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# SHAUN OF THE DEAD

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STUART CONRAN



DAN FRYE



STUART BRAY



# SHAUN OF THE DEAD

FX BREAKDOWN SPECIAL

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### Credits and thanks

This little nod of appreciation comes from that place which still makes me warm and fuzzy when I flick through old *Fangoria* and *Gorezone* magazines.

Thanks to the folks that have given up time and supplied pictures and information, including Stuart Conran, Dan Frye, Jane Walker, Mark Donovan, Tim Baggaley, James Greenwood and Joe Nazzaro for the foreword.

Joe wrote the original *Fangoria* article about *Shaun of the Dead* (#237, Oct 2004) so I was absolutely delighted to have him involved in this little offering.

Thanks as ever to Animated Extras for everything.



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# Shaun of the Dead: An Appreciation

By JOE NAZZARO

**T**here's a shot in the opening act of *Shaun of the Dead*, which opens on a pair of shuffling feet, gradually panning up to reveal the film's title character caught in an early morning yawn. The reason that gag works is because horror film geeks immediately recognize it as a homage to George Romero's 1985 *Day of the Dead*, in which a Tom Savini-crafted zombie puppet (nicknamed 'Dr. Tongue' after its obvious facial disfigurement) staggers up to the camera, revealing the film's title.

The scene also tells movie-goers that actor/co-writer Simon Pegg and director Edgar Wright not only had an intimate knowledge of the genre they were parodying, but they also understood the delicate balance between comedy and horror; a balance that countless less successful genre-bending films often fail to grasp. "We just always thought, 'Let's keep the humor in the situation'" Pegg told me during a visit to the 'Shaun' set in May of '03, "rather than have comedy zombies or have funny things happen to zombies. Let's keep all the humor separate from the horror. Occasionally things happen that are funny involving zombies, but it's never at the zombie's expense. They don't really become figures of fun, so it was just a matter of trying to balance the two genres and come up with something that was concurrently funny and scary."

And that's the key, isn't it? While there are moments in 'Shaun' that are laugh-out-loud funny, there are also scenes that are genuinely chilling. There's an old actor saying that 'Dying is easy. Comedy is hard!' I would suggest the adage applies equally well to tongue-in-cheek (no pun intended) zombie movies, where the only way to make the humor truly work is to just play it straight. And maybe throw in some awesome zombie makeups for good measure.



**Working on *Shaun Of The Dead* was one of the highlights of my life in an already fantastic year. 2003 had been good to me --- possibly one of the busiest I had with *Alexander the Great* followed by *Shaun*, then straight to Prague for *The Brothers Grimm* followed by *Batman Begins* straight after Christmas.**

**T**he best thing about SOTD for me was that I was already a *Spaced* fan - the TV show directed by Edgar Wright which had put the cast into public consciousness and rekindled the (at the time) quiet zombie genre.

To 'top and tail' the SOTD experience for me was the fact that a few years earlier, I had applied a fake chest to Simon Pegg for *Guest House Paradiso* for one of the many gags in the slapstick storyline.

He told me they were editing a show he'd just finished called *Spaced*, which of course at the time meant nothing to anyone. It went on to be a much-loved cult classic and I urge to track it down if you haven't seen it!

Within that show was an episode (called 'Art', series 1, ep. 3) which centred on the

sleep-deprived characters (having spent all night playing *Resident Evil*) hallucinating and mixing zombie attacks into an otherwise routine day. The glorious sequences helped align the stars and planets to create what became SOTD.

I thought it would be fun to chat with Stuart Conran and Dan Frye, two FX buddies who I have known and worked with for many years on many projects. We all worked together for Animated Extras at Shepperton Film Studios on the build and shot at Ealing Studios.

Re-watching the movie, one of the biggest surprises to me was just how much things have changed over the years. Seeing Shaun in the opening sequence smoking a cigarette and sipping a pint because then you could smoke in pubs! We see a full-sized yellow page on the phone

table. Two inches of printed paper listings bound into a book— no smart-phones here to find Fulci's restaurant, (*the place that does the fish*).

Shaun works at a small independent electrical outlet store, (a pre-Amazon world) and the thickness of those rentable (yes, *rented!*) cathode ray tube TV's compared with the cheap wafer thin screens we are accustomed to now....

### **How's that for a slice of fried gold?**

This, then, is a love letter from me to a great time on a great movie, for the enjoyment of other nerds who like to know how stuff is made. I hope you enjoy it.

**- Stuart Bray  
April 2020**

# 1. 'Haven't you had your tea?'

When Shaun is commiserating with Ed about his break-up, they see the shadow of someone thumping on the pub window which is obscured, frosted glass so we see only a silhouette.

This was going to be a jawless head gag, but was scrapped. What we do see

shortly afterwards is a couple necking outside the pub.

When the focus is on the two leads, you see the blurred figures in the background clear enough to spot the guy's head flip right back over as his neck was eaten away.

This was a fake body, and the zombie holding him up and responsible for eating

the hapless victim was the zombie choreographer, Litza Bixler.

Dan Frye responsible for this gag, using generic moulds from Animated. It was an articulated body with silicone hands & head with a fabricated wound.



(Above) Litza Bixler handling the rather heavy 'Pez Dispenser' headed zombie with a weighted skull to ensure a speedy flipping action.



(Right) The jawless head silhouette gag at the window was scrapped. This test was in the workshop. You can just see me red toolbox and blowtorch to the left of that wooden screen. Still got them!



(Left) One of the many memes bouncing around which prompted discussions about this podcast episode.



## 2. 'In the garden ... there's a girl!'



**M**ary (played by Nicola Cunningham) is the first zombie we see which confirms things really are not well with the world. The boys know her name by her work name-tag which reads **LANDIS – Happy To Help- Mary.**

The store name may be a play on the convenience store chain 'Londis' here in the UK and director John Landis of *American Werewolf in London*).

A struggle ensues, and Shaun pushes Mary away where she stumbles, falling back and is impaled onto a steel umbrella holder.

This is the pivotal moment when everything changes, marked by a moment of silence as Shaun and Ed freeze, watching in horror as Mary slowly pulls herself up, crablike.

She now stands, revealing the gaping hole in her torso through which we see Shaun's horrified face. Prosthetically speaking, there wasn't too much in the way of rubber stuff.

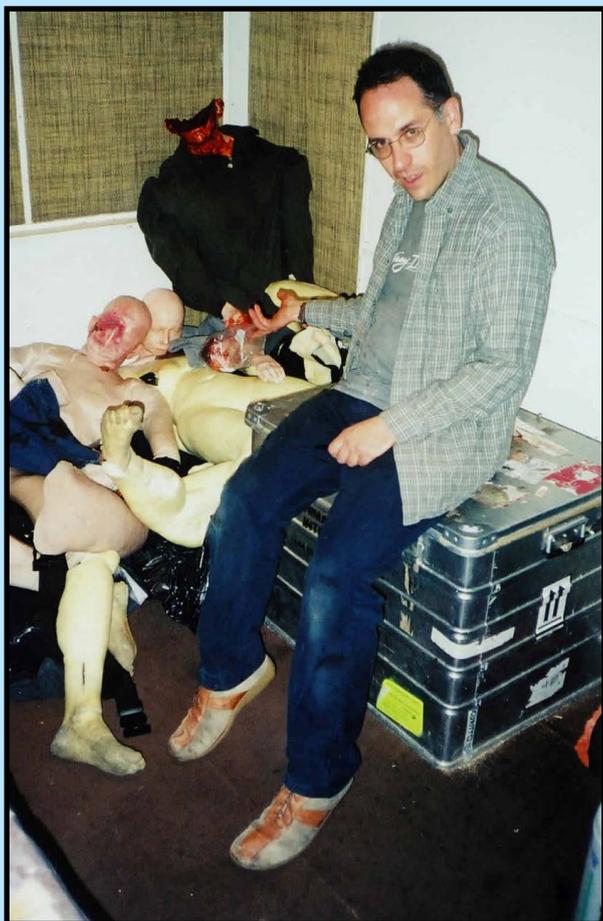
This neat effect was a combination of elements, with a fake torso section rammed onto a real pole, a retractable pole enabling the rising up action to take place

practically, a prosthetic to create a gory surround and digital magic from Double Negative blending these elements together with some blood spurts, pole replacement and seamless integration into the footage.

The costume was fixed to ensure everything stayed in alignment so the jacket didn't slide around and cover the hole made during the fall, which of course is what would happen.

There are often things like this which need practical considerations to enable the effect to appear as intended.



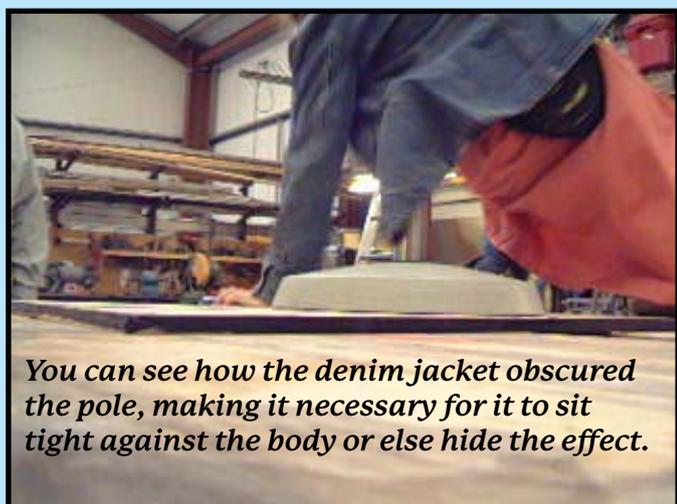


*(Left) Dan babysits the dead things until they are needed for a shot. Hurry up and wait, the mantra on any set.*

*(Below) Setting up the shot. Lighting plays such a big part in filming, keeping the light consistent when filming outside where the light changes constantly is a challenge. Done right, you don't notice.*



*Testing the 'Mary' pole rig.*



*You can see how the denim jacket obscured the pole, making it necessary for it to sit tight against the body or else hide the effect.*



### 3. 'He's got an arm off...'



The one-armed groom played by Tim Baggaley gets beaten to (another) death with an ashtray. What a way to go. Again.

Having worked with Tim before on a BBC show called Strange, I was luckily able to suggest the perfect candidate when we needed someone to be a zombie with a missing arm.

**Stu C:** "Dan made the arm stump for Tim. The head effect was a fibreglass plate, with a tray or cup built in that could hold nernies/giblets & blood....a tube leading out of the bottom fitted to a pango which was filled with compressed air.... this could then blow the material out & onto Tim's head, along with a spurt of blood.

The nernies were attached to the tray & could be flipped back in to re-set.

The ashtrays were breakaway ones built by Paul Dunn & special effects who also made the soft props that were thrown before the inevitable ashtray based coup de grâce."

*Tim in full get-up as zombie groom.*

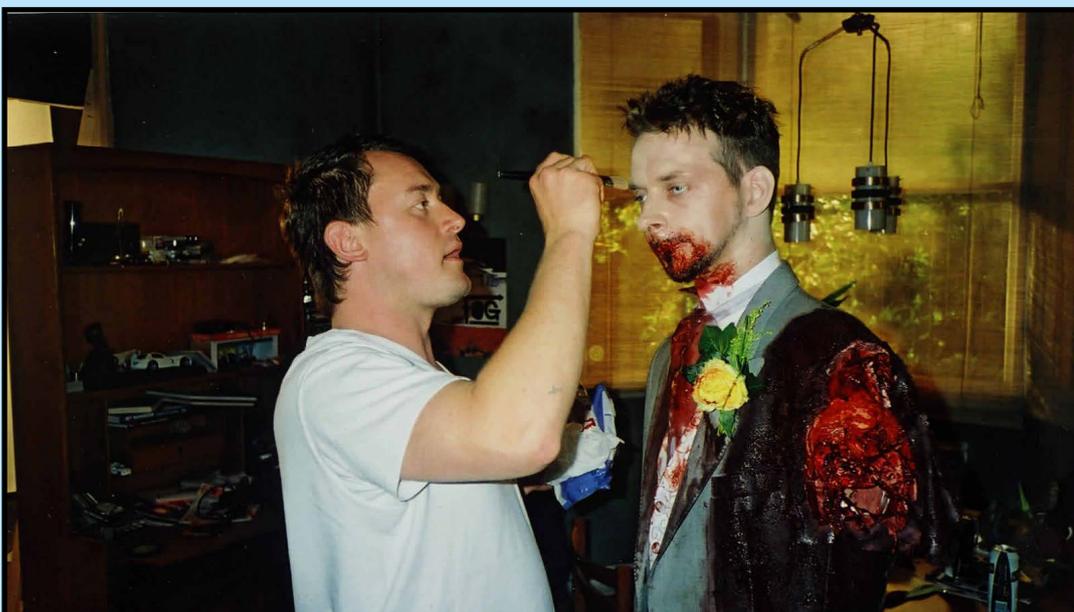




*Checking the take at the monitors.*



*Tim stumbles up to his mark in full zombie regalia.*



*Tony Lilley finishes up before a take at the Ealing Studios set.*

## 4. 'Which one do you want? Girl or bloke?'



*Stu C poses in front of the Animated Extras workshop at Shepperton Studios. All this was sadly flattened in redevelopment. The amazing memories made in that space...*

**T**he Hulking Man zombie played by Mark Donovan became the recognisable face of Shaun Of The Dead. This makeup was created by Stuart Conran, and consisted of foam latex appliances with removable teeth created by Chris Lyons of Fangs FX.

Paul Dunn's Special FX department made the flying records, some rubber and some wax so they shattered on impact.

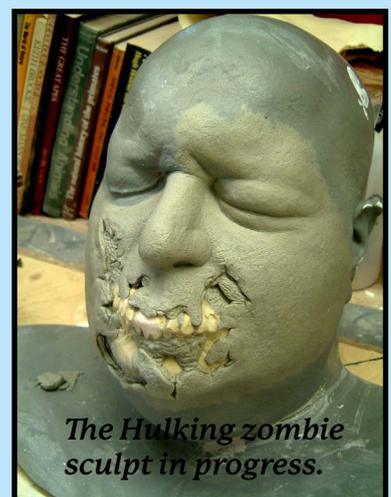
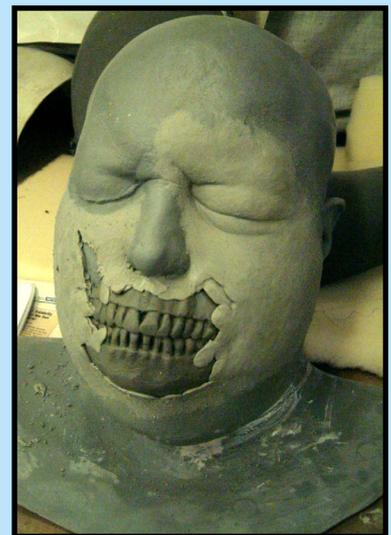
The record hitting Mary's face was a thin strip of cap plastic whipped away on a monofilament line so the red mark appears on camera. This was such a quick shot; you barely see it as it's so fast.

As Stu C said, "I should totally credit Dick Smith's

work from Taxi Driver & the Exorcist as inspiration. That effect is totally cribbed from both of those films!!!"

For the battering scene where Shaun and Ed beat the zombies to a pulp (although that bit is not seen). dummy bodies were built of both actors...waist up in fibreglass, with silicone heads & generic foam arms to be posable, with a silicone cast of Mark's make-up attached., all of the team chipping in."

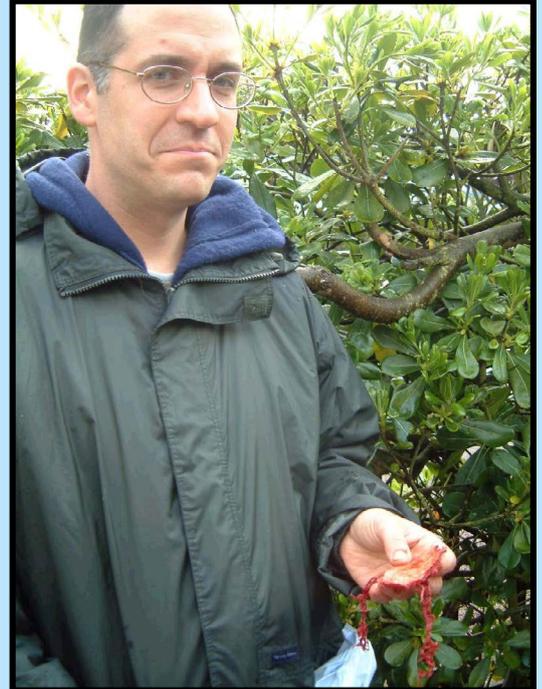
On the shoot days, it was operated by art dept/props, with Dan & Stu C re-setting.



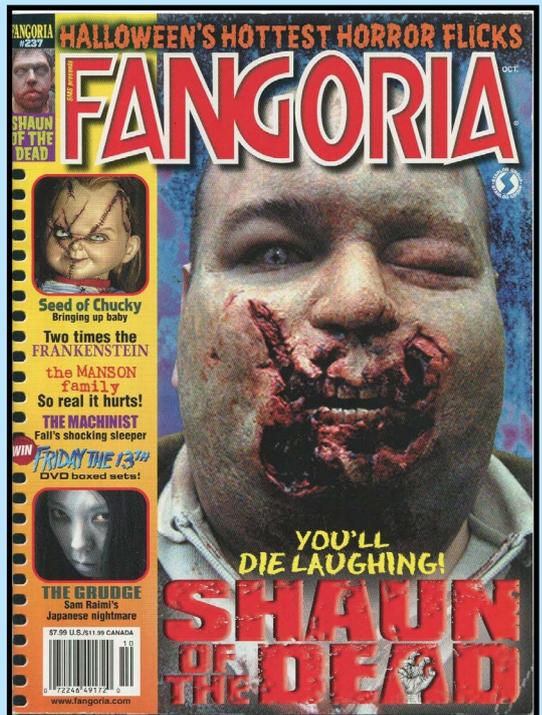
*The Hulking zombie sculpt in progress.*



Bright eyed and bushy tailed. Younger versions us contemplative the impending destruction of our dummies.



The upper body dummies ready for bashing with shovel and cricket bat. Stu C's makeup (and the amazing Mark Donovan) made it to the cover of Fangoria #237 in October 2004. Bucket list stuff!



## 5. 'We take care of Philip.'



Philip's head smashed in the now famous montage.

The famous sequence of grabbing Mum, killing Philip and getting to the Winchester to wait for this to all blow over sees Philip being dispatched with a shovel and cricket bat.

This neat effect was a mixture of swift editing, safe props created by Special FX dept and a non-flinching stunt performer wearing a great wig courtesy of Jane Walker in Makeup. A beautiful combination of many departments working together.



## 6. 'We're gonna borrow your car, okay...'

Peter Serafinowicz plays Pete, the grown-up in a house-of-fools. After being bitten the night before, Shaun discovers his housemate (un)dead in the

shower. This awesome body paint job was the work of makeup designer Jane Walker, complete with direct applied bite wound. We see him

again later in The Winchester when he is dispatched in glorious fashion with a well placed gunshot blast through the eye, blowing his brains out..More on that later.



## 7. 'I guess we'll have to take the Jag.'



Shaun's step-father isn't the easiest man to please if you're Shaun, but it's still a pity when a zombie comes up out of the blue and tears a huge chunk out of his neck.

Stuart Conran created the effect with a wraparound foam latex appliance, rigged with blood tubing and nernies, attached to the

resettable chunk that gets bitten out, ready for multiple takes.

He made a piece for the actual bite but the bleeding in car was a rig set up by special effects dept.

Nernies (small shredded pieces of stringy latex) were threaded back into the prosthetic & bladder for each

take.

Stu made a fitting that could be held in the hand to divert blood between the fingers, this same rig was also used for Ed bleeding in the pub basement at the end.

The shots inside the car were a handover of blood rig to art dept/props who operated on those days.



## 8. 'I'll just flip the mains breakers...'

*The scene with a pic of that shot as seen from behind (inset).*



Once in the Winchester, Shaun realises the power may be out due to a circuit break so tries the fuse board, flipping switches until the power comes back on.

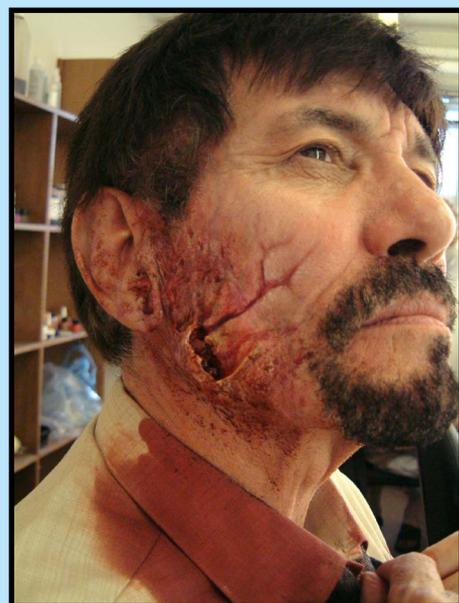
He briefly illuminates the yard outside which reveals

a horde of zombies waiting outside.

Among the crowds of zombies throughout the scenes were uncredited cameos by friends to the cast such as Paul Kaye, Paul Putner, Joe Cornish, Russell Howard, Lauren

Laverne, Garth Jennings and Coldplays' Chris Martin.

These were all out of the kit paint jobs designed and overseen by Jane Walker and her makeup team.



## 9. 'I didn't want to say anything.'



**B**arbara, Shaun's mum was bitten back at the house, but she kept this secret from everyone as she didn't want to cause a fuss. Revealing the bite by rolling up the sleeve, we see a deep scoop missing from the arm, although the lighting doesn't make it obvious how deep the bite is.

The gag was a fake arm prop allowing real depth of bite

without the arm being built up as would be the case with a straight appliance.

This was a clay press of Penelope Wilton's arm, lifecast in position. Her real arm was hidden behind her back and poked out of a hole in the costume with the fake arm strapped onto the elbow complete with a gaping wound & blood tubing for a gout when it's exposed. Very

effective but not much is seen as it is dark in the scene.

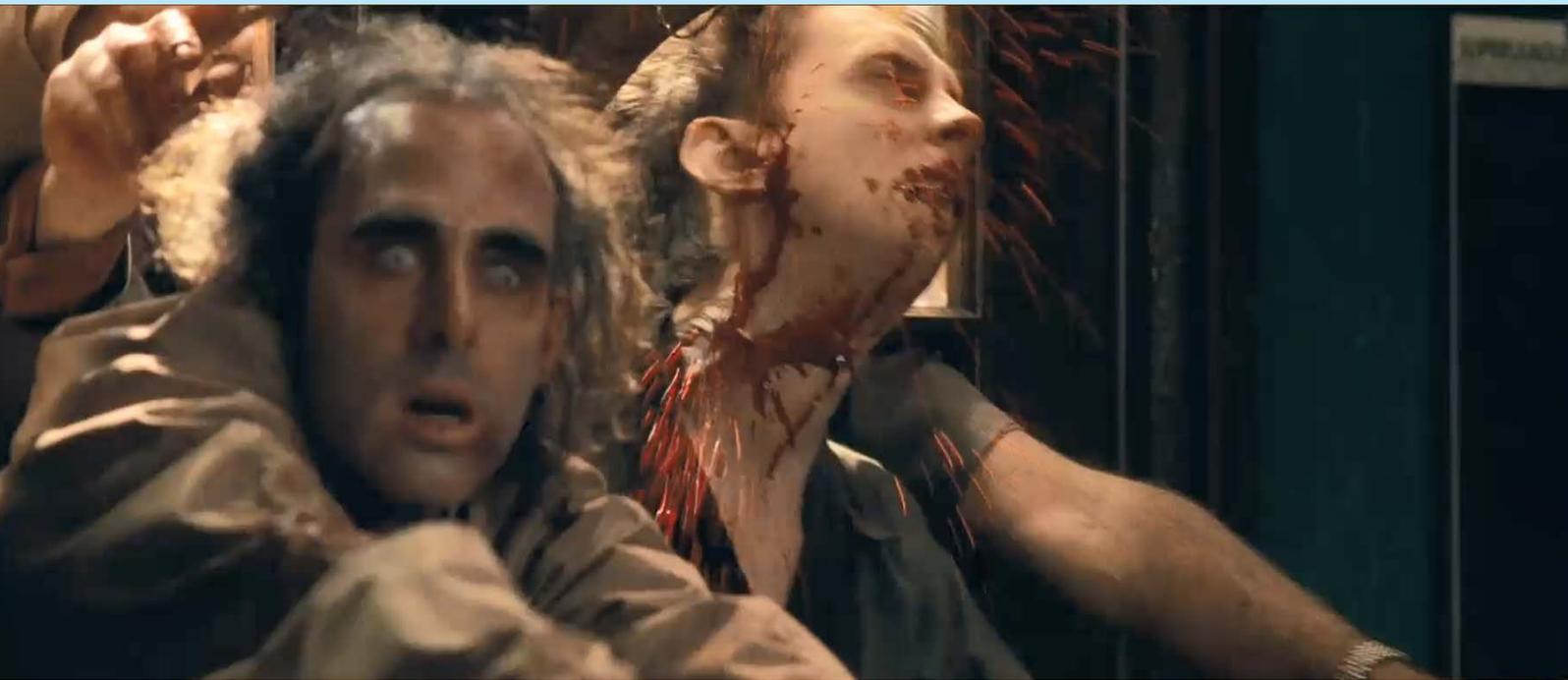
It's often the case the exact circumstances of the shot can't be determined until they are ready to shoot, and this arm gag is a prime example. As a result, much more goes into making something to cover all eventualities.



*Stu Conran testing out the Barbara arm. These are stills from a low resolution video clip we took in the workshop.*



## 10. 'Cock it!'



There were a number of head-shots in the pub skirmish with a Winchester rifle.

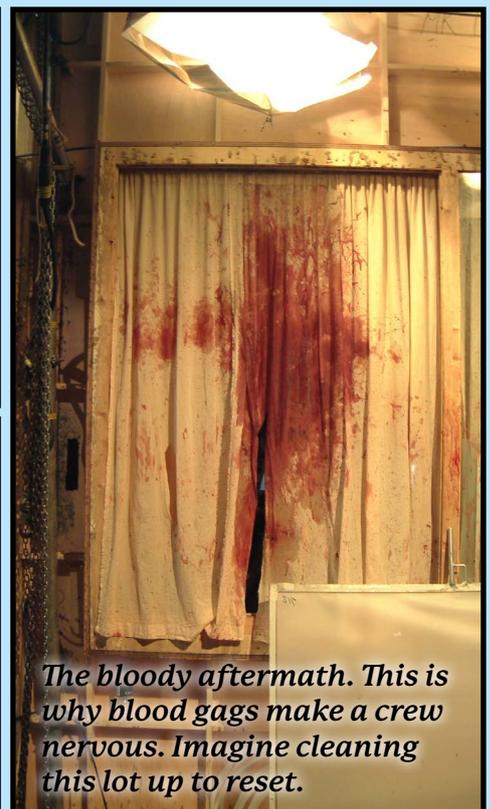
Stu C: "These were a mix of SFX squibs & blood mortars for the most part, all with bullet hole prosthetics.

This showed a great mix of techniques...forehead prosthetics erased & opened by VFX. The appliance is on, and then the wound is digitally hidden before being revealed just as the blood splat is set off.

The fella shot in the neck at the window was a last-minute addition, using a prosthetic/bladder & pango blood squirt...I still cringe because you can see the bottom of the tubing!"



*One of the many head-shots, a combination of practical and digital effects. Speed and safety are big considerations in deciding what method to use.*



*The bloody aftermath. This is why blood gags make a crew nervous. Imagine cleaning this lot up to reset.*

# 11. 'I'm sorry Mum.'



**N**ot too long after Barbara reveals her bite, she turns and is now a zombie among the living inside the pub.

**Stu C:** "This was a stunt double wearing a wig...I honestly can't remember if there was blood used on this

or not.... but I don't think so, because camera would have had a shit fit!

The stunt performer was wearing a wig with a tube underneath. This was connected to the pango (a hand-held, pump-up compressed air drain

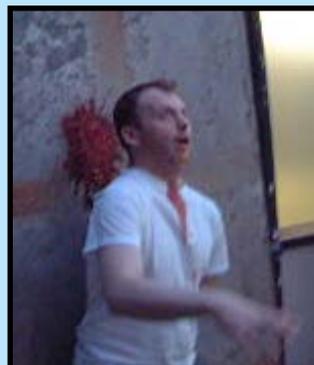
unblocker) which fired a burst of air/hair debris out on cue, with a flap cut into the wig weft.

This was mostly for timing of the shot & for VFX to have something to add on to".



*I got very messy - often - testing out the blood gags from bites, gunshots and bludgeoning. It was so much fun.*

*All these splats powered by the Pango.*



*The mighty 'Monument Pango' drain unblocker.*

## 12. 'Get away from that door this instant!'



David's gory dismembering and disembowelling after being pulled through the window (my screen debut!)

An awesome, orgasmic crescendo to the previous tension, this effect was a fibreglass articulated body minus head and arms, with detachable legs so they could be pulled off on cue (carefully cut Ziplock ties!).

The guts were a mixture of latex nernies, hot melt vinyl poured into a bucket of cold water guts which then cools instantly into amazing, organic shapes.

The torso was scooped out to make a hollow and the chest part of the fibreglass body was cut and dremelled to make ribs, painted white with bone coloured gelcoat resin. The skin was made by painted layers of hot melt vinyl into a body mould.

After a few 'skin' coats, layers built up using a paint spinner dunked into the molten vinyl. Held inside the cavity and spun using a power drill, the resulting strands cooled as they hit the inside of the mould, building up spongy layers which held their shape but were easily torn when required.

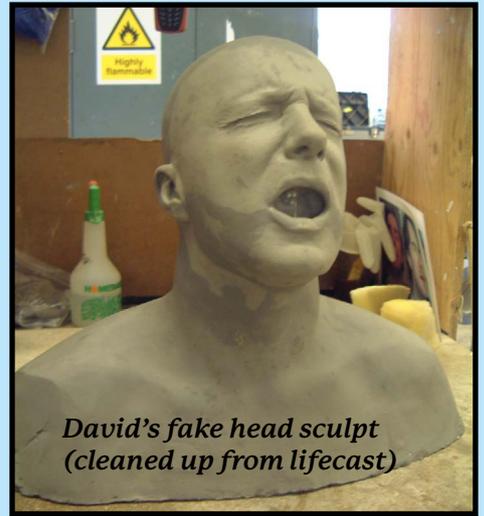
Blood was poured into the softened mass, and sealed from the back with more molten vinyl and allowed to cool. Once required, the body cavity was filled with stringy lengths of fake guts and blood, before being covered in the vinyl skin.

Pre-cut costume was then dressed onto the body, and Dylan Moran's real head and arms are used to supply correct articulation and performance. He wore a foam latex neck appliance (pictured) on his real neck and tucked under the

costume on the fake body which then hid the join. A sequence of beautifully edited shots included the glass window being blown by detonators on cue, a stunt performer bringing Dylan safely over the window sill into the crowd, and a switch to the fake body as the guts are torn out.

To help with the effect, Stuart Bray, Brian Best, Ian Morse from the prosthetic department were themselves made up as zombies and placed in the crowd to ensure the stomach was opened in the correct place, allowing the 'cats' cradle' of intestines to fill the shot as he is pulled apart by the ravenous horde.

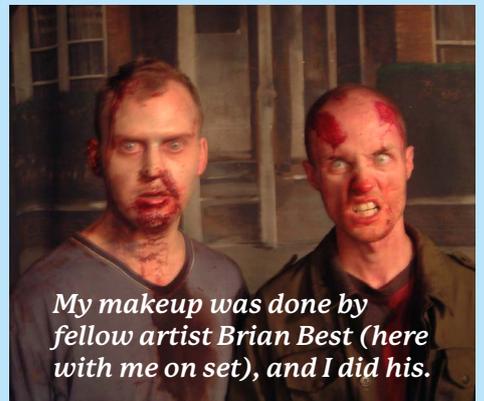
Holding onto the body, the reverse angle shows the legs breaking off as they are tugged hard, breaking the prepared Ziplock ties holding the legs in place whilst allowing articulation.



*David's fake head sculpt  
(cleaned up from lifecast)*



*My one and only screen role  
- as a zombie. Good times.*



*My makeup was done by  
fellow artist Brian Best (here  
with me on set), and I did his.*



*These are stills from a  
'gut tearing' test for the  
scene. The vinyl tears so  
well, and layered to have  
different densities.*





*The foam appliance that Dylan Moran wore to obscure the join between his real head and the fake body.*



*Me modelling the rig on a test day at Pinewood Studios.*



*Dylan Moran's character, David, is torn to pieces and his limbs passed around. Made from Silicone.*

*(Below) It was important to get the timing right. Stunt performers were nearest the window on the other side of the glass prepared to pull Dylan up and over the sill safely so he can be pulled apart by the crowd.*

*Obviously it needs to look violent whilst remaining safe to do repeatedly, so rehearsing and dry runs were important so everyone knew what to do, and when, without it looking deliberate.*



### 13. '...multiple unidentified assailants.'



For the zombies crowding to get into the pub, a large crew call was needed. The make-ups were relatively simple as the time frame hadn't allowed for a huge amount of

decomposition. For speed, a lot of airbrushing and blood strategically placed, messed up hair and lenses for those closest to camera. Plus Of course, lots of blood!

Costume made a big difference, and as many of the supporting artists were recruited from Spaced fan forums, and supplied their own clothes for breakdown and mess.





## 14. 'Shaun, look who it is!'



In the final battle, Pete returns and Ed overpowers him, but forgets about zombies and teeth.

He also gets chomped on the neck so it's not looking good for him. This was a full dummy arm in silicone with a fibreglass core, from a clay press.

There was a separate plug that could be replaced for

extra takes. Nick's arm was hidden behind his back & it was attached by straps & webbing.

For the same shot, there was also a wraparound neck prosthetic with a blood bladder/tubing underneath.

Blood from both was supplied with a Pango for a safe spurt without too much pressure or explosives.



*Tests at Pinewood to figure out camera angles and timings.*



*Me again, getting messy testing out Stu C's arm rig. This first test used just water (easier to clean up) before trying again with fake blood.*



*This time with blood, I tear into a test arm whilst trying not to get blood down the inside of my shirt.*



*The neck bite gag was a messy fountain.*

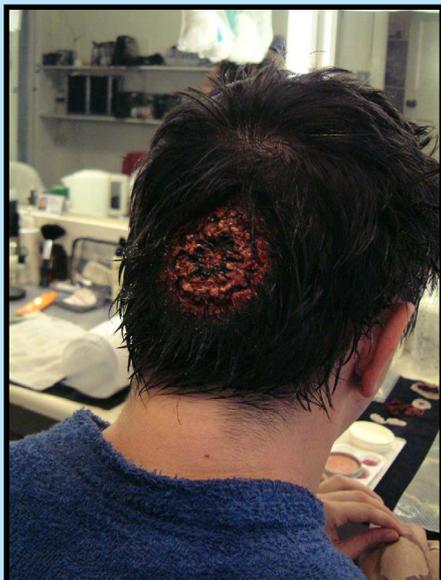
## 15. 'I said leave him alone.'



Pete's head shot was a vengeful payback and damn fine shot by all accounts.

**Stu C:** This was a low-profile prosthetic that was glued to the back of Peter Serafinowicz's head...luckily, he has very thick hair, so it could be gathered up around the piece to give the impression of depth.

A fibreglass skull section was made to fit & covered



with hair. This was jerked away with a fishing line/monofilament...again another nod to Dick Smith!

This was not shot properly on the day because of time constraints, so the 'money shot' was completed as a pickup during re-shoots.

He also had a simple prosthetic on his eye. Again, great work by VFX, who erased/added the eye wound & blood

*(Right) The head shot appliance was beautifully executed (no pun intended) by Stu C.*

*(Right) Dan wearing the test piece. The appliance is glued onto flattened hair and dressed. A small rigid cap with fishing line attached is placed over the piece and has hand laid hair applied. Yank the wire on cue, and boom, the injury appears.*

squirts, as well as beefing up & shifting the wound around at the back of the head).



## 16. 'They're taking us somewhere safe.'



Pick-ups for the bloody conclusion were shot at Shepperton, near Christmas 2003). For the finale of the film, squibs and out of the kit zombies were the order of the day.

Lots of paint jobs, a couple of 'back-of-head' Pango blood squirts through wigs. It was a busy year, and Stu C was tasked with getting crew and kit together at a time when many people were working on other shows.

In the DVD extras, you can spot Barrie Gower, Simon Webber and Sunita Parma. The back of Pete's head was also done during this shoot.



## 17. 'I might pop into the garden for a bit.'



Edger Wright was keen to create a Neanderthal look (remember Ed did a 'Clyde' impression earlier in the pub?) and Stuart Conran created a single foam

appliance which covered the brow and crept down onto the cheeks.

Although it was seen at the end of the movie, it was

shot during the same time as the exterior scenes with the Hulking Zombie/Mary/Record throwing in the garden.



*(Left)  
The quick  
Photoshop  
composite  
image to  
establish  
the look.*



*(Right)  
Stu C's  
finish  
makeup  
applied to  
Nick Frost.  
Utter  
Legend.*

## 18. 'Removing the head, or destroying the brain.'



Throughout the film, various bits of news footage and scenes from around the world tell the story of the zombie apocalypse, and documented the eventual integration as they became part of the new world.

Shaun kept Ed safely chained up in the shed as a game buddy, we see snippets of 'Trisha', a reality shame-show like Jerry Springer in the UK at the time with a girl who married a zombie, and game shows using them as contestants.

One bit of fun was creating some scenes where SWAT teams dispatch zombies in a raid, and as you can see, Stu C masterminded the messy head trauma that ensued.

Glorious fun on Z Day. Mobile Deceased!





**SPECIAL THANKS TO JAMES GREENWOOD  
([CHECK HIM OUT ON INSTAGRAM](#)) FOR THE  
AWESOME COMIC BOOK COVER ART.**