

"DESECRATION"

Haunted by religion

THE TERROR TELETYPE



Nun's the word when Christie Sanford falls victim to *Desecration*.

Brimming with dark dreams, family dysfunction, Catholic imagery and murder, writer/director Dante Tomaselli's *Desecration* offers up a potent dose of indie psychological horror. Focusing on a teenaged boy plagued by supernatural events, Tomaselli describes his feature debut as "an ambient horror film. I don't want to prod the audience. I just want to set up a mood and allow them to interpret the images however they'd like. There are no easy answers." This surreal tale hits video and DVD from Image on March 14.

Always a fan of horror, Tomaselli recalls, "When I was 11 years old, I saw *Creepshow*, and the opening segment of the boy with all the horror imagery around him and his father being mean to him, I absolutely could relate to that. In fact, one time my father came into my room and tore down all of my horror posters because he thought they were bringing the house bad luck. So now I pursue this with a vengeance."

In 1996, his passion took the form of a 23-minute version of *Desecration*. "After that was done," Tomaselli explains, "I showed the tape to Jack Swain—who turned out to be my executive producer—and he said it had possibilities and could turn it into a feature."

Tomaselli admits that many of his ideas and themes come from horrible nightmares he had as a child, as well as his religious upbringing. *Desecration*'s "interior journey" revolves around teenaged Bobby Rullo (Danny Lopes), who has been traumatized by the death of his mother. His stay at a Catholic boarding school only makes matters worse, as he experiences severe hallucinations (including a demonic nun), while supporting characters are being mysteriously killed. The supporting cast includes Salvatore Piro as Bobby's working-class father, Vincent Lambertini as a pill-pushing priest and Irma (*Thinner*) St. Paul as Bobby's grandmother.

Tomaselli shot *Desecration* on Super 16mm and filmed around the Paterson and Nutley areas of New Jersey, where

he spent his childhood. He attributes the surprisingly smooth production to his longtime planning and the early short. "Everyone who shot the feature with me basically looked at what I'd done in the short and said, 'OK, I can do this even better.'" Still, he admits, "It was supposed to be a two-week shoot, but it turned into four weeks and the budget ballooned from \$30,000 to \$85,000 [with a final completion cost of \$150,000]. All of my planned visuals were so elaborate that they were impossible. My producer hated me for a while, but after he saw the actual footage, he was very excited about it."

Still, filming on a low budget isn't easy, particularly during an East Coast winter. According to Tomaselli, "All of the scenes in the woods were shot in the middle of the night; when you see those scenes, just think of the crew freezing our asses off, deep in the woods of New Jersey."

Tomaselli credits much of the film's haunting edge to production designer Michele La Rocca and art director Michelle Lang, who constructed the complex sets, as well as his brother Michael, who composed the eerie score. Of course, the work by makeup FX artist Oliver Brig plays a major role, including a grisly scissors attack on a nun. "The sequence was shot in reverse, so every time the scissors looked like they were jabbing the nun, they were actually being pulled off," Tomaselli says. "The girl who played Sister Rita [Nora Maher] was really excited about the role. She had the storyboards on her bedroom wall months before we shot."

Tomaselli also acknowledges another family member, his cousin Alfred Sole, who directed the classic *Alice*, *Sweet Alice*. "There's obviously something in the Paterson, New Jersey Catholic community that spurs these images," he says. "I just remember that my father, who provided all of the communion dresses and veils [for *Alice*] since he owned a bridal mall and jewelry shop, had a promo shot from the film of the little girl holding the crucifix dagger, and I was mesmerized by it. So I think Alfred definitely had an influence on me."

Summing up his movie, Tomaselli says, "It's almost like a silent film, because I rely so heavily on just images, and it's the kind of movie that you can come away and have all sorts of different opinions as to what it was all about. That's good, because it goes back to all the films I loved—films that were like nightmares, vague and unsettling. I love the idea of exploring the darkness. Because you really can't find the light until you've explored the dark."

—Steve Puchalski

Anthony Hopkins has committed to star in *Hannibal*, while Jodie Foster turned down the sequel to work on her directorial project *Flora Plum* with Julianne Moore stepping into the Clarice Starling role...Fine Line has picked up the U.S. release and (uh-oh) remake rights to Hideo Nakata's super Japanese *Ring* films...In an encouraging bit of news, acclaimed documentary filmmaker Joe Berlinger (*Brother's Keeper*, *Paradise Lost*) will helm *Blair Witch Project 2*, aimed at a Halloween release. The first film's Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez will then direct the second sequel. The Haxan Films team are also teaming with writer David S. (Blade) Goyer on *Fearsum*, a Fox series centering on a web site devoted to weird phenomena. And Trimark picked up U.S. rights to the *Blair Witch*-like *The St. Francisville Experiment*; the company will also release the Australian slasher *Cut* in the States...Jan De Bont will produce and direct *Dust*, an ecological horror film from Warners and Village Roadshow, based on Charles Pellegrino's novel...John Puch directs Woodlake Entertainment's biopic *Karloff and Lugosi*, written by Jeff Yagher (Kevin's brother)...In casting news, Keanu Reeves, Hilary Swank, Katie Holmes, Gary Cole, Giovanni Ribisi, Michael Jeter and Greg Kinnear co-star in Sam Raimi's *The Gift* (written by the *One False Move* team of Billy Bob Thornton and Tom Epperson); Pam Grier joins Snoop Dogg in Ernest Dickerson's currently lensing *Bones*; Leelee Sobieski moves from *Squelch* to Sony's thriller *The Glass House*, directed by Daniel (*The X-Files*) Sackheim; Brendan Fraser, Rachel Weisz and John Hannah return for *The Mummy 2*; Dee Snider encores in *Strangeland 2*, which rolls this month; Pauly Shore (yikes!) hosts Trimark's short spoof compilation *The Bogus Witch Project*; and Steve Rails back and Carrie Snodgrass (reuniting from *Trick or Treats*) star in *Ed Gein*, directed by Chuck (Henry 2) Parelllo...David DeCoteau has launched the new genre company Rapid Heart Pictures; the first film, *Ancient Evil: Scream of the Mummy*, stars Ariauna Albright and Jeff Peterson and was produced by Sam (Gods and Monsters) Irvin...Floridian genre veteran William Greife's latest is *The Triangle*, written by John Shepard, about six young people encountering a ghost ship in the Bermuda Triangle...In the vein of *Lost Souls*, Richard Caesar's upcoming *The Calling* is about a young woman charged with preventing the apocalypse. John Rice scripted; Laura (*The Faculty*) Harris will star...The busy SOTA FX guys are doing makeup/creature work for another clutch of sequels: *Wishmaster 3* and 4, to be filmed back to back by Blue Rider Pictures beginning this month, and *Jack Frost II: Revenge of the Mutant Killer Snowman*, again written and directed by Michael Cooney.



Religion is literally a prison for Bobby.