

He's back, all dolled up and ready to kill, as his original creators put him through new paces in "Child's Play 2."

By MARK PATRICK CARDUCCI

DON'T TOY WITH CHUCKY!



That's the last time this teacher will take toys away from her pupils.

Universal's production of *Child's Play 2*, unlike most sequels, happily reunites numerous personnel from the original \$40 million-plus hit that spawned it and created a brand-new horror villain. There are David Kirschner and Laura Moskowitz, the producers; Don Mancini, creator of Chucky and co-writer of the original; and John Lafia, who co-wrote the first film with Mancini and Tom Holland, and is directing this time out. Special FX makeup magician Kevin Yagher and his crew reprise their functions as well, with Yagher also directing 2nd unit (after getting his feet wet directing the Crypt-Keeper "bumpers" for HBO's *Tales from the Crypt*, as well as an episode). Actor Brad Dourif returns as the inimitable voice of

Chucky and, last but not least, Alex Vincent is back as Andy Barclay, the besieged little boy.

This time around, in the wake of the events of the first film, Andy's mother has been so psychologically traumatized that she is unable to care for him. So the kid is placed in a foster home with the Simpsons, Phil and Joanne (actors Gerrit Graham and Jenny Agutter), who already have one foster child, 16-year-old Kyle (Christine Elise). While Andy is trying to adjust to his new surroundings and family, Chucky is inadvertently resurrected by corporate types at Play Pal Toys, home of Good Guys. Concerned about the bad publicity that stemmed from Chucky's mayhem in the first *Child's Play*, the company manages to reacquire Chucky's charred corpse. In a twisted early sequence, one of their toymakers painstakingly rebuilds Chucky, and the doll is accidentally returned to life. As before, the spirit of psycho killer Charles Lee Ray still needs Andy's body to jump into. The terror begins again.

On the *Child's Play 2* soundstages at Universal Studios, most of the interiors have been constructed at least 6 feet off the ground. The extra elevation allows the filmmakers maximum visual freedom by keeping Kevin Yagher's Chucky FX crew below, off-set. So there's an upstairs and downstairs reality to much of the shooting, with the actors, crew and director above, and Yagher and his fellow wizards having the real fun below, manipulating Chucky via cables and other devices and kept in constant touch with what the camera is seeing via video monitors.

The first shot on today's agenda is part of the sequel's climax, which takes place within the Good Guy doll factory. Chucky's very birthplace. The set is vast, painted in superbright reds and blues. It looks more like a nightmarish amusement park ride than a realistic manufacturing site. Barrels of Good Guy eyeballs dot the floor, while overhead hooks carry dozens of loose Good Guy arms, legs, heads and torsos through the construction process.

While in murderous pursuit of Andy and Kyle through the factory, Chucky gets his hand caught in a wire grating along a conveyor belt. Unable to yank it out, Chucky finally tears his hand off at the wrist, leaving the bloody member in the grating, and continues pursuit of his quarry. The close-up has Chucky screaming in rage and agony as his hand comes off. Above, on

the elevated set, director Lafia observes the puppet directly, while below one of Kevin Yagher's crew wears a facial waldo (a helmetlike device with chin straps, connected by cables to the doll). Whatever facial expressions the operator makes, the puppet duplicates.

Chucky's face now boasts major improvements in expressiveness. Chucky mouths his scream of pain to an audio playback, recorded in three days just prior to principal photography by actor Brad Dourif (Fango #95). All Chucky's dialogue scenes are being filmed this way, unlike the original *Child's Play*, in which Dourif was brought in *after* shooting to dub over Chucky's lines. Lafia, as well as Kevin Yagher and Dourif, favor the new process. Lafia feels that working from a pre-recorded playback enhances the killer doll's performance significantly.

"It was a great deal of fun," Lafia says. "Brad's easy to work with in that he gives you lots of readings, lots of choices. I'd have my storyboards, and I'd show Brad the scene—Chucky getting his hand chopped off—and he'd project himself into it. And him doing the voice before we shot the action helped me a lot in defining the character. Several times, because I had the playback, I would work with the nature of the character's reaction around that playback. Having Brad there in advance, I had his reading to work from. If we had just done the voice later, it would have been a loss to the film."

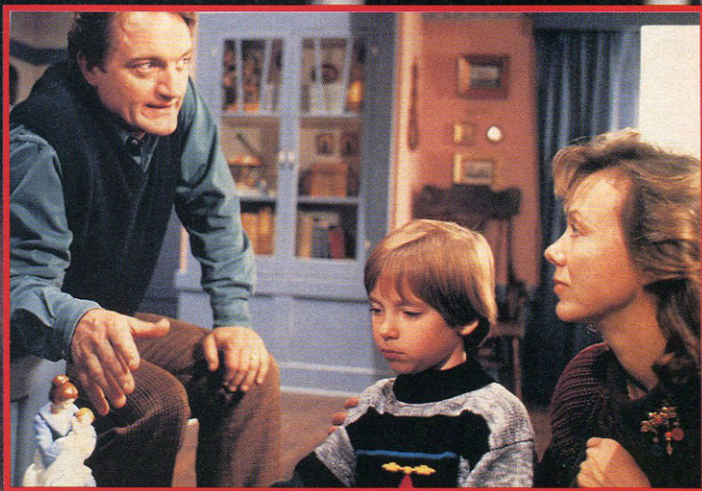
Little Andy's new parents (Gerrit Graham and Jenny Agutter) serve as potential victims for the devil doll.

After two films Chucky finally gets the girl.



"I want to take the series in the direction of full-out fright. I don't think it's campy, like some of the first film."

—John Lafia, director





For Kevin Yagher, having the playback allows a technical refinement that results in much-improved lip-syncing of Chucky's voice. "We slowed the Chucky dialogue down 25 percent during playback and shot at 18 frames per second rather than the usual 24," he explains. "Then, in the sound transfer for dailies, they speed it back up. So while you're on set, you're hearing Chucky's voice a little slower, but it allows us to have just a few more seconds manipulating the puppet's mouth to get it where it's going, so Chucky's more articulate. The guys working the body have to

slow down their gesturing, too. The extra time we get to sync up facial movements to the words enables us to get the really tough letters, like 'F' and 'B,' more realistically."

Yagher is extremely busy on *Child's Play 2*. In addition to directing 2nd unit, he must also supervise all Chucky FX shooting by main unit director Lafia. Yagher has enjoyed the directing challenges on *Tales from the Crypt*, and he is no less excited about the much more complex filmmaking he faces on *Child's Play 2*.

"It deals with, for one thing, a more complicated puppet," Yagher

notes. "But I'm also dealing with full scenes, with action, car chases and things. Stuff besides just directing the puppet. And I actually got to do a couple of scenes with the actors."

The chance to direct 2nd unit was something Yagher had in mind from the moment producer David Kirschner first approached him about handling the sequel's FX.

"I told David I really wanted to be involved with the whole picture," Yagher recalls. "Otherwise I would probably end up pursuing directing and let someone else do Chucky. And he said, 'Fine, no



Child's Play 2 is the first movie to combine Pinocchio and Captain Hook in one character.

problem.' And John Lafia said the same. And over the course of production meetings, it became clear that I was going to do *all* of the Chucky stuff. Every time you saw Chucky, unless he was in a major scene with an actress or actor, it would be my stuff. Since we started having union problems and fell behind, even more stuff's been thrown at me. 'Go out and do this insert, do this car chase.' I'm not complaining one bit."

In addition to the improvement in the lip-syncing of Chucky's dialogue, Yagher and his crew have come up with other Chucky refinements.

"We did a couple of new things," he reveals. "This time around, we created a new face that had a real sinister smile. One problem we had last time was not really getting a mean enough look out of him. Now he's got this one grimacing evil face. Also, we finally got a great full-walking shot without using a little person, like we did on the first film."

John Lafia is ready to shoot part of an extended kill sequence in which Chucky menaces, and then dispatches, a strict teacher at Andy's school. After Miss Kettlewell (Beth Grant) keeps Andy after class, the Good Guy arrives on the scene. Andy flees, and when Kettlewell returns, she thinks he's hiding in the closet. Bad mistake.

As the unsuspecting teacher orders her student to come out, Chucky flies at her, sending actress

Grant sprawling to the floor. As she looks up, Chucky looms threateningly over her with a yardstick in his hands.

Lafia now moves in close for a reaction shot on Grant as she turns to see the vile doll. The script calls for Chucky to smack his palm with the yardstick as he delivers the lines: "You've been very naughty, Miss Kettlewell. Time for me to teach you a lesson." For the shot, Lafia himself stands offscreen with a yardstick in his hand, feeding Grant the lines and gleefully punctuating them with unnerving whacks to his palm. He really gets into it, a rather Chucky-like grin playing across his face.

"The strength of the first film was Chucky himself," the director feels. "And, such as it was, the uniqueness of this little kid fighting him, rather than, say, a bunch of teenagers. And an ending that worked real well. What didn't work so well for me was its stilted quality. I didn't much care for the voodoo element. People accepted it, and I'm glad, but it was a little thin for me."

Lafia seems genuinely energized by the challenge of topping the predecessor in several areas.

"I would have loved more visual panache from the first film," Lafia relates. "*Child's Play 2* will be a real feast, visually. Cinematically, there'll be a lot more thrills. The film looks much bigger in terms of the design, the atmosphere, the lighting. There'll be plenty of

moody lighting and camera moves. I really studied everybody, from Sam Raimi to *The Invisible Man* to John Carpenter. If you like the style of Carpenter, or Brian De Palma, Raimi or Alfred Hitchcock, and I'm not saying I'm equalling those directors at all, but if you like the idea of that kind of filmmaking, you should love this movie. It really is reaching to be a much more fluid piece visually, with sequences in which you have 12 or 13 minutes without a word said, all sustained by the camera."

Child's Play 2 also promises an even higher quotient of laughs than the Tom Holland film, some—ugh—bordering on camp. But director Lafia doesn't feel overly compelled to play up this element.

"I haven't felt obligated to do that, to be honest," he admits. "Maybe because the script already has humorous lines and things in it. I haven't felt that I need to spend a great deal of energy on that. In fact, I've spent all of my energy on trying to make it scary. The primary thing to get out of the movie is scares. I don't know how funny it is or isn't going to be, to me that's not as important. If it scares the shit out of people and they find it funny too, great. But I want to take the series in the direction of full-out fright. I don't think it's campy, like some of the first film."

Lunch is called, and later the dailies are screened. Many of the crew watch as various shots go by of actor Gerrit Graham walking fearfully down a steep staircase into a darkened basement. Each time he gets to a certain point, he violently loses his footing and falls out of frame, courtesy of a yet-to-be-filmed shot of Chucky, secreted under the stairs, swiping at Graham's ankles with his trademark knife.

A few Chucky close-ups follow, where he's screaming and cursing at the top of his little lungs. The movements of his face are extremely lifelike and disturbing and seem to encapsulate Chucky's appeal as a horror figure.

"Chucky appeals primarily because the idea of the doll, although not really the newest idea, was fresh at the time of the first film and is still fresh," Lafia comments. "No other film had taken the doll-come-to-life idea and given the doll so much personality, such a unique presence. The first film showed me that people do love to be scared, that they love to see a horror film, but that they do need a fresh idea, even if it's just a recycled idea that's extended or elaborated

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CHUCKY

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upon. Chucky has a personality, a character, like Frankenstein or Dracula or Freddy. He grabs you."

Brad Dourif contributes his own views. "Chucky's motivation is fear," he states. "He's afraid of dying, afraid of what might happen to him when he dies. Do we just dissolve, disappear? Chucky does not want to disappear. So he's afraid. And he had to have rage, a rage potential he believed could generate supernatural power. Chucky represents something very primitive, something amoral. And also, in a deeper sense, he's a cultural shadow, the shadow of consumerism."

The inclusion of this thematic notion was something intended from the start by screenwriter Don Mancini, whose father worked in advertising, a fact that had much to do with how he came to write the original film. A lifetime of exposure to horror also played a part.

"I grew up seeing various sorts of ad campaigns before they'd come out," Mancini recalls. "I came to want to write something about how advertising affects children. At the time, the Cabbage Patch dolls were

very popular. Also, I like horror movies. I'd seen the *Twilight Zone* episode and whatnot in which dolls come to life, but felt it had never been done on a large scale with the doll a full-fledged character. I just felt that a foul-mouthed killer doll would be a memorable villain."

The next day, Mancini leads FANGORIA on a tour of the interior sets for the *Simpson* house. The affable screenwriter has been on-set during the entire shoot to make any adjustments in his script that might be necessary. He's enjoying the heady experience of seeing his script produced.

The *Simpson* home interiors have been strikingly designed by Ivo (Tremors) Cristante, complete with high ceilings, skewed angles, extra-tall doorways and superlong halls. The colors are garish, bright as the blue of Chucky's jeans or the red of his hair, intentionally but subtly suggesting a child's Caligari-esque nightmare.

Though a true genre fan (he also wrote the Charles Band production *Cellar Dweller*, though he wound up using a pseudonym), Mancini is somewhat concerned that the studio tide may be turning away from horror, pointing out that the genre is still too often denigrated in many

Hollywood circles.

"In some ways, it's the most limiting tag a writer can have in this town," Mancini confesses. "They really think if you do that you can't do anything else. Oh, they'll deal with you because they think you can make them money, but it's getting increasingly disreputable. In the '70s, it was more reputable because filmmakers like Spielberg and De Palma were spending lots of money on scary movies. But the country's gotten a lot more conservative. Just look at UA's decision to give up the whole *Child's Play* franchise. They were patting themselves on the back and giving news conferences about it."

Fortunately, there's more than one studio. And even if horror production may be temporarily on the wane, Universal, home of the most famous celluloid monsters (Frankenstein, Dracula, etc.) of all, has eagerly welcomed Chucky into their stable. Standing nearby the *Child's Play* 2 sets is the original opera house interior from Lon Chaney's *Phantom of the Opera*, still in use today. And now Chucky's crazed voice echoes around the ornate opera boxes and rich velvet curtains, mixing with memories of other legendary movie madmen. ☠

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