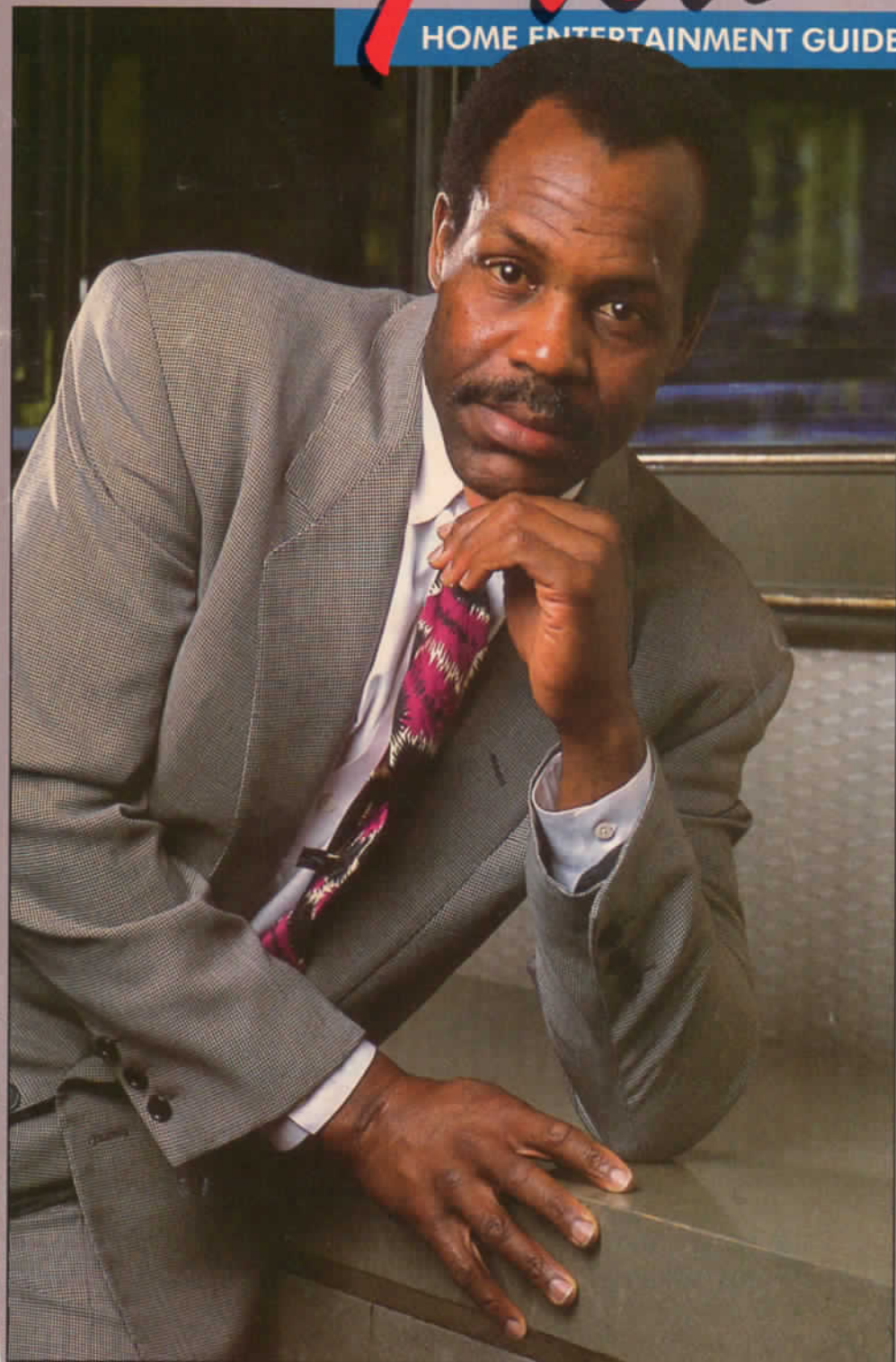


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**DANNY  
GLOVER  
MAKES  
MOVIES  
THAT  
MATTER**

This big-screen star embraces television when it provides him with 'creative and dangerous' films like 'Mandela' or this week's compelling look at capital punishment, 'Dead Man Out'

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# 'I Want My Work to

Danny Glover's latest film, 'Dead Man Out' on HBO, looks at the chilling realities of prison and punishment

BY MARTIN KASINDORF

**'D**ead man walking!" Whenever a death row inmate is let out of his tiny cell, the guard's dehumanizing warning shout echoes through the cavernous prison. The chilling words might have made an even better title than

HOLLYWOOD

"Dead Man Out" for the 90-minute HBO drama debuting tonight at 10. But whatever the cable network decided to call the story, its busy and increasingly acclaimed co-star Danny Glover would have found filming it an unsettling personal experience.



*In tonight's movie, Glover plays a psychiatrist asked to make prisoner Ruben Blades sane enough to die.*

Glover, who won a cable ACE award for his title-role performance in HBO's "Mandela," here plays a psychiatrist hired to "cure" an apparently insane prisoner so he can be executed for killing four people eight years earlier in a \$50 coffee-shop robbery. The Supreme Court has held that under the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishment," a person like Ruben Blades' disturbed character, who was sane when he committed the offense but has gone insane in prison, cannot be put to death.

If you think Barbra Streisand was nuts in "Nuts," Blades redefines the term. In a battle of wits between doctor and patient, Blades, alternately catatonic, fetally withdrawn and violent — or is he faking it all to escape death? — manages to force Glover's Dr. Alex Marsh to a painful confrontation of his own moral dilemma: If the doctor succeeds professionally, his patient will die.

"It was fascinating to me," Glover recalled, "to play someone who believes emphatically in the Hippocratic responsibility to cure and who must stop hiding behind the doctor's cloak of moral neutrality and face the contradiction that he's actually sending someone to his death. I end up stronger, having reluctantly made a choice."

**F**or research, Glover accompanied two forensic psychiatrists to jailhouse interviews with three trial defendants facing the death penalty. Then, location shooting in two noisy Montreal prisons created the proper atmosphere, but in disconcerting ways.

In the middle of one crucial monologue, as the prison P.A. system blared nonstop, Glover was rattled by a distant prisoner's maniacal laughter and somebody's guitar rendition of "The William Tell Overture," but he tramped on. "It worked so appropriately," he recalled gamely.

If anti-death penalty overtones can be discerned in Ron Hutchinson's screenplay, Glover doesn't hesitate to embrace them. "I'm totally against capital punishment," Glover said.



# Stir People'

"Have been for years. Always will be."

The show's director, Richard Pearce ("Country"), shared Glover's views on capital punishment. For all Blades' screaming, the crux of the story, said Pearce, is that the doctor moves from having no position to "no longer ignoring the moral issue." As Pearce put it, "A lot of people in this country have no position because they don't actually have to throw the switch. Alex Marsh was unable to live with those blinders in place. He had to accept full moral responsibility."

**G**lover's goal was to choose a project reflecting "social consciousness," as it was in portraying the imprisoned South African black leader Nelson Mandela last year.

"I want my work to stir people," he said. "It may stir me, but if it doesn't stir other people, who needs it? I want work that tries to uncover something and make us question who we are."

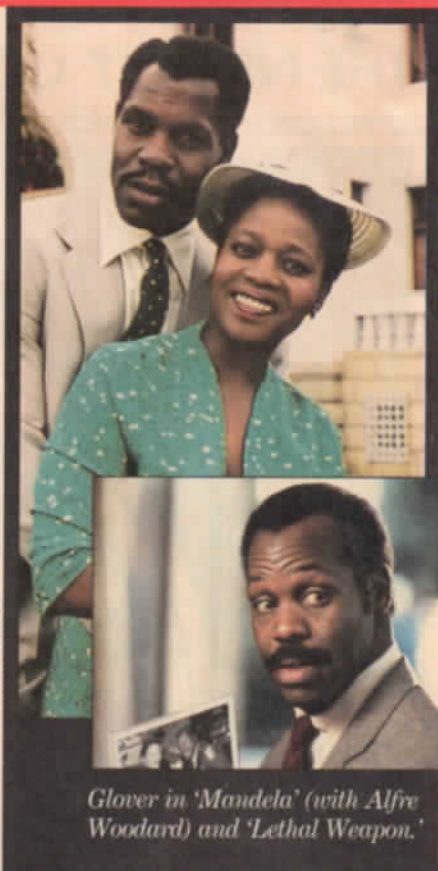
Glover, 41, tall (6-foot-4) and commandingly built, is known better for his work in eight feature films — among them some not very socially conscious ones — than for working in television. Recently, though, he has raised his small-screen profile, with

not only "Mandela" but the role of Deets the scout in "Lonesome Dove" for CBS, and "A Raisin in the Sun" for PBS' "American Playhouse."

Trained in acting in his native San Francisco after dropping college studies in economics, Glover won initial notice using South African dialect on the New York stage in five plays by Athol Fugard, from "The Blood Knot" to "Master Harold . . . and the Boys."

Africa assumed a large place in Glover's life. After Glover's Zimbabwe location work on "Mandela," his wife adopted a South African name, Asake Bomani, and started collecting and selling Zimbabwean stone sculpture. Their 13-year-old daughter was given a South African name, Mendisa. The award for "Mandela," therefore, was "the culmination of everything that was truly, truly dear to my heart," Glover said. He had first read a book on Mandela 21 years ago, and to him the award proved "you're kind of, in a way, destined to do certain things."

Glover's first major screen role, in "Places in the Heart," helped win him the controversial but flashy part of the cruel Mississippi farm husband in Steven Spielberg's "The Color Purple." That box-office hit led to an even more



Glover in 'Mandela' (with Alfre Woodard) and 'Lethal Weapon.'

commercially oriented success as Mel Gibson's stable, 52-year-old L. A. detective partner in "Lethal Weapon." The same pair just finished making "Lethal Weapon II."

Acknowledging that the combined \$170 million U.S. earnings of "The Color Purple" and "Lethal Weapon" have boosted his career, Glover nonetheless does not insist on big salaries for every project. The son of a postal worker, he still lives in San Francisco, in a restored Victorian house in the Haight-Ashbury district, and he drives a Toyota. He expects to soon start a low-budget independent movie, "To Sleep With Anger," which trade reports call "an exploration of the black experience." And, to be sure, there is cable, which pays less than feature stardom.

"Cable does some very amazing things," Glover said, explaining his willingness to leave the big screen occasionally. "Subjects like those in 'Dead Man Out' and 'Mandela' have not been picked up by the networks in any way. Cable could be even more dangerous, but it certainly has been more creative than the networks. The more creative and dangerous it becomes, the more it may push the networks." ●

## Ruben Blades Has Been to Prison Before

**A**s a Panamanian law student in 1971, Ruben Blades took a boat to Panama's prison island of Coiba to research a paper on repeat criminals. The warden, he remembers, scorned his work as "pointless." A generation later, from platforms like the one provided in "Dead Man Out," Blades says in some sadness, "We are still asking the same questions."

At 40, Blades remains interested in issues of the justice system, though he has long since made the crossover to entertainment: First as the Grammy-winning Latin singer whose salsa albums are bestsellers, then in the 1985 film "Crossover Dreams" as the East Harlem musician who tries to make

the jump from the Latin to the mainstream pop market.

After his screen debut, Blades had other movie roles in "Fatal Beauty" and "Critical Condition," and was directed by Robert Redford in "The Milagro Beanfield War." When an agent friend approached him with the "Dead Man Out" script and suggested it was "the kind of thing you should be doing," Blades agreed — and changed agents to hire her.

However, Blades is less certain in his opposition to capital punishment than others who worked on the HBO film. "I am also against the death penalty," he says. "But my mother's never been killed . . ." — *Kasindorf*