

Scream previews:

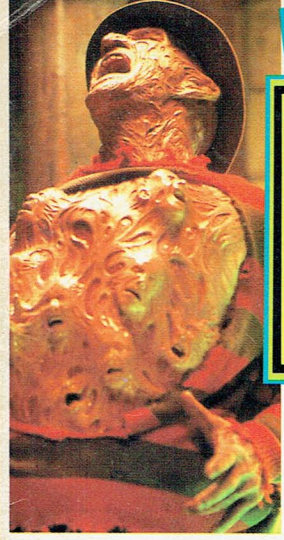
Halloween movie countdown

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HORROR IN ENTERTAINMENT



NIGHTMARE 4
The death of Freddy

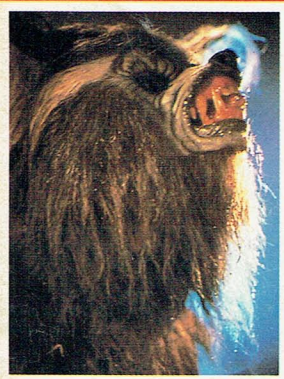
**Cronenberg's
DEAD RINGERS**
Twins of terror

**Carpenter's
THEY LIVE**
Aliens among us

THE BLOB
wants you



Expanded VIDEO
coverage:
All the new releases
The good, the bad,
the worst



WAXWORK
Gory monster rally

HELLRAISER II



EXCLUSIVE!
Clive Barker interview:
A Matter of Splatter



Who wouldn't take orders from this guy?

RUN!



RUN!
RUN
FOR
YOUR
LIFE!

Photo: Bruce Birmelin

By **MARC SHAPIRO**

Life imitates art. Pretty profound stuff, eh? Well, try this one on for size: Life takes its size 13 jackboot and plants it upside the head of art. No, it's not pretty, but that's basically been the attitude stalking director John Carpenter as he squeezes out his SF/political satire *They Live*.

For instance, witness Carpenter and his crew during an evening shoot centered in downtown Los Angeles' Skid Row. A scattering of street people, the ones who haven't

When John Carpenter starts pulling the old "not a horror film" business, we'll let him get away with it.

yet staked out a sidewalk stretch or a cardboard box for the night, watch as a camera crew spits out some footage of *They Live* star and former pro wrestler Roddy Piper wisecracking as a prelude to some heavy duty action.

Suddenly, some gunshots ring out from a nearby building—gunshots that are *not* in the script.

The proceedings stop dead. But when moments pass and nobody *drops* dead, filming continues. Minutes later, a police helicopter rattles into view and waves a searchlight around the streets. Carpenter never discovers if the cops turned up any bodies or the source of the gunfire.

"But you know, shooting in the scummy parts of town was probably the easiest part of making this movie," reflects Carpenter, some weeks after completing principal photography. "The only time we were in any real danger was when we were shooting some special effects stuff out in the San Fernando Valley [upscale central, for the uninformed] and the police responded to an explosion we set off by shooting automatic weapons over our heads."

And you wonder why Carpenter's head shag has gone from gray to

silver in the past few months? The director, long, lean and laidback despite his editing crush on *They Live*, is not hellbent on recalling urban guerrilla tales of terror. In fact, he points out that the shots fired during *They Live*'s filming were probably the scariest things about the movie. "*They Live* is not a horror film," announces Carpenter.

"*They Live* poses the question of what would happen if the Reagan revolution was run by aliens from another planet."

—John Carpenter

(Listen, that remark pissed this reporter off at first, too. It's not as though we don't have enough filmmakers bending over backwards to defend their splatter-drenched epics as "relationship movies" rather than horror. But hey, this is John Carpenter, the guy that gave us *Halloween* and *The Thing*. We're not talking about the mercenary who directed *The Unholy*. So let's give him the benefit of the doubt. We

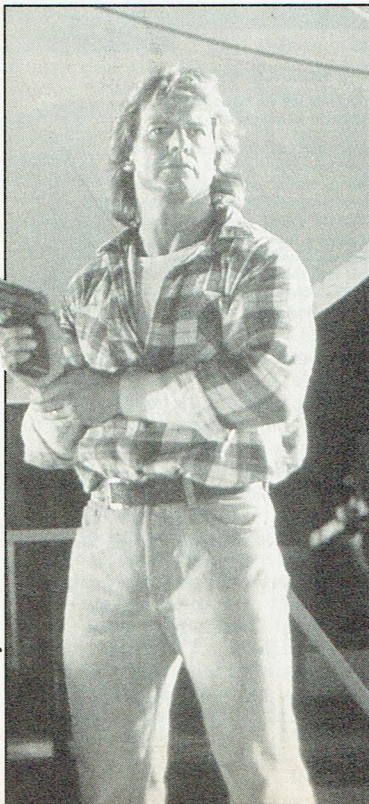


Photo: Sidney Balwin

It's up to former wrestling superstar Roddy Piper to save the world in John Carpenter's *They Live*.

WAVE

can always go for the jugular later.)

"It's a science-fiction political satire," Carpenter continues. "The film poses the question of what would happen if the Reagan revolution was run by aliens from another planet."

OK, now that Carpenter has made things interesting but still basically clear as mud, let your correspondent give it a try: *They Live*, which stars Roddy Piper, Keith David of *The Thing*, Meg Foster, Peter Jason, Buck Flower and Raymond St. Jacques, centers on out-of-work blue-collar stiff John Nada (Piper) who has come to Los Angeles to find work. While getting his act together in a homeless center called Justiceville, Nada and his newfound friend Frank (Keith David) stumble upon a decades-old plot by aliens to take over the Earth and its resources through the use of a hypnotic form of mind control hidden subliminally in television broadcasts and print ads. Nada, with the aid of a special pair of sunglasses he discovers in an alien hideout, is able to see through the aliens' human disguises to their ghoulish cores. In the words of the Bard, Nada is a man alone who takes on the space fiends in an attempt to save his and Earth's humanity.

Along the way, he discovers that the world is really in black-and-white (colored for our benefit by the aliens), has a borderline



Wow! Farrah Fawcett puts in a cameo appearance sans makeup.

Photos: Copyright 1988 Universal City Studios
Photo: Bruce Birmelin

meaningful relationship with cable TV worker Holly (Meg Foster) and learns the most horrible secret of all—that earthlings are willing to trade their loyalty and support to invading hordes for money and power.

On paper at least, *They Live* is an odd elephant, a modest-budget

fantasy with an extremely liberal and often cynical point of view. "Brave" isn't the word for it; "balls the size of cantaloupes" fits better. Produced by longtime Carpenter cohort Larry Franco from a Frank Armitage script, the project features FX work by Jim Danforth and special makeup FX by Frank

This shot echoes *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*.

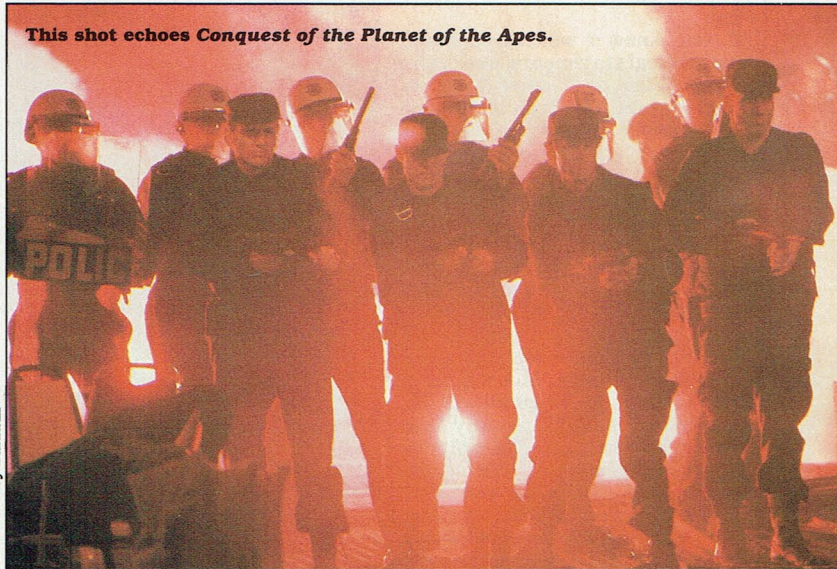


Photo: Sidney Baldwin



Makeup artist Frank Carissosa shows us what the aliens really look like underneath their human guises.

Carissosa, both *Prince of Darkness* contributors.

Following *Prince of Darkness*' critical drubbing, Carpenter says he wanted to try something "eclectic" for his next opus. A bit of research uncovered a short story chestnut written by Ray Nelson called "Eight O'Clock in the Morning." The tale, first published in 1963, tells of a man who is hypnotized by a stage mesmerist and wakes to discover that there are creatures hiding among the human race, controlling our every action. Carpenter's initial fascination grew as he replaced the hypnotic element with a visual theme.

"I also knew I wanted to make some political statements, one of the biggest being that everybody is proud to be an American as long as they can make money at it," recalls the director. "For the longest time, I wasn't quite sure how to tell the story. One way was to make it scary, but this element of humor always kept creeping into it. I was at a loss as to how to bring it all together. . . until I met Roddy Piper at *Wrestlemania III*."

In his never-ending search for atmosphere, Carpenter and company have taken over a Mom & Pop grocery store in a rundown LA neighborhood so greasy-grimy that the intermittent rain can only be considered a godlike act for cleansing both the sidewalks and local residents. Inside the store, Carpenter and a boatload of technicians adjust the lighting, arrange

the canned goods and snatch the odd candy bar for a midmorning snack.

A call goes down the line that "John is ready for Roddy." Moments later, the former WWF champion and all-around questionable human being saunters into the store, dressed in regulation Nada mufti of flannel shirt, blue jeans and sneakers. While a stylist gives the rowdy one's hair a final touch-up, Carpenter coaches Piper on how he will wander into the store, scan the place through his special lenses and

No one dared try this move on Piper's Pit.



spy one of the creepy crawlies in the guise of an old lady. He will insult her heritage in language you'll have to pay your \$6.00 to hear, and the store owner will call the cops.

Extras take their marks. The cameramen get set. Carpenter says, "Go." Piper shuffles through the door, does a surprisingly good take of the store scan and advances to his encounter with the extraterrestrial granny.

"And you, you're uglier than ****," growls Piper in the one bit of dialogue Fango can almost print. The store owner hollers, "Hey, you get out of here before I call the cops!"

Carpenter likes what he sees and calls a half-hour break for lunch. And this reporter (a firm supporter of the "Wrestling is fake" credo) risks life and limb by venturing into the trailer (i.e. cage) of Roddy Piper. "There are all kinds of stories that have parallels to *They Live*," opines Piper in a rough but insightful bit of conversation. "Hell, Lassie losing her puppies probably fits into this story, to a certain extent."

Piper, one of those heartland-of-America types who probably eats ACLU lawyers for breakfast, is not totally new to the acting game. While still trouncing tail as Rowdy Roddy, Piper appeared in such questionable efforts as *Bodyslam* and *Hell Comes to Frogtown*. One year removed from his final wrestling match and in what he considers his first real film, Piper decides that, despite some real live lessons, his acting is, well. . .

Photo: Bruce Birmelin

Photo: Bruce Birmelin

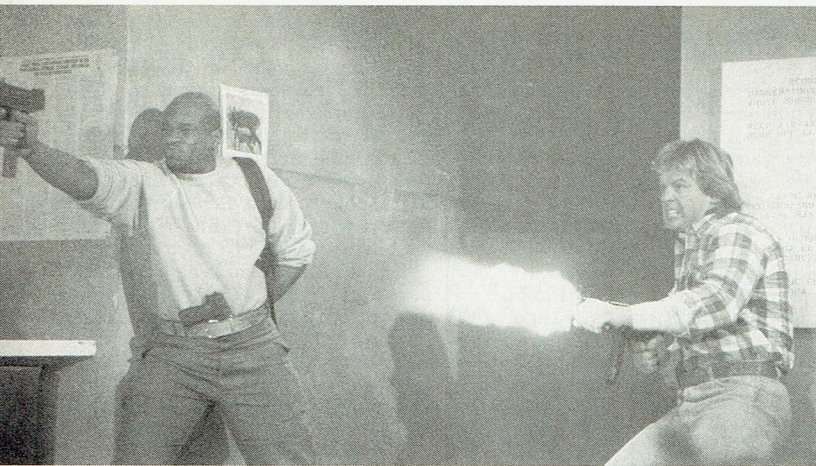


Photo: Sidney Baldwin

Thank heavens Piper didn't carry one of those things when he jumped around in the ring.

"I'm not really acting in this film, and I think that's the key to why it seems to be working," offers Piper. "When I met John at *Wrestlemania III*, he was looking for a real live person who had experienced life, rather than some pretty boy who had gone to acting school for two years to learn how to imitate crispy bacon. Let's face it, I've been on the streets since I was 13, have been a professional fighter since 15, have been electrocuted once and stabbed three times. John could see that I had experienced what the character of John Nada required, so he incorporated those things into the film. And since the character was essentially me, who better to play him?"

Piper proceeds to the makeup trailer half a block down the rain-drenched street, where he concedes that *They Live* has forced him to stretch. "Acting sure beats getting your head beat in for a living," he acknowledges. "But it's also turned into a real challenge personally. I've had to learn to control my aggressiveness and not take the physical action too far. The hardest part has been letting my emotions go and not bundling them up like I've done all my life. The only way I've been able to do that has been to trust John's instincts about filmmaking. Making this film has forced me to go against all my personal rules, so it hasn't been easy.

"There is some real humor in this film," the Glasgow-born Piper continues. "Not the joke type of laughs, but the humor of playing to certain situations. We've got this one scene where Frank and I have just beaten each other to pulps and are attempting to check into a hotel.

Well, here we are standing in front of this hotel clerk with blood and all kinds of stuff hanging off us, trying to act like nothing's happened. Now, *that's* funny."

Piper quips a couple of crude jokes

"There are all kinds of stories that have parallels to *They Live*. Hell, Lassie losing her puppies probably fits."

—Roddy Piper

Carpenter making a political satire? Remember, it's an election year.



Photo: Bruce Birmelin

and mentions an upcoming project, something called *Blue Lightning*, which he claims as evidence that his acting career has a way to run. Feeling awfully brave (or foolhardy, as the case may be), this correspondent cattleprods Piper into a self-assessment of his acting skills. "I'd say I'm somewhere between George C. Scott and Rin Tin Tin," chuckles Piper, who thankfully does not take offense. "One thing I can tell you is that I will never do *Othello*."

The Rin Tin Tin side of Piper gets put to the test as lunch ends. A real live street person wanders into the store. Nobody acts to remove him, and he strolls to the store's back where he joins others watching the continuation of the earlier confrontation. Piper returns to the scene of the crime. After another confab with Carpenter, the cameras roll on two cops entering the shop and confronting Nada. The cops, in reality two ghouls from space, realize that Nada knows who they really are.

"Why don't you come with us?" coos one of the bogus bobbies. "I'm sure we can sort this out."

Nada won't fall for that. A fight erupts with bodies and canned goods flying everywhere. At one point in the action, Nada shoots one cop, then the other, and runs like hell out the door.

Like most John Carpenter films, makeup plays a major role. But we're not talking blood and pus here, folks. *They Live* is real life (sort of), and so presents some particular challenges to Frank



Photo: Galaxy Releasing Corp.

The Curse of "Halloween"

Legally liberated at last from his decade-long association with the spawn of *Halloween* sequels, John Carpenter has no direct involvement with the inevitable *Halloween 4: The Return of Michael Myers*. "I don't want to make any more *Halloween* films," the 40-year-old director declares. "I've done that idea. I don't want to do it again. There isn't much more you can do with it in that context. The first film was fine. Let's leave it at that."

Nevertheless, his name was invoked by the producers of *Halloween 4* to entice Donald Pleasence into reprising his role as Dr. Sam Loomis. "Donald came to Los Angeles after he finished the picture, and invited me to a party," Carpenter relates. "I asked him, 'How is the movie?' He said, 'The producers told me that you read the script, and thought it was the best of the *Halloween* series.' I told him, 'Donald, I've never even seen the script, much less read it.' He asked me, 'Why did they lie?' I answered, 'This is Hollywood, man.'"

Indeed, it was just such mercenary maneuvers that prompted Carpenter to sever his connection with *Halloween* business partners Moustapha Akkad, Irwin Yablans and Debra Hill. "This is the nature of business in America," he laments. "The partners threatened me by saying, 'If you don't do something with this property, we will sue you for preventing us from using an asset.'"

"I had been claiming for years that I wouldn't have anything more to do with the *Halloween* films," Carpenter grimaces. "But I would always get suckered in at the last

Carpenter's child menaces again in *The Return of Michael Myers*.

minute. The partners would say, 'Your name will be on it, everybody will associate it with you. Don't you want it to be good?' It was like a curse."

Bowing to their unrelenting persuasion, Carpenter originally consulted on the development of a since-rejected *Halloween 4* screenplay, written by his good friend Dennis Etchison (Fango #52). "It was an excellent script, but it didn't include Michael Myers," he reveals. "The premise was that the adults' fear caused the Shape to reappear. He was created by the dark side of the adults in Haddonfield, by their fear of life and of something different. The two children whom Jamie Lee Curtis babysat in the first film were now teenagers, and only they knew the truth. It was a philosophical type of *Halloween*, but it was too intellectual for the producers. They wanted to go back to the original."

Refusing to sanction a business enterprise he regarded as aesthetically suspect, Carpenter finally sold his share of the ownership rights back to the partners—enabling them to arrange a *Halloween 4* production without his participation. His only tenuous link to the project is the reprise of his distinctive theme music, contractually incorporated into the musical score by his longtime collaborator Alan Howarth.

"It was like a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders," Carpenter asserts. "I could finally stop feeling guilty about being responsible for the outcome. I told the producers, 'Don't put my name on it. Don't even credit it.' Based on characters created by John Carpenter and Debra Hill." But they're trying to attach my name to it anyway. I suppose they will, at least in terms of the music."

Readying *They Live* for an October debut before the release of *Halloween 4*, John Carpenter has no desire to view the bastard offspring of his initial inspiration. "I don't even think about *Halloween 4*," he insists. "It's not part of my life anymore. Why should I go out of my way to see it? If I want to see Donald Pleasence, I can get together with him when he's in Los Angeles. If I want to hear Alan Howarth's music, I can go to his home and he'll play it for me. Why should I go to a theater? What will I gain?"

—Steve Swires

Carissosa. "Aside from the ghouls' latex and rubber skull faces, most of the makeup used in this film is realistic," explains Carissosa. "The film's homeless people are made up to look exactly like homeless people look in Los Angeles today. I worked real hard to give them that same worn look, to show how hard it is to protect your dignity and self-respect when you're living from day to day."

This air of realism is also part and parcel of *They Live*'s gritty, grainy and textured ambience. "A lot of the film was shot at night and in very realistic settings," explains director of photography Gary Kibbe. "What we've attempted to do is create a certain realistic air of menace and a real atmosphere to the film."

Director Carpenter is quick to acknowledge those elements of *They Live*. He salutes FX veteran Jim Danforth for his work on the sunglasses that turn the field of vision from color to black-and-white and back again. "This is a subtle picture," Carpenter notes. "We've got lots of effects, but they're not real over-the-top things. The important thing has been the challenge of making a movie that tells a complicated story and addresses a number of issues."

"I don't know if people will look at the homeless differently after seeing this film, because it is not a serious movie," he continues. "People won't come out of the theater and say, 'I've got to do something about that,' but I guarantee you that it will make middle class audiences stop and think. If there's an overriding message to this movie, it's that all most people are interested in is the bucks and doing anything to make them."

They Live's inherent lecture on the human condition takes a temporary backseat to Carpenter's good vibes surrounding the recent success of *Prince of Darkness*. "The movie won a couple of awards overseas," he reports, "and it did good box office. It also allowed me to play around with the horror genre a bit, so I have no complaints."

They Live, Carpenter's second collaboration with Alive Films, is slated for an early October opening (distribution by Universal). Piper sums up the film's chances by saying, "We'll know when the popcorn hits the floor."

Carpenter is a bit more verbose. "You always take a chance when you go for something different," concludes the director. "This has been an underdog type of movie from the word go, but that's the price you pay when you decide to attack the status quo." 