

FANGORIA

# FRIGHTFEST

The New **DARK HOUSE**

By NICK MASERCOLA

FANGORIA

In the *Dark House*, you can look, but there's no guarantee they won't touch.



gore-and-gags haunted-attraction movies that seem to have fallen by the wayside in recent years, and the fan-voted winner of theatrical release last month as part of the FANGORIA FrightFest (it's now on DVD, VOD and downloadable as a Blockbuster exclusive, hitting retail disc September 28 via Phase 4 Films). "The number-one thing that inspired me is my lifelong love of horror and haunted-house movies," Scott says. "Going back to *The Legend of Hell House*, *The Haunting*, *The Innocents*—I've always loved the genre and wanted to do a fresh take on it."

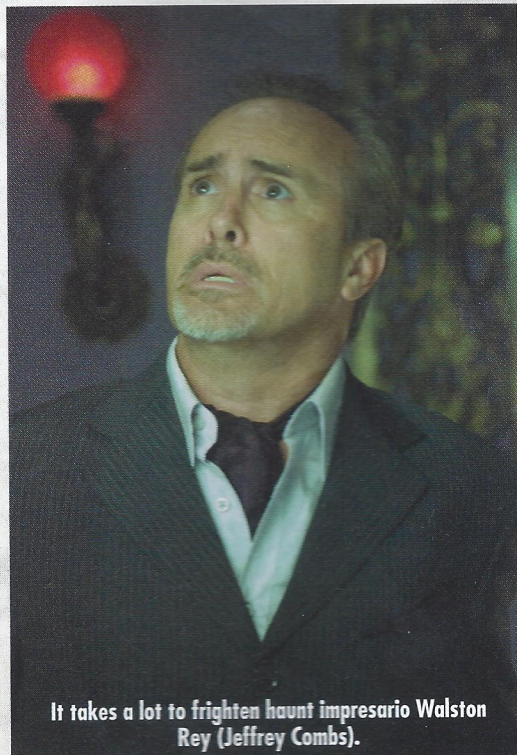
And fresh it is. While the film contains the usual tropes of this spooky subgenre, such as a location with a violent history (in this case, an orphanage where all the children were murdered by their caretaker, Miss Darrode) and a crazy entrepreneur looking to make a fortune building an attraction there (Walston Rey, a spectacular performance by Jeffrey Combs), the film goes in a different direction with its frights than any other flick of its ilk.

Fourteen years after witnessing the aftermath of the brutal child massacre in the now-infamous Darrode house, Claire Thompson (Meghan Ory) is still traumatized by the event, working as a struggling actress and taking classes with a local theater troupe. One day, Walston, an amusement park tycoon, visits the group and tells them how he plans on making a haunted attraction out of the Darrode place, and needs actors to work it. Needing to face her fears (and make some cash), Claire signs up, unaware just how much of Miss Darrode's presence still lingers...

If it seems like a standard set-up, don't worry. The spin is that Walston's haunt runs on laser projectors, allowing him to create hundreds of lifelike ghouls that look completely real, but are harmless. That is, until Miss Darrode's evil force hijacks the computer that creates them, resulting in dozens of flesh-and-blood creatures that hunt down the now-trapped performers. "I was searching the Internet for ideas," Scott explains, "and on YouTube I found clips of modern

hologram demonstrations. One was at a fashion show, and this guy came out to talk to the audience, and then suddenly disappeared. I was like, 'Wow, they can do holograms that realistically?' That's where I got the idea: to fill this haunted house with holograms, and if the computer is generating them, I can make them whatever I want," he laughs. "Or what I can afford."

Unfortunately (as is the case for most independent fare), restricted time and money were major factors in the production. *Dark House* had a tiny budget, and the shooting for this special FX-heavy film had to be completed in 18 days. "It was very difficult, because there's a lot going on in the movie," Scott recalls. "Basically, what we did was shoot a couple of days on location for the outside of the house, and the theater where the actors are approached by Walston. After that, we went to a big set we had built. Everything you see inside the house is a set: the upstairs, the downstairs, the hallways, the basements. Then I had to figure out how to get all the effects done."



It takes a lot to frighten haunt impresario Walston Rey (Jeffrey Combs).

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I love horror movies where people jump and yell and scream during the whole thing, and then come out laughing," says *Dark House* writer/director Darin Scott (producer of *Tales from the Hood*, *Stepfather II* and others). "I grew up going to horror movies to have fun, not to question whether or not I still want to be on this Earth."

That mentality is on full display in *Dark House*, a throwback to the old-school,

FANGORIA FrightFest presents a traditional haunted-attraction chiller with updated creatures.



This clown is only screaming on the inside.

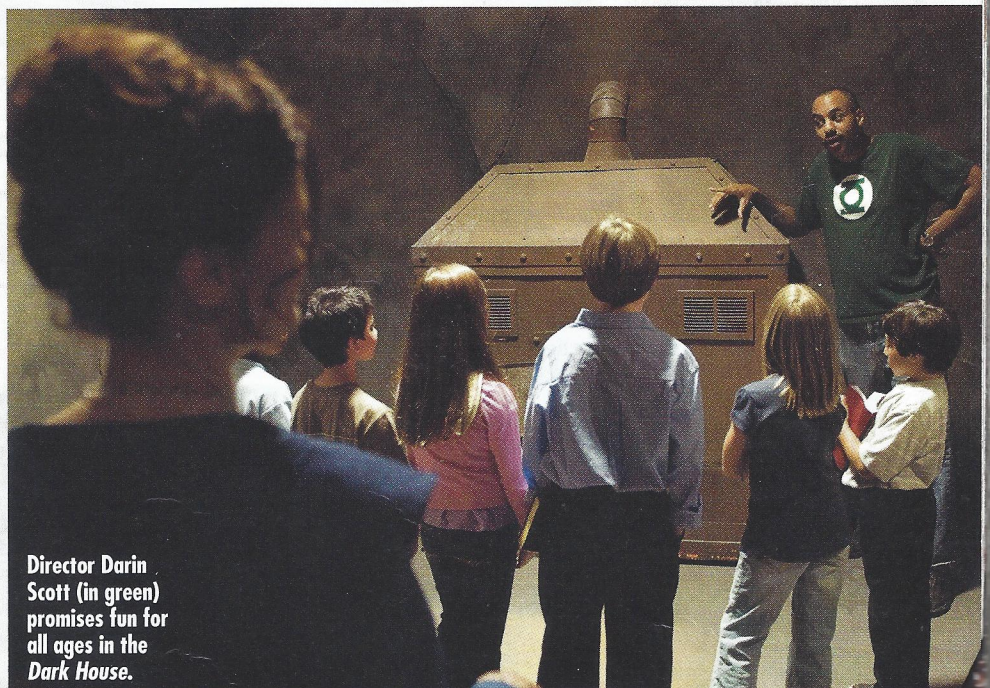
This required a great deal of ingenuity and skill on the part of his crew, since the film called for a dozen specters, lots of graphic deaths and general visual insanity. In order to get all the shots he needed, Scott had to be creative with the schedule and the way he shot the movie. "I did the usual shot-listing and storyboarding, but what I did on this picture was create precise shot lists for our 1st and 2nd units. A lot of people use 2nd unit for pickups, whatever [the main unit] didn't get. But I knew I'd never get this movie finished doing it that way, and because it was all on one set, I had the 1st and 2nd units shooting at the same time, and I would just run between the two."

If that sounds like it could get complicated, you're right. "There was one period I called 'The Night of Chaos' because we had seven kids on the set, and they had to be done by a certain time because there's a very tight amount of hours young children can work. So I had to get them all wrapped, and at the same time I had the second crew shooting a scene on the same set. It literally got to the point where the camera crews were back to back, filming different things in the same place. We had two hours to finish it all, and it was just insane. That was the craziest thing, as far as shooting, that I've ever done."

Don't let the strained sound of the shoot put you off the movie, though; it has plenty of jolts and laughs, and many of the holograms (the true highlights of the picture) are extremely creative. One in particular—dubbed "the long-fingered woman"—is sure to make an impression on audiences. "That's definitely my favorite," Scott beams. "When I wrote the script, I was trying to come up with a couple of unique creatures, and I got the idea for a woman with long, long fingernails in a tattered wedding dress. I came up with the idea that the nails go *click-click-click* while she tries to stab you and all this stuff. [Makeup FX supervisor] Megan

Areford took that concept and ran with it, and raised it another 300 percent with her design. The best thing when you come up with an idea for a monster is for the makeup person to come back with something that makes you go, 'That's way cooler than what I came up with!' That's what Megan did, and I love that monster.

with his producers was as pleasant as could be. "They were really cool and gave me total creative freedom, which is another reason it was one of my best experiences. They really believed in me and got behind me, and knew I had a lot of production experience as well as directing and writing and that I could figure out



Director Darin Scott (in green) promises fun for all ages in the *Dark House*.

I'd do a whole movie with her."

And as it turns out, despite all the stresses that came with creating a film on such a tight schedule, Scott would have it no other way. "Having to do it like that, to throw out your ideas in a burst of creativity on paper, going immediately into the preproduction of building a house and just making it happen—that was the most fun I've probably ever had on a movie. And it's kinda nice when the producers don't have time to second-guess you," he laughs.

All joking aside, Scott's experience

how to logistically do the movie.

"If you read that script, even though it was probably only 88 pages," he continues, "you would go, 'You're going to shoot this with a million bucks in 18 days? Forget about it!' I had a bunch of kids getting killed, eight people in the house—seemed crazy. But I'm so proud we managed to pull it off; it's a tribute to everyone involved."

Of course, Scott is no stranger to the horror genre, and one of his previous works still ranks as a cult classic. *Tal* public.

*Hood*, an old-school horror anthology with an urban twist (directed by Rusty Cundieff from a script he wrote with Scott), sees three drug dealers go to a funeral home to pick up a stash from odd mortician Mr. Simms, who regales the gangbangers with macabre, moralistic tales regarding the deaths of some of his strangest visitors. The movie spawned numerous imitators, including the much-maligned *Snoop Dogg's Hood of Horror*.

"I try to take it as flattering; I've never seen any of them, 'cause I don't want them to aggravate me if I don't like them," Scott laughs. "But to be fair, the horror anthology has been around for a long time, all the way back to the Amicus movies. The idea of doing it in an urban context was unique at that point, but not unique enough that I can sit up here like, 'Nobody else can ever do this!' I mean, nobody jumped up and said I couldn't do a haunted-house movie, so I'm not annoyed with it; I just want my chance to do my retake on it."

Unfortunately, that retake was the now-defunct project *The Hood That Dripped Blood*. When asked what happened to the film, Scott says, "Basically, it was a horror anthology along the lines of *Tales from the Hood*, only it wasn't going to be all-black; it was going to be a rainbow cast with the modern hip-hop sensibility. And the stories were completely off the hook, I mean insane. I'm still trying to get that movie

made. For three or four years we were trying to raise outside financing; we got it and the picture started to go into pre-production, and then the financier's money fell apart. I was incredibly depressed and upset."

That upset, however, eventually led to the creation of *Dark House*. "I just wanted to make a movie so bad, and it turned out

that this guy, Ken Schwenger, the line producer on *The Hood That Dripped Blood*, had hooked up with these other producers who wanted to do a haunted-house movie, and they were looking for a writer/director to do it. And he said he knew a guy, and it fit right in. Now I'm hoping that this project will allow me to do that movie, as well as a bunch of others I want to do."

Scott's good fortune continued with *Dark House* being picked up for the FANGORIA FrightFest. "As far as being involved with the whole FANGORIA thing, I've been going to *Weekend of Horrors* conventions since the late '80s. I've had panels at those four or five times, my movies have been on the cover three or four times. It's a long history with me and the magazine, so I love the fact that they're so involved and helping me; it's kinda like coming home."

Now, with *Dark House* bagged, tagged and scaring home viewers, the jack-of-all-trades filmmaker is up to more scary stuff. "I've got several projects, most of which are thriller- or horror-oriented. I'm talking to a few companies, but as you know, it's harder raising money now than it has ever been, but I do have a couple of good nibbles. I'm hoping to be back in production before the year is out. If any of them go, they're going to have that similar mix of shocks, rollercoaster-ride fun, a little sense of humor and plenty of kills, 'cause that's the kind of movie I like to make." 🦋



Here's a setpiece that some of the attendees probably wouldn't mind coming to life.

Miss Darrode (Diane Salinger) wants heroine Claire (Meghan Ory) all to herself.

