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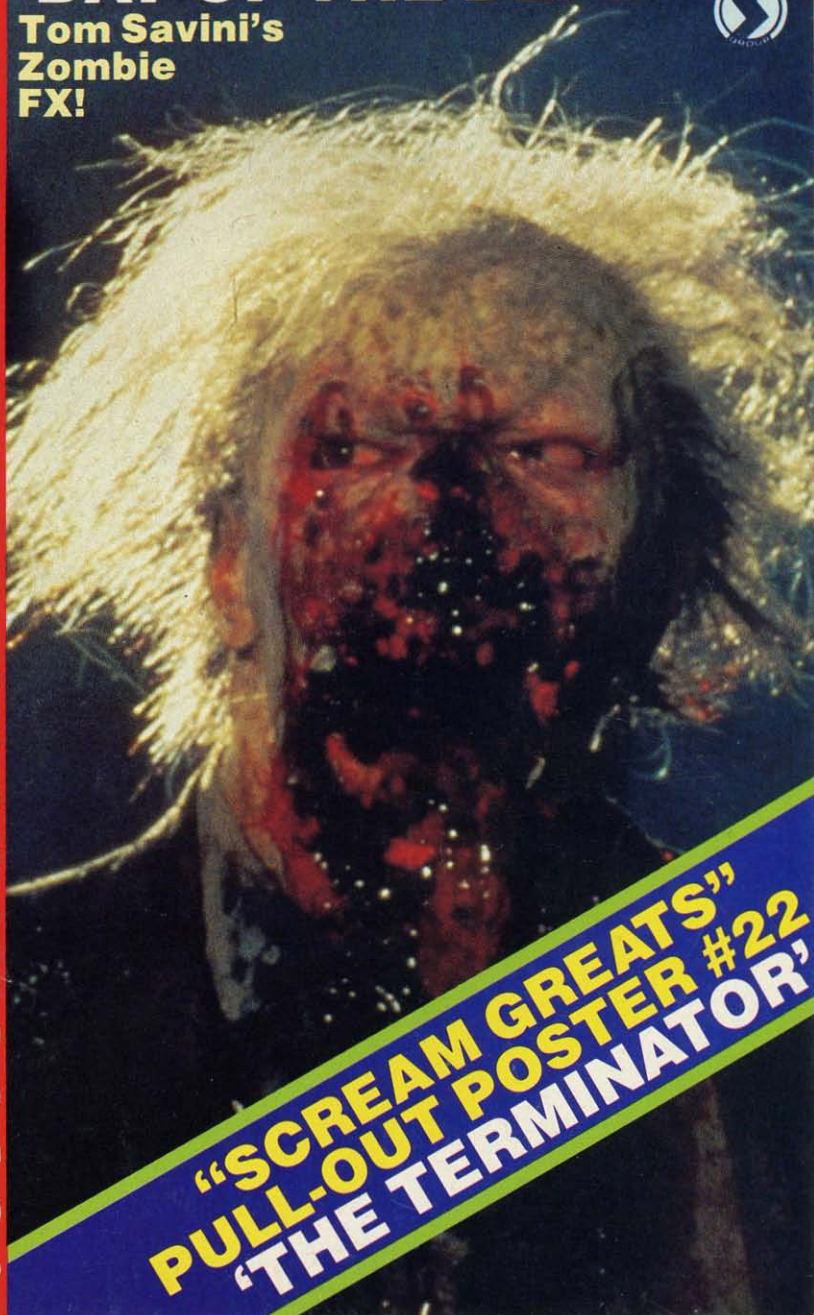
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"SCREAM GREATS"
PULL-OUT POSTER #22
'THE TERMINATOR'



Lenses, dentures, finger extenders and a "subtle" appliance help Sarandon's portrayal of Dandrige's mildly ticked-off stage.

Last summer, Columbia Pictures gave the go-ahead to *Fright Night*, a present-day vampire movie concerning average teenager Charley Brewster who discovers that his suave next-door-neighbor Jerry Dandrige is really one of the Undead. Herb Jaffe is the producer; Richard Edlund's Boss Film Company facility is handling the effects, and screenwriter Tom Holland (*Psycho II*) is making his directorial debut with the project, scheduled to open August 2.

When I initially interviewed Holland during *Fright Night's* preproduction (see *Fango* #45), Holland generously invited me to come visit the set as frequently as I wished. This resulted in the article you're about to read.

Wednesday, Dec. 19, 1984

My first trip to the set. It's the monsoon season in Los Angeles, and a fierce rainstorm batters the downtown lot where the *Fright Night* company vehicles are parked. The lot is conveniently right behind today's location, a former hardware store converted for use as a soundstage. A sequence for *Body Double* was shot here, and the nightclub set has been left semi-intact. The ground floor is filled with tables and chairs; more tables and chairs dot the upstairs balcony that runs along the upper floor.

At least a hundred extras are on hand today, dressed in studded leather and Day-Glo New Wave chic to lend colorful background as the vampire kills a pair of disco bouncers who get in the way of his pursuit of Charley and A my, Charley's girlfriend, played by William Ragsdale and Amanda Bearse.

First assistant director Jerry Sobul megaphones instructions to the mob of extras: "Everybody take a position on the

On the Set:

FRIGHT NIGHT

Behind the Scenes of the Vampire Epic!

By Abbie Bernstein



Macdowall and monster bat in a face-to-fang confrontation.

runway, except the blood people." This refers to the lucky souls soon to be splashed with a mixture of Karo syrup and food coloring.

Chris Sarandon enters the set, in costume as Jerry Dandrige. Earlier, Sarandon had admitted to me his hesitance in taking this part; after his Oscar-nominated performance as a nervous transsexual in *Dog Day Afternoon* was followed by a turn as a vicious rapist in *Lipstick*, he found it hard to persuade the film community he could play characters other than odd-balls and villains. After shaking the mold, he wasn't anxious to risk more typecasting, but says he was won over by Holland's vision of the vampire as "a very attractive, sexy guy.

The thing Tom wanted most from this character was not the evil awfulness of him, but the fact that he was tremendously charming. Tom wanted him to have a sense of humor and also a sense of the price he has to pay for being who he is and what he is. Eternal life is not necessarily a great gift; there's a kind of mythic, tragic proportion to that."

Right now, Sarandon looks like just another handsome leading man—until you notice the two-inch fingernail extensions secured to his right hand by latex false fingertips. Someone yells for the makeup artists to get the "baby fangs"—slightly exaggerated canines our vampire sports when mildly annoyed. (When Jerry's really upset, he grows Doberman

Pinscher-sized chompers.)

In another area of the set, Rick Stratton, John Goodwin and Ken Diaz (the head of the on-set makeup unit) are applying baldcaps to the bouncers' stunt doubles: strips of Kleenex are affixed to the edges of the caps then sprayed down with the surgical sealant AeroPlast.

Stratton spends a lot of time in the lab, where he and frequent partner Steve Neill sculpted some of the appliances used in this shoot. However, he also enjoys working on the set: "In the lab, you're an unsung hero; on the set, you're representing yourself. Also, I like working with actors."

Special effects worker Darrell Pritchett walks through the set, fanning smoke around out of a film can containing a burning compound of non-toxic oils. The smoke's purpose is to give visual definition to the shafts of light streaming down from the ceiling.

Michael Lantieri, the supervisor of on-set special effects (as opposed to the creatures and makeup prepared at Boss Films), readies a fire-extinguisher-type contraption that will spray "movie blood" onto the extras, just before stuntman Strong's body is thrown off the stairway landing and into the crowd below by the vampire (actually, Strong propels himself off the landing, but on film it will look like the vampire does it). The body crashes down on a table full of partyers, knocking a stuntwoman backward into the breakaway table behind her. At this point, the whole disco crowd freaks out and stampedes. Dangerous though it appears, the stunt comes off without a hitch.

The next shot calls for Charley and Amy to push past the other bouncer, played by Ernie Holmes. Before the bouncer can get to the kids, Jerry gets to him, squeezing the life out of the poor guy's throat, then tossing the body off the landing onto the dance floor.

Within an hour, carpenters erect a platform that extends out from the landing. To create the illusion that Holmes is really being lifted up and held high over the dance floor, the actor stands on a wheel-mounted box, manipulated below camera range by Lantieri and Pritchett. When he's supposed to be standing on his own, Holmes crouches on the box so that he's eye-level with Sarandon. As Sarandon uses his long-nailed hand to "lift" the bouncer, Holmes (who winds up doing his own stunt) straightens his knees. The added height of the box puts his head high above Sarandon, so that he really seems to be held in mid-air. Then Lantieri and Pritchett wheel the box from the landing onto the platform—onscreen, it will look as though Holmes is being dangled over the landing's edge. As Holmes flails at his attacker, Holland reminds him, "His claws are two inches into your neck! You're slowly dying!" Holmes dives sideways off the box onto a



Sarandon, in a more elaborate vampire stage, prepares to do some major damage.

massive airbag, concluding his "death scene."

At 9:10 p.m., they're done for the night. Sarandon, "blood" on his hands, breaks off his false fingertips and flings them one by one at the makeup people: "Take that! And that!"

Friday, Jan. 4, 1985

On Soundstage 8 at Laird Studios in Culver City, a large sheet of fake grass separates sets for both Charley's and Jerry's houses. A Champman camera crane

sits on the grass, waiting to peer in the second-story window of Charley's room, mounted on wooden scaffolding.

Ragsdale, who plays Charley, says "I always liked horror as a kid—I lived in sort of a small town, El Dorado, Arkansas, so I guess believing in witches and vampires and things like that sort of zested it up a little.

How would he feel, faced with his character's predicament? "If I found out there was a real vampire living next door to me, I think my response to that would

just be shock. It's like the stages of death: denial, resignation, anger—those are stages Charley goes through. It's interesting to try and touch on those in performance, never having been that close to death."

He's been close to minor disaster, though; a few weeks back, during a shot in which Charley runs down a stairway, Ragsdale broke his foot. Thanks to some inventive rescheduling and reblocking, the show and Ragsdale are both going on, but the actor's foot is still in a cast, which sometimes poses problems even when he's sitting down.

Like now, for instance: the upcoming shot has Ragsdale scrambling around on his back, having been thrown into Charley's closet by the vampire, and his feet are going to show. No shoes big enough to fit over his cast can be found, but costumers Bettylee Balsam and Mort Schwartz hit upon a solution: they slit Ragsdale's shoe in several places, slip it on, then cover the portions of cast gleaming whitely through the slits with black cloth.

Charley's mood in this scene is, according to director Holland, "stark balls-out terror" as the vampire reaches down, seizing his intended victim by the neck and belt. The first take seems alright, but Sarandon grabs Ragsdale's shirt instead of his neck. On the second take, Ragsdale reacts with proper fear, but when "cut" is called, Sarandon is the one looking startled and pained: Ragsdale accidentally stepped on his foot. On the third take, Sarandon grabs his prey so violently that he slams his own shoulder into the camera lens.

When they get a good take, they move on to the next shot. The camera takes over Ragsdale's position in the closet, assuming Charley's point of view. The lack of a body where he's reaching for Charley throws Sarandon off a little, so Holland obligingly sits in the closet next to the camera. He asks if Sarandon would like him to offer resistance to being pulled up. "Yes, please," the actor says.

"Scare me to death," Holland instructs. Sarandon duly gets scary; Holland is pleased. "Really good, Chris."

Monday, Jan. 7, 1985

It's 6:15 a.m. Diaz and Stratton, along with Jeff Kennemore, have already been working on Sarandon for over an hour in the makeup trailer. Today sees the actor in the third stage vampire makeup, which is the most extreme; Jerry is at the height of fury, and thus at his most inhuman, because Charley's just stabbed him through the hand with a pencil.

A baldcap with a long fringe of hair attached is on Sarandon's head; Stratton has applied latex thumb tips to Sarandon's hands. Now Stratton painstakingly starts gluing down all the latex fingertips on Sarandon's left hand, keeping the fingers separated with little foam wedges; Kennemore begins work on the hand.

Diaz puts adhesive on the actor's nose, then stretches a one-piece foam latex appliance over Sarandon's entire face and begins applying adhesive under the unattached portions of the piece.

Kennemore holds up a weird-looking appliance, like a latex glove with the fingers cut off, and asks what it's for. This is the "pencil-stab" piece (sculpted by Steve Neill); Kennemore powders Sarandon's right hand, then with Stratton's help stretches the appliance onto it.

"What a stupid way to make a living," Sarandon says. "Well, not stupid—silly."

Stratton: "Who, you or us?"
Sarandon: "Me. You guys are having all the fun."

Darrell Pritchett comes in with the plate that goes under the hand appliance, consisting of the pointed half of a pencil attached to a nickel-sized base. Kennemore makes an incision in the appliance's palm with scissors, then fits the base into the slit, along with a plastic tube that goes between Sarandon's forefinger and thumb, disappears into the hole, and emerges again at the actor's wrist. The tube will pump smoke out of the hand as Jerry is stabbed.

Diaz uses his own left hand as a palette on which he mixes colors of makeup, alternating between a paintbrush and a sponge as he adds hues to the facial appliance. Talon-like fingernails have been attached to the latex fingertips; Stratton applies liquid latex around the back of the nails to build up simulated cuticles.

Randy Cook, who with Steve Johnson designed and sculpted most of the *Fright Night* appliances and strange creatures, pitches in to help by attaching eyebrow pieces—real hair woven into very fine mesh—to the appliance brow. The fake eyebrows tangle in Sarandon's real eyelashes; Cook disentangles them and cautions Sarandon to close his eyes. Sarandon, who's being a very good sport about all this, seems just a bit uneasy at all the strange things poking and prodding near his closed eyes. Cook reassures him, "This is just my finger, not some implement of death."

Diaz and Cook adhere a hairpiece to the top of Sarandon's baldcap; the lace on one side buckles. They peel it back with infinite care, but a tiny patch of makeup comes up with the lace. They readjust and reglue the hairpiece, then repaint the patch of makeup.

Hairdresser Marina Pedraza joins the group, trimming and shaping the hairpiece so that the contours of Sarandon's head won't be obscured, taking special care around the pointed ear appliances.

Diaz steps back for a look at the whole ensemble: face, hair, ears, hands. "It looks great."

Stratton quips: "Let's go home. Chris, the contact lenses are over there, the teeth are over there, if anything comes loose, they can fix it in the cutting."

At 12:55 p.m., almost eight hours after

they started, the makeup crew is done. Steve Johnson puts in the finishing touches—fangs and contact lenses—when they arrive on the set. A crew member who hasn't been near the makeup trailer this morning walks up, takes a good look at Sarandon, mutters "Jeez," and walks away again.

Thursday, Jan. 24, 1985

I arrive on Soundstage 9 at 3:30 p.m. Holland promptly grabs me by the arm and drags me over to today's set, the bedroom of Charley's mother, where Stephen Geoffreys is in full makeup as "Evil Ed" Thompson, who starts out as a weird high-school kid and winds up as an even weirder vampire. He looks really ghastly: Ed has just had a cross burnt into his forehead and some of his flesh is melting off (thanks to a full-face latex appliance), his eyes are vacant pools of darkness (via opaque contact lenses), his fangs are huge and, due to Ed's sense of humor, he's wearing a Raggedy Ann wig.

Geoffreys wishes he had more scenes in the heavy makeup: "It's great, great fun. At first, I was worried how to make it look real, 'Should I be a human monster, should I be real sympathetic?' But I figured you've got to just go all the way for it, open your mouth as wide as you can and be as terrifying as possible. And Evil Ed loves putting on a show like that, this is his big chance. And he does a good job, I think."

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 1985

"On a scale of one to ten, isn't that a terrific bat?" Holland is proudly showing me the latest wonder from Boss Films, a special effects bat with a body the size of a greyhound, an eight-foot wingspan and a remarkably mobile cable-controlled face.

We're on Soundstage 15, which houses the ornate set for the main entrance to Jerry's house, complete with a staircase from the original *Gone With the Wind* set, leading up to a balcony topped by a breakup-stained-glass window.

The bat and its handlers—Cook, Johnson, John Axford, Kevin Brennan, Craig Caton, Screaming Mad George and the bat's personal makeup person, Theresa Burkett—occupy one corner of the floor at the foot of the stairs. In the other corner, cinematographer Jan Kiesser's camera crew set up a shot of the bat attacking Roddy McDowall as Peter Vincent, an aging ham horror actor who reluctantly becomes Charley's ally. "He's such a terrible actor," McDowall says of his character. "He's got such a sad life, he's sort of cowardly and then he finds his strength as a human being."

Right now, he's fighting for his life as the bat swoops in for the kill, knocking McDowall backwards (a stuntman lies below camera range to catch the actor as he falls). Brennan and Wilson use poles to manipulate the bat's right and left

wings, respectively; Cook crouches under its body, holding it aloft as he runs from tall box to small box to floor, so that the bat appears to swoop swiftly down at McDowall in a graceful, smooth arc.

"I'm seeing Randy," camera operator Craig Denault reports as he peers through his camera's viewfinder.

"Do you have any more material the bat's made of to put on Randy's shirt?" assistant director Sobul asks, hoping to camouflage Cooke. Unfortunately, no one does, but the scene is reblocked so that Cook no longer shows up beneath his creation.

For the next shot, the last few steps of the stairway are replaced with a wooden platform on which McDowall lies for the continuation of the bat attack. Denault yells: "Effects! We're gonna need some bones on the stairs!" Lantieri and Pritchett inspect the "human bones" they've concocted in the special effects truck, selecting the most photogenic ones to scatter above McDowall's head.

During rehearsal, McDowall grapples with the bat, defending himself by grabbing a bone from the stairs and thrusting it between the creature's jaws. At least, that's what's supposed to happen. First the bone slides under the bat's chin, then bops it on the nose, but keeps missing its mouth. Holland tells McDowall to let the bat come to the bone instead of trying to put the bone in the bat's mouth. This works much better.

On the last take, there is a mishap: McDowall pulls too hard on the bone while it's in the bat's mouth, causing a separation in the beastie's skull. The shape of the bat's head changes weirdly as its right eye sinks down into its throat.

Holland is understandably dismayed. "I love that bat. I want the fucker to work."

The bat crew strives frantically to salvage their creature. Cook says the smile control is broken, but the bat can be made to work well enough for some shots over its shoulder while it's on McDowall's chest. The bat's closeups will have to wait for two days, when Cook and company will have had sufficient time to do more thorough repairs.

Finally, they're as ready as they'll ever be tonight. Ragsdale kneels at the edge of the platform to lean into the shot more easily with his stake and crucifix as the bat exposes McDowall's neck. Sunlight hits the bat and it "screams" (that is, it lifts its head into the air and shakes—the sound of the scream will be added in post-production), then drops back out of the frame.

"Is the bat in sunlight yet?" Cook asks. "No," says Holland, "can't you tell?" From his position under the bat, Cooke can barely see anything, so Holland talks him through the action: "Okay, go in... sunlight...bat out! Bat out!"

Shooting on *Fright Night* is officially completed at 3 a.m. Saturday morning,



"Evil Ed" does his Raggedy Ann imitation.

Feb. 23. Of course, there will be pick-up shots—retakes of bits and pieces that didn't turn out right the first time—and work will continue at Boss Films for weeks on the opticals and effects, but for most cast and crew, this is it.

Two weeks later, there is a wrap party,

giving everyone a chance to say goodbye (or, in some cases, "see you later"), in a relaxed, congenial atmosphere. It's fun and pleasant, but it lacks the intense camaraderie of the set. In other words, it's a good party, but it's not the same as making a movie. Then again, what is?

Dandridge looks less than sexy in *Fright Night's* later scenes.

