

Danny Glover and Rubén Blades Get Sent to Prison

# THE CABLE GUIDE™

MARCH 1989 VOL. VIII ISSUE 87



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# March

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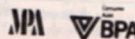


## PROGRAMMING

### A1 *The A-to-Z* rundown of March's movies and specials, local cable info and the daily schedule

Cover photograph: Visages

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Cher: Visages; Jeff Labov: Focus on Sports

# 'Dead Man Out'

Danny Glover and Rubén Blades go to jail for shooting a film



**B**ordeaux Detention Centre, Montreal, Canada. The moment you walk into this medium-security prison, you realize you are being watched. A burly guard in a blue uniform, his keys jangling from his belt, eyes you suspiciously as he unlocks the first of myriad steel gates. Ten feet above, another guard in a

security tower stares coldly down at you.

This is an eerie place to film a movie, as the cast and crew of HBO's *Dead Man Out* have discovered. What unnerves you most—even more than the omnipresent security guards—are the angry stares from the 850 prisoners themselves. Even if you force yourself to look away, you can still feel their

BY ERIC SHERMAN

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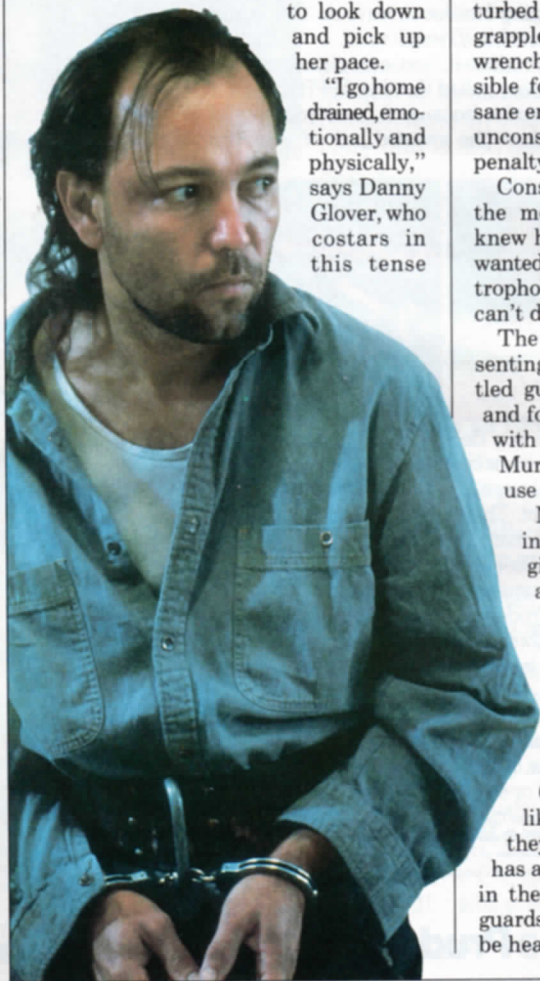
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steely gaze as you walk by the rows of cramped, dreary cells—wild, desperate eyes that peer out from slits in the gray doors. (Bordeaux has cells with solid doors, not bars.) Continue walking and you pass the infirmary, where a prisoner, with his hand in a cast from a fight, gives you the once-over. He whistles at a female member of the crew and mutters a crude comment in French

that causes her to look down and pick up her pace.

"I go home drained, emotionally and physically," says Danny Glover, who costars in this tense



prison drama with Rubén Blades. "Wherever you look, there's brick and steel—you get so sick of it. It's like the fresh air can't make it past the bars. The mice, the dirty bathrooms, the smell of vomit, the darkness that's so heavy you can feel it—they all wear you down. And those endless corridors. I hate to walk down them just to get coffee."

In *Dead Man Out* Glover plays a psychiatrist called in to treat a disturbed murderer (Blades). Forced to grapple with ethical dilemmas and gut-wrenching decisions, Glover is responsible for getting the irrational inmate sane enough to be executed—since it is unconstitutional to carry out the death penalty on anyone deemed insane.

Considering the disturbing nature of the movie, producer Forrest Murray knew he wanted to film in a prison. "I wanted to re-create that harrowing, claustrophobic feeling you get in jail, and you can't do that on some set," he says.

The Canadian authorities, after presenting a list of stipulations that entitled guards to search the crew's cars and forbade the crew from associating with prisoners, agreed not only to let Murray film in Bordeaux but also to use some actual prisoners as extras.

Now, on the set, the crew is finding that if filming in jail for 20 days gives the movie greater realism, it also creates problems. First there is the noise—the constant din of prisoners shouting, announcements blaring over the loud-speaker, and food and laundry carts rumbling through the hallways. "The noise is all around you, in layers," says Glover. "It becomes a part of you, like mildew on your clothes." Since they've begun shooting, a prisoner has attempted to break out, and a riot in the mess hall was put down when guards fired warning shots that could be heard on the set.

**G**lover: "I heard the clang of that gate being locked behind me, and it hit home all over again. It's a brutal sound."

Perhaps no one has it harder than Rubén Blades, who often spends eight hours a day with chains around his wrists and ankles, and cannot even go to the bathroom unless someone unlocks his manacles. Today, he and Glover are shooting a scene in which Blades is dragged into an interrogation room, kicking and fighting two security guards. For three hours, he is dragged back and forth until director Richard Pearce (*No Mercy, Country*) finds a series of camera angles that work. When the crew breaks for lunch, Blades, already weak with the flu, goes to the makeup room (a former men's room) to have lotion spread on his wrists, red and chafed from the handcuffs, and Vaporub smeared on his congested chest. Right now, Blades is not a happy camper.

"This is the most difficult shoot I've done," says the Panamanian-born singer and star of *Crossover Dreams* and *The Milagro Beanfield War*, as he relaxes later (if you can call it relaxing) on the hard bed of a vacant cell. For Blades, the difficulties of filming in prison are compounded by the subtleties of play-

ing an irrational man. "I had a chance to have an edge," Blades says, "like a razor blade." Blades—whom Harvard and the University of California lawyer for set in New York City. While working on the Panamanian

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ing an irrational character. "I've never had a chance to play a character with an edge," Blades says, "and this man is like a razor blade."

Blades—who has a law degree from Harvard and a degree in criminology from the University of Panama—was a lawyer for several years in Panama City. While writing his thesis, he lived on the Panamanian penal island of

Coiba, studying the inmates. "Compared to Coiba, this place is Beverly Hills," he says, making a sweeping motion of his hand around the cell.

It's hard to imagine conditions sparser than this. The cell is tiny—a few feet from the bed is the drab toilet and, above it, a small sink, so that it's impossible to go to the bathroom and sit up straight. The only light—dingy and brownish as it is—comes from a dirty barred window high out of reach.

Blades looks around the cell. "With all the time I spent in jails in Latin America, being in here still affects me," he says quietly. "Sometimes I go to one of the abandoned cells and I'll think, Somebody spent time here. They felt anger and hope. They tried to find order in things. They used this toilet and scratched a message on these walls."

Like Blades, Glover knows firsthand what the inside of a prison cell looks like: as a kid he was detained by police after being caught shoplifting. Later, as a student activist in San Francisco, he was jailed for two weeks on charges of inciting to riot for a protest he helped lead. (He was acquitted.)

"The very first day we began filming, I heard the clang of that gate being locked behind me, and it hit home all over again," Glover says. "It's a brutal sound—so symbolic. Even being back in here just to shoot a movie, you be-

come a prisoner again. It's the same in every prison—you never forget it. The smell of vomit is everywhere. They try to cover it up with ammonia, but it never goes away. The food is tasteless, and you have to barter for everything—coffee, bread, cigarettes. You're not a person anymore. They take your clothes, and you lose your ability to move. Most of all, you lose your dignity."

Although crew members are not allowed to speak with the inmates—even their contact with the extras was tightly controlled—they nonetheless have been affected by the lonely prisoners of Bordeaux. Midway through filming, an inmate slipped under the door of the makeup room a

poem he had written about his experiences in the Gothic, 76-year-old jail:

An ancient Bastille-like fortress  
By a river it stands tall  
A pentagram of penthouse dungeons  
Seals your fate from Montreal

Nearly two centuries of silence  
Its cathedral ceilings as in Rome  
Have broken many a man's spirit  
Who've been forced to call it home

I took the trip philosophically,  
The judge gave me just thirty days  
But in the eyes of most, you knew  
They'd take it to their graves. ■



Blades: "Being in here still affects me."

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