

THE LAST WOMAN ON EARTH? DAY OF THE DEAD'S LORI CARDILLE

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August 1985
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FRIGHT NIGHT

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Writer-Director Tom Holland

BY MICHAEL MAYO

Yes, friends & fiends, I bet you didn't know it, but vampire pictures have been pretty anemic lately, at least according to Tom Holland, and he's upset! The guy **loves** vampire pictures, but not the wishy-washy stuff like **The Hunger**. The Good Stuff: AIP vampire films, and Hammer . . . especially Hammer. Tall, good-looking vampires that can paralyze you with one pinky, and girls wandering around barely sheathed in filmy clothing. That's what Holland thinks a good vampire film should be and that's exactly what Holland has been holed up the last few months making.

HOLLAND'S DUTCH TREAT

If firsttime director Holland can capture on film what he's got on his storyboards, theatergoers this August are going to see a very weird film when Columbia Pictures releases **Fright Night**, Holland's own contribution to the vampire genre. He's tried to make the film with the slick & glossy Hammer look, and certainly has the technical talent backing him. But Holland is also the screenwriter, and as befits the author of **Psycho II** and **Cloak and Dagger**, the material has just a slight "bent" to it. The stuff may be a little hokey and tattered, Holland seems to be saying, but we love it anyway.

The title of the film comes from the name of the **Fright Night** horror movie televised weekly by a local station and hosted by a fading ham horror actor,

FRIGHT NIGHT

TOM HOLLAND PUTS
SOME NEW TEETH IN THE
OLD VAMPIRE LEGEND





Peter Vincent (Roddy McDowell) made up to look like Peter Cushing). Vincent frequently embellishes his show with talks about how he's fought all these undead creatures and won. It's good for the show, you know?

NOT A REEL VAMPIRE

The only problem is that a real vampire does show up and he looks even better than Christopher Lee. He's a swinging, sexy dude named Jerry Dandridge who

says he restores old homes. Jerry's neighbors include Charley Brewster (newcomer Bill Ragsdale), an everyday kid who discovers that Dandridge is a vampire when he accidentally sees Dandridge put the bite on his girlfriend. Charley still can't believe it until a near-fatal encounter with Dandridge sends Charley scurrying for somebody, anybody who will believe him. Well, since Vincent has always been blowing about his battles, what the hark? (as in Jonathan Harker). Charley goes to Vin-

cent and tells him his story. Vincent thinks the kid is bats but humors him by going to see Dandridge anyway. Vincent is charmed by the guy (everyone is) and can't see anything wrong with him until a peek at a pocket mirror shows there isn't anything to see of Dandridge. Vincent now knows Charley is right but doesn't feel any better for it. After 30 years spent fighting foam rubber and special effects, he's now up against the Real Thing, a supernaturally powerful creature



who's very smart and very deadly . . .

"I decided to resuscitate the genre because I have so many fond childhood memories of them. I want to see them, and nobody's been able to do a decent vampire film in 10 years. The last Drac flick that was any good was a parody, *Love at First Bite*, and a parody is always the last gasp of a dying genre. So I wanted to bring them back and be faithful to the legend. These are vampires that do everything we've been brought up to expect vampires to do:

they turn into bats and wolves and bite pretty girls . . . all that good stuff."

I'D LIKE TO BE AN OSCAR WIENER

And they do it, alright. *Fright Night* features some truly effective special makeup and optical effects done by Oscar-winner Richard Edlund's BFC outfit. They haven't built Holland just a tiny little bat that flaps rigidly against a wall but a huge, fleshy-pink, redeyed



Left: Roddy McDowell, playing an ex-horror movie star, about to have a howl of a time with a real-life werewolf in *Fright Night*. Top: The Vampire next door. Above: Bill Ragsdale as Charley Brewster says—"Well, there goes the neighborhood."





A kiss is still a kiss, except when it's from this toothsome Miss

Nosferatic nasty that is the ugliest thing you've seen in ages. This oogle is so ugly it's beautiful; just the sort of thing I wish I had sitting on my mailbox to snap at bill collectors and junk mail carriers. And that's just one of the things McDowell and Ragsdale have to

cope with. Dandridge also manages to turn *Heaven Help Us* star Steven Geofreys into a werewolf and Ragsdale's girlfriend (Amanda Bearse) into a voluptuous siren who grows more teeth than Rin Tin Tin.

"THE HUNGER" GAVE HOLLAND A GREYSTROKE

"I was so angry at *The Hunger*," says Holland. "I thought it was the biggest abortion I'd ever seen. Sheesh, it was so pretentious . . . right up there with



And a Fightful Night was had by all.

Greystoke. I mean, in **Greystoke** they were ashamed to mention the name Tarzan and they didn't say it once in the film, while in **The Hunger** they didn't say the word vampire once. I think those guys should go out and make other kinds of movies if they're going to be ashamed of the genre."

Holland's affection for fantasy & horror began as a youngster when he was growing up in a small, mid-state New York town gobbling down HP Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch and others. He wanted to be a writer but became an actor when he came to Hollywood. Holland still pursued writing though, and finally sold a screenplay which almost sank his career before it got started.

A BEASTLY BUSINESS

"It was the first script I'd done that got made and it was done so badly it put me out of the business for a year. That was **The Beast Within**. I got thrown off the set and out of the dailies because I told them exactly what I thought they were doing to the story. The next one I did was **Class of 1984**, then **Psycho II**, then one called **Scream for Help** that was made so badly it was never released, then **Cloak and Dagger**."

Fright Night is Holland's first film as a director. Like many writers who become directors, part of Holland's

drive to direct was to present his stories as he thought they should be made.

PSYCHO II: BOO HOO

"I think you really have to know what you're doing with the stories to make a good film. Some people have done badly with my stories and some have done okay, but even when it was done well, it's never been done the way I intended. **Psycho II**, on which I had a good relationship with director Richard Franklin by the way, was supposed to be a very emotional and romantic film in its own way. I designed it for you to feel a great deal of empathy for Norman. He and Meg Tilly really come to love each other but it's tragic because it's never allowed to consummate itself and then she's killed. I think this element of the story got subjugated to the murder mystery elements, which I don't think were as powerful as the emotional elements. So, with **Fright Night** I wrote it specifically to direct. I wanted to write something that was so completely commercial that nobody could afford to turn it down, they'd have to let me direct it, which is exactly what happened. Every major studio in town wanted it... it's that simple."

Well, not exactly, and Holland knows it too. He wants to make a scary film that's also funny; and a violent, sexy

vampire film that's lo-cal on the gore. Might Holland be in danger of making a film with too much humor and not enough blood for today's genre audiences?

GORE A BORE

"This is meant to be a crossover film. It's going to be an R, but because of the sex, not the gore. If you want that, go see the Italians because I'm not into gore. I think it's a cheap trick to squirt blood into people's faces. It's the last refuge of the untalented who go to it because they can't think of any other way to do it. I make fun of it in the movie."

CRYING FOUL

"For the humor, I think it depends on if your laughs stem from kidding the genre or come from the situation. I think it's a big, big mistake to spoof the genre and I don't do that. If your humor evolves from the situation, though, that's OK. I personally think **Fright Night** is a very funny movie. You've got this guy who's been fighting vampires for 30 years in all these bad movies, and he tries it on the vampire, waves a cross at him and says 'Back, you foul creature of the night!' And the vampire just cracks up."

