

CHILD'S PLAY 2

Get ready for another visit from Geppetto's worst nightmare.

By Kyle Counts

Lock your doors. Bar your windows. Check your toy chest... Chucky's coming back. The diminutive mechanical star of CHILD'S PLAY, the 1988 hit horror thriller, will again wreak bloody havoc in CHILD'S PLAY 2, directed by John Lafia and penned by series creator Don Mancini—both of whom separately served as writers on CHILD'S PLAY. The \$12 million sequel began shoot-



Directing the sequel, John Lafia.

ing November 6 at Universal Studios, which will release the film nationwide at Halloween under producer David Kirschner's Living Doll Productions banner. Kevin Yagher, designer and builder of the animatronic Chucky, has again been tapped to handle similar chores for the second installment (a "new, improved Chucky" has been promised). Yagher will also direct all second unit sequences involving animatronics.

Alex Vincent reprises his role as Andy Barclay, the sweet-faced eight year-old who is stalked by the doll. Brad Dourif returns to do the voiceovers of psychotic killer Charles Lee Ray, whose spirit possesses Chucky. Rounding out the cast are Jenny Agutter and Gerrit Graham, playing Andy's foster parents, the Simpsons; Christine Elise, as Kyle, a street-smart teenager who becomes Alex's ally; and Grace Zabriskie, as a social worker who experiences, as publicist Stacy Ivers put it, "death by Xerox." Chucky returns when a technician at the Play Pals toy factory reconstructs him, hoping to counteract plummeting sales due to publicity linking the doll to the murders depicted in CHILD'S PLAY. In a moment worthy of Mary Shelley, the rebuilt Chucky is re-animated by an electric charge and dispatches the technician.

CHILD'S PLAY proved profitable enough for United Artists (approximate domestic gross: \$35 million) to consider making a sequel within a month of its release. But MGM/UA decided to put CHILD'S PLAY 2 into turnaround on the grounds that Quintex, a prospective purchaser bidding to buy the company, was morally uncomfortable with such a horror project, only to see the Quintex deal fall through. Some industry

observers speculated that UA didn't have the money to fund the production, and invented the Quintex story to mask their cash flow problem.

"Certainly, from a business standpoint it [UA's decision to put CHILD'S PLAY 2 into turnaround] was a stupid decision," said Mancini, the film's 26 year-old screenwriter. "But if they were taking a genuine moral position, I can't really fault that. I believe that it was more Quintex's decision [to disown the project] than it was UA's. I do know, however, that UA retained points [in the sequel's profits]."

While the turnaround ordeal caused a three-week delay in the start of shooting, Mancini, for one, was thrilled to see Universal pick up the option to back the film. "I think it's the best thing that could have happened," he said. "Not only did we get a bigger budget here at Universal, but it's a much more solid studio—MGM is in total disarray. And the movie will certainly be better marketed and distributed here." The studio bidding war that ensued over the script (even Disney expressed interest) was also good for Mancini's career, he admitted. "After that, I got offered three projects in one week."

While the budget of CHILD'S PLAY was in the \$15 million range, the sequel was to be produced for \$3 million less—a



Alex Vincent returns as young Andy Barclay, again menaced by Chucky, the "Good Guys" doll given life behind the scenes by effects expert Kevin Yagher.

reduction made possible because, as a studio pick-up, it was made as a non-union film. (And, in Mancini's words, "We don't have a million-dollar director's fee [for Tom Holland], as the first one did.") But as a response to picketing at Universal by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) that saw the film's non-union crew vote for union representation, the budget escalated.

Lafia, whose first directorial effort was the noir-ish THE BLUEIGUANA (1988), secured the CHILD'S PLAY 2 assignment through producer Kirschner, who had promised him the job if a sequel was ever put into production. Lafia prepared for the assignment by checking out the competition. "I watched all John Carpenter's movies, as well as stuff like GREMLINS," he said. "Anyone who attempts to do a horror movie these days is an idiot if he doesn't study what everyone else has done. I looked at PSYCHO, HALLOWEEN and JAWS—three seminal horror movies—and THE EVIL DEAD. I watched and assimilated what the filmmakers were doing. The whole idea is to get ahead of people, to anticipate where they think the story is going and to surprise them. This film has an old-fashioned look to it—lots of low angles and shadows, which is something that audiences don't see much anymore."

Is Chucky the true star of the series? "Absolutely," Lafia replied. "He propels the story and he's the most flamboyant character. But I must say, the other characters in this movie hold their own against him. I've spent a lot of time working with

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complete jerks. The film is selling well and might make its money. All is forgiven—not forgotten, but forgiven.”

Whether theatre-goers prove as magnanimous is still anyone's guess. **JUST THE FEEBLES** is fairly hard-core. “We never set out to make porn,” said Jackson, “but rather a satire of porn. Our approach throughout the movie was a parody. If you make a film as excessive as this, you have to make it funny. I think it is very funny, and that helps dilute the harmful effect.” □

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

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TURTLES attempts to imaginatively negotiate the presence of foreigners (specifically Asians) in American life. Thus, whereas *emigre* Splinter and the Turtles themselves coolly mix Oriental mysticism with America's fun mentality, arch villain Shredder and the Foot represent the East at its most insidious (and corporate?), and therefore must be destroyed. Beneath the crazy surface of Turtlemania lurks a social tension between incorporating and/or obliterating the racial Other.

But perhaps the film's key moment occurs when, during one

of the endless ninja melees, Leonardo (I think) looks into the camera and exults, “God, I love being a Turtle!” Like Pee Wee Herman's celebrations of personal strangeness, this is an anthem of empowerment, a rousing acceptance of oneself as “cool” in all one's seeming freakishness. It's a message that children eagerly assent to in a society whose media constantly trumpets our powerlessness, the same children whose social heritage is adding up to environmental decay, sexual disease, and consumer oppression. Sad, then, that such a stirring expression of selfhood should arrive in a cinematic fast-food package of urban despair, jock foolishness, and Domino's Pizza, but as I ventured in my opening line . . . □

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the actors, and the performances are quite good—there are no duds in our cast. I think the acting is terrible in most horror films. I want this movie to be well performed as well as scary, like **JAWS** and Hitchcock's movies.”

Working with a mechanical actor, Lafia confessed, is what gains a director a “twenty-take” reputation. “I always try to get at least four or five printable takes any time Chucky is in the scene

because there are so many things that can go wrong. It's not an exact science [working with a puppet]. It's really helped to have Kevin [Yagher] and the guys rehearse with Chucky in advance of shooting. That's probably been the number one benefit of this being a sequel—having had Chucky pretested in the first movie. I've spent a lot of time with Kevin trying to understand how the puppet works technically.”

If Lafia looks a bit drawn these days, it's with good reason. “It's almost impossible to sleep,” he admitted. “Not because I'm obsessed. I work from a video monitor so that I can see right in front of me the image I'm shooting. Almost every night when I try to sleep, my dreams are framed in a video monitor. When you're spending thirteen, fourteen hours a day concentrating on something, you don't just go home and go to bed—your brain doesn't shut up.”

Does Lafia's nocturnal restlessness have anything to do with his concerns about following in the original's footsteps? “Not at all,” he shot back. “If I had to follow Kubrick or Scorsese, maybe I'd be worried. But **CHILD'S PLAY** isn't all that great of a movie. We're going to kick ass on this one. I want to scare the shit out of the audience.” □

DARKMAN

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assembled footage, the studio provided additional money for the enhancement of some scenes, including a spectacular helicopter sequence above the streets of downtown Los Angeles. Said Raimi, “Universal's been supportive of me, especially Jim Jacks. The marketing department seems very anxious to push the picture. That's a new experience for me, because I've never had a picture released that's not been X-rated. They liked what they saw and said, ‘Fine, keep working on it.’ What else could a filmmaker ask for?”

After **DARKMAN**, Raimi plans to continue developing his craft, gradually moving away from horror. Said Raimi, “When I grew up, I wasn't really a fan of horror pictures—it was only after I made **THE EVIL DEAD** that I began to look at them and appreciate their art and craftsmanship. What I really want to do is make the audience laugh—which is probably the hardest thing in the world. All my early Super-8 pictures were comedies. Only when I got in college and realized I had to make money did my partner Robert Tappert and I realize that we should make a horror picture. We knew no matter how badly we failed, it would still play somewhere.” □