

# CHILD'S PLAY

## An on-the-set report, pulling Chucky's puppet

By Kyle Counts

"Open wide, Alex—open nice and wide. And . . . stuff it! A beautiful stuff job. Keep it in there, Alex. Bite that sock!"

Eight-year-old Alex Vincent wasn't particularly fond of filming this scene in *CHILD'S PLAY 2*, which called for him to be awakened in his bedroom by Chucky, everyone's favorite devil doll, who has tied him up with a jump rope in anticipation of transferring his soul into the youngster's body. Director John Lafia can see that Vincent is getting tired, but he's not yet satisfied with the way the scene is working.

"Let's tie him up . . . let's go!" Lafia called out. An assistant once again bound Vincent's arm with the jump rope. Lafia, working closely with director of photography Stefan Czapsky (*VAMPIRE'S KISS*, *FLASHBACK*), planned to open the scene with a tight closeup of Vincent's eyes. The camera will then pull back to reveal Andy (Vincent's character) in bondage, with Chucky kneeling over him on his bed, gloating, as Andy tries to cry out for help, his mouth full of sock.

"Open up, Alex . . . here comes lunch!" cracked Lafia to the delight of the crew, which is sandwiched into the small room that is part of the impressively realistic split-level house created for the \$12 million horror sequel by production designer Ivo Cristante (*TREMORS*). The voice of actor Brad Dourif—who reprises his role in voice form as killer Charles Lee Ray, the spirit inside Chucky—is played back to give the scene the proper Grand Guignol texture.

"I told you we were going to be friends to the end," intoned Ray menacingly. "And now it's time to play. I've got a new game for ya . . . It's called Hide the Soul. And guess what? You're it!" Vincent bites on the sock and struggles valiantly again for the camera, whimpering skillfully as he tries to get free of his restraints. Lafia guided Vincent through a series of reactions, carefully observing it all on a video monitor that is positioned nearby.

Chucky's daddy, effects man Kevin Yagher, coordinated the animatronic puppet's movements with his puppeteers, who are stationed below the set in what is



Christine Elise as Andy's new step-sister, menaced by Chucky in *CHILD'S PLAY 2*, a sequel to the 1988 shocker which Universal Pictures opens nationwide November 9.

called "puppet hell." *CHILD'S PLAY 2* screenwriter Don Mancini stood at the foot of Andy's bed, catching the action on his video camcorder for a "Making of" video planned for cast and crew.

With his ponytail and earring, ankle-length coat and unshaven face, Lafia has the appearance of a renegade director. After the critical lambasting he took for his directorial debut, *THE BLUEIGUANA* (Roger Ebert roasted it, while Leonard Maltin gave it a "Bomb" rating), he knows that *CHILD'S PLAY 2* is an important step in his motion picture career. Lafia co-wrote the script for *CHILD'S PLAY*, sharing credit with Mancini, who wrote the original draft, and director Tom Holland, who wrote the shooting script. Lafia still has hard feelings about being barred from the set of the first film by Holland—along with Mancini—in a squabble over the film's screenplay credits (19:1:27). "I feel that Tom rode on the coattails of what Don and I did," said Lafia.

The story and characters for *CHILD'S*

*PLAY* were created by Mancini while a student at UCLA. Producer David Kirschner optioned the script, then titled *BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED* (changed for obvious reasons). What Lafia said he missed most from Mancini's original draft was the script's skewering of Madison Avenue. "Tom [Holland] took out all of Don's ideas about advertising—this doll being a social phenomenon like the Cabbage Patch dolls, and Chucky being a form of merchandising revenge. We had a more satirical edge on the corporate world in our draft. We're trying to bring that back to some degree in this film."

You can see the camaraderie that exists between Lafia and Mancini during their interplay on the *CHILD'S PLAY 2* set. Mancini is around both to observe and to handle dialogue alterations when necessary, but mostly he's having fun. Being part of the day-to-day experience of *CHILD'S PLAY 2* is, according to Mancini, "Wonderful. Everyone must think I'm crazy because I'm here every day with my video camera, shooting everything in sight. But, in a way, I guess I'm making up for what I missed the first time around. I'm having the most fun of anyone here because, basically, my work is done." It's not all play, though. "I'd like to direct in the not-too-distant future," said Mancini, who's using his tenure on the set as an education in filmmaking.

In getting started on the sequel, Mancini was fortunate to have the input of Lafia, producer Kirschner and associate producer Laura Moskowitz in shaping the story line. Based on the ideas generated in informal story sessions, Mancini wrote a fifteen-page outline from which he crafted the script in three months, toiling over his computer at home a minimum of five hours a day. He eventually did seven drafts.

The biggest hurdle came in figuring out how to resurrect Chucky from the dead. At first, it was thought that a police forensics expert would reconstruct Chucky to use as evidence; eventually, the forensics expert gave way to a technician at the Play Pals toy factory. The company is anxious to prove that Chucky is nothing but a harmless plastic toy—sales of Good Guy dolls have dropped drastically in the wake of the

# 2

## horror strings.

murders depicted in the first film. The sequel opens with Chucky's reconstruction at the factory lab. As his eyeball is dropped into its socket, a jolt of electricity reanimates the doll and sends a technician flying to his death. Said Mancini of Chucky's rebirth, "It worked in FRANKENSTEIN, and I think it'll work for us."

Mancini has also altered the mythology of the Charles Lee Ray character. "We were all extremely uncomfortable with the voodoo element that Tom Holland added," said Mancini. "Holland added the bit that Chucky was slowly becoming human because he needed that to motivate his third act. We didn't want to carry that idea into the second film, though we give Chucky certain human characteristics—he bleeds, for instance. But his hairline is not going to recede. Our take is that [Ray] has only a certain amount of time to transfer his soul into Alex's body, but we never expect you to believe that Chucky's really going to turn human."

With mom locked away in a padded cell, Andy goes to live at Children's Crisis Center until he is placed in the foster home of Joanne and Phil Simpson (Jenny Agutter and Gerrit Graham), shared with new foster sister Kyle, played by teenage actress Christine Elise (21 JUMP STREET). Once Chucky bumps off Andy's new guardians, he holds the girl hostage at knife point until the final showdown. When asked what she thinks of young co-star Alex Vincent, Elise's response was

**The animatronic Chucky, taking a ruler to Andy's school teacher. Inset: Filming the scene, director John Lafia (left) instructs the puppeteers, showing operation of a sophisticated new walking rig (center).**

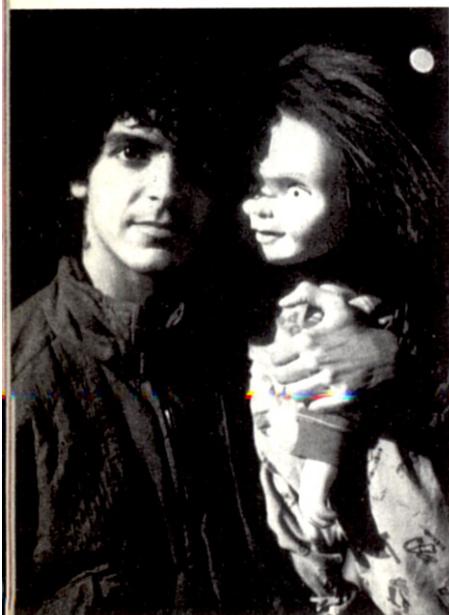


to smile knowingly. "Alex is a little kid who's more like a forty-year-old man," she said. "They had us together for a week for rehearsals before we started shooting. He was uptight at first. He was much more serious and would give answers like an adult. But he's loosened up quite a bit. Now he acts more like a kid. He's very smart, and an incredible stickler for continuity."

Added Agutter, "Obviously, spending a great deal of time around adults has made Alex very precocious. He's very mature in the way that he approaches what he's doing. It's a bit scary when you consider that he's only eight years old. I went to the studio commissary with him one day, and there he was, sitting amidst all these executives talking about agents and his next job. In the next breath he asked if he could show me a magic trick with the tablecloth. There's a mixture of little boy and professional adult."

On the sidelines, as Lafia prepared an insert shot of Elise and Chucky, associate producer Laura Moskowitz watched Kevin Yagher and his crew of puppeteers. Like everyone else on the CHILD'S PLAY 2 set, Moskowitz is astounded by the versatility of the new and improved mechan-

Mancini, who wrote the script for the original while a student at UCLA, having fun on the set with his buddy.



**FILMING PUPPET HORROR**  
**"What you hope for in a movie like this is a few key shots to really sell the doll as an entity, as an actor," said associate producer Laura Moskowitz. "You get an audience asking 'How'd they do that?'"**



Screenwriter Don Mancini and director John Lafia (right) rehearse a scene on the set.

ical wonder. "In the first film we never felt satisfied in seeing the doll walk, said Moskowitz, who also served as associate producer on the original.

Off-camera, a member of Yagher's crew showed him video footage of the walking Chucky, who is swinging a yardstick (for a scene where he murders Andy's teacher, Mrs. Kettlewell) in a most life-like manner. "What you hope for in a movie like this is a few key shots to really sell the doll as an entity, as an actor," said Moskowitz. "This scene will be one of those because that's the moment when you have the audience going 'How did they do that? Is that a little person or is that a puppet?'"

For CHILD'S PLAY, midget Ed Gale was used in key scenes to supplement the doll's actions, requiring costly sets scaled a third larger. "That was a major expense," recalled Moskowitz. "In this film, we don't have anything oversized at all. In fact, this time around, because Chucky works so well, we've had Ed basically standing by—we really haven't needed him. But you never know when you're going to get into a jam. Ed's on call for certain days

when we think we might need him—even in terms of just using one of his hands for an insert, like opening a briefcase. So he's a major part of the production, just in terms of security."

During a lunch break, Lafia hurriedly consumed a chef salad while he talked about the filming. "I'm a fanatic about preparation," said Lafia, producing as evidence a large black binder containing the script, broken down into weeks by scene numbers. Also bound up were storyboards (for stunt/effects scenes) and set layouts (for planning camera angles). Lafia also said he had miniatures of the sets built out of styrofoam to aid him in staging shots. His shot list was almost as long as the script itself.

The meticulous planning was in keeping with what Lafia said was his approach to the film medium. "I feel strongly that movies should be shot like silent films," he said. "I love a lot of the early silents—especially King Vidor's THE CROWD. I truly believe that you should try to tell your story in images rather than words. The words should be another texture within that—you

shouldn't have to rely on them. I try to show you, rather than tell you, what the story is about. I do a lot of thinking about the camera, and the audience being the camera—whose point of view are we seeing? I've shot an enormous amount of this movie from low angles, which represent both Andy's and Chucky's perspectives. I don't think you've seen as much ceiling in a movie since CITIZEN KANE.

"Also, I'm shooting Chucky in a way that's a lot scarier than the first movie—Tom [Holland] tended to have him in medium closeup all the time. My idea was to treat Chucky like another actor. He's a villain, so we have a lot of low angles on him, a lot of wide angles and quick dolly-ins, shadowy lighting. It's just how I would make a human being look sinister. I watched GREMLINS and other films that used puppets, and to a large degree their shots are kind of flat and dead-on. My style is more like Sam Raimi's."

Not only is Chucky a better-built monster, he'll be more menacing this time around as well, asserted Lafia. "He does a lot more in this film—he's in more scenes, and he does a lot more things, physically. He talks less, too. The more he talks, the less scary he seems to become. I love the voodoo doll segment in TRILOGY OF TERROR with Karen Black—that was the best doll movie ever made. The doll just made noises, and he was scarier than hell somehow."

Finally, there's the question of a CHILD'S PLAY 3. Will Lafia attempt another series outing? "That depends on two things: if Don's script is brilliant enough, and how this one does at the boxoffice."

Mancini said he considered it a responsibility to wrap up the CHILD'S PLAY series. "My feeling is, they're going to do Part 3 with me or without me. It would bother me to know that someone else was writing it. I look at the CHILD'S PLAY films as a trilogy; there's another story yet to be told, and I have the basics for that already in mind." □

# INSIDE CHUCKY

**Makeup effects expert Kevin Yagher created the movie's puppet star.**

*By Kyle Counts*

For Kevin Yagher's money, *CHILD'S PLAY 2* contains some of his best work. The creator of Chucky for the original, Yagher admitted that the horror series has benefited him greatly in terms of increased exposure, better billing in other films and—last but not least—his recent marriage to *CHILD'S PLAY* star Catherine Hicks. When asked how he came to be associated with the sequel, Yagher impishly wiggled his eyebrows and said, "I have the doll!"

Yagher's makeup truck, parked on the Universal Studios lot, is littered with hanging Chucky dolls, both rod and foam versions (each is labeled according to its function: "biting doll," "flailing doll," etc.), replacement skins and two interchangeable closeup Chucky heads.

Among Yagher's many chal-

lenges in *CHILD'S PLAY 2* was to make a better, more advanced doll on a smaller budget. "They [the producers] wanted to keep the cost of the doll down," he said. "And it really wouldn't have been fair to charge them for the design and construction of a new doll. I had to explain to [executive producer] David [Kirschner] that the doll took a tremendous amount of abuse in the first film and was quite gunked up. Plus, the skins were all ruined from corrosion and the metal parts had begun to oxidize. We basically had to take Chucky apart and put him back together. We strengthened him, plus we added full cable legs so we could get a good walk. Last time, we ended up cutting out the walking shot."

The new walking rig—made of aluminum and weighing in at 45 pounds—fits around the puppeteer "like the Power Loader in *ALIENS*; it hangs



Eight-year-old Alex Vincent as Andy, held hostage by Yagher's animatronic actor. Below: Chucky practices his phonetics. Yagher's puppeteers lip-synched the doll's dialogue scenes to slowed-down audio tracks for more realistic lip movements.



on his shoulders. He steps inside and holds the handles, and the puppet mimics his movements. He has to take baby steps to mimic Chucky's walk."

Chucky's face, said Yagher, "is more animated—we have four different faces with a neutral expression and one smiling face with a wicked smile and a mean brow, which was pre-set in the sculpture design."

Having Brad Dourif's voice to use on playback has made it possible for Yagher's puppeteers—F. Charles Lutkus, Brock Winkless, Kevin Carlson, Tony Rupperecht, Mecki Heussen, Ron Pipes, Van Snowden, Michael Trcic, Shannon Shea—to coax a more convincing performance out of Chucky. "Last time, we prerecorded Chucky's dialogue using [director] Tom Holland's voice," explained Yagher. "This time around, we got smart. We prerecorded Chucky's voice tracks in advance using Brad Dourif, and we slowed everything down on the voiceover [from 24 frames per second] to 18 frames per second, which makes it sound like a 45 record at 33 1/3.

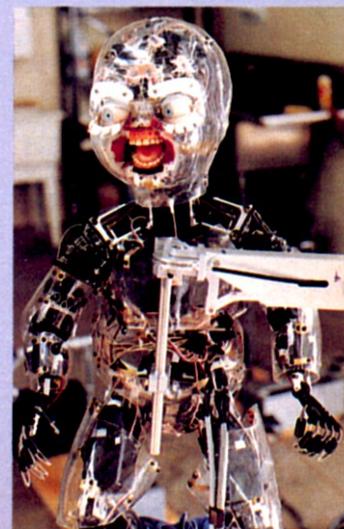
"On set, it gives the facial

guys a chance to hit their mark at times when the action is so quick that the puppeteer can't get to it—o's, p's and t's, stuff where his lips come together—or when Chucky's brow has to come down and go back up."

There have been no time delays caused by mechanical problems with Chucky, Yagher insisted. "We had a month of rehearsal, with no down time.

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The visible Chucky, a look at the mechanics of one of the radio-operated puppets built for *CHILD'S PLAY*.



Yagher and his animatronic brain child, directing the second unit effects work.



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and sees the bastard he was—is?—and refuses to embrace his own former identity, the film only hints at the emotional depth it might have achieved. Instead, it goes for a magic show blow out and planetary cataclysm. Next time Hollywood draws on the master of space and time for inspiration, let's have more Dick and less shtick. □

## DICK TRACY

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using every one of our shots, which is phenomenal when you consider that most directors leave tons of mattes on the cutting room floor, all because they don't move the story along. He really went non-stop to get the movie right, and Warren's been terribly misunderstood because of that. He's been forced into doing unwanted interviews on talk shows, where people are more concerned if he slept with Madonna than about the environment he was laboring to create. When a picture like DICK TRACY gets hyped to death, that only makes people criticize it when the film doesn't live up to their expectations. Warren never intended for anyone to find the meaning of life here, but for them to leave entertained."

Lloyd's good feelings, however, don't extend to production designer Richard Sylbert, Beatty's long-time collaborator who remarked that he was "saddled" with Disney's matte department. "I was pretty amazed that he could say that, and then turn around and tell everyone he loved our work," said Lloyd. "It's my suspicion that Sylbert made that comment before he'd even seen the film, and that's uncalled for, especially from such a respected and successful person. It wasn't very enjoyable to work with him either, but I'm a

firm believer that if you can't say anything nice about a person, then keep your mouth shut!"

Lloyd said he hoped that DICK TRACY's incredible matte work will clue Hollywood into surreal looks for other productions. "We're selling images to an audience, and I don't think realistic mattes would have worked for DICK TRACY," said Lloyd. "When you call attention to every brick, you only get someone in the audience who says 'nice matte.' We wanted to create an unusual environment right off, and let people know we weren't going to get any hokier. This means you can shoot any genre in a different way. You don't have to take a camera to Monument Valley to film a western anymore."

In the meantime, Lloyd said he plans to pursue a career as a director, using his achievements on DICK TRACY as a stepping stone. "I'll be leaving Disney to see the rest of the world, because I don't want to be solely known as an effects man," he said. "That's my biggest obstacle to directing features." □

## MISERY

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think he's sometimes frightened to just go with—how can I put this—he's so talented that sometimes he's over-violent because he's afraid he'll lose his audience. And he won't because he's brilliant as a character writer.

"Listen, I think basically if we don't scare people with this movie, the movie's not going to work," summed up Goldman. "So, it's not Shirley Temple. But I think some of the horrific elements are out. But I know she's going to be scary. I know it. Those are two wonderful characters." □

## JACOB'S LADDER

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tured things. I tried to use images from Frances Bacon—tortured, blurred shots, red streaks and sharp pieces which, when you freeze frame this stuff, looks just like Bacon's drawings." Gordon J. Smith's Toronto-based FxSmith company provided the makeup effects.

"I am rarely convinced that my films are going to do well," said Lync. "I had no idea FATAL ATTRACTION would be a hit. But I just saw all but one of the reels of JACOB'S LADDER for the first time, and I'm so fucking excited. This is a movie audiences are going to yap about." □

## PSYCHO IV

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sequels, Thomas viewed only Perkins' original performance (when Norman was closest to the age at which Thomas plays him) to help pick up the character's mannerisms. Garris praised the actor's cooperative nature, pointing out, "A lot of people would be afraid to put on a dress and a wig."

The film began production in Florida during the opening week of the new studio's theme park tour earlier this year—and in the middle of the rain season—shot 25 days, and managed to wrap on schedule, July 3, then returned to Universal Studios in California for postproduction. Garris' assessment of Universal's new facility was succinct: "Working on the stage was great; working on the back-lot sucked." Explained Green, "You just have so much noise. Although everybody cooperated, including the Hard Rock Cafe, which is fifty yards away, you just couldn't cut it off. Even when we were shooting all night

long, and the park was closed down, there was still cleaning going on for the next day. And we were close to the highway.

"There are reasons to shoot in Florida—it's a right-to-work state—but to say it was better to shoot PSYCHO IV in Florida when everything is here in California?—I would have to say no. Universal wanted to open the park with a major production being shot there—that was the main value, and that was fine." Green added with a smile, "If we're quoted out of context, we'll never work for Universal again."

Having brought the Hitchcock saga full circle to reveal Norman's origins, Zaloom doesn't believe the series is exhausted yet. "There could be a PSYCHO V," he said. "That will probably be the last one—maybe." □

## CHILD'S PLAY 2

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It does take time to coordinate human actors with Chucky, though. For instance, in a scene where Chucky trips Christine Elise, it took 33 takes—not only did we have to coordinate Chucky's movements, but Elise had to hit her mark by walking backwards. The most takes we ever did in the first show was fourteen or fifteen."

Yagher also directed the film's second unit ("all the Chucky stuff without actors"), including a scene where Chucky buries Andy's new Good Guy doll, and action footage such as when Chucky attempts to hang on to the hood of a car Elise is driving. "The second unit was a blast to do," said Yagher. "We would go off on our own, and I could work with Chucky and puppeteers without a crew of sixty people standing around looking at their watches." □