#### SPECIAL ISSUE FROM THE TEAM BEHIND DATLY DEAD



**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:** RARE PHOTOS - RODDY MCDOWALL TRIBUTE

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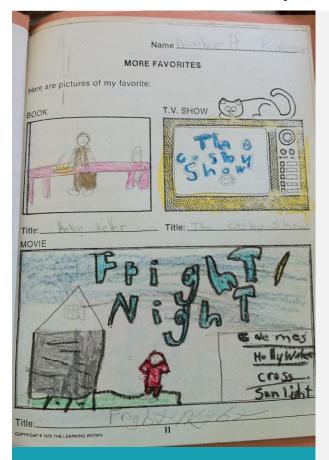
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### LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

by Heather Wixson



### WE WANT TO **HEAR FROM YOU!**

Send us your questions and comments to: letters@deadlymagazine.com

Our favorite submissions will be featured in an upcoming issue of



Last year, when we first began planning out what we wanted to do with DEADLY - Horror & Sci-Fi Magazine, the very first thing I put on our editorial calendar was a celebration of Tom Holland's *Fright* Night for our August 2015 issue, so that I could pay tribute to one of my favorite films of all time in honor of its 30th anniversary.

Sometimes a movie comes along and changes your life and for me, that film was Fright Night. Growing up as a horror fan, I often felt misunderstood as a kid and so when I discovered Holland's directorial debut on VHS in 1986, it had a profound impact on me. Deep down, I was Charley Brewster. I was also a kid being raised by a single mom and had a profound love of horror movies and a genuine affection for the hosts who brought them into my home week in and week out. I found comfort over the years in watching Charley battle against the evil that moved next door in the forms of Jerry Dandrige and Billy Cole. I sought solace in Charley's quest alongside his idol Peter Vincent to rescue the over-lovely Amy Peterson from the to rescue the ever-lovely Amy Peterson from the clutches of a cunning and charismatic vampire. In fact, my love for *Fright Night* even got me in trouble in second grade when my teacher, Mrs. Reigner, was troubled that I drew a picture from the film for our end-of-the-year reports and called my mom in for a meeting to discuss what I had done.

As a youngster, I never could have imagined that I'd ever have the opportunity to write about Fright Night, which has made the last few months an amazing experience, as being able to speak to so many talented folks on behalf of our 30th anniversary celebration of Holland's masterpiece has been a dream come true for this writer.

I want to take a moment and thank all the folks who made this issue of DEADLY so fantastic: Tom Holland, Jonathan Stark, Chris Sarandon, William Ragsdale, Amanda Bearse, Stephen Geoffreys, Steve Johnson, John DeCuir Jr., and Brad Fiedel (whose interview with me last month was sadly lost to the audio gods). I'm still pinching myself that I was able to celebrate Fright Night in my own special way and I do hope you enjoy all the wonderful stories and memories that these pages contain.

"Welcome to Fright Night!"



by Heather Wixson

In Tom Holland's *Fright Night*, we're introduced to Charley Brewster, a nice horror-loving kid who has a seemingly normal life—he struggles in math, gets along with his mom (Dorothy Fielding) and adores his girlfriend, Amy (Amanda Bearse). Everything changes for Charley, though, after his new neighbor moves in next door, and he soon begins to suspect that Jerry Dandrige (Chris Sarandon), the new owner of 99 Oak Street, is actually a blood-sucking vampire who is feeding on the residents of his small town.

For William Ragsdale, who earned the role of Charley after several auditions, he saw working on *Fright Night* as a huge opportunity for his then-burgeoning career, even if he wasn't wholly convinced at first he'd actually gotten the part. "When I was starting out, I was living up in San Francisco and I had gotten a call from a casting agent, Jackie Burch, who was working on a movie called *Mask* at that time," said Ragsdale. "That didn't work out, but we reconnected later and she asked if I'd want to read for another project, which ended up being *Fright Night*. I actually ended up reading for it four or five different times, so I had thought

originally that they were stringing me along, or something to that effect. Of course, it eventually worked out, as I landed the role of Charley, and I just remember how amazing it felt because I hadn't really done anything of that size in my career at that point."

"And I liked Charley; he was sort of a kid going through that phase we all go through as teens where it seems like your parents, or adults, just don't understand you and so you have to start defining yourself. The way Tom wrote him rang very true to me."

Before production officially began on *Fright Night*, Ragsdale and the rest of the cast had the opportunity to work together for several weeks in an extensive rehearsal process at the request of Holland, who thought the time would benefit his ensemble. It was a smart but unusual idea from the director and Ragsdale credits much of the success of *Fright Night*'s performances on the fact that he and his costars were given that time to come together as a cast.

"I thought our rehearsal process was perfect

because I had done a lot of theatre in grad school, so it was the only way I knew at the time," explained Ragsdale. "Chris also had a theatre background and Roddy did as well, so I think we all relished it. Tom gave us the time to work out the relationships between our characters and it wasn't until later in my career that I realized just how rare that kind of experience is in our business. Sometimes when you work with other actors, there can be aloofness, but Tom giving us that time really broke down all those walls. We all embraced it and I think that shows in the film. I was very blessed and we all benefited from that experience."

Ragsdale discussed one of the sets he spent a good amount of time on during the *Fright Night* shoot — Charley's bedroom — which eventually becomes a reflection of his character's mental state due to the increasing pressure of knowing his next-door neighbor wants to kill him and everyone he loves.

"I didn't really have too much input into Charley's room, but at that point in my career I don't know if it would have been my place

to offer up my ideas, either. But because Fright Night was Tom's baby and he was so meticulous about everything, I'm sure that Charley's room was really his room, if you get what I mean. That was a visual representation of Tom and his own fandom for the horror genre. I do remember the first time I saw that set, I was blown away by all the details; I also remember when they set up that room with all the candles and crucifixes after Charley has sort of melted down and I thought that was the coolest thing ever. It felt like I was working in a fantasy world and it heightened that whole scene with Charley—it was incredible."

Considering Charley is the central figure driving the story of *Fright Night*, it's the relationships that Ragsdale's character shares throughout the film that all act as catalysts for the journey the young hero experiences in Holland's story. Ragsdale reminisced about working with both Sarandon and Fielding, and the unique position Charley's mother unknowingly puts her son in during *Fright Night*.

"What made the relationship between Jerry and Charley so interesting was that we both had to play everything on the DL," explained Ragsdale. "No one believed Charley when he tried telling them that there was a vampire living next door to him, so he knew he was on his own.

> He couldn't keep trying to tell people because it just made him look crazier, so that led to this kind of 'coded' communication between him and Jerry. Neither one of them could show their hand, which makes all those moments between them so great. It also gave Jerry some humanity because that humor and the way he manipulates people against Charley are very human qualities, and I think that makes him that much more scary. How can this charming guy be such a monster? That duality makes Jerry that much more formidable in the eyes of this kid."

> "And working with Dorothy was fantastic; I'm a huge fan of her performance in *Fright*

Night. There are very few good mother/son relationships in the horror genre, so that's something I always appreciated about in the relationship between our characters. I also

loved how Tom made her character into the bait for Charley and how she unwittingly helps Jerry get under the skin of her own son. Those scenes when Jerry is in our house for the first time are so great and show just how talented Dorothy was at playing up the humor of how oblivious she was to what was happening right in front of her," he added.

Ragsdale also discussed collaborating with another central figure in Charley's life, Peter Vincent, who was portrayed by the incredible Roddy McDowall. "Roddy was such a professional and so on top of his craft. He really went into the depths of where these leaps in character were on a day-to-day basis because it would always change. As an actor who was still learning, it was an amazing experience to be able to play along with that because as Peter would crack, it allowed Charley to find his own strength and vice versa. We were able to play that dynamic up and establish that 'buddy' feeling you see between the two towards the end of Fright Night. As that relationship evolved, it sort of echoed the relationship between Roddy and myself. I was very fortunate to have worked with him and have these kinds of experiences so early in my career, too."

While Ragsdale enjoyed an overall pleasant time working on *Fright Night*, he did talk about one incident that marred that experience for him and left him limping around set for some time.

"I ended up breaking my foot on Christmas Eve," said Ragsdale. "They had just set up this really nice banquet for all of us in another room so we were just trying to get done shooting the scene where I'm running down the stairs in Jerry's house. Tom had wanted me to be a little more panicked when I did it, so we set everything up one more time and as I ran down that last time, it felt like I sprained my ankle. The sound guy knew it was much more serious than a sprain because he actually heard the pop in his headphones, so he knew that I had broken it immediately."

"Thankfully, we had a bit of a break for Christmas—maybe a few days—but once we were back on, I still had to get back to work, too. They were able to get me a great trainer

from the Oakland Raiders who would come and wrap my ankle every day; Tom did a great job of hiding it, but if you look at some of those moments near the stairs in the movie, you can see me hobbling around a bit [laughs]."

For Ragsdale, his physical sacrifice while shooting *Fright Night* was all worth it in the end, as Holland's film has not only established itself as a modern horror classic amongst fans, but its universal themes have also made it more popular than ever now, 30 years after it was first released in theaters.

"It's great to see how much *Fright Night* has endured with fans and how it has remained popular over all these years. Very few movies I've worked on have stuck with me the way this one has and it almost seems more popular now than it was back in '85. It also became hugely important to my formation as a person and as an actor, and it's amazing to see how *Fright Night* became that to a lot of fans who grew up watching it, too.

"It's a story everyone can relate to on some level and how it has endured is a testament to what Tom and Roddy and Chris did on the film, because they bore the brunt of everything. I was very fortunate to have been a part of *Fright Night*," Ragsdale added. "It was and still is something very special."





### **WELCOME TO FRIGHT NIGHT... FOR REAL:** TOM HOLLAND REMEMBERS HIS BELOVED TRIBUTE TO CLASSIC MONSTER MOVIES

- by Heather Wixson -

On August 2nd, 1985, a then up-and-coming writer by the name of Tom Holland saw the release of his directorial debut, Fright Night, his own loving tribute to the monster movies of yesteryear and the horror hosts who brought them into our homes each and every week. Fright Night's legacy and influence would live on beyond that fateful August, as 30 years later Holland's movie still remains one of the best creature features of its era and also reinvigorated the somewhat dormant vampire subgenre as well.

According to Holland, his inspiration for Fright Night came about a year prior to its creation, while he was writing another project. "I was originally writing a movie called Cloak & Dagger and it was originally based on this idea of a window where you see something happening outside, but can't do anything about it. Then, Cloak & Dagger turned into something completely different, but I realized when I was trying to think of situations where somebody would look out a window, like Rear Window, and see something horrific happening next door, it occurred to me that the scenario would also make for a great "Boy Who Cried Wolf" situation."

"And what would happen if a teen horror movie fan was looking out his window and saw a vampire living next door? Nobody would believe it. I just thought that was the funniest thing I'd ever thought of and I carried that around for about a year in my head; I had a premise, but I didn't really have a story at that point."

"So I kept saying to myself, 'What would I do?' because I was a horror movie fan when I was growing up and then it occurred to me-I'd go to one of those horror movie hosts that I'd grown up watching. The only time when you could see horror movies when I was a kid was on the independent channels at like 11 o'clock on a Friday night and everybody called them the 'Friday Night Frights.' And that's how I thought of Peter Vincent and the minute I had Peter Vincent, I had the story. It just fell into place in my head and I couldn't get home fast enough to write it."

For Holland, an established screenwriter at this time in his career with an impressive résumé that boasted titles like Psycho II, The Beast Within and Class of 1984, his newest writing project would end up being one of his

most fulfilling and would become his way of addressing where the horror genre was in the early to mid-1980s.

"Writing Fright Night was one of the most fun writing experiences that I've ever had," said Holland. "I chuckled all the way through. I think I wrote the first draft in about three weeks even though I thought about it for a solid year. And Peter Vincent was the heart of the story; Charley Brewster is the engine, but Peter Vincent was the heart and it's when I found the heart that I knew I had something special. I think also that's one of the reasons the movie has lasted as long as it has, because it does have a heart."

"The film was in reaction partially to the onslaught of mindless slasher films that were getting made at the time. Everybody was making them and for most of the early '80s, there was this tide of everybody copying John Carpenter's *Halloween* or Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th*. It had gotten silly because everyone was beating the slasher genre to death. That's why Roddy McDowall says in *Fright Night*, 'All horror fans want is to see young virgins being hacked up by killers in ski masks.' That was my response to where horror was at the time because as a fan, I wanted something more out of those films," added Holland.

And while fans have experienced countless vampire films over the last several decades, making a project like *Fright Night* wasn't necessarily an easy pitch in the early '80s, as bloodsuckers—and monsters in general—had fallen out of vogue over the years amongst the studio system.

Holland explained, "They had given up on making monster films when I made *Fright Night*. Vampires were considered the kiss of death, because, well, they were all failing. There was Frank Langella's *Dracula*, which had been a huge stage play, but as a movie it failed badly. Then after that, along came *Love at First Bite* with George Hamilton, which is a comedy and a farce and I think when you move into farce territory, you're showing how exhausted that genre is. And that was the state of vampires when I got to do *Fright Night*. And I say this modestly, but I do think that in a lot of ways, *Fright Night* helped resuscitate the vampire genre."

Not only did Holland help make vampires a formidable force in movies once again, but he managed to craft a heartwarming story that explored several timeless themes like friendship, devotion, and finding your inner strength when faced with insurmountable odds, and those core values were brought to life by an enigmatic ensemble featuring a mix of veteran performers and newcomers alike.



"What happened in terms of how magical it became with Fright Night was due to the cast, and how that group of actors came together and worked with each other throughout rehearsals and then production," discussed Holland. "Yes, the practical effects work, and the light techs—all that atmosphere and even John's [De Cuir Jr.] flawless production design all absolutely adds to the film, but at the end of the day, it's about those characters. Because these actors came to care enough for each other throughout production, and understood their characters so well, they were able to bring that warmth out in their characters and also added something of a sweetness to the movie."

"It's an old line—you're as involved with a horror movie in direct proportion of how much you care about the characters. If the people are just kills and just victims, then there's no emotional involvement. So if you really feel something for the characters involved, it makes it a better experience for fans. I think I was just very, very lucky with the cast for the film, but I also worked very hard, too, as their director."

Another way Holland immersed audiences in *Fright Night* was through the amazing camerawork of his Director of Photography,

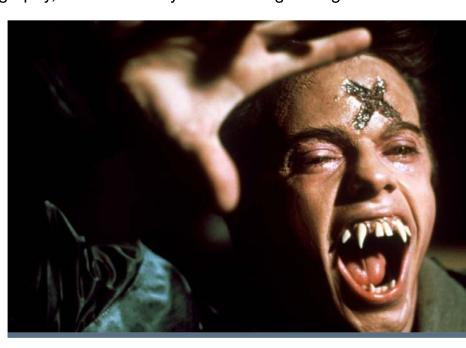
Jan Kiesser, who utilized a fluid motion in order to keep us moving along with all the action. "Jan was wonderful at seeing moves with the camera that followed the actors, because we had all the scenes blocked out already. For example, that scene with Charley going to Peter Vincent's apartment after leaving the disco and begging him to help him get Amy back—it's all done in one shot. It's so subtle. but it does make that scene so much better and all of that style is due to Jan Kiesser. It always seemed like we were running out of time, but he knew precisely how to do everything so we could maximize those shots. Jan also lit the hell out of *Fright Night*; he has a real talent painting with light and he's the biggest reason why the film looks as great as it still does."

Holland was also gifted with one of the best special effects teams at the time that featured

the talents of such visionary artists as Richard Edlund (Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark), Steve Johnson (Big Trouble in Little China, A Nightmare on Elm Street 4), Randall William Cook (The Thing, The Lord of the Rings trilogy), Michael Lantieri (Who Framed Roger Rabbit, Jurassic Park), John Bruno (Poltergeist, Terminator 2: Judgment Day), Thaine Morris (The Empire Strikes Back, Die Hard), and many more.

"I got a big-budget crew on this tiny little movie, which is amazing in retrospect because *Fright* Night was the least important of Columbia's releases that year. It was a throwaway to them. Guy McElwaine, the studio head who gave the official green light, never figured that it would amount to anything. It was like, 'Let's take a chance on the hot screenwriter kid.' And so I got lucky once again because all those amazing people on our crew were chosen for me just because Columbia really wasn't paying attention."

"In fact, a lot of these guys were just coming off of Ghostbusters [which was also under Columbia, and they had worked out all the kinks on how to do the matte shots there because they had this huge budget at their



disposal to play around. And, as a result, they really knew how to do it as inexpensively and as efficiently as it could be done at the time for Fright Night."

Holland continued, discussing the collaborative process he shared with many of the artisans who worked on his directorial debut. "I was very specific in the script about how the creatures should look and I had cut things out from magazines of monsters, too. And these talented guys took those ideas and made them even better. Fright Night may have been Steve Johnson's first job or very close to it and Randy Cook—who went on to do King Kong (2005) and The Lord of the Rings — was a very talented sculptor. Richard [Edlund] helped me understand how we were going to achieve all the transformations, whether it was on cuts or if we'd cut back and forth the reaction shots. This was before CGI was everywhere, so we knew these were our money shots and we spent a lot of time planning those out."

"But all of those guys led me by the hand to understand how to do it, and how the economics of those effects broke down because I didn't understand so much about them. I've carried all of that knowledge with me onto every film I've done ever since, too," added Holland.

His approach to vampirism for *Fright Night* was another element of the story Holland always had very specific ideas for from the start of the script process and throughout production. For him, the creature represented all those licentious inhibitions that our generally empirical society frowns upon.

"One of the things that vampires have always represented to me is wantonness and sexual liberation," Holland said. "Once you're bit by a vampire you can be as wanton as you want. You're released from all morality because of your lack of mortality. It was a more innocent time back then and so keeping the character of Amy pure was important because if she's not a nice girl, where do you go with that character once she's seduced by Jerry? Ultimately, the stakes in Fright Night wouldn't have been so great had the movie opened up with two teenagers-Charley and Amy-having wild sex in his bedroom."

"The whole thing then becomes Jerry, who comes along and breaks through that innocence. That's what the whole bite on Amy's shoulder is, the blood that's trickling down her back represents the blood of the maiden as she transitions away from innocence. It's all about sensuality—it's about erotica and it's about repression in the younger characters."

Because Holland had grown up such a huge horror fan—an admirer of both Hammer and AIP's films as well as the classic Universal Monsters—he wanted to make sure *Fright* Night perfectly paid tribute to those movies that transformed his youth and influenced him as a storyteller. Holland even wrote one scene in particular as his own veneration of one of the greatest horror comedies of all time.

"I wanted to pay homage to *Abbott and Costello* Meet Frankenstein in Fright Night. So in the scene where Roddy and Charley were walking up the staircase, with Jonathan [Stark] coming up behind them, that was my moment. After he's been shot in the head, Jonathan sits up behind them and then he starts coming after them, where it's almost comedic yet still scary, and that was directly from a scene in Abbott and Costello because I always thought it was such a timeless moment of humor, but it also had some tension as well. It just really fit with what I was hoping to do on my film."

One aspect of the Fright Night script that changed early on was the original ending, which saw Peter Vincent transforming into a vampire on live television, as both Charley and Amy watch on in horror. According to Holland, it wasn't something he was wholly confident in and thankfully, someone came in with some suggestions on how to make some changes without losing any story momentum. "I was never completely satisfied with that ending. And it was Guy [McElwaine] who called me up after he first read the script and told me I couldn't have that ending. He knew that the audience would come out of Fright Night loving both Peter Vincent and Charley, so it had to have a happy-ish ending. And he was absolutely right, and so I did a rewrite on the ending and that's the one that is in the movie."

But despite McElwaine's enthusiasm for Holland's story, he noted how Columbia as a whole was never quite sure of just what kind of horror movie *Fright Night* really was and so their support his debut feature received didn't really do much to help the film once it was released in August of 1985. In fact, it was the genre fans out there who discovered Fright *Night*—despite the mis-marketing—and helped establish it as an instant horror classic.

"Columbia could have cared less about Fright Night, if I'm being honest," explained Holland. "Their big movie that year was Perfect with Jamie Lee Curtis and John Travolta, two of the hottest actors in America at the time, and I didn't feel they supported the movie well enough after it opened. That was also largely due to the fact that the marketing team from Coca-Cola had moved in and had all these printouts saying that you progressively starve the movie for marketing the longer it's out there. I thought that they really cut the legs off of it and released it in August too, which was considered the time when studios dumped all the films they had no confidence in."

"But the thing was, the audience reaction ended up exceptional and fans found the movie, despite the studio creating these ads about how scary the movie was. That wasn't what Fright Night was about. Yes, it was about the rollercoaster ride that happens in the third act, but you had these people, these characters who you really came to care about as an audience member. That was the magic of Fright Night and that's why it connected with the fans, even if they thought they were

going to be seeing a different movie."

During its theatrical release, *Fright Night* would go on to become the second-highest grossing horror film of 1985 and also performed better overall than any of its peers released during the summer movie season, almost tripling its budget in box office receipts. Fright Night also became a moderate hit when it arrived on VHS in 1986, and in 1988 the film even spawned a video game and comic book series which celebrated the story and the characters Holland had brought to life with the help of his amazing cast and highly talented and dedicated crew. The now-Master of Horror will be the first to tell you one of the biggest reasons Fright Night still continues to be a film that's well-regarded, much-beloved and still enjoyed to this day is due to the fans' consistent enthusiasm throughout the last three decades.

"It's really because of the fans that we have been able to continue to keep the film's legacy alive; you've got parents who grew up watching it who are now showing it to their kids, and in turn, their kids end up loving it as much as the parents do. It's amazing to see how it keeps moving forward with new generations and hopefully a few of those messages in the film have meant something to the fans."

"At the end of the day, *Fright Night* is about monsters and my love of horror movies,

> but there are also some very positive values at the core of the story," added Holland. "I don't want to be corny, but it's really about friendship, it's about caring, it's about the older man trying to take your girl away and he's got big fangs on top of it. Underneath all the fantasy elements, what the characters are going through here is all too human and that's why you can relate to it. We've all been through some aspect of *Fright* Night's story at some point in our lives. We've all had to fight for something we believe in."



#### I LOVE YOU, CHARLEY: AMANDA BEARSE ON THE POWER OF PLAYING AMY PETERSON FOR FRIGHT NIGHT

by Heather Wixson

In Fright Night, Tom Holland's story is very much centered around a teenaged Charley Brewster's (William Ragsdale) journey into adulthood and finding his inner strength. Along the way, though, something else remarkable happens. Charley's girlfriend, Amy Peterson (Amanda

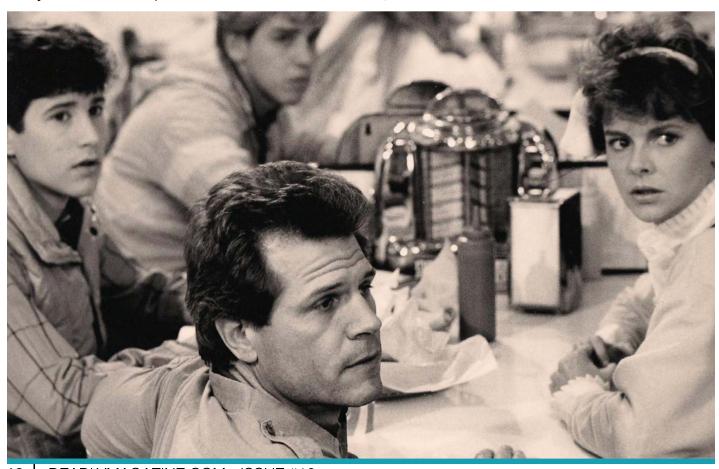
Bearse), becomes a pillar of strength and demonstrates her true devotion for Charley as he fights against the evil that has moved in next door, all while never compromising her ideals or her own belief in herself, either. Tenacious, intelligent, adorable and loving, Amy Peterson was precisely the kind of girl worth fighting a deadly vampire like Jerry Dandrige (Chris Sarandon) to the death for.

Bearse discussed how rare an opportunity like *Fright Night* was for her, considering she was a relative newcomer to acting and had only been working in the industry a short while at the time. "*Fright Night* was kind of a fluke for me, in that it happened during the first year I was in Hollywood. That never happens. The first film I'd done [*Fraternity Vacation*],

I did with Stephen Geoffreys and it was in the *Porky's* vein of a teenage exploitation/ sexploitation film, which were popular in that era. I was one of the few in the movie, besides him, that kept our clothes on [laughs]."

"And so at the end of the filming I asked Stephen, 'So what are you doing next?' And he says, 'Oh I'm doing this little horror movie.' I said, 'Oh yeah, what?' 'Fright Night.' I said, 'Me too.' We had no idea we had both been cast to roll right into the next film together. We were boyfriend and girlfriend in the first film, and while I wouldn't say that Amy and Evil were the best of friends, they became somewhat bonded through the course of the events of Fright Night."

When she auditioned for



Holland's directorial debut. Bearse recollected on how it was casting director extraordinaire Jackie Burch (The Breakfast Club, Die Hard, Predator) who helped her through the audition and was a key factor on how such a fantastic ensemble came together for Fright Night.

"Jackie Burch, who is just one of the finest, loveliest people in Hollywood (and there's not a lot), was very supportive of young talent," said Bearse. "I was submitted by the agency that I was working with at the time, and went through some rounds of auditions. I don't remember specifically what it was like in the room except that she was so very kind. She really set the tone for giving you an opportunity to bring your best and be comfortable and she had a great eye for bringing strong talent together on some great films, including Fright Night."

"And I do remember that I was seated in the outer waiting rooms with real 16 and 17-year-old girls, and I was 26. I was aware that I didn't look like these girls. Even though I looked young for my age then, obviously, it wasn't quite the same. I'd had ten more years on the planet and life experience and so forth, but I think it was that ability to play young, but then also click into a little more worldliness for the transition that Amy had to make in the film, that helped me earn the role."

As Bearse dug into Holland's script, she was surprised that for *Fright Night* her character was not only a bit more fleshed out than you normally would

expect for a female protagonist in a horror film from the 1980s. but that she was also a strong and intelligent character that felt fully realized. "As I mentioned before, movies were very exploitative of women and young women exploring their sexuality at that time. It was horrible. especially in horror. And yet Tom treated every character with dignity, including Amy. He gave her real power, and that was unusual. It still is, in fact."

"I immediately knew then that this was going to be something special. There's so much more to *Fright Night*, and again, it all begins and ends with Tom's work—both written on the page and then what he executed visually. It's remarkable that this was his first film. I can't imagine the film being directed by somebody other than him, either. He's just imprinted all over it, and that's one of the reasons why the sequel did not have the same resonance. and also the remake. This was Tom's baby and all of that is so beautifully layered in Tom's script."

While Holland's approach to her character's sexuality was anything but exploitative, Amy Peterson's "virginity" is a symbolic prize that both Charley and Jerry vie for throughout Fright Night and becomes a key part of the arc of the film's third act. Bearse discussed how it ends up impacting her character as well as Charley and Jerry. "Fright Night opens with that struggle between Charley and Amy and trying to figure out the right thing to do in regards to their sexuality. It is a coming-of-age moment for both of them and then when Amy is ripped away from Charley in the night club, she suddenly becomes this carrot dangling right in front of him by Jerry, and throughout a lot of the film Jerry is toying with Charley and using me as the catalyst."

"Amy basically loses her virginity symbolically in the scene where she's seduced and bitten by Jerry and then this transformation occurs where you have to draw on something inside yourself as an actor that's much different from the innocence of the girl next door you've been portraying thus far. It's an interesting scene that, yet again, was another layer from Tom with this idea that there's a certain quality in Amy that Jerry responds to as she's reminiscent of someone that he loved long ago. That gives this monster some vulnerability too; it's almost tragic and that kind of complexity in horror is rare."

"It's interesting, though, how her role became much more subservient once she succumbs to Jerry and then they have this very classic male/female relationship where he's commanding her to kill Charley and Peter," Bearse added. "I don't think I've ever really observed it like that before where once that intimacy is achieved, that dynamic then changes. I don't know if I have ever stepped outside it to look at it that way, but when you do, that's really what was happening with Amy. And even though she was transforming into something monstrous, and the whole point was to scare the bejesus out of you, it's what Charley's

most vulnerable to. He's the hero and he wants to rescue Amy and, against all odds, he's going for it.'

But even though it's Amy's purity-real or symbolicthat does become a driving factor throughout the second half of Fright Night, Bearse recognized that it wasn't something that ultimately defined her character in the end or made her any more powerless amongst her male counterparts.

"What I loved about her was that Amy didn't really find her power—she had it from the beginning," explained Bearse. "I love that in the very first scene, even though she's affected by his dismissal of her based on what Charley gets distracted about outside his window, she's still involved in the intimacy of that moment. She's also ultimately the one who says, 'No.' That demonstrates a lot of strength

of character in that girl to say, 'Hey, I'm not there yet and this isn't comfortable for me.' Her power is evident immediately, especially when she walks out Charley's front door that

first time when he's not paying attention to her. She isn't going to let those distractions take away from who she is."

Bearse was one of *Fright* Night's co-stars that had to contend with prosthetic

effects during production on the film. And while most of the makeup she underwent was to transform Amy into her vampiric state, another part of her anatomy ended up receiving a bit of a boost as well during those scenes later on in the film. "I was not as voluptuously endowed as Tom wanted Amy to be, so when they designed this beautiful dress, it needed a little boost behind the halter top area and so that's when they decided I needed the boobs."

"I remember the morning I went to get my chest cast, it was like the crack of dawn and I had to go down to some warehouse in the middle of nowhere," Bearse continued. "And I remember I got there and there were these guys, just what you would think of as the nerdy, sort of '80s-type of awkward guys, and I was just like, 'Okay, I'll just take my shirt off then,' and they just started



there [laughs]. I remember it being cold that day, too, so I guess that helped in terms of getting protruded nipples and so forth [laughs]. It wasn't real glamorous, but they were definitely effective when it came time for me to come down the stairs, and lower my voice and try to pull Charley in."

"I did keep the boobs, though. They asked me if I wanted them and I thought, 'Why not?' just because it was kind of an odd keepsake. They were in a See's Candies box forever and when we first started coming together to do these conventions, I thought that maybe some fan out there would want them as a kooky keepsake and sure enough, some guy bought them and now owns my boobs [laughs]."

When Amy finally does attack Charley down in Jerry's basement during Fright Night's finale, Bearse donned the nowfamous "shark mouth" in order to create one of the film's best jump scares and create an iconic visage that would also become part of the imagery featured on the theatrical poster. But according to Bearse, it was something that

> almost didn't happen, as the "shark mouth" was created based on a last-minute decision by Holland to intensify her presence in those final moments of Fright Night.

"The design of how Amy looked once she goes into supervamp mode was not what they had planned for originally, and Tom decided at the last minute that he wanted something really crazy for that moment, Bearse said. "So it was up to

Steve [Johnson] and Randy [Cook] to build it in one, maybe two days. Either way, it was pretty amazing. I had some problems removing it, though; you have to use acetate to get the prosthetics off your face. At the time, I was washing my face with a product that had an iodine kind of solution in it and the reaction, once those two chemicals hit my skin, was really horrible. Thankfully, that happened at home, but these are the things that you do in order to push the envelope, to take those moments to the edge. The actors just become the willing guinea pigs along the way."

And now that *Fright Night* has enjoyed its 30th anniversary this month, Bearse spoke fondly of the film's impact on her career as well as the fans who have loved and supported it throughout the last three decades. "You know, I didn't have much relative experience when we worked on this. It was so early on in my career, and so I look back now and realize how amazing it was that we were able to come together and create that kind of energy between us. Some of that is just chemical. Some of that is not something that you plan or can plan or train for. It's just there and we had it on Fright Night."

"We have all been so very blessed with the reception this film has had across the decades and for the generations of fans that have embraced it." Bearse added. "We enjoyed doing it, but we had no idea that it was going to have this robust cult fandom that would keep it alive, not only as a film. but also with each other. To be able to come together and see these folks after so many years, and still have that real genuine connection with one another, it's something very special. We just had a great energy, and we still do when we gather together and do these conventions. It's the coolest. It really is."





by Heather Wixson

At a time when vampires weren't being taken seriously in cinema, along came the deadly, but charismatic, Jerry Dandrige in Tom Holland's *Fright Night*. A night stalker who is looking for more than just his next meal, Jerry moves into young Charley Brewster's (William Ragsdale) neighborhood at the start of the film. While he was someone to be feared, Jerry was also much more than that, as he was a creature who endured a hundred lifetimes and had experienced his own personal losses throughout those years as well.

Portrayed by the accomplished and venerable Chris Sarandon, Jerry Dandrige was truly a villain for the ages—the perfect mix of sophistication, cunning and intelligence that made him a terrifying, yet enigmatic, foe in *Fright Night* and provided Sarandon with one of his most memorable roles in his illustrious career.

According to Sarandon, it was his initial meeting with Holland and *Fright Night*'s producer Herb Jaffe that gave him confidence in taking on the character of Jerry Dandrige and working with the then first-time director on his ode to Hammer Horror and the classic vampire mythos.

"I remember I had received an inquiry from my agent about playing the villain in *Fright Night*, and I went to meet both Tom and Herb after I read the script, which I thought was a fantastic read," Sarandon said. I really enjoyed it and so the three of us sat around and talked for hours about the film and Tom even described what he wanted to do shot-by-shot during that initial conversation. We hit it off immediately and I realized that he was coming at these themes from a very clever place story-wise."

"And when we began working on the film, Tom had us create biographies for our characters; I can't remember specifics, but I know that I delved deep into the past that Jerry and Billy [Cole] shared throughout the years. Incidents that might inform that relationship, things like that. It was such a valuable exercise for all of us, as it helped us all connect with our characters even more deeply," added Sarandon.

Even though Holland's script and writing exercise gave Sarandon a deeper understanding of who Jerry was, he felt like the character needed another aspect in order to give him some humanity and make him a bit more multidimensional than many of the other vampires who have graced the silver screen over the years.

"Some of that humanity you see in him was built into Tom's original script," Sarandon explained. "The character of Jerry had a great sense of dimensionality to him, but I also had some ideas when I came on board. Tom was very collaborative, though, and we had great talks about the character and things we could add to make him a much more layered villain than just a vampire living in this small town."

"I had this idea about having pictures of women from Jerry's past, which is how we ended up with that scene where Charley discovers the painting of the woman who looks like Amy. I thought that would not only give Jerry a sense of history to him, but would also explain that attraction he has to Amy when he first meets her. That moment between them when Jerry bites her is much more than just about blood—it's also about a human connection that he longs for."

"And that kind of romanticism—about past lives—feels inherent to vampires as a whole. You saw that in the *Interview with the Vampire* books where these creatures were romantic and desirable, but they also felt cursed with eternal life. It was a burden and a gift. It's a grind to be living for hundreds and hundreds of years and I wanted that world-weariness to

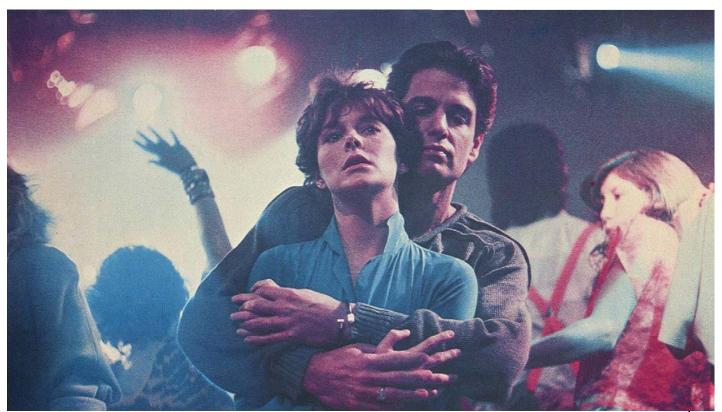
come across in my performance."

Sarandon also saw Jerry as someone who didn't necessarily want to kill everyone, as demonstrated by the scene when his character confronts Charley Brewster in his bedroom after the teenager brings the police by to investigate a murder of a young woman.

"That scene with Charley, where he gives him a choice, is such a great example of who Jerry was. He wasn't just a cold-blooded killer—he knew what it was like to be a human being, too. He was ruthless, but there was also a sadness to him," said Sarandon, discussing the duality of Jerry's vampiric nature.

"I also thought it was really clever the way Tom made the character of Charley a parallel to the powerlessness of being a teenager, feeling like you're finally an 'adult,' but in reality, you have no power, no voice. That made Jerry double trouble for Charley because how do you, in that position as a teenager, fight against someone like that? Not only is he an adult, but he's also a vampire, and a charming one at that."

While Holland's script gave Sarandon a lot to dig into while working on *Fright Night*, the practical makeup he wore whenever Jerry



transformed into a creature of the night also helped him get into character.

"The prosthetics makeup was great at getting me into that space, but it also required a sort of Zen approach on my part on the days I was in makeup," Sarandon explained. "It wasn't excruciating, especially since the guys who worked on me were all great, but that final look to Jerry took about eight hours in the makeup chair. Those were long days. The pieces they used were foam and I just remember there were a lot of layers and blending and some days, I would just go ahead and do my hands myself just because I had some experience from my work in the theatre. It helped me keep my sanity some days too, just to be able to help with the stippling or some of the coloring, because it was a lot of me just sitting there, not doing anything."

"The contact lenses were tough to deal with, though, because they were primitive at that point. There weren't soft contact lenses at all. They would use old contacts and then paint them so they would look however it was that they needed to look. That meant your inner eyelid was touching that paint and sometimes it would flake off—they were very uncomfortable. You could only really wear them for about half an hour before they started to drive you insane."

While it may not have been wholly apparent to Sarandon when he came onto Fright Night just how much of a mark his character Jerry would end up making on the horror genre, he discussed how Holland's affection for the creatures helped turn the tide in the vampire subgenre.

"I absolutely think Jerry helped resurrect vampires in film, as they had become quite satirical at the time. That's always the death knell, but Tom was smart enough to look beyond that and make these creatures scary and interesting-again. Jerry was his way of paying homage to all those classic vampire conventions he grew up watching, but then making them modern and infusing them with humanity and some humor, too."

Throughout his celebrated career, which has spanned over four decades now, Sarandon has enjoyed many opportunities to play characters on both sides of the good and evil spectrum, but he does admit that portraying villains is a bit more fulfilling for him creatively.

"Bad guys are always more fun," said Sarandon. "You get to live out those fantasies we all have of doing terrible things, but you're never actually able to do them. Everyone loves to hate the bad guys too, especially the fun ones like Jerry. Generally, they're written well, so it makes them easier to play. Being the good guy is kind of dull, honestly—those guys aren't always that interesting to portray because of their function within a story. The good guys rarely get to cut loose, whereas the villains get to have all the fun [laughs]."



# HEY KID! JONATHAN STARK ON CREATING HIS GHOULISH BULLY FOR FRIGHT NIGHT

by Heather Wixson

While his actual onscreen time may not be that long in comparison to his counterparts, actor Jonathan Stark's presence in Tom Holland's Fright Night as Billy Cole, protector of Jerry Dandrige (Chris Sarandon), still made an everlasting impression and loomed large over those he would antagonize throughout the film. And much like *Fright* Night's director, Stark was also a first-timer in his respective field while working on the 1985 horror comedy, and he discussed the nerve-wracking audition process that left him guessing for months.

"When I went in. I auditioned with the scene where Bill [Ragsdale] and Art Evans come to the house to question me about the murders," said Stark. "I decided to throw in all that stuff where I'm mocking Charley and acting like a jerk because I really felt like that was me in a real situation. Responding like that was the only way I could deal with it logically. I wouldn't be evil, I'd be just blowing the guy off, playing it cool, so the cops would think, 'Oh yeah, this kid's an idiot.' That's what a smart villain does. They don't sit there and give away that they're hiding something, so that's how I did it. And I just



had the one audition and then I got a call from Jackie Burch a week later or something saying, 'Tom wants you.' And I was like, 'Oh my God.' I couldn't believe it."

"But then three or four months went by before I heard anything else, because Tom was auditioning everybody else. I may have gotten in on one of the first auditions, but I still just kept calling up Jackie and saying, 'Hey I haven't heard anything.' And she kept telling me I still had it but all I could think was, 'Yeah, sure, it's Hollywood, they're just stringing me along.' But Tom stuck to his guns and he really did bring me along for this, which was incredible.'

It was Stark's unique spin on the character of Billy Cole that ultimately won him the role and it was something he infused into his performance throughout production on Fright Night as well. In fact, Holland gave him a lot of room to work as an actor, which resulted in Stark having a bit of off-script fun at the expense of Ragsdale's character, Charley Brewster.

"There's that scene when we're all together in that room and Jerry drinks the supposed holy water from Peter Vincent, Roddy McDowall], and then they all start to leave. I just thought it would be a great moment to mess with Charley and so I just go and stand right in front of Billy, out of nowhere. It played so great because it was a little out of the blue. And that was my whole relationship with him—and with Peter and the others, too. I was just a bully and I was going to have fun with it, because I knew no one would believe this kid and that gave me power over the whole situation."

Billy Cole's relationship with the centuries-old Jerry, though, was anything but antagonistic and Stark discussed the kinship the pair shared while he collaborated with Sarandon on *Fright Night*. "I can't

remember exactly what the real notes were or what we talked about during rehearsals. just because it has been so long, but my feeling of it was that I was his protector, but Jerry was also my protector, too. I just felt like we were best buddies and we had seen a lot throughout the ages. I know some people have read into that relationship or whatever over time, but I didn't decide one way or another because it didn't matter to me. They were together; they loved each other and whether it was platonic or a sexual nature, it didn't really matter to me."

"And Chris couldn't have been better to work with. The moment I met Chris, I felt like I had known him for years. He's just so accepting and he didn't have to be because he was the star of the show [laughs]. We had a great time on our scenes together."

Stark reminisced over the amazing production design for the interior set of Dandridge's house, which was brimming with a gothic beauty and ornate fixtures that had a bit of cinematic history in their DNA as well.

"I remember the first time we walked on the set and it was just like, 'Oh my God. This is amazing.' Somebody told me that the railings and balusters were from Gone with the Wind. The whole thing was incredible and having that practical added so much to how great the film looks, because actually what you saw was right there. It was like a whole different world—like a Hammer movie come to life."

While he was sure that *Fright* Night probably had its share of headaches throughout production, Stark commented on how Holland never once lost a beat at the helm and his experiences, albeit limited, were all like a dream come true, especially when working with his director. "Tom was very confident; I'm sure there must have been normal production issues, but he never let it show. To me, it was always just the greatest thing ever and I know Tom felt the same. Little did I know, not all movies were like that [laughs]."

"Tom was also really great about letting me do my own thing, because some directors would be, 'Well if I didn't write it that way then no, I don't want you doing it that way.' Tom was quite the opposite; he was always so collaborative with everybody, especially Chris, who worked very hard to make Jerry such a memorable character and find all these right beats to add to his performance. It was a great environment for all of us to work in, really."

The role of Billy Cole also required Stark to don some elaborate practical makeup effects for the scene when his character finally meets his untimely demise at the hands of Charley and Peter. "When I had to do the melting scene, they had me go somewhere else to do that at an effects house in Santa Monica. They told me that I would probably be done in four or five hours. which didn't sound so bad initially. So I went down there and I stand there and they have me shoot some stuff in front of a screen so that they can put the shots in later. And when I'm doing all this, they're putting these things in my hair where all the liquids come out—the green goop and the blood, which was basically Karo syrup—and it's almost disgustingly sticky. It ended up being a very uncomfortable, very long day."

"At the end of the day, because I was just covered in all this blood and this green goop, I asked the artists where the shower was so I could clean off. They told me, 'Oh man, we had a plumbing problem so we had to shut off the water.' I was like, 'Are you serious? I have to drive home like this?' So I leave, get in my car, and as I'm going along the Santa Monica Freeway, I realize that I don't have enough gas to get home."

"So I pull into a gas station and I know this is going to be weird either way. I decide to do full service because I wasn't going to do self-service and stand outside covered from head to toe in this stuff. The guy comes out and he says, 'How much do you want?' And the whole time I'm trying to keep my head out of view, but then he looked right in my car, saw me in the state I was in and his face went white. He put the gas in and then I left, but I saw him get on the phone as I was leaving. I don't know if he was just calling the cops or whatever, but he was definitely startled that night [laughs]. Something else that's cool, which I'm sure Richard (Edlund) wouldn't remember, was that I actually worked for his company as a receptionist while they were on Ghostbusters. I ended up getting fired, though, because

I spent too much time talking to everyone and not doing my actual job," added Stark.

After working on Fright Night, Stark saw his career take off in some unexpected wavs as he transitioned into the world of writing in the 1990s, eventually working on hit series like Cheers, Ellen, The Nanny, The Drew Carey Show, and According to Jim, which he also produced and co-created.

"*Fright Night* absolutely changed my life," explained Stark. "It gave me a wonderful career as an actor, as I went on to do films like House II and then *Project X*. I'm sure it helped me move ahead, but I think really what I got out of that experience was how fun it is to work with a bunch of great people and really enjoy what you're doing."

"And after *Project X*, nothing was happening for me on the acting front. It slowed down. I wasn't one of those actors that were always on their agents to find them work and so I sat for awhile and didn't do anything. I was starting to go out again to read for one or two lines and I thought that if I'm going to do that, I might as well do something else because I don't want to go backwards."

"Then, a friend of mine named Bill [Steinkellner] asked me if I was a writer at all. He and his wife Cherie ran Cheers for a vear and I had done improv with him for years. So I started writing and then I experienced the overnight success of two years of writing where they finally gave me my first job on Cheers, and I never looked back."

"I've often thought about maybe going back to acting, but it's never been one of those thoughts where I've actually pursued it that much because I really like writing. I may someday. Luckily, According to Jim afforded me the opportunity to be able to do what I want and not worry if I was going to be broke in my old age [laughs], so anything is possible."







### FIVE QUESTIONS WITH FRIGHT NIGHT'S STEPHEN GEOFFREYS

by Heather Wixson

In Tom Holland's Fright Night, Stephen Geoffreys portrays "Evil" Ed Thompson, the wisecracking best friend of Charley Brewster. While he may not have necessarily been the film's hero, Evil Ed became a beloved figure in the horror genre over time and also gave us some of the most iconic lines in Fright Night, including the ever-popular "You're so cool, Brewster!" after Charley gets a face full of a sandwich for once again ignoring his loving girlfriend, Amy Peterson.

I recently had the chance to catch up with Geoffreys, who is keeping busier than ever these days in law school, to ask him five questions about his experiences working on *Fright Night*.

So I heard from Amanda [Bearse] that you guys actually had the chance to work together prior to *Fright Night* and that Jackie Burch was just as instrumental on getting you involved with this film as she was with Amanda.

**Stephen Geoffreys:** Yeah, we met on the set of *Fraternity Vacation*, which was a much different experience than *Fright Night*. And with Jackie, I actually met her because of a mistake by my agent. She sent me instead of Anthony Michael Hall to meet Jackie when they were casting *Weird Science*, but I showed up and we ended up talking for half an hour. I guess she remembered me from that erroneous encounter and thought I'd be perfect for Evil Ed.

Evil Ed is such a great character but also a tragic one, too. Did you have to do anything special to prepare for the role?

Stephen Geoffreys: You know, the same as I pretty much do for all the parts I play. It was written so well by Tom Holland that I didn't have much work to do, because he pretty much covered the growth of the character extremely well in the script. All I had to do was memorize the lines and talk loud enough to be able to be heard; it really wasn't much more complicated than that [laughs].

Did you have any idea that you'd be going through most of the intricate special effects work on *Fright Night?* It really was an amazing amount of stuff they put your character through in the film.

Stephen Geoffreys: No, I didn't. Yeah, I had never done it before, so it was a surprise and I had no idea what to expect. When it [the makeup application] happened, I just stayed in the chair until they finished and then I did the scene. Some days it felt pretty inhumane, but this was before CGI, so you had to do it all yourself; because the camera picks everything up, you have to make everything look real, and that can take a very long time. But it was definitely worth it.

Ed's death scene is such a remarkable moment for many reasons, particularly because it was so emotional and at that time it didn't seem that a lot of horror films wanted audiences to invest themselves in that manner when characters died. Was that a tough shoot to get through for you?

**Stephen Geoffreys:** No, the tough part was sitting in the chair for fourteen hours. I mean, the camera was filming for maybe seven minutes at the most, so that was by far the easy part. Getting into that emotional state was not difficult at all. It was actually enjoyable for me—and that's why I chose to act when I did, because it was fun.

Looking back on *Fright Night* now, after 30 years, how much did that experience mean to you both personally and professionally?

**Stephen Geoffreys:** Overall it was great. Everyone was professional and everybody was on the same page and wanted to do a good movie, and pretty much everyone had their hearts in it, which is the right reason to do a movie.

It couldn't have turned out any better. You make a lot of movies and you finish and that's the end. You never see the people that you worked with for six to ten weeks, ever again. With this, I knew that it was special. Again, it was just such a labor of love and that never stops even after all these years. We just really got lucky, because I guess all the stars aligned

and everything blended together really nice. People—at least from what I observed—all did it because they loved it, and it's hard to fail if that's everyone's objective.





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## PRODUCTION DESIGNER JOHN DECUIR JR. DISCUSSES THE INSPIRATION BEHIND FRIGHT NIGHT & MORE

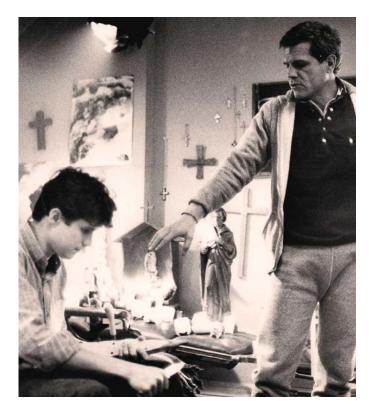
by Heather Wixson

Throughout his career, production designer John DeCuir Jr. has collaborated on memorable films such as *Ghostbusters*, *Top Gun*, *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark*, *Turner & Hooch*, and *Sleepwalkers*, but it's what he achieved on Tom Holland's *Fright Night* that still remains some of my favorite set design work ever committed to celluloid. The perfect juxtaposition between old world sensibilities and the sleek modern world, DeCuir's vision set the stage for Jerry Dandrige and Charley Brewster's showdown and created an amazing environment for legendary horror host Peter Vincent.

I recently had the opportunity to speak in depth with DeCuir about his involvement on *Fright Night*, his experiences collaborating with Holland, what classic films inspired his design work, and much more.

I noticed that you had previously worked on *Ghostbusters* before *Fright Night*; was there a connection between the two projects?

John DeCuir: Yeah, it was a direct connection. My father [John DeCuir Sr.] was the production designer on *Ghostbusters* and I was the art director on it. Because we were both working for Columbia, Tom had been introduced to my dad, and they had done some pre-visualization talks and preconceptual discussions about the show [*Fright Night*]. I'm not sure why dad couldn't do *Fright Night*, but for some reason he couldn't and suggested that I do it, and so Tom was gracious enough to give me a shot at it. That was my first production design credit, so it was a good moment for me.







There are a lot of reasons I've always loved *Fright Night*, but the design work on the various sets has always stood out to me because they felt like perfect visual representations of the characters. Were there any classic films that inspired your work at all?

John DeCuir: I'm not too sure I had it completely and clearly formed in my mind way back then, but I do believe in the idea that the character who owns that set really should be driving its design, and through a narrative, to create a narrative-driven environment, the set is an extension of the story, an extension of the characters in the story. It's really the hallmark of good design and good film design.

You don't always have that kind of opportunity, where you get to build intricate environments, because sometimes a gas station is just a gas station. But when you get a great opportunity—like in *Fright Night*—to take a character like Jerry and take a character like Charley, and then create environments that reflect their characters, as written by Tom, that's a real exciting design challenge.

And as far as the films that inspired me, the first was Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, since so much information in *Fright Night* is passed through both Charley and Jerry's windows. The second was *Gone with the Wind*, because of that staircase idea and how central it became to the action of *Fright Night*.

In my interview with William Ragsdale, he mentioned how Charley's bedroom was really Tom's bedroom—or at least a visual representation of who he was as a teenager and a horror fan. Was that the case? Did Tom give you a ton of input into Charley's room?

John DeCuir: You know, Tom gave me a lot of input in just about everything. Moviemaking's a team sport and so working closely with the director is the designer's first obligation, and getting inside his head; and I don't want to diminish Tom's ability to keep me out of his head, but I got in there and got a lot of great ideas as to how we should move forward.

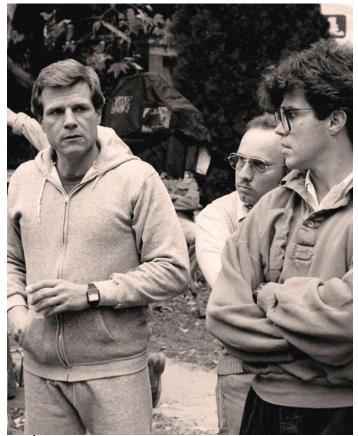


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I always thought it was so interesting how Charley's home felt so new and modern and yet Jerry's house, which is just right next door, feels like it could have been plucked right out of a Hammer film. Were you conscious of that when you initially embarked on creating these environments?

John DeCuir: The juxtaposition between the two houses was so important. Having the traditional little home where Charley lives that's positioned next to that old Victorian house, where it feels like the neighborhood sort of grew up around it. And so it was terribly important that those two houses reflected the characters of the two protagonists in each house: Charley and Jerry. Charley was kind of going from adolescence into manhood, so he was being forced to sort of live in a world that really wasn't his world, so the dressing in his room was really important to bring in some of the props that reflected that transition.

But we got very, very lucky, because after we had discussed that concept, we ended up finding those two houses on the backlot, so that made everything a lot easier in terms of what we wanted to achieve.



Let's talk a bit about the look inside of Jerry's house, because it's beyond incredible. The staircase and landing are amazing and there are so many little details that really bring that setting to life and made it so memorable for me.

John DeCuir: There are a couple of interesting issues that orbited the design of the interiors. If you examine the action in the script, it really called for a crossroads in Jerry's house; most times in horror films, you have to play out the action in separate, individual smaller rooms, but that really didn't work well here. So that entry hall with the big staircase became a crossroads for all of that activity and I believe that separated *Fright Night*, design-wise, from a lot of other horror shows at that time. We really had a palatial playground in that entry hall.

In terms of the studio where we shot the interiors, I don't know if it was serendipity or ghostly coincidence, but that studio was the old Gone with the Wind studio, and if you look very closely at the staircase, you will see significant resemblances, including the two side doors flanking the staircase. It ended up being architecturally consistent with the character of Jerry and that timelessness his character reflects. Part of good set design is how it can help set up the character and reinforce his position within a film. It's just like costuming, where you can destroy the character with the wrong costume. I don't know if you can destroy a character with the wrong set, but it can definitely be a detriment.



Peter's apartment was another amazing set because it felt like it could have been a museum—it had so many cool props and photos. Can you discuss the process behind designing this location? It felt so akin to who Roddy McDowall was in real life, considering his reverence for cinematic history.

John DeCuir: So here's an interesting anecdote; when I first started on Fright Night, I was walking down the lot through all the stages, and there was a little figure way off in the distance coming towards me, and he was waving his hands. I could barely see who it was, and he was shouting, "Johnny! Johnny!" and when I finally got up to him, it was Roddy. We had first met on the backlot on Cleopatra and hadn't seen each other for years. Roddy had a very good memory and very good eyes, and so Fright Night was a reunion for us. It was a lot of fun, and we went on to have a couple of dinners and enjoyed some good times together over the years.

And we wanted Peter's apartment to feel like one of those old Hollywood duplexes that had a Spanish-esque feel to them. We tried to make that feel like a Hollywood apartment. The arches and the architecture were the most important elements in Peter's apartment. As far as the dressing was concerned, we created some original pieces and we also found some of that stuff in wonderful prop shops around Hollywood. We shopped around for movie memorabilia that reinforced Peter's career, too.



Because Jan Kiesser (director of photography) and Tom decided to shoot Fright Night anamorphically, I'm guessing you had to take special considerations while designing the sets to allow extra space for the camera movements.

John DeCuir: Jan, of course, was a great cinematographer, but the tendency when you're dealing with that kind of a style was to build everything a little bit larger than you might normally build it, so those sets and those rooms were really 20, 25 percent larger than they would have been. For some reason, the camera doesn't detect that extra space, but it does give you some ability to get some shots that you wouldn't be able to get on location in a normal small apartment. As the designer, you always have to remember that there are a lot of people who need to be behind the lens, so you have to make room for it.



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He's gone on to make a lot of incredible films since then, but I know at the time Tom was a rather new filmmaker. Can you discuss how it was collaborating with him on *Fright Night*?

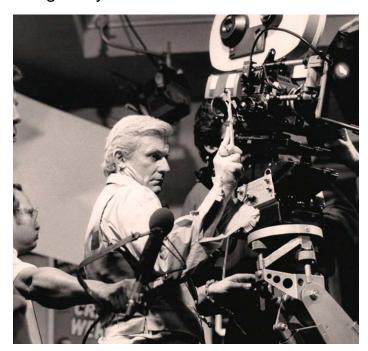
John DeCuir: Tom's a great communicator, and when we started off, he used those skills very effectively to get his ideas across, and I didn't sense there was any difficulty in our collaboration at all, at just about any point. There was some interesting evolution in that collaboration. Of course, we began with the ideas that you initially bring to the table, but he was also very good at reacting to ideas and then adapting other aspects of the film or the story to those ideas. For example, putting that stained glass window at the top of the staircase inspired Tom to create that shot of Jerry flying down from it because he knew how great that would look. To work with a first-time director who was that sharp was a real, unique privilege. I'm very, very appreciative of that opportunity.

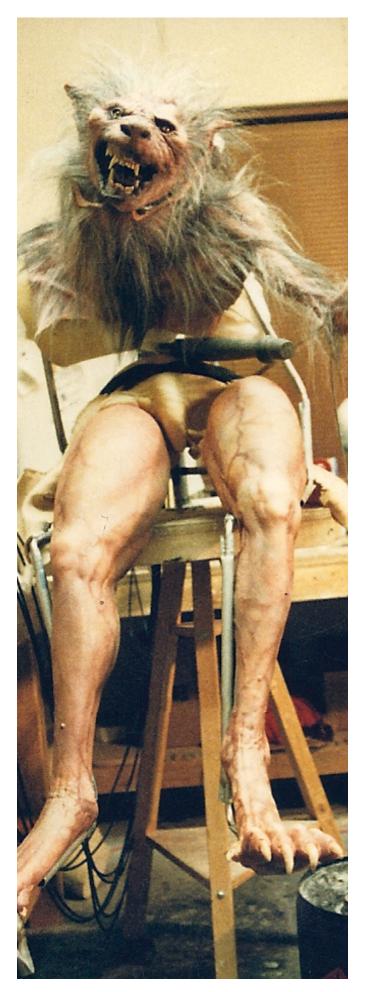


Do you have any funny stories from working on *Fright Night*, or maybe a memory that sticks out to you after all these years?

John DeCuir: There was one humorous situation that happened on *Fright Night*. Because Charley's bedroom had to face Jerry's bedroom window for that interplay between each other, there was a need for Charley's bedroom to be up higher. We also needed it high up to shoot down into that side yard and do some action from that perspective too, so we had to build Charley's bedroom up on a pretty high platform.

Being up on platforms is really challenging for the crew, and they were up there for three days, so it was tedious. I didn't spend a lot of time on stage during that time because I was the one that had put them up there [laughs]. But then I got a call the last day, on literally the last shot, and was told, 'We're having a terrible time trying to get this one shot and things are getting out of hand, so you need to get down here right away.' So I came running downstage, and two grips had two big chainsaws, and they were literally cutting it in half, whacking away at it [the platform]. The walls were crashing down all over, and I said, 'Wait, wait, wait, wait, that's no way to handle those walls, they come apart very quickly,' and that's when the whole crew started laughing. They just wanted to get back at me for putting them up there for three straight days.





## EGENDARY ARTIST

- by Heather Wixson

There are many reasons *Fright Night* has always been a standout film amongst genre fans—the incredible characters, Tom Holland's wonderfully nuanced script and the endlessly engaging performances from an accomplished cast of veterans and newcomers alike. And while those are all certainly key elements of Fright Night's continuing resonance over 30 years since it was released, another huge factor behind the film's success for me has always been the (still) jawdropping special effects created and brought to life by Randall Cook (The Lord of the Rings trilogy, 2005's King Kong) and Steve Johnson (Spider-Man 2, Lord of Illusions). At the time, both were rising talents in the world of monsters and blood-soaked mayhem, and they have since gone on to become prominent figureheads in the special effects industry.

To Johnson, he saw the opportunity to co-lead on such an ambitious project like Fright Night as a way of making his own mark as an artist. It was still very early in his career and prior to working on Holland's film, he enjoyed collaborating on several mesmerizing creatures alongside some of the greatest effects masterminds ever in the early 1980s.

"Fright Night was the second film I did at Boss Film (Richard Edlund's company), the first one being *Ghostbusters*," said Johnson. "Before that, I had worked with Rob Bottin and Rick Baker on several projects, but most notoriously on The Howling and [An] American Werewolf in London. When I had the opportunity, under Richard Edlund's umbrella at Boss Film, to create a werewolf in a transformation scene for Fright Night, I used the things I had learned from these great masters as a springboard and tried to take it a little bit further from what I had already done."

"And the fact is that *Fright Night* was the first movie, to my knowledge, other than maybe all the way back to the silent *Nosferatu*, that actually had vampires physically transform. After *Fright Night*, every vampire was transforming, but I do believe this is the first time the director said, 'Hey, I want to make them more evil looking and not just the fangs. I want to see some crazy monster physically transforming right there on the screen.' So that was a pretty unique challenge and it was pretty exciting to work on, too."

When it came time to break down and tackle all the various creatures and vampire creations for *Fright Night*, Johnson discussed how he and Cook made it a joint effort, much like their approach to working on *Ghostbusters*. "What I want to make very clear here is that in the beginning of Boss Films, Randy and I co-headed the creature department. Just like on *Ghostbusters* where we split up the work—the characters and effects that we would each supervise—the same thing happened on *Fright Night*, too. Randy actually was in charge of all the Jerry Dandrige stuff—including the bat—and then I worked on all the Evil Ed effects."

The character of Evil Ed, portrayed by Stephen Geoffreys, undergoes many changes throughout the second half of *Fright Night* and it was up to Johnson to make sure everything about those effects rang true onscreen. What he didn't realize initially going into the film was just how those creations would continue to resonate after all these years.

Johnson discussed how integral casting Geoffreys was for the role, saying, "What I have found out over time was that Evil Ed has become a very iconic, very memorable character, and I didn't necessarily expect that to happen. Stephen was an amazing choice, an amazing find, and anything we did to him, it was just so easy because he was always game. As a matter of fact, because of the anniversary, I just went to do a *Fright Night* panel, and as part of the convention, we recreated the Evil Ed makeup on Stephen, complete with the yarn wig and the burned cross in his forehead. It worked even 30 years later, and that's pretty cool."

Part of why the makeup used on the character of Evil Ed has always stood out to many is the fact that it was unlike anything we'd ever





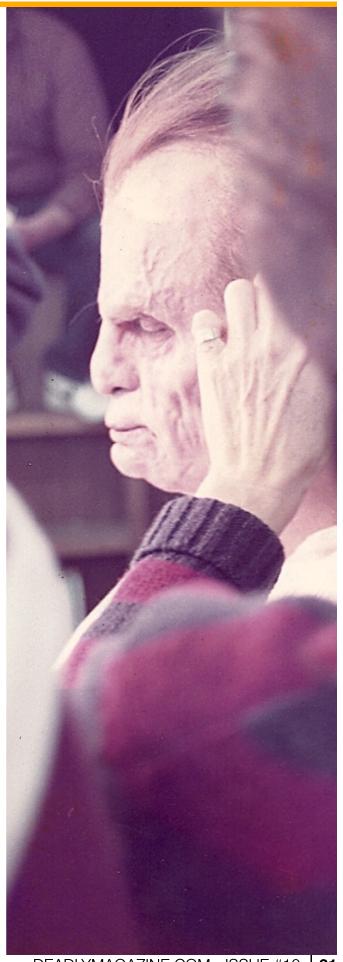
seen before in cinema, a somewhat askew interpretation of the classic vampire and werewolf creatures that was boldly unique and ahead of its time in many ways. Johnson discussed his twist on the look, saying, "That comes from back when I was working on both The Howling and American Werewolf transformations, where I kept thinking, 'Why are these werewolves transforming so symmetrically?' Again, they were groundbreaking effects, but I was just sitting in the background thinking, 'Fuck, if this was my film, I would do it asymmetrical.' It never made sense to me that it would be so perfect and so handsome and so easy."

"So that was one of the things I really tried to do on Evil Ed. I wanted to bring something else to the idea of the transformation effect. And the thing about Stephen was, we put him through absolute hell, and he never complained. The final makeup that we did on Stephen, where he is transforming under the stairwell as Roddy [McDowall] tearfully watches him as he is dying, took 18 hours with three people. It felt basically like we were doing an operation, a brain surgery kind of thing, where we worked constantly on him around the clock."

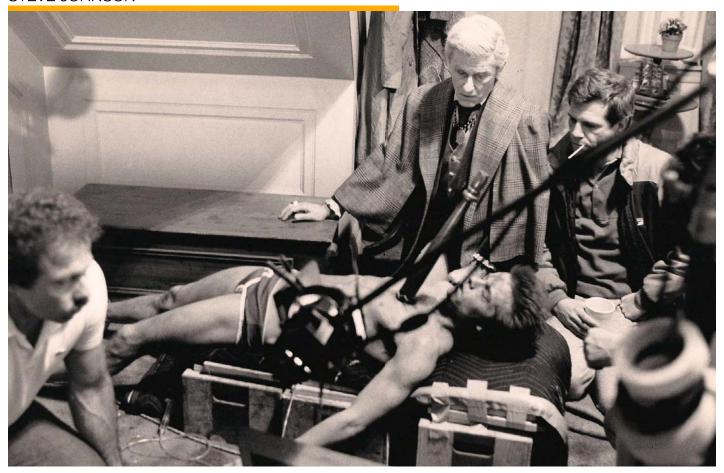
"Stephen also had an animatronic head that was extended beyond his own head, where he bent his upper body down, and he also had one false arm, one false leg—the list went on and on and on. His entire body had to be entertaining and active and it had to have hair laid on top of it all, so it was really quite a trick to pull off. It's definitely still the longest makeup l've ever been involved with on an actor, and after all these years, Fright Night still holds the gold medal [laughs]."

The notoriety of the contact lenses utilized on several cast members of Fright Night was a topic brought up several times throughout the interview process, so it only seemed natural to hear from Johnson about his experiences dealing with the tricky but necessary effect that helped transform some characters into their more evil and animalistic states.

"Well, those lenses have become—for those in the know—a bit legendary," Johnson discussed. "So yes, I did develop some very, very unique lenses for this film, because Rick Baker taught



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me on American Werewolf that the brighter the eyes, the more intense the effect you're going to get. And the way Rick did it—this was back in the days when we didn't have soft contact lenses, they didn't exist. What we used at this point were not really glass, they were a dental plastic called 'methyl methacrylate' that would cover not only the iris, but they covered the entire sclera as well, which is the white part of the eye. Imagine putting huge, plastic cups in your eye; even if there was no paint on them at all, that would be kind of a difficult thing to deal with. These were initially developed for divers to keep chlorine out of their eyes, but at some point in Hollywood, people decided we can also use those for the film industry."

"And what Rick had done for American Werewolf was use these fluorescent, Day-Glo colors. They weren't just regular acrylic paint, they were literally fluorescent paints. They worked amazingly well and so when I had the opportunity to do my first lenses ever on Fright Night, I thought, 'How could I make them brighter than fluorescent paint?' And then I thought, 'How about fluorescent paint with iridescent powders laminated on top of

that?' And also glitter, laminated on top of that, because I knew glitter would be shiny and reflective."

"So I tested and tested, and developed these hard plastic lenses and I actually tested each of these lenses in my own eyes before I put them in the actors' eyes. I know that's probably not what a lot of people do, because they weren't measured for me, but I wouldn't do anything to someone else that I wouldn't do to myself. So in my own defense, I did actually try out each lens in my eyes before they went in the actors' eyes, and then they were sterilized, which worked for the actors. And that's the contact lens story, at least my side of it [laughs]."

While Johnson and Cook enjoyed a decent preproduction schedule to handle *Fright Night*'s ambitious creature effects and various vampire transformations, the pair were thrown a bit of a curveball during the filming of the finale when, at the very last minute, Holland requested a new look for Amy [Amanda Bearse] after she's become a vampire.

According to Johnson, "We had months of



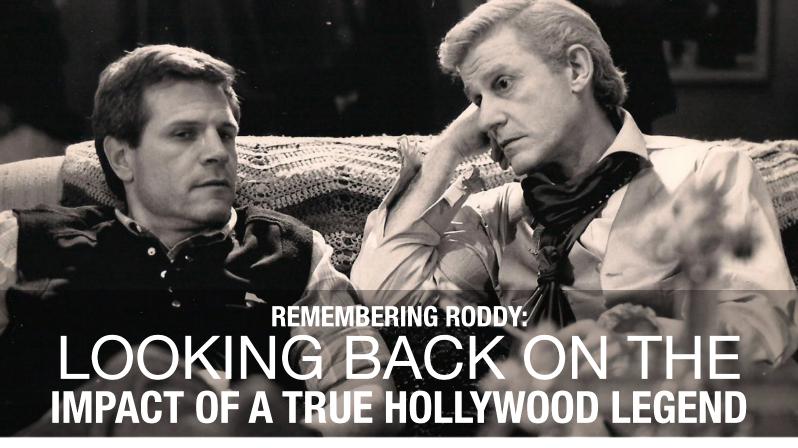


preparation—much more than you have these days—to design all of these effects and design them into the characters and make sure that they fit seamlessly into Fright Night. But then Tom had this bright idea one afternoon on set, where he came up to Randy Cook and he said, 'I want you to use a shark mouth on Amanda." So I then said, 'Okay, fine. When do we shoot?' He replied, 'Tomorrow,' and I said, 'No, there's no way—are you kidding me?"

"But then Randy decided, if I go back to the shop, stay up all night and make the mold myself so I can get some foam on it before the morning, perhaps we can have a single appliance up for the shoot tomorrow afternoon. So Randy took that upon himself and, cut to the next day, Amanda was in the makeup and it ended up working out pretty damn well."

"It was supposed to be used for a quick shot, but Tom used it for sequence after sequence after sequence and shot after shot and I thought it was going to end up making us look silly because it wasn't articulate or anything. But look what happened—it shows how much I knew because it ended up being the single most iconic image in the film and it got to be used on the poster, too. Randy did a great job on that appliance."

As a whole, Johnson recalled enjoying his time on Fright Night and collaborating with Holland, whom he gives most of the credit for making the film a truly special and memorable experience for those who participated in its creation and for the fans as well. "I'm pretty proud of the work we did on Fright Night myself, but you have to go back to the script, and you have to go back to Tom Holland, because those things are the cornerstone to a great film. It's the casting and it's the performances so obviously, if you don't care about the characters, you're not going to care about what's happening with the effects. I do believe that's one of the reasons the movie holds a place in so many people's hearts 30 years later. It's because you really did care about these characters. It's all Tom Holland."



by Heather Wixson

Roderick "Roddy" McDowall was born on September 17th, 1928 in South London, England, and to those who knew him best, Roddy was an incredible talent but an even more incredible friend and lover of the arts, in which he spent much time preserving and chronicling the golden age of cinema. His career spanned over six decades and McDowall was widely known for his involvement in both the original Planet of the Apes film series and the television show which ran for one season in 1974, as well as a multitude of films including Cleopatra, My Friend Flicka, How Green Was My Valley, Bedknobs and Broomsticks, Macbeth, Class of 1984, A Bug's Life, and a personal favorite of mine, Overboard.

Roddy's contributions to the world of genre movies and television were also

endless, as the versatile actor appeared in a multitude of horror, sci-fi and adventure projects like Shock Treatment, The Poseidon Adventure, Laserblast, The Black Hole, It!, The Legend of Hell House, The Twilight Zone, the pilot episode of Night Gallery, The Alfred Hitchcock Hour, Mork & Mindy, Quantum Leap, and even made appearances on both Wonder Woman and the original Batman series as "The Bookworm." McDowall also kept his vocal cords just as busy as the rest of himself, providing voice work on great animated series including Pinky and the Brain, The Tick, Gargoyles, Batman: The Animated Series, as well as the Rankin/Bass TV movie adaptation of The Wind in the Willows.

But even though he had over 200 credits on his résumé, to this writer, the role I will always

think of when remembering the esteemed, late Roddy McDowall is Peter Vincent, the aging horror host who must find his inner strength when tasked with destroying a real-life vampire in Tom Holland's Fright Night. The character was a loving tribute to Hammer horror and all the unique personalities over the years who also became iconic for bringing classic genre films into our homes each and every week. Peter was a gentle soul who relished his creative vocation, and it seemed that Holland managed to concoct a character that was also the perfect embodiment of who McDowall was as a performer at that time in his career, as described by those who knew and worked with him on Fright Night.

During the interview process for our 30th anniversary celebration of *Fright Night*,

McDowall was someone who came up frequently during the chats I had with several of his fellow cast members as well as director Holland, who all remembered the iconic actor fondly and shared some great stories and memories from their time with him on and off the set.

**Tom Holland:** Roddy was just wonderful and he took me through the MGM lot back when it was closing down.

He showed me where he had gone to school-I think Elizabeth Taylor went to school there, too-and he would point out to me what movies were filmed on what sound stages as we walked around. He knew where Katharine Hepburn met Spencer Tracy, where Judy Garland's studio was and he even took me down into these below-ground

tunnels where they would store their nitrate film.

I know Roddy took all these 8mm films when we were shooting Fright Night and nobody can find them, which is a shame. I think Roddy even had some of the costumes from Planet of the Apes, as he was way ahead of all of us at being aware of props and memorabilia and what they would mean in the future. I know Roddy also took Peter's vampire case from Fright Night and that it ended up in a college, maybe in Rhode Island, after he passed away. I wish I knew where, though.

I'd also be interested in knowing where all of his 35mm and 16mm films ended up, too; he had an enormous collection, so much so that at one point, the studios sued him and he had to go in for questioning. But I knew back then that if I wanted a film that I couldn't find anywhere

up during that Golden Age of cinema but was almost considered an afterthought in many ways. I used to go to dinners at his house and the parties he'd have were amazing. So many different types of folks would be there and it was always a great time filled with great stories and interesting people. I remember his quest bathroom had the bowlers that both Laurel and Hardy wore and even had one of the Planet of the Apes garbage cans

in another room, the very same one I had as a kid. How cool, right?

And Roddy was a fountain o f movie knowledge. too. Some of my favorite times on Fright Night were listening all of t o his stories because he had so many,

as a young actor.

especially about Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor when he worked with them on Cleopatra. I grew up watching him in *Planet of the Apes* or even in My Friend Flicka. I used to watch him on TV too, so being able to work as closely with him as I did on Fright Night was the most amazing experience you could ask for

because it was too old or too archaic, I could ask Roddy and more often than not, he had a 35mm print and would strike a VHS for me. It was really amazing. And Roddy was a walking oral history of Hollywood; he worshiped the stars that he remembered from when he was a boy and he stayed friends with.

William Ragsdale: Peter Vincent very much spoke to who Roddy felt like as an actor-someone who came

Chris Sarandon: Roddy was the heart of Hollywood, a living repository as he lived through everything in this industry. He started off as a young boy and worked until he was very old and he was someone who was close friends with all the greats. He worked with John Ford, of all people, as a child and they remained friends for years.

Roddy was also someone who was an extraordinary friend. He would always remember birthdays and anniversaries regardless of where he was or what he was working on. It wasn't uncommon to get a surprise postcard in your mailbox from him for your birthday from someplace exotic like Prague or Budapest. He was a very kind and thoughtful man.

He was also a very social man, so he'd always be hosting dinner parties at his home and you never knew who you'd meet on that particular night; it was always an eclectic mix of actors, directors, or writers. He lived his life very gracefully, which is why he made such an impact on everyone who either knew him or had worked with him.

Jonathan Stark: I wasn't around on *Fright Night* as much as Bill and Amanda or Chris. so they all became pretty close with Roddy, more so than I did. I do remember though, that one of my favorite things on Fright Night was that between takes—and you do have a lot of time between takes [laughs]—Roddy wouldn't go to his trailer or anything like that. He'd sit around on set or in the makeup trailer and just entertain everybody with stories for hours on end. I also remember that somebody said to him on Fright Night, 'You should write a book,' because of all these great stories. He replied, 'If I wrote one, this town would be destroyed' [laughs]. So I'm sure Roddy had so many stories that he took to his grave with him.

Amanda Bearse: The thing I was most struck by with Roddy was his quietness. His nature was one to not be forward, but to take in everything around him. He was really rather reserved. He was very jovial, very engaging, and warm and lovely, but not real

out there as a human being. I'm not shy, but at the time, especially being a young actor, I wasn't intimidated by him—I just more observed him a lot while we were on set. And yet, when we engaged, he treated me and Bill and Stephen—all the kids on the set—as equals. There was no posturing. We didn't have the occasion of that many scenes together, but when we did, those were the things that I was most struck by—that he was gentle, very humble, even selfdeprecating. That was also what was interesting about his character, that he was sort of playing himself. Roddy had an A-list of friends, but his career was not necessarily regarded that way. He was playing sort of this B-movie actor, knowing that this is a part of who he was.

I remember one day he told this great story about William Randolph Hearst and Marion Davies, the actress. Hearst would host these grand parties where he'd basically send a yacht down to Hollywood and just bring hordes of stars and celebrities and so forth up to the castle for parties.

And apparently Marion Davies was having an affair with Charlie Chaplin, who was a bit of a cad, and Hearst got wind of this, so he hired a hitman to go on-board the boat after one of these weekend soirées and he took out a hit on Chaplin. But unfortunately, it was Thomas Ince that was killed by mistake, as he was also small in stature like Chaplin was. It was enthralling, especially the way Roddy told the story, and that's definitely a moment that really made a mark on me.





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