

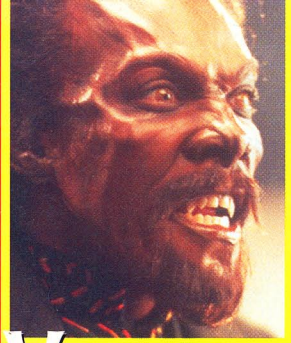
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THE BAD BOYS OF HORROR

No wimpy genre cop-outs here—Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino are making “From Dusk Till Dawn” the real thing.

Two auteurs—one vision” might be the best way to describe the unholy filmic marriage of *Desperado*’s on-set jack-of-all-trades director Robert Rodriguez and red-hot *Pulp Fiction* filmmaker Quentin Tarantino. In the thick of the downtown Los Angeles summer heat, the two friends are plugging away at *From Dusk Till Dawn* (Rodriguez directing, Tarantino scripting and starring), a good old-fashioned bloodbath kind of horror movie with big money and an

By ANTHONY C. FERRANTE

A-list cast (George Clooney, Harvey Keitel, Juliette Lewis) mixed in with familiar genre faces (Tom Savini, Fred Williamson and KNB’s creature creations). Tentatively still set for a December 22 release, the film may be bumped into January.

“This movie won’t be easy to categorize,” beams the 27-year-old Rodriguez. “It’s just like *Pulp Fiction*—it’s a bizarre film. And it’s

something horror fans haven’t seen and probably won’t see at this level ever again.”

It would seem an impossible dream that these filmmakers would link up for one of the most eagerly awaited genre films of the year (they previously collaborated on this fall’s anthology *Four Rooms*), but with *Dusk*, they’ve managed to convince Miramax’s Dimension Films divi-



sion to plop down \$18 million for a balls-out shocker—with the big bonus of total creative control. “We’re doing this independently,” notes co-producer Elizabeth Avellan, who is also Rodriguez’s wife. “Miramax isn’t bothering us—we’re allowed to just do it. That’s how *Pulp Fiction* was for Quentin. There’s a certain trust they have. Being left alone and free to do what they want is how Quentin and Robert were able to get where they are. They worked at their craft and did their first movies for nothing. Miramax appreciates that, because [studio honchos] the Weinsteins came out of nowhere too. So they’re like, ‘Let them do their thing and they’ll come up with something cool for us.’”

Nonetheless, the producers are no doubt well aware that the results will certainly be much more gratifying for the average Fango fan than for Dimension’s marketing department, especially if the heavily blood-drenched floors on set are any indication. “They keep watering down all kinds of movies, especially horror films, so we’re trying to push the envelope,” says Rodriguez. “In a

horror film, you’re supposed to get what you pay for, and get what you deserve.”

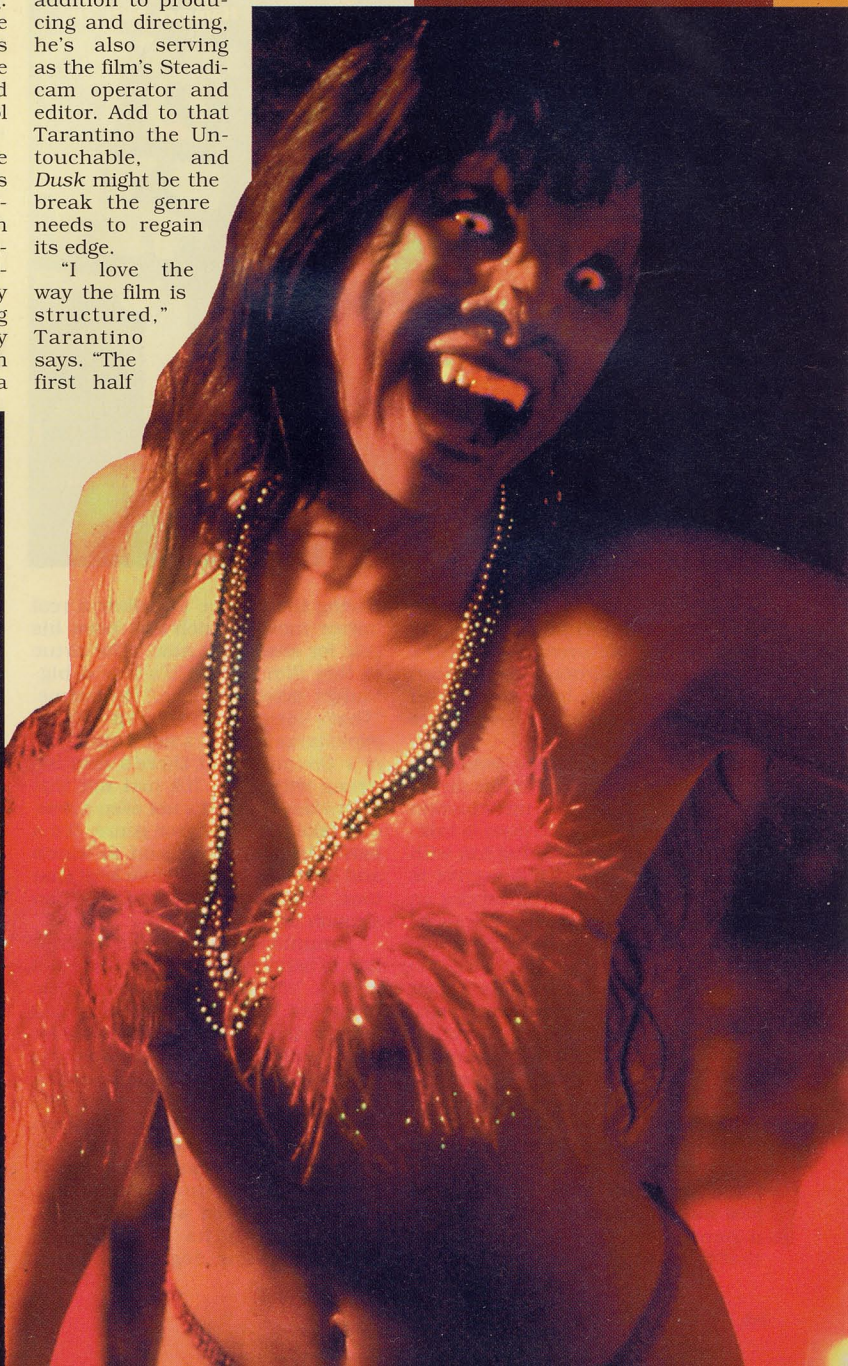
While promises can, and very often are, broken by filmmakers (especially in an unpredictable climate where studios are wont to sell their horror movies as “psychological thrillers”), the powers that be behind this film are trying to insure that its effectiveness will not be sabotaged by the time it arrives in theaters. Part of this involves Rodriguez’s multifaceted talents; in addition to producing and directing, he’s also serving as the film’s Steadicam operator and editor. Add to that Tarantino the Untouchable, and *Dusk* might be the break the genre needs to regain its edge.

“I love the way the film is structured,” Tarantino says. “The first half

is closer to *Silence of the Lambs* in that it’s a real serious, intense thriller, while the second half turns into this big, wild carnival of horrors like *Evil Dead II*. In fact, the second half is very influenced by *Evil Dead II* in the sense that there’s humor and one damn thing after another coming at you.”

On the second to last day of principal photography, it’s clear that the two filmmakers complement each

Eat your heart out, *Showgirls!*



This looks like a pretty scary place even before the vampires show up.



other, yet are also a study in contrasts as well. Rodriguez is living up to his reputation for staying busy as he waits for a complicated makeup effect to be rigged by KNB's Greg Nicotero and Howard Berger. Instead of relaxing in his director's chair, the fidgety director keeps himself occupied by playing with a prop guitar.

"The guitar keeps me calm—I would never have had time to play one on my other movies," says

"We really wanted to come up with monster concepts that got away from simply being fangs."

—Robert Rodriguez

order," Tarantino quips to his small audience.

Later, in his trailer, Tarantino waxes enthusiastic about finally

audience exists, but the problem is it has become a ghettoized genre. There hasn't been a really good low-budget horror film in a long time, and especially with a theatrical release. They're all going straight to video, which cuts out 50 percent of their effectiveness right there."

The main problem, Tarantino feels, is that the big studios have created a monopoly on the horror market by churning out "mainstream" fare that doesn't have any faith in the genre's audience. "They're trying to make horror films for people who don't go to horror films, which turns off the fans automatically," he says. "Studios are scared of the word 'horror' and we're not. This is a horror film—a rip-off-your-head-and-drink-your-blood horror film."

On the set, Tarantino's promises are not proving empty, as carnage is getting ample play; numerous special FX gags that were pushed to the end of the shoot due to time constraints are being shot. On a normal movie, these scenes would have simply been cut, but Rodriguez knows the importance of delivering the goods and is sparing nothing to film every gruesome thing he can—even if it means going over schedule a couple of days. "We just keep shooting all this cool stuff," the director says. "It's been long hours and a lot of shots. It's probably going to be a two-and-a-half-hour movie. Everyone's character kind of grew and got more stuff to do. I will have to cut it down, though there might be an epic-length laserdisc."

Savini has been one of the benefactors of this growth of character. Playing the quick-witted biker Sex Machine, the actor/makeup guru began with a couple of lines and ended up as the film's unstoppable Jackie Chan type. "I knew we would go to hell if we put Tom Savini in the movie and didn't do anything with him," says Rodriguez. "So I started thinking of all the things we could do with him, and when he said he'd do his own stunts, we had him flipping off pool tables and other things. Now he's Mr. Badass. He has a bigger part than anybody else in the last half. Savini won't die; he keeps coming back, and horror fans will love that. Every time



Rodriguez, who is notorious for knocking off 50 to 70 setups a day on his prior pictures, *El Mariachi*, Showtime's *Roadracers* and *Desperado*. "Things that have to do with horror effects take time—you have to wait for the monsters."

Meanwhile, Tarantino (who has wrapped his acting role but is on set to shoot a videotaped introduction to the *Pulp Fiction* laserdisc) is talking up a storm and having fun with the cast and crew. Hyperactive is the operative word as he carries on the type of movie-absorbed conversations that would have probably gotten him fired from his early job at a video store. Outside his trailer, he chats with a couple of crew members about special "director's cuts" he used to make of movies he really liked (such as editing together the "exposition-heavy," watered-down TV cut and the incomprehensible theatrical version of the overlooked 1982 shocker *The Sender* into a largely complete video edition). "I'm just waiting for some kid to send me a homemade tape of *Pulp Fiction* that tells the story in chronological

having the chance to deliver a real horror movie, which has been his goal for some time now. "The virtue of this film is that it's like a big-budget drive-in movie," he beams. "That's what's good about it—it's an exploitation film. It's not *Bram Stoker's Dracula*—and there's nothing wrong with that. It's just not this high-class thing. It's not even a serious take on the horror genre. It's a movie to drink beer and to watch and hoot and holler. We've kept that tone, even though we're doing it on a much bigger scale."

Tarantino lives up to the description of being "the first director who's a rock 'n' roll star" when, a few moments later, a couple of young female visitors knock on his trailer door requesting an autograph. He agrees to comply after the interview and then offers his observations about the current state of horror. "We feel there's actually a big audience out there for horror that hasn't been showing up because the movies have been weak," he says. "*Species*, with its big opening, proved to some degree that that

you try to kill a piece of him, another one turns into something else."

Currently shooting on the set of the "Titty Twister" (the film's Mexican bar), a vampire "rat" version of Savini is fighting off star Clooney. One of the film's most impressive and threatening KNB creations, it attacks, bites and does all sorts of horrible things to the actor throughout the afternoon. On the video monitor, the scene plays beautifully; the cable-controlled/animatronic creation provides a show-stopping setpiece.

"Shooting horror stuff is the same as shooting the action—it has to be energetic, like *Aliens*," says Rodriguez, who moves around the stage from the "rat" setup to various 2nd-unit shots that include everything from a deep-focus close-up of a crossbow, Sam Raimi style, to a vampire getting hit with a balloon full of holy water. "The faster you move, the better the movie looks anyway," the director continues. "In *Desperado*, I'd reload the gun and start shooting again. Here we reload the goop and the monsters."

The teamup of Hollywood's two most wanted directors began back in March 1993, when both were working on the Sony Pictures lot—Rodriguez prepping *Desperado* and Tarantino developing *Pulp Fiction* (then a TriStar project). "We were both working late at the office and decided to go out to eat," Rodriguez

recalls. "I was telling Quentin how I liked shooting in Mexico, because there are no rules over there and you can have more freedom. People can run through the streets with guns in your movies and no one will question it. Then he said he had written a horror movie that was set in Mexico."

Rodriguez ultimately read the script, but it was tangled up with various producers and unavailable. A year and a half later, the producers were interested in Tarantino becoming involved with the film again, and he said he would rewrite it only if Rodriguez directed it. The deal went through quickly, and the film went into production this past summer. "We got very excited about it and wanted to do it fast—we didn't want to spend our whole lives on it," says Rodriguez. "We wanted to go and shoot the hell out of it rapidly. We originally wanted it out by Halloween, but most of the actors were not available right away, so we had to wait."

Though Tarantino had the option to direct the film, he always saw it as a script for somebody else, and when it became available again he thought Rodriguez's "quick poppy style" could make it work. "Years

would pass, and from time to time I pulled the script out, read it and thought, 'This is really cool,' but I didn't have much hope for it," Tarantino admits. "It would be so easy to do badly. They could get the



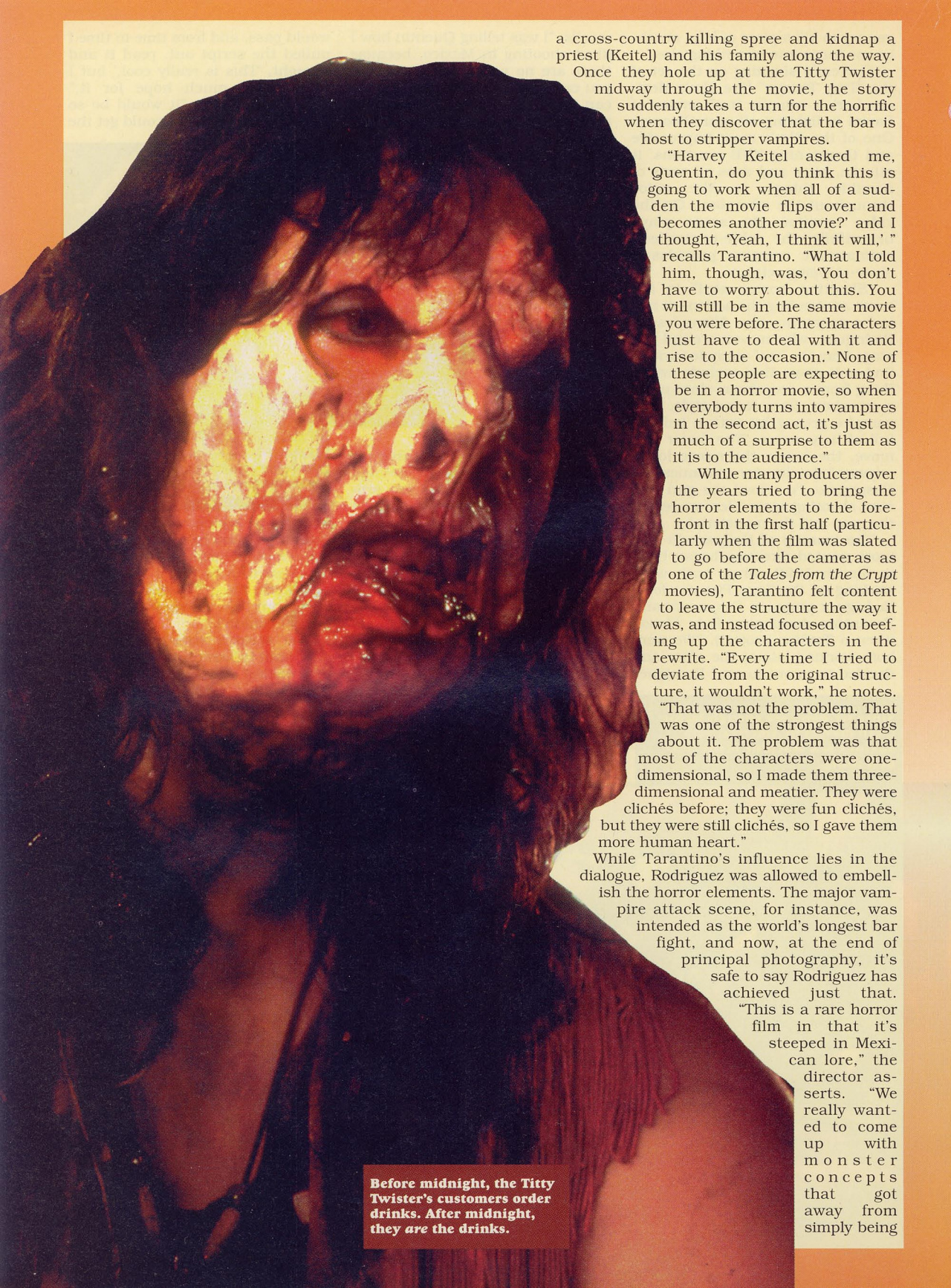
It's their biggest horror film yet, and KNB EFX's Gino Crognale (left) and Greg Nicotero know what's at stake.

wrong guy, which would probably be the case, and he wouldn't understand it or just make it cheap. And I didn't want to do it. If I could do it real quick, like in 18 days, I would have, but it's so special effects-heavy I couldn't."

The script's structure is also important to Tarantino, who is used to breaking down and reinventing genre conventions. *Dusk* starts off as an archetypal Tarantino film, revolving around two psychopathic brothers—Seth and Richard Gecko (Clooney and Tarantino)—who go on

Since we don't see enough Jackie Chan movies in America, Tom Savini's *Sex Machine* is the next best thing.





a cross-country killing spree and kidnap a priest (Keitel) and his family along the way. Once they hole up at the Titty Twister midway through the movie, the story suddenly takes a turn for the horrific when they discover that the bar is host to stripper vampires.

"Harvey Keitel asked me, 'Quentin, do you think this is going to work when all of a sudden the movie flips over and becomes another movie?' and I thought, 'Yeah, I think it will,'" recalls Tarantino. "What I told him, though, was, 'You don't have to worry about this. You will still be in the same movie you were before. The characters just have to deal with it and rise to the occasion.' None of these people are expecting to be in a horror movie, so when everybody turns into vampires in the second act, it's just as much of a surprise to them as it is to the audience."

While many producers over the years tried to bring the horror elements to the forefront in the first half (particularly when the film was slated to go before the cameras as one of the *Tales from the Crypt* movies), Tarantino felt content to leave the structure the way it was, and instead focused on beefing up the characters in the rewrite. "Every time I tried to deviate from the original structure, it wouldn't work," he notes. "That was not the problem. That was one of the strongest things about it. The problem was that most of the characters were one-dimensional, so I made them three-dimensional and meatier. They were clichés before; they were fun clichés, but they were still clichés, so I gave them more human heart."

While Tarantino's influence lies in the dialogue, Rodriguez was allowed to embellish the horror elements. The major vampire attack scene, for instance, was intended as the world's longest bar fight, and now, at the end of principal photography, it's safe to say Rodriguez has achieved just that.

"This is a rare horror film in that it's steeped in Mexican lore," the director asserts. "We really wanted to come up with monster concepts that got away from simply being

Before midnight, the Titty Twister's customers order drinks. After midnight, they are the drinks.

fangs, because Mexican vampires are much different from other legends. They're more brutal. They would sacrifice people to the sun to keep it going during Aztec times and rip people apart to get more blood out. It's a real ritual. So we came up with this concept that they had turned an old temple into a bar, just to entice customers over the centuries for sacrifices."

Though Rodriguez affirms that there will be a nod to famed Mexi-

"The virtue of this film is that it's like a big-budget drive-in movie. It's not *Bram Stoker's Dracula*."

—Quentin Tarantino

worried about cuts, though, because I have a good relationship with the MPAA. We're going to have to go back a few times, but one of

the case with this. The good stuff will still be in there."

Nonetheless, everyone has a theory or two on how *From Dusk Till Dawn* will ultimately end up in theaters. Beyond Rodriguez's confirmation that there will be a longer laserdisc version, the director also suspects that the success or failure of the NC-17 *Showgirls* might influence the decision to put *Dusk* out as the first horror film with that rating. "We've also been thinking about coming out with simultaneous versions," says Rodriguez. "We would do an R version and one that's unrated—it could be a first."

Both self-confessed Fango fans (Tarantino started with the hard-to-find *Motel Hell* issue #9, and Rodriguez shortly thereafter), the duo can each recall incidents where friends told the budding young filmmakers that one day they'd be featured in its pages. "I've always liked the magazine and felt inspired by it, because it made me want to make movies," says Tarantino. "Whereas someone would read *American Cine-*

Is he aiming at monsters—or at critics of *Destiny Turns on the Radio*?

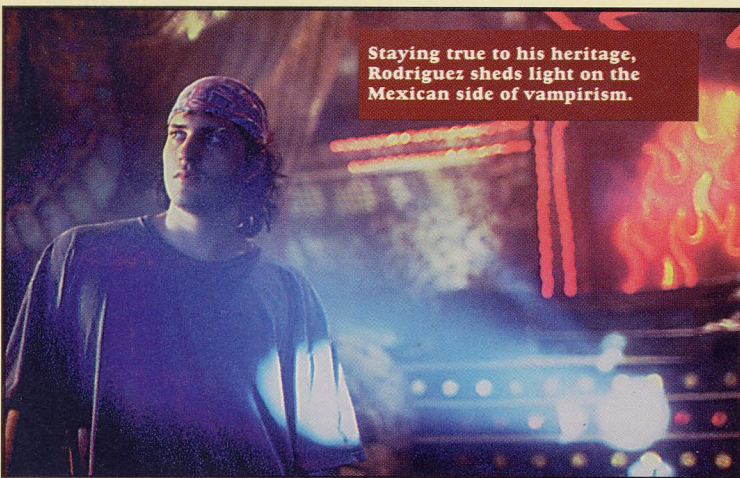


can horror wrestler Santo in the film, the extent of his presence is minimal (if you pay attention to the bar walls, you'll see faded photographs of the wrestler pasted all over, alongside such other wrestling stars as Andre the Giant). "Everybody said we had to have Santo in there, so we have a burial site for him in the film, and in the bar's back room there's a bust of him," says Rodriguez, who reveals that he's received plentiful fan mail suggesting he do a Santo movie.

According to the director, one of the more interesting challenges of *Dusk* was working on something he didn't write for the first time, but even after being present to defend his work, Tarantino admits that Rodriguez usually got his way. "Robert's a bully," Tarantino says. "He's the best bully I've ever seen, though, because he doesn't do it by picking on you; he does it by being nice to you."

The one place Rodriguez will most likely get bullied himself, however, is with the MPAA. Despite everyone's assurance on set that *From Dusk Till Dawn* will get by the ratings board relatively unscathed, it's pretty obvious from the constant horrific activity that there will definitely be some concessions made. "We can't do an NC-17 because this is going out with a big 2,000-screen release," says Tarantino. "I'm not

the things I've learned is that I usually get them released exactly the way I want them to. Again, my films are different from Robert's. Never-



Staying true to his heritage, Rodriguez sheds light on the Mexican side of vampirism.

theless, when you're as intense as those films are to start with, yeah, you cut this and cut that, but you still have a strong movie at the end of the day. It's still got real impact. You see a film like *Hard Target* and go, 'Wow, that's a lot of shit.' It doesn't look like they cut everything out. Fans may go, 'Oh my God, the good stuff got cut out like in *Friday the 13th Part 2*,' but that won't be

matographer and get all excited, I would read FANGORIA and feel the same way, because the heroes were the directors. People would write in saying, 'Joe Dante is God,' and the directors and makeup effects artists were the real horror stars of the time. It was no longer star-driven—it was the people behind the scenes who drew in the fans."

(continued on page 76)

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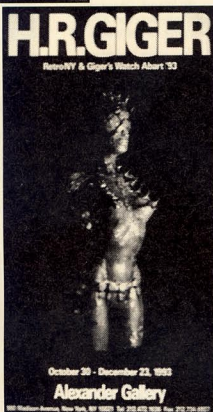
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DUSK

(continued from page 37)

Both filmmakers would like to continue in the genre, and Rodriguez has a head start with a script for *Predator 3* he's currently finishing up for 20th Century Fox. "I started writing it a few years ago when *Desperado* was postponed and my agent got me the gig," recalls Rodriguez, whose story involves a group of humans traveling to a *Predator* planet. "I didn't really finish it, though. I would call it *Predators*, and it's more along the lines of *Aliens*—there would definitely be a bunch of them. If I do finish it, I probably won't direct it; I just want to do my own stuff. They own it. I'd rather create something of my own. Then you participate in the profits and control it a little better instead of watching them market a bunch of goofy stuff."

As for the immediate future, Tarantino's slate is filled only with acting gigs, with his most recent turn being in the upcoming Spike Lee movie *Girl 6*. "I would totally like to be involved in another horror film as either a writer, director or actor, but I have nothing on the burner," he says. "I have nothing after this—I'm finished for now."

By contrast, Rodriguez's job is just beginning as he goes into a round-the-clock editing whirlpool in order to complete *From Dusk Till Dawn* in time for its January opening. "On a normal Hollywood movie, there's usually an editor working on the movie from the moment they start shooting," he says. "So there would have been an editor working on this movie for 10 weeks as of now, but I'm the editor and I'm just getting ready to start. I will be 11 weeks behind by next week and have about four weeks to edit the movie where most people have 20. So we will be cutting it close."

While *Dusk's* delivery date may be somewhat flexible, the due date of Rodriguez and Avellan's first child won't be, as brand new baby boy Rocket Valentino Rodriguez will have arrived by the time this story goes to press. "Every time my baby cries, I'm planning to record him with my little digital tape recorder, put his voice into the computer and morph it to make it a monster voice," says Rodriguez with a grin. "Kids make such horrible high-pitched sounds and he's going to be crying all the time, so why not put the kid to work the moment he's born? Give him a strong work ethic and get him his first paycheck before his feet even hit the ground." ❌

FREAK

(continued from page 45)

and the other castle staff bustle to prepare for their arrival. We are told in friendly but *no uncertain* terms that we have to finish by Saturday the 9th and be out. "Couldn't they put us in a hotel for a day?" I ask, unanswered. Stuart rushes to finish as many of the remaining shots as he can, focusing on Helen. During that long night, I pack my bags in full makeup while wearing my two-inch nails. Helen and I joke about the glamour of the film world as she whips me with the fake (finally) cat-o'-nine-tails. She gives us a start when she leans up against a doorway, breathing heavily. "Are you all right, Helen?" Stuart asks in alarm. Helen snaps out of it and says, "Of course, dear boy, I'm *acting*." With about a 22-hour day under our belts, Mike, John and I rip off my makeup (and bits of skin with it in my haste) in order to get to Rome to catch our flights home. I thank Stu, say hurried *arrividercis*, collapse on the plane, and eight hours later am home in LA, about 10 pounds lighter—with the film incomplete, despite all our hard work.

.....

Epilogue: Here it is 16 months later, and *Castle Freak* is finally completed and being released. Full Moon went through some difficult financial times, the reasons for which are varied and the stuff of rumors. Charlie Band's company owed many of the American actors overtime, and in my case, with all the makeup, it amounted to about \$6,000. Those Americans owed refused to come in and do dialogue replacement on the film until back pay was met. Months passed, and we finally were worn down by Stuart's pleas to accept a "payment plan" from Charlie so at least the film could be finished and all our hard work could see the light of day. The Americans came in and, to the best of my knowledge, were paid. Despite Band's written "personal guarantee," I am still owed thousands of dollars for all the overtime I put in. As of last Christmas, through subsequent correspondence with my European cohorts, I heard that Band's Italian producer failed to pay the actors approximately half to three-quarters of their salaries. The Auschwitz survivor was also among those not paid. That is the quintessential "low-budget" story for me. When *gonifs* rip off a Holocaust survivor to line their own pockets, you know you've landed on Planet Hollywood. Freaky, huh? ❌