the role included inventing a detailed biography for the character. "The scenario I created for myself was that here is a man who has not only lived hundreds of years, but also lived them unable to make any lasting human bonds," he said.

Added Holland, "It's not a very pleasant way to live out eternity, being constantly chased and hounded. I didn't want to re-write the story and make him a nice guy, but I did want the audience to have a sense of the curse of being a

creature like this, as well as the attraction of it. I needed someone who was strongly sexual, but who would also be willing to scare the shit out of you. Sarandon had both qualities."

Newcomer William Ragsdale, delighted to be making his feature debut as the film's teen hero after solid stage experience, is appropriately ingenuous as the youth who stumbles onto a vampire in his home town. Casting Roddy McDowell as a former horror star hoping to recapture some of his past glory was sheer inspiration.

"I had to have people who would deliver for me," said Holland about his cast, "because I was asking so much more than is usually required within the genre. I wrote strong acting scenes, and I did some scenes in masters so they had to give a sustained performance for 2 to 3 minutes."

Holland called on Richard Edlund's Boss Film Corporation to produce the special effects which range from matte shots to a puppet bat. The most impressive works are the makeup creations of Ken Diaz.

Both Sarandon and Amanda Bearse, who plays Ragsdale's girlfriend, undergo startling makeup transformations. Even genre veterans were visibly startled by the gruesome sight of the wholesomely pretty Bearse arriving on set in a macabre full-face prosthetic for her vampire scene. In another scene, makeup effects create the metamorphosis of one

character from a wolf to a boy.

An elaborate, antique-filled jumble of rooms which rambled through two sound stages was production designer John De Cuir's set for Dandridge's sinister mansion. The set was like visiting an immense Halloween funhouse.

How does Holland think modern audiences will react to a *now* vampire film? "Hopefully it will be scary enough for those who are into vampires, but also with enough character, relationships and just plain fun so that other people will like it too," said Holland. "I think, if you want to do it successfully, you have to embrace it with great caring. There is no sense that this film is a parody of the genre. The vampire is dead real, a real threat. The danger is, if you don't get a willing suspension of disbelief, the audience is going to be laughing in the aisles."

"I think also that all of us want to believe in the vampire legend," added Holland. "There are certain fantasy characters that have a sort of timeless appeal. I don't know what archetype it is, but it is one that sure is appealing to the human consciousness." □

McDowell with the film's teen leads, William Ragsdale and Amanda Bearse.

Reluctant vampire killer Roddy McDowell watches a werewolf in its death throes.



CINEFANTASTIQUE®

January 1986

Volume 15 Number 5

\$4.95

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LEGEND

Director Ridley Scott and
makeup creator Rob Bottin
on filming epic fantasy.

ENEMY MINE

This big Christmas release
had big production problems.

AMAZING SPIELBERG

Steven Spielberg talks, and
spins "Amazing Stories."

Randy Cook on the makeup effects of FRIGHT NIGHT

By Marc Shapiro

Vampires and bats have been horror film staples since NOSFERATU (1922) and, consequently, have become familiar assignments for special effects people. It has long since passed the stage when bats on a string and snap-in fangs cut the mustard for discriminating audiences, so Randall William Cook faced a bit of a challenge when he was picked to do the prosthetic design, sculpture and bat effects on FRIGHT NIGHT.

Cook, who created the makeup effects for The Boss Film Corporation, is holding court this day in a noisy parking lot at the special effects shop in Santa Monica, California. The reason for the outdoor setting is that some of the special effects for the upcoming POLTERGEIST II are being completed inside and to say that people are security conscious at this stage is an understatement.

Cook has done stop-motion effects on a number of films including LASERBLAST, GHOSTBUSTERS, Q, and THE CRATER LAKE MONSTER and was more than capable of adding that kind of animation to FRIGHT NIGHT's small flying bat and the monstrous offspring that appears near the film's end. Stop-motion wasn't used because the filmmakers ruled it out.

"The film company said before shooting began that they did not want stop-motion effects used," said Cook. "They wanted us to use marionettes because it was felt it would be more time and cost effective. But, considering all the man hours that went into making the marionette bat, I don't agree."

"What you've seen in most vampire

Makeup co-supervisor Randy Cook inspects the finger extensions of Chris Sarandon's bat-like makeup.



Cook's design for Amanda Bearse-turned-vampire was intended to be used as a quick shock cut, but director Tom Holland ended-up featuring it extensively.

films are these bouncing marionette bats on strings that look and perform exactly like what they are and are not very convincing," he continued. "The challenge was to come up with a marionette bat that would flap its wings convincingly and with a sense of power without doing something like dropping the bat and yanking on strings to create movement."

Cook said the flight of the giant bat was accomplished by filming the marionette at super slow speed, one frame per second, which looked just right when projected normally at 24 frames per second.

"By doing it that way, we were able to get a lot of solidity of arm movement and good wing follow through," he said. "Had I been able to use stop-motion, the bat's flight could have been better than what it turned out to be. We could have had it crashing into walls and all kinds of action. But, all things considered, I think what we came up with turned out all right."

FRIGHT NIGHT proved a departure of sorts for Cook as it allowed him, for the first time, to do some major prosthetic makeup work; most notably the vampire makeup on actor Chris Sarandon. Cook admits that the ideas behind this particular effect were not totally original.

"Basically I stole the idea from John Barrymore's DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE," said Cook. "Everything done makeup-wise in that film, including finger extensions, was so subtle and effective that it seemed to me that was the right way to go. Tom Holland was very much affected by NOSFERATU so we were pretty much in agreement on how the vampire should look."

The result of these ideas and skull sessions with fellow monster maker Steve Johnson and visual effects art director John Bruno arrived at a

makeup that was a striking cross between Sarandon's features and the previously sculpted giant bat.

Molds of vampire actor Chris Sarandon's hands were made so that makeup artists could create the dozens of finger extensions that the vampire wears throughout the film. Full and partial masks were created for Sarandon's transition into an increasingly bat-like appearance.

"At the time I was creating the makeup, no actor had yet been cast," said Cook. "I had to reverse the normal process and create the bat with an eye toward the direction the makeup of the actor would take. Fortunately actor Chris Sarandon has the type of pronounced features that made the whole process easier."

Not so easy and, by Cook's estimation, not completely successful was a last minute effects curve Holland threw Cook just prior to the major effects blitz at the conclusion of the film. "Holland wanted this terrifying fanged mouth for actress Amanda Bearse that he said would

only be seen as one quick cut for a fraction of a second," said Cook. "So I threw a kind of built-up toothpaste ad mouth together in a couple of days. That mouth ended up being used in five different shots."

"I was a little embarrassed by it," Cook continued. "It doesn't really play the way it was intended. I would have taken more than a couple of days with it if I had known it was going to be visible for more than a fraction of a second."

Easily the most arresting effects sequence in FRIGHT NIGHT is the death of Evil Ed and his transformation from werewolf back to boy. Handling this sequence was Steve Johnson who, through work on THE HOWLING and AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON, has become a veteran of beast makeup and hidden moving bladders.

As Evil Ed, dying, changes from a wolf back into actor Stephen Geoffreys, the sequence begins with a full-sized wolf puppet. The puppet was wired to move across the stage floor, and appliances on Geoffreys simulated the various stages of the transformation effect. Johnson pushed the now all too familiar transformation scenes a step further, according to Cook, who was present when these scenes were shot.

"Stylistically it was a definite step forward. In previous films, that sort of scene was shot as a show-stopping 'okay we're going to transform somebody' kind of thing. On FRIGHT NIGHT the approach was different in that the scene was done almost completely with cuts rather than one continuous scene. It flowed real well and didn't distract from the progress of the story."

Cook concluded by laughingly recalling some of the jobs he'd done over the years to break into the field. He cringed at the memory of the storyboard work he did for Disney on HERBIE GOES TO MONTE CARLO and claims that his experience on Q is a long sad story not worth rehashing.

"And then there was the time I painted rubber gorilla butts on the film KING KONG," laughed Cook. "For a long time that was the high point of my career."

"Fortunately now it isn't." □

Makeup co-supervisor Steve Johnson (right) with mechanized werewolf head. The controls are demonstrated by Billy Bryan (left), who played the Marshmallow Man in GHOSTBUSTERS, and chief makeup technician Mark B. Wilson (center).



Resurrects Gothic chills of the bygone days of Hammer/AIP

FRIGHT NIGHT

A Columbia Pictures release. 7/85, 105 mins. In color. Director, Tom Holland. Producer, Herb Jaffe. Editor, Kent Beyda. Director of photography, Jan Kiesser. Production designer, John De Cuir Jr. Associate producer, Jerry A. Baerwitz. Sound, Don Rush. Visual effects, Richard Edlund.

Charley Brewster..... William Ragsdale
 Jerry Dandrige..... Chris Sarandon
 Peter Vincent..... Roddy McDowall
 Amy Peterson..... Amanda Bearse
 Evil Ed..... Stephen Geoffreys
 Billy Cole..... Jonathan Stark
 Judy Brewster..... Dorothy Fielding
 Det. Lennox..... Art J. Evans

by Kyle Counts

FRIGHT NIGHT did modest business at the box office this summer and proved to be entertaining romp in the Saturday matinee tradition. Its success on even this modest level marks it as one of the better genre films of the season. Making the leap from writer to director, Tom Holland playfully resurrects the Gothic chills of the old Hammer/American International Pictures in an updated, boy-who-cried-wolf format, and does so with humor and a genuine feel for those Sturm-und-Fang minorworks. Even though riddled with plot holes and slow-going at times, the film delivers in the big moments, and wins you over with its anxious-to-please, grand finale.

Charley is just your average horny-and-failing-trigonometry teenager (so why does he walk around in suit jackets?), with a curiosity not unlike that of James Stewart in REAR WINDOW (he even owns a pair of binoculars). And like Stewart's character in the Hitchcock classic, his spying gets him knee-deep in trouble. He sees to much—like his neighbors carrying a filled-to-capacity body bag out of the house one night—and instinctively knows that the fangs and elongated fingers his neighbor sports are not of this Earth. But the price he pays for being a 17 year-old kid with an active imagination means that no one—not mom, not girlfriend and certainly not the local police—takes his tales of the “sleeping undead” seriously. (As Charley, Ragsdale manages to pull off the difficult task of playing the role straight-faced quite impressively.)

Oh well, Charley reasons, as long as he's protected by a gold cross—provided by his skeptical nerd of a pal, Evil Ed (Stephen Geoffreys, in a performance so hysterical and unfocused that it seems to belong to another movie)—and keeps garlic handy, he's got nothing to worry about. Unless, of course, the vampire gains access to him by—so the legend says—being invited into his house by the “rightful owner.” Cut to mom, calling Charley downstairs to



Evil Ed (Stephen Geoffreys) changes from vampire (left) to werewolf. Steve Johnson built the mechanized werewolf body (right).



meet the new neighbor, Jerry Dandrige (Chris Sarandon, doing a surprisingly authoritative turn as the lusty creature of the night), a suave and fashionably dressed (lots of grays and blood-reds), er, lady-killer who makes it clear to Charley that he will see him again... real soon.

And visit again he does—that same night, in a scene that kicks the movie into high gear, however briefly. Whistling a casual refrain of “Strangers in the Night,” Dandrige enters Charley's room and grabs him by the throat (note the inserts of Charley's feet kicking helplessly; Holland continues to emulate the Hitchcock touch), tossing him like a rag doll through the doors of his closet.

Charley turns for help to Peter Vincent (Roddy McDowall), a has-been actor-turned-late-night TV host (of “Fright Night Theatre”) who professes—on his show, at least—to be a “great vampire killer.” Vincent has just been kicked off the air due to declining ratings (young people today prefer movies about “demented mad men in ski masks hacking up young virgins,” he hisses). This broken-down Cowardly Lion role would seem tailor-made for McDowall, but there isn't enough cleverness in the concept of the character to make it more than just another wimp-who-rises-to-the-occasion transformation. Still, McDowall has fun with the part's theatrical hamminess.

When Dandrige takes a liking to Amy, who reminds him of a girl he used to know “a long time ago,” he kidnaps her at a crowded disco where she and Charley have taken refuge. Their dance and seduction borders on a parody of SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER, but it illustrates Holland's idea that the vampire is a metaphor for seduction.

Charley and Vincent then join forces for a showdown with Mr. Fangs and his “live-in carpenter roommate,” Billy Cole (Jonathan Stark, doing wonders with a bit part).

While Holland shows a certain flair behind the camera (his point-of-view, vampire-to-bat shots, aided by the Louma crane camera, are imaginative, and expertly handled by cinematographer Jan Kiesser), and the film is witty on a visual level, his dialogue is surprisingly flat and thick with exposition. All things considered, if it wasn't for the pull-out-the-stops last half-hour—Evil Ed transforms into a wolf and back again, Billy Cole decomposes into a zombie, Dandrige metamorphoses into a bat, and Amy into a sort of she-beast—the film would be a dud.

But the climax is where FRIGHT NIGHT shines: the effects by the Boss Film Corporation, supervised by John Bruno, may occasionally be a bit too POLTERGEISTish (and some, like Ed's transformation/death from wolf to human form, are lingered on for far too long), but they

are largely first rate. The makeup by Randy Cook and Steve Johnson is appropriately gruesome and disturbing, even outlandishly funny at points (the she-beast's Joker-sized mouth) and the bat creature, second cousin to the Terror Dogs of GHOSTBUSTERS, works well, especially in the shot where it flies down the hallway of the house knocking over a vase. Don Rush's sound work also deserves praise—I've still got the willies from the whimpering death rattle made by Evil Ed's wolf incarnation.

In the (happy) end, Vincent returns to “Fright Night Theatre” (though it's never explained what the connection is between his dime-store heroics and the show's sudden renewal) and we find Charley and Amy back to their backseat shenanigans. (But wait: what's that set of glowing eyes in the window next door?) “Is something wrong?” Amy asks her main squeeze. Charley, wise to this type of thing by now, insists that it's nothing. Or is it the dreaded sequel, waiting in the wings? □

Charley Brewster (William Ragsdale) and vampire Jerry Dandrige (Chris Sarandon).

