

# CHILD'S PLAY

By Steven  
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Young Andy just got the latest, every-kid's-gotta-have-one toy—a "Good Guy" doll. Andy's new pal is never far from his side and is so utterly life-like, it's frightening, and ultimately, very deadly. That's the premise of director Tom Holland's new film *CHILDSPLAY*, a "psychological thriller-with-a-twist," according to Holland, the screenwriter who made his stylish directing debut on 1985's *FRIGHT NIGHT*. The film marks a return for Holland to territory that is, as he put it, "more akin to *FRIGHT NIGHT* than anything else." In a somewhat ironic turn of events, MGM/UA plans to release the film at the end of July, head-to-head with New Century/Vista's release of *FRIGHT NIGHT II* on August 5th, which Holland had once been slated to direct.

According to Holland, the original story elements of *CHILDSPLAY* came from a script by Don Mancini, and is not to be confused with the 1972 film of the same name (3:1:31), a satanic parable directed by Sidney Lumet, starring James Mason and Robert Preston. Holland said he took the basic situations from Mancini's script and created his own original screenplay. Those basic elements told the story of a mother giving her son a doll, which the boy soon discovers is alive. Holland is furious about a ruling from the Writer's Guild that gives Mancini co-credit for Holland's script. "This is an original screenplay, even if the credits say it isn't," said Holland. "I'm

**A new horror/fantasy from  
writer/director Tom Holland,  
creator of *FRIGHT NIGHT*.**



Director Tom Holland waits pensively while an effects puppet of Chucky is readied for filming.

going to have to share a screenplay credit because of the Writer's Guild. They're so prejudiced against writer-directors."

The horror classic *DEAD OF NIGHT* (1945), *MAGIC*, Stuart Gordon's *DOLLS*, and a few episodes of *THE TWILIGHT ZONE* have all dipped into the territory Holland is now repaving. Holland described his story as psychological-suspense for the first 60-65 pages of the script, the first half of the film. Young Andy is swept up in several murders, and eventually committed for close psychological observation. While undergoing the scrutiny of doctors, more kill-

ings occur and Andy is vindicated. With his mother's help, Andy sets out to find and stop... "Chucky!"

Producing *CHILDSPLAY* for United Artists is David Kirschner, who entered the arena of filmmaking through the sale of his "Rose Petal Place" characters to Hallmark for merchandising and a series of television specials. As a writer and illustrator of children's stories, toys and children are two areas Kirschner is well-versed in. More recently Kirschner teamed with Steven Spielberg on *AN AMERICAN TAIL*, creating the characters, story, and serving as co-execu-

tive producer. Kirschner bought the rights to Mancini's original script for *CHILDSPLAY*. "I've always wanted to do a story about dolls," said Kirschner. "I was intrigued and frightened by my sisters' dolls when I was very young. The original story had elements in it that I loved."

*CHILDSPLAY* stars newcomer Alex Vincent as six year-old Andy, who discovers that "Chucky," his "best pal," can do a lot more than talk and roll his eyes. Teaming again with Holland is *FRIGHT NIGHT* star Chris Sarandon, this time as a Chicago detective. Catherine Hicks of *STAR TREK IV* plays Andy's mother, and Brad Dourif (*ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST*, *DUNE*) is a psychotic whose evil mind is a springboard for the film's action.

Kevin Yagher designed and built "Chucky" in at least 20 different effects incarnations. According to Yagher, the core of the doll army enlisted for service throughout filming included stunt dolls, rod puppet dolls, servo-motor driven dolls, cable-operated dolls, and a few ordinary non-effects-equipped dolls, called affectionately, "rag dolls." Aside from the mechanical puppet action in the film, Holland also planned to utilize forced perspective, matte, process, and blue screen shots to enhance his story.

The amount of puppet work in *CHILDSPLAY* is extensive. Puppeteers underneath the sets performed with the live actors above, referring to the action seen on a video tap off the Panavision camera, fed to monitors. "I'm using several



Chucky and midget Ed Gail, who plays the doll in scenes shot on a special oversized set built at Laird Studios.

warm and a bit noisy, because of the servos." The motors articulated eye, eyebrow and cheek movements.

Besides being completely satisfied with the effects side of the production, Holland felt he truly chose a wonderful cast. "The only one we're missing on this one is Roddy [McDowall]," he said, referring to the star of *FRIGHT NIGHT* and its sequel. Working with young Alex Vincent, for Holland, was a very rewarding experience. "We shot a scene in a mental institution where I brought Alex to tears, and ever since then he's been making leaps and bounds," said Holland. "He's going to give Roddy McDowall a run for his money in *HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY!*" □

Above: Andy (Alex Vincent) plays with his new best friend, a "Good Guys" doll that he dubs Chucky. Right: To make the doll come alive, effects expert Kevin Yagher built the doll as an animatronic puppet, shown here with four of its eight puppeteers.

types of puppets," explained Holland. "In addition to a close-up puppet, which really works wonderfully, we have a walking puppet with a ten-foot boom that attaches itself behind the puppet. There is a full-rig puppet, a standing puppet—which is attached via drilled holes in the floor. All the sets have been built four feet off the ground, so that the puppeteers can get underneath."

One of several techniques used to bring "Chucky" to life

in *CHILDSPLAY* was the use of a large set constructed one-third over scale at Laird Studios in Culver City. "We spent over \$100,000 to build the original set," said Holland. "Don't ask me how much we spent to duplicate it one-third larger—the whole damn set!" For these scenes Yagher built a mechanical head, worn by midget actor Ed Gail (the "little person" inside *HOWARD THE DUCK*). "This head is very much like the 'Howard' head," said Gail. "It's

