

**'RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD'
'TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE'**

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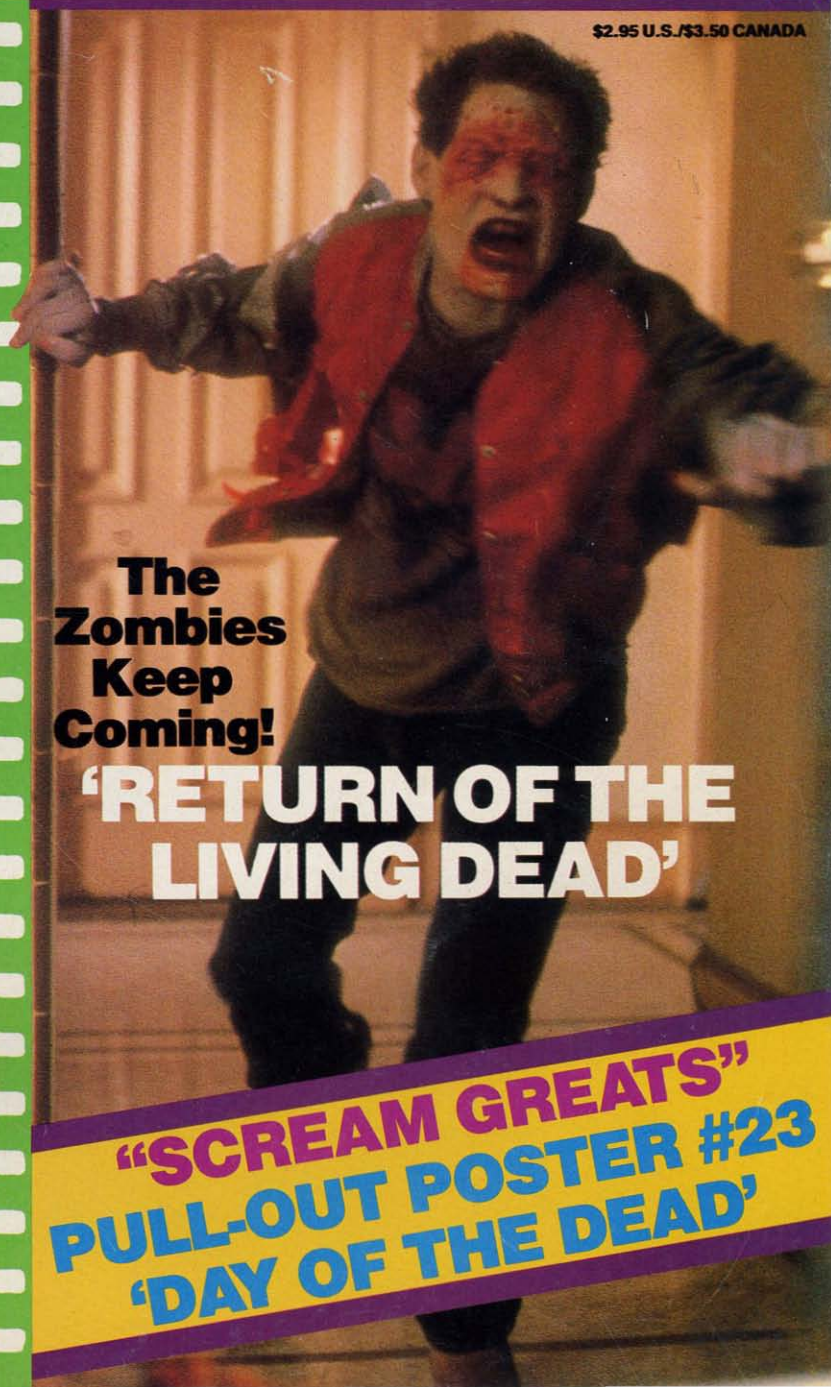
**George Romero on
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**'RETURN OF THE
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'DAY OF THE DEAD'**

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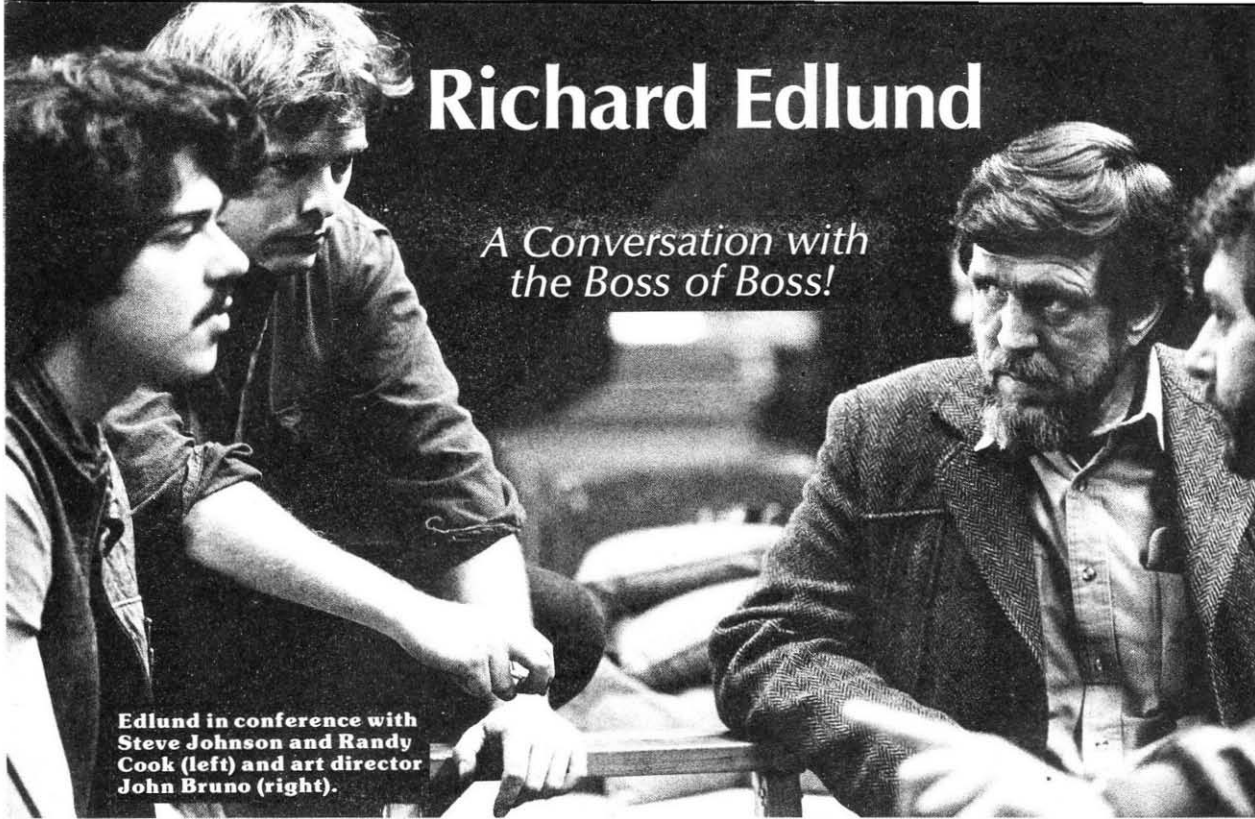
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Richard Edlund

*A Conversation with
the Boss of Boss!*



Edlund in conference with Steve Johnson and Randy Cook (left) and art director John Bruno (right).

By David Hutchison

Editor's note: Heretofore, Richard Edlund has been a film craftsman whose body of experience in SF film has made him a more suitable interview subject for our illustrious sister magazine, STARLOG. With *Poltergeist* and *Ghostbusters*, however, Edlund has begun to wield considerable influence in the realm of state-of-the-art horror effects as well. Early this year, STARLOG's David Hutchison visited Edlund's Boss Film Company, chatting up several of Edlund's key employees, as well as the Boss boss himself.

FANGORIA: Did Columbia seek you out for *Fright Night*, or did you go to them?

Richard Edlund: They came to us. It has to be that way, since we don't know what's cooking in the back room of the studios, you know? We happen to have a very good relationship with Columbia, because we did *Ghostbusters* for them. And naturally they want to keep that going, as we do.

Fang: *Fright Night* isn't the sort of \$20 million fantasy spectacular you're known for...

Edlund: I want us to be able to service shows that don't necessarily have blockbuster-level effects. I want to be able to do smaller shows; that helps us in terms



Pyrotechnician Thaine Morris readyes the gas jets for a vampire meltdown.

of keeping our talented staff employed. A flow of smaller pictures helps us to keep a comfortably large staff, which has benefits for both small and large pictures.

Fang: I notice that your studio makes a real effort to give individual recognition to its effects artists for their work, in contrast to the way things were done in the old studio system.

Edlund: What I'm trying to do is break away from the attitude of keeping every staff member invisible, hiding behind a billboard that has a company name on it. I get a lot of press because I'm the guy that signs the contracts and makes the deals and hires the people and all that; but I couldn't do it without these particular people. I don't believe that people are directly replaceable; when you get a team together that is as finely tuned as this one is, when you lose one member it can be like losing a vital organ. Thane Morris, for instance, is a master pyrotechnician, but he also knows all about

machine processors, and he is excellent at controlling the logistics of a project—he has an enormous hand of cards to play with. Garry Waller knows robots, knows chemistry, knows lasers; and besides that, he is basically an artist, with an artist's eye. To replace Waller...you could find a laser person, or a chemist, but whoever you found would have a different range of talents, and would fit it in a different way, so every person affects everybody else...certainly not least among these are my talented associates Mark Vargo, the optical supervisor, John Bruno, the art director, our matte department supervisor Neil Krepela, our matte artist Matt Yuricich and Terry Wendell, the animation supervisor. The theory is that this is a team like Blackhawks.

Steve Johnson and Randy Cook are also like that; they're working out very well in the rubber department here. Randy Cook is a great stop motion animator, and there's probably three or four guys in the world who are any good at it,

but he's also a great sculptor; Steve Johnson—another outrageously talented guy—is a very advanced sculptor, and he has also has an organizational ability, which you have to have in order to run a department like that. I deal with department heads pretty much, and get around to talk to the guys occasionally—but I have so many things on my agenda—

Fang: I saw the stack of phone messages waiting for you...

Edlund: Right—this is the deal-making pantheon. Plus trying to get the word out so everybody knows where we are. Right now I'm almost to the point of saying that I don't want anyone else to know where we are, because we've got enough work. But then, you want to keep the doors open for future projects and so on. You know, we've got scripts, probably two feet high, that were added in the last six to eight months; we're doing the contracts. Plus we have a couple of pet projects, and it's possible that, as a group, we will produce a picture before long.

Roddy McDowell confronts *Fright Night's* vampire in its lupine form!





The chilling aftermath of vampire meltdown!!!

Fang: I would have thought *Poltergeist* had exhausted your bag of tricks, but then you topped yourself with *Ghostbusters*, and again with *2010*. Now you face topping yourself again with *Poltergeist 2*...

Edlund: Well, we did use everything that we had in our bag of tricks at the time of *Poltergeist*, as limited by budget and time constraints. The attempt to top yourself is inevitable in this business. For some reason, in visual effects, it's a thing where, when you start climbing the ladder, you don't know how far up it will take you; there are always a few rungs left, and sometimes you seem to see the rungs going into the clouds.

I think that any idea that can be thought about or sketched can be converted into a very interesting, visual mov-

ing image. That's what is driving all of us along in the group, because we love what we're doing, and I don't see any end to it. It's like saying to a writer, "You've written so many books, and the library is already full of really great, interesting books." But we keep getting better at what we do, and at the same time the audience gets more sophisticated visually, and it takes more sleight-of-hand in order to trick them into believing what you want them to believe. The responsibility is therefore on us to keep coming up with new images.

Dan Ayckroyd, for instance, used *Poltergeist* as a sort of palette when he was writing *Ghostbusters*; he saw *Poltergeist* and said, "Hey, that's fantastic—I didn't know they could do that kind of stuff!" and he wrote *Ghostbusters* with those

capabilities in mind. I think that *Poltergeist* was the most interesting single project I worked on at ILM, in that it had so many various things involved in it. And I was actually involved in conceptualizing a lot of the stuff with Steven Spielberg, because when we were shooting the background material, when the movie itself was being shot, we didn't know yet what we were going to do. Once the movie was rough-cut, then we started figuring how to balance the intensity of the picture's various effects, and they were, in every sequence, the punch-line. The effects reel for *Poltergeist* is a very intense reel, because it's all of the climaxes and sub-climaxes of the movie; the scares and so on. We got a lot of ideas along the way that we didn't get to use—so we'll use 'em this time.

