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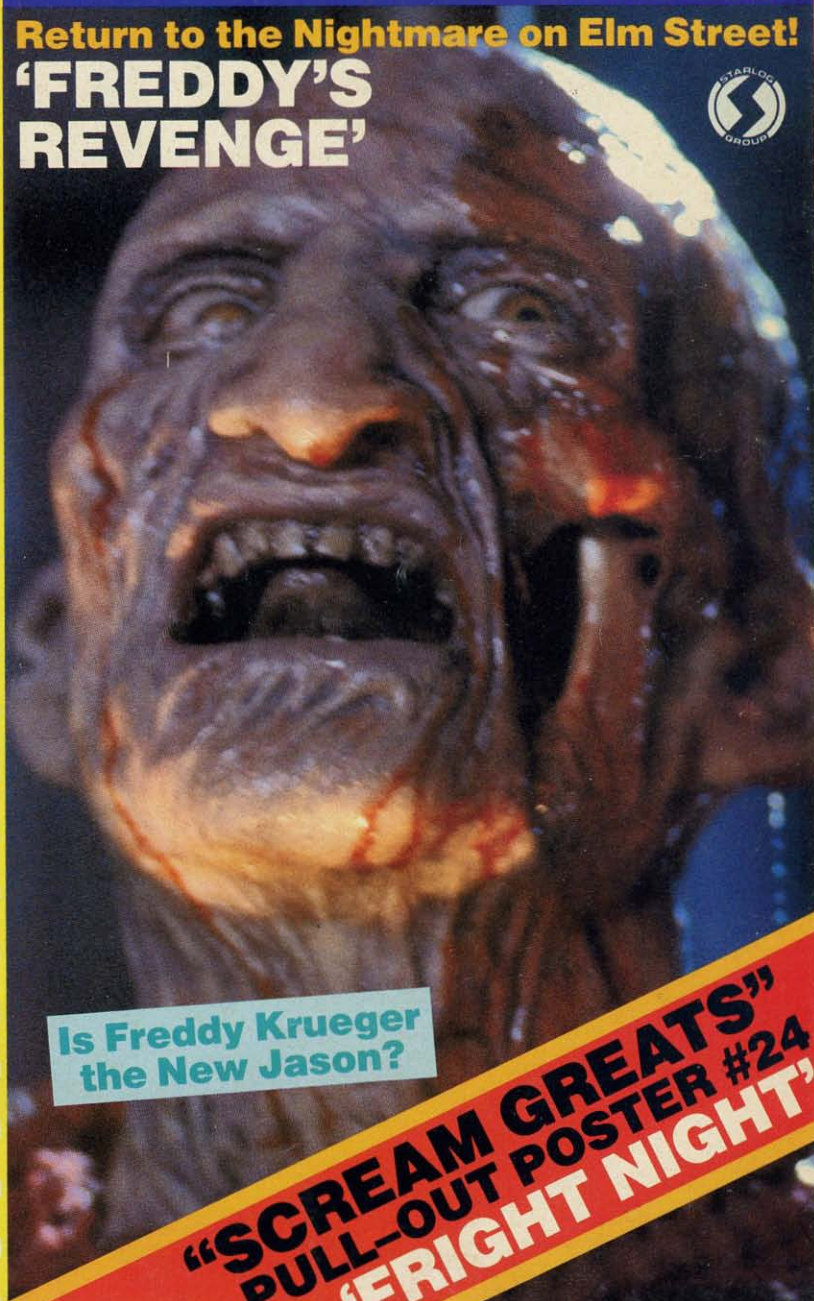
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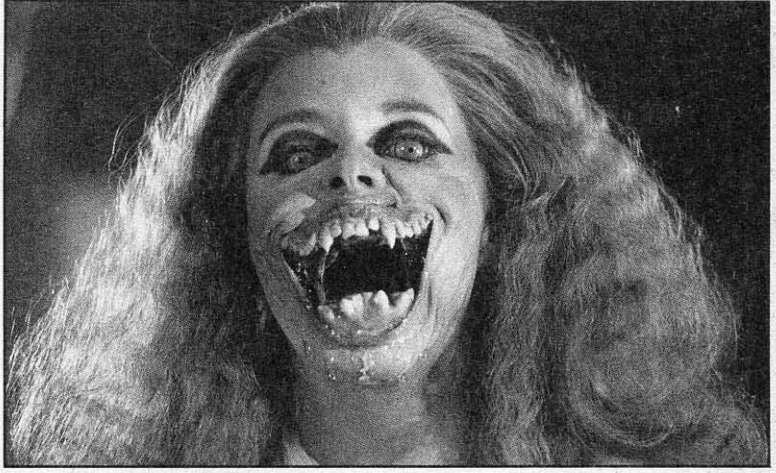
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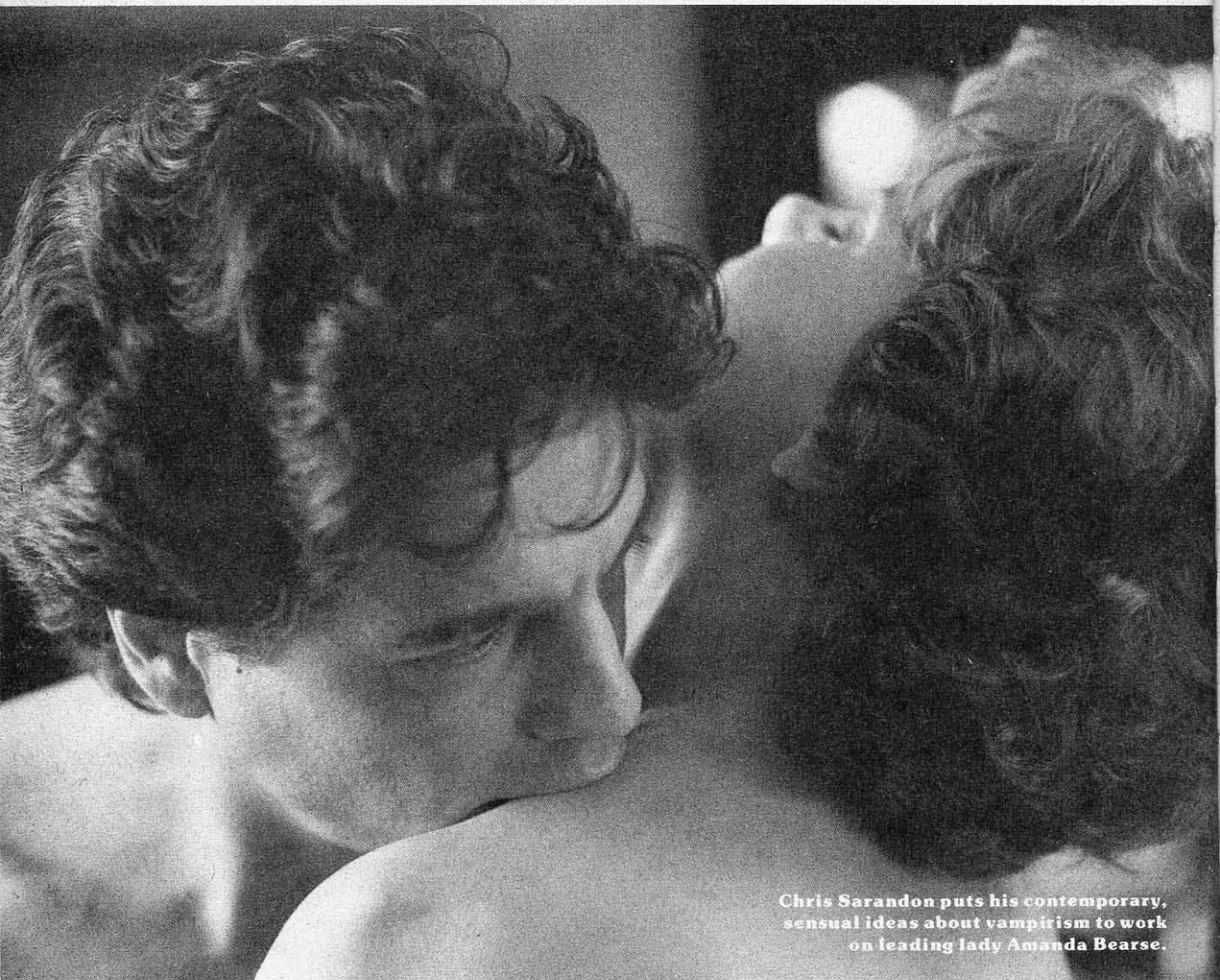
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The VAMPIRE Next Door

Chris Sarandon on his variation on an undead theme in *Fright Night*.

By Ed Gross



Chris Sarandon puts his contemporary, sensual ideas about vampirism to work on leading lady Amanda Bearse.

PHOTOS: © 1985 COLUMBIA PICTURES

In the past, cinematic vampires have been portrayed as pale-skinned ghouls wandering around cemeteries, draped in cumbersome black capes, and threatening to suck the blood out of any victims who happen by. Then in the late 1970's Frank Langella romanticized Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in the play and film of the same name, proving that vampires could be, above all else, charming.

Now, Chris Sarandon has contemporized this incarnation of evil to great effect in Tom Holland's *Fright Night*, a film which has more in common with the Universal horror classics of the 30's and 40's than the current crop of slice-and-dice productions which have proliferated in the genre.

In this updating of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," Sarandon plays Jerry Dandrige, a vampire who will go to any

means to make sure that his secret remains safe, including killing Charley Brewster, his teenaged next door neighbor, who has learned the truth.

"The thing that appeals to me about Jerry," explains Sarandon, "is that he's totally contemporary. That was something we all strived for, and something I found very interesting about the character because he wasn't the Count of legend or Bram Stoker, but a guy who everybody

knew and couldn't believe was being accused of being a vampire. He isn't the personification of pure evil that vampires are known to be."

What impressed the actor most about the character, was his multi-dimensional facets.

"Just think about this guy's problems," he says sincerely. "On the one hand you've got somebody who's got something which everybody would probably love to have, which is eternal life. Also, he's tremendously powerful, physically, and attractive sexually. What he does, people are, for some reason, attracted to. But at the same time, how would you like to know that if people found out about you, nobody would really want to hang around you? That is, to spend eternity—but to spend eternity shunned by any normal kind of society; not being able to form any kind of normal human relationship. To be, in a way, damned to eternity. There's a sense of this guy's tragedy as well as his attractiveness."

This obvious enthusiasm is surprising, especially when one considers that the actor nearly turned the role down.

"I was sent the script by my agent and immediately sort of got sucked in by the plot because it's wonderfully constructed and plotted," explains Sarandon. "After I read it, I said 'Gee, this is going to make a great movie. It's a shame that I'm not really interested in playing this part.' The reasons for that are that over the past couple of years I've played a few villains and didn't want to get locked into playing another one. I thought the character was an interesting one, though I didn't think it was quite fleshed out. Despite my reservations, I had some conversations with Tom, we came up with some ideas, and I ended up doing it."

"I made a promise to Chris," adds Holland, "that I would make Jerry sensual and into a leading man; to show that side of him. He didn't want to do another wild and crazy character role."

Sarandon felt that what was missing was the character's haunted quality, part of which would come across in the playing, and that there were a few things needed in the script which would express this.

"The character's not so much the personification of pure evil, as he is a person who became a vampire by circumstances," he says. "We did all that groundwork for ourselves in terms of who this guy was and what happened; how it happened. Tom was very encouraging about that. To come up with that kind of life for the character so that he ultimately ends up more interesting for the audience."

Coming up with identifiable characters has been an objective of the actor's since graduating from the University of West Virginia, and, besides numerous stage roles, he's tried to achieve this goal

Vampire Jerry reprises the old wall-scaling trick in order to sneak up on the unwitting horror host Peter Vincent (Roddy McDowell).



via his various screen personas, from Al Pacino's gay lover in *Dog Day Afternoon* (which won him an Oscar nomination) and the rapist of *Lipstick*, to a tool of the devil in *The Sentinel* and, finally, a leading role with Goldie Hawn in *Protocol*.

Bearing this in mind, one wonders if he had any aversions to the idea of play-

ing a vampire, certainly one of the most bizarre roles he's been offered.

"It wasn't so much that," he counters, "but that the guy was such a bad guy. In a way he was, but in a way he wasn't. I think that I carried in some of my prejudices when I first read the script. Rather than reading it in a very objective way, I read it

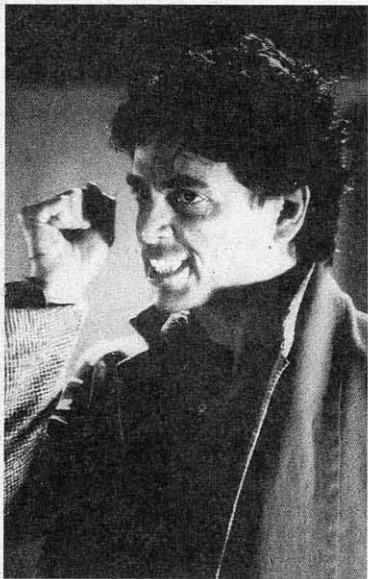
Charley (William Ragsdale) discovers his neighbor's feelings about snooping around the backyard.



in a much more 'what's it going to do for me?' way. Having played a couple of villains in the past, I was a little worried about it.

"I don't want to get locked into playing anything," he elaborates. "I don't want to be known as a heavy, or as anything in particular but just a good actor who can handle anything that comes along. Wishful thinking, but that's the image I would hope to have in the industry. That's something you cultivate over time by the choice of roles you take. Also, I think I underestimated the fact that in the movie I did just before *Fright Night*, *Protocol*, I was playing Mr. Total Straight Arrow. As nice a guy and as totally uncontroversial a character as you'll find anywhere. Considering that that's the

Sarandon in one of his in-between moods.



one I did just before this, I think I needn't have worried so much. I came to realize that after a while."

One thing which came close to being a problem was the marathon makeup sessions which enabled Sarandon to go from being the suave and good looking Dandrige, to the snarling bat-like "spawn of Satan" during choice moments:

"We had certain stages of change," he says, "which had a lot to do with just how pissed off Jerry is at any particular moment...how provoked he is.

"I was stuck in makeup so goddamned much of the time," he sighs. "I had two weeks of eight-hour makeup calls, everyday. I'd go in at four in the morning and the makeup people would have to be in at three something. They'd start on me at four and I'd go to work at noon or one. Quite a remarkable experience. You either learn how to hypnotize yourself and meditate, or you become stark-raving mad.

"I tried to do the former," the actor laughs.

A big question on everybody's mind throughout production was whether or not *Fright Night* could find a niche for itself in this age of the slasher or splatter film.

"That's a good question," he says. "The feeling I had, and I have reasonably good instincts as an audience, is that it would

work. When I first read the script, I couldn't put it down. I don't mean that as a cliché, I mean that for real. When I read that script, I remember sitting in the very chair I'm sitting in as we speak, my wife sitting in bed knitting and I said, 'Sorry, honey, I know it's time to go in and start dinner, but I can't yet. I have to finish this! I put it down like an hour and 10 minutes later and I figured that it was going to be a terrific movie. I'm hoping that my original instincts were correct.'

The horror genre is one that has intrigued him over the years, though he isn't really a fan of splatter films. Friends of his really love those really shocking horror movies, but he is much more of an aficionado of the older ones, such as the original *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*.

"And of practitioners like Hitchcock," he adds, "who really understood an audience. People who are much more interested in creating work which leaves a lasting impression. I'm much more interested in the resonance or haunting quality of the really good ones, and it'll be interesting to see if we've got one of those.

"There are a couple of things towards the end of the film where there's your requisite sort of special effects, bodies flying around and falling apart, and things like that," he continues. "But that specifically comes about due to what's going on in the script.

"When I first read the script, there was, interestingly, very little real physical violence in it. What's so startling about it is you are in constant anticipation of a violent act, and that comes from good scriptwriting. The film also has a lot of humor, but it's intentional. It is a humor of irony in situation. Any humor comes out of the fact that the audience has invested a certain amount of emotional baggage with the characters, and if something funny happens they're going to laugh at that. We're having fun with it, but we're not making fun of it.

"Also, I think you'll find in this movie that in the first 40 minutes or so there's only one violent act, and that's somebody sticking a pencil through somebody's hand. The rest of that time is spent leading up to something happening. You know something's got to happen, but nothing does. To me, that's much more effective, a kind of Hitchcockian approach to that sort of material. What's much more important is how you lead up to the act rather than the act itself. It's not what you see, but what you've dreaded seeing," he explains.

Could he see himself returning as Jerry Dandrige?

"I might, but who knows?" concludes Sarandon. "Let's see what happens with this one first. It's an interesting character for me. I could perceive bringing him back, but it would depend on the circumstances. It's a little premature to talk about that now."

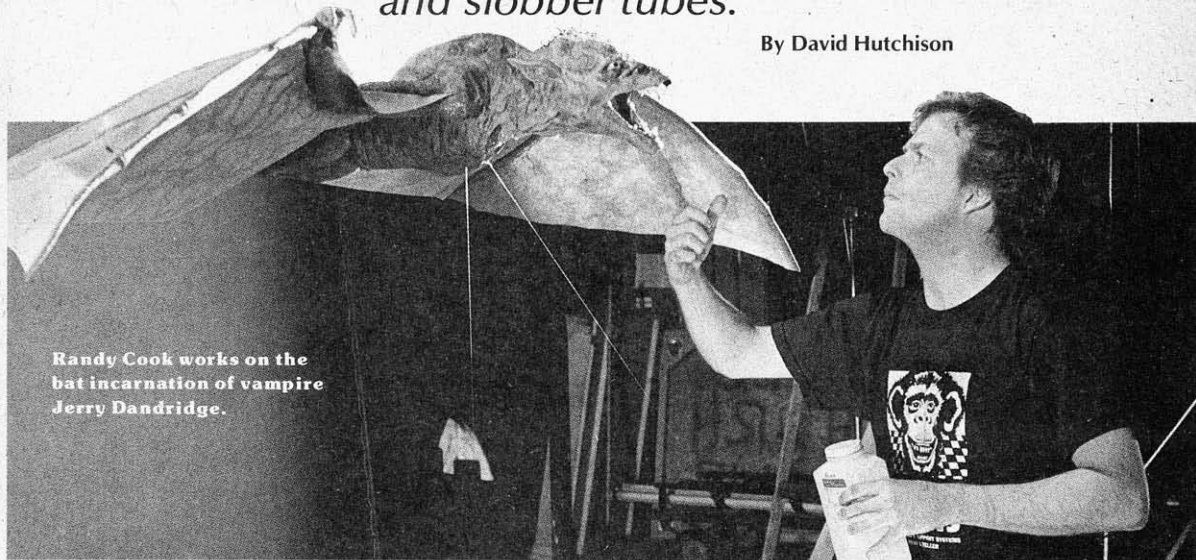
Now good and peeved, Sarandon takes on his monstrous form.



A Vampire's Brew of **TERROR**

Randy and Steve Johnson on their Fright Night FX. From demon bats and werewolves to melt-downs and slobber tubes.

By David Hutchison



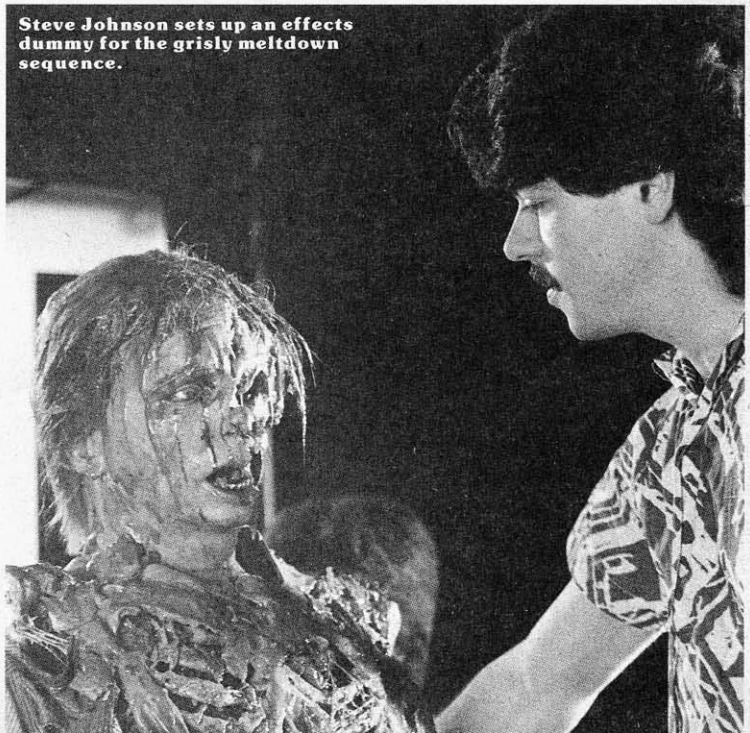
Randy Cook works on the bat incarnation of vampire Jerry Dandrige.

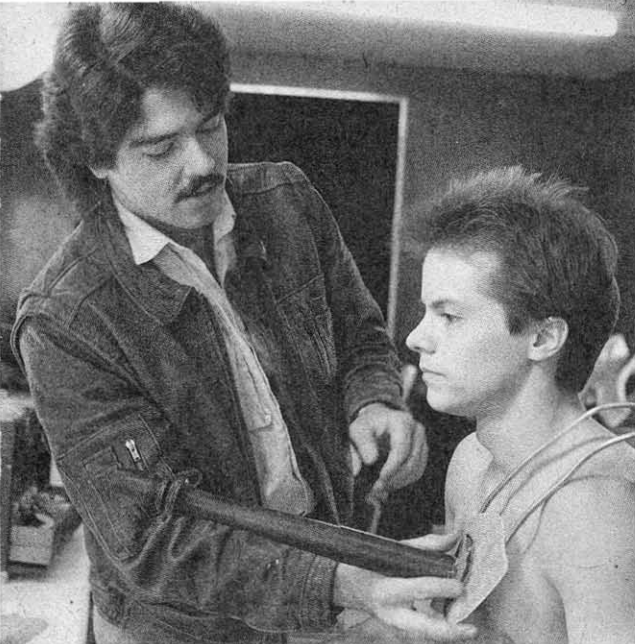
EDITOR'S NOTE: By now most of you have had the chance to see Tom Holland's *Fright Night*, which means that we can feel safe in running a creature-effects story without spoiling the picture's well-timed jolts.

As part of Richard Edlund's crack Entertainment Effects Group, Randy Cook and Steve Johnson have been credited with the design and creation of *Fright Night*'s many creatures, a job that also includes all the various transformations and melt-downs that these creatures are subjected to. (Stories on Cook and Johnson's contributions to *Ghostbusters* can be found in Fangos #39 and #41 respectively.)

As is the case with any large effects assignment, the monster creations for *Fright Night* required the coordinated effort of a sizeable crew. Cook and Johnson wish to give due credit to their Creature FX Shop crew: Rob Cantrell, Dale Brady, Craig Caton, Makio Kida, David Matherly, Richard Ruiz, Steve Neill, Ken Diaz and Jack Bricker. They also have much praise for Mark Wilson, their shop's first technician; Bob Cole and Bill Sturgeon, who worked on effects mechanisms; and Thaine Morris, the film's

Steve Johnson sets up an effects dummy for the grisly meltdown sequence.





Stephen Geoffreys (Evil Ed) is prepped by Johnson for his impaling scene. Right: The effect on screen.

mechanical effects supervisor.

The following interview was conducted while *Fright Night* was still in production.

FANGORIA: One of the major effects sequences in *Fright Night* is the transformation of the werewolf back to its original form, Evil Ed. How do you think this transformation compares to, say, *The Howling*?

Steve Johnson: It's real different because it's asymmetrical. Everything since *American Werewolf in London* has just been chango-pieces; they've been stretching mechanical pieces on-set. So, I figured



Randy Cook worked on designing bat features into the "ticked-off" makeup for Chris Sarandon.

we'd make it asymmetrical; he'd be changing unevenly. He's more human on one side, but he's got a long skinny dog neck. He's got a hunchback on one side, and, at times, he's got one wolf-leg. And he's got this long, spindly arm that's worked with a rod, while his real arm is tied behind him.

Another thing—since it's asymmetrical in its look, and if you're showing inserts of changing extremities, why should you use the same technique for each change? So, if we see a foot changing and then we see a hand changing, we use different techniques. Besides changing at different rates on different parts of the body at different times, it's happening in different ways too.

Randy Cook: The way this effect, and other effects, are integrated in this film is also different. The picture-makers who made the original stretcho-piece effects were really in love with what these things could do. As a consequence, one saw a series of fairly clinical shots of limbs growing, faces stretching, and balloons bulging under brows. This *Fright Night* transformation sort of takes that all for granted, and doesn't stop the show while this stuff is going on. This scene is not meant to say, "Okay, we're going to dispense with the plot for the next four minutes while you watch this really marvelous special effect." The special effects are going on while the story is going on, and they're integrated pretty well into the picture.

Johnson: Another different thing, too, is that the director is really good to work with. Tom Holland listens to us, he respects us, and he's smart enough to know that he hired experts to do a cer-

tain job. He's not so insecure that he'd feel like we were stepping on his toes when we suggest something. So, a lot of our ideas have really gotten through. Also the fact that Holland is an "actor-ish" director—he used to be an actor—makes a lot of our stuff come off a lot better. He was really concerned from the beginning that our creatures "act". He was on the set when we shot the second-unit effects stuff and he actually directed it. And you need a director for a puppet. People seem to think you don't, but you do.

Cook: He realizes that these puppets are characters.

Fang: Could you describe how the werewolf transformation was shot?

Johnson: We shot the stuff here in the shop for the changing of the wolf. We altered the set so the actor can put his legs through it, out of sight, and we could just deal with the effects legs that look totally inhuman.

We made a control board and we attached about 15 bladders to it; bladders not only in the head, but in the shoulders too. And the werewolf had little slobber tubes; we ran slime out.

Cook: We were spitting in a jar for days and days to get those slobber tubes ready and running! It demanded a lot of intensity.

Fang: A usually laughable effect in just about every vampire movie is that motheaten bat that they fly in on a fishing pole.

Cook: We tried to do something with the bat that's a little more fantastically-oriented than just your standard flapping mouse—you know, as you say, the Universal bat-on-the-line. We decided to do

something a bit more horrifying and non-bat-like, that maintained the impression of a bat but was different, and also retained about the same amount of mass as the guy [Chris Sarandon] had. Instead of shrinking down to Chihuahua-size to take off, he's still shifting his shape, while still retaining most of his mass, so we've got something with about an eight-foot wingspread. And a very, very unpleasant disposition.

We've also done a makeup on the actor when he sort of loses his composure and begins to decompose; he looks sort of like the bat-sculpture. It's a *Nosferatu*-type approach on Chris Sarandon which retains certain elements of the bat's look.


I originally wanted to do a caricature of the actor in the bat, but the bat was the first thing that was sculpted here, even before the leading man was chosen. So, unfortunately, we had to work sort of back-asswards on that. It was not the ideal situation, but I think we did all right with it. I've been making rubber appliances to put some of my puppet's features onto Sarandon. Anyway, it's a little different.

Johnson: Tell him how the bat rig works.

Cook: It's a marionette on a track. The biggest problem was one of speed. The down-flap of the creature's wing is too fast. Plus, when it's free-falling it loses control when you catch it and attempt to pull it back up again. So, what we did was go through the bat's motions very slowly, and then speeded it up. You can't get the necessary speed in real time without



The meltdown of the vampire-henchman Billy Cole (Jonathan Stark) was the one sequence in the film in which Johnson and Cook went all out for a gruesome effect.



The "asymmetrical" transformation of Evil Ed.



Two stages of the spectacular destruction of the vampire.

did internal things with cables, pulling parts of the face away and down in different places.

The head has a real skull in there. The parts of the head are operated by hand, the mouth movement and tongue movement and so on. And besides just having the skin slide off of it, we made it as though it's melting from within.

Swelling up with the chemicals, we found, works really nice. It's similar to Dick Smith's method used for that snake-bit head in *Spasms*, except we did other things besides just swelling it; we pulled it around and screwed around with it in other ways. We colored the chemicals, for instance. If you put enough coloring in, it looks really nice pumping it from behind, because you start getting little blotchy areas breaking out all over the face before it starts to swell. It's real nice.

That is the one scene in the film where Holland wanted the audience to be grossed out. All the way through, he's been really against the idea of us making anything disgusting, except for this one melt-down sequence, and that's probably because you're supposed to really hate this guy.

Fang: How would you characterize the effects of *Fright Night* overall?

Johnson: They're amazing, and they're something you would not want to look away from, except maybe, once again, for the Billy Bones melt-down thing. Even the transformation at the end where the vampire, Chris Sarandon, is burning is kind of fantastic because it's one face changing into another.

Cook: Yeah, it is more fantastic than repellent, on the whole. Which is a nice change.



shaking it and making it go crazy.

Fang: A favorite effect from Hammer's vampire films was the use of contact lenses to give Chris Lee red eyes. What sort of lenses did you use in *Fright Night*?

Johnson: The lenses were made by Doctor Greenspan. There's around seven pairs of them in the film. I've painted them all myself. The first idea was that the vampire's eyes should glow. It turned out they didn't have the money to do this effect optically with rotoscoping. So I designed these lenses so they'd kick back as much light as possible. I painted them with day-glo colors, enamel paints and

actually laminated iridescent powders and glitter onto them so they really do kick back a lot of light.

Fang: To most actors, wearing a contact lens is like wearing a potato chip under your eyelid.

Johnson: It is, but all these lenses are laminated inside, so it's really smooth. And they're buffed on the outside; we sent them back to the doctor to buff them.

Fang: The most gruesome effect in the movie would seem to be the disintegration of the vampire's henchman.

Johnson: Yeah, it has a real putrefying look. We swabbed it with chemicals and



The Other Living Dead

Dear People:

I was disappointed that *Return of the Living Dead* was such a good movie. With all the hype and strange rumors concerning this unofficial sequel, most notably that the film was unreleasable. I was content in knowing that *Dawn of the Dead* and the original had nothing to fear. When I went to the premiere and saw the poster in the lobby proclaiming, "They're back from the grave and ready to party!" I couldn't help but get my hopes up for what could only be another lifeless zombie flick. Needless to say, I had to eat my words. *Return of the Living Dead* was a winner, and on top of that, a comedy. I nearly bust a gut laughing at the reanimated split dogs and how the cool, collected army colonel dealt with the plague of intelligent dead heads by nuking Louisville, Kentucky. Talk about drastic measures. It was so hilarious, I'm still maniacally laughing.

Kevin J. Lindenmuth
36038 Crompton Circle
Farmington Hills, MI 48018

Fellow Fangorians and Filmmakers:

There have been few horror films in recent years that have made me recommend them highly. *The Evil Dead*, *Creepshow*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Dawn of the Dead* make up most of the list, but I now must add Dan O'Bannon's *Return of the Living Dead*.

Fango's coverage and pictorial review of the film back in issues #40 and #44 led me to believe this wasn't going to be anything big (sorry, Fango), but WOW! The highly effective twist from the usual Romero-zombie-film format was great, and the relative lack of blood and gore made one cringe when it did happen.

It has just the right blend of humor and horror that made *Creepshow* such a hit, but yet it is a zombie film to stand alone among zombie films. No Italian-esque zombie movie here!

Long Live The Independents,
J.R. Bookwalter, Amsco Studios
Akron, Ohio

Not a Nickpicker

Dear Fangoria:

A few issues ago you printed a letter from me in which I pointed out a few mistakes I found in *The Terminator*. I thought that by signing my name "Jerry the Nitpicker", I was making it clear that I understood that these were moot points. Unfortunately, some of your more unbalanced readers thought my last name actually was "Nitpicker", and were offended that I had the gall to say something bad about their favorite movie. So I ended up getting a bunch of letters from irate *Terminator* fans. This is sort of an open letter to all the lunatics who have my address.

Number one: I loved *The Terminator*! I only wrote the letter in order to impress my few friends with what an intellectual giant I am.

Number two: My last name is NOT Nitpicker.

Number three: If you send me any more angry letters, I will find out where you live,

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O'Bannon's Living Dead.

and I will move in next door to you. With me living next door to you, the value of your home will plunge.

Many thanks,
Jerry, no longer a Nitpicker
850 Corona Drive
Pacifica, CA 94044

almost all of it seemed to make logical, straightforward sense. His direction was equally impressive, with great camera angles and shots, and a quick sense of timing and pacing not often seen.

Sincerely
Mark Capelletty
Perryburg, OH

Fright Night

Dear Dave and the Fango staff,

I just saw *Fright Night* the other night and it proved that at least one major studio, Columbia, has the balls to produce not only a horror film (a real accomplishment these days), but one of the best damn horror films that I've ever seen. Congratulations to Rick Stratton, Richard Edlund and the entire effects crew for making every single effects scene believable, from the ultra-fantastic finale (love that bat!) to the reasonably subtle nightclub sequence. Congrats also must go to the actors, all of whom did a terrific job, especially Roddy McDowall and Chris Sarandon, Sarandon here portraying one of the best vampires that I've ever seen.

The loudest round of applause must go, however, to writer-director Tom Holland. Holland's script was written with both style and wit, a rare combination these days, and

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Fright Night: a winner.

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