It’s a week before Halloween when Fango ventures to the set of JACK ATTACK, a new horror short set during pumpkin season intended to scare you out of your gourd. Directed by Bryan Norton, creator of PENNY DREADFUL, and Antonio Padovan, it stars V/H/S’ Helen Rogers; Fango spoke to all three, and we’ve got a few exclusive photos as well.

On a small Brooklyn soundstage, the JACK ATTACK team (also including producer Lucia Bellini and cinematographer Gordon Yu) are buzzing around a detailed replica of a West Village townhouse kitchen where something nasty is about to happen, judging by the fake blood and other makeup FX accoutrements scattered around the space. These include a rack of small pumpkins and long vines, a mix of rubber mockups and the real thing. “From the beginning, we wanted to do as many of the effects as possible on camera,” Padovan explains. “We didn’t want to have CG vines.”

Procuring enough of the genuine article required a certain amount of guerrilla…planting, as Norton explains: “We started growing pumpkins about five months ago. We’re in New York City and no one has a garden, so Antonio and I ran around the West Village and illegally planted pumpkins in every tree and flower bed we could find. We watered them every week, and we got 20-foot vines that we’ve been using and dipping in plastic.”

JACK ATTACK was born when Norton, a directing teacher at the New York Film Academy, and former student Padovan decided to use Norton’s access to equipment and crew to their advantage. “We’ve always talked about making a movie based in the West Village in fall,” Padovan says.

“On Halloween,” Norton adds.

“Because it photographs very well,” Padovan continues.

“We toyed with some very complicated ideas for shorts,” Norton says, “which would have been really complicated, with tour buses, crowds…”

“Haunted houses, too,” Padovan interjects.

“And I said, as a joke, ‘We could even make a movie just about a *pumpkin*,’ ” Norton recalls. “And we came up with this idea.”

In this particular Halloween horror story, the pumpkins aren’t just omnipresent decorations—they’re the threat, part of the horrific scenario a babysitter named Elizabeth (Helen Rogers) finds herself in when she reluctantly agrees to look after a young boy named Jack (Tyler Rossell). In the scene being shot today, Jack suffers an awful choking fit, and a desperate Elizabeth tries to ventilate his throat with a kitchen knife.

Considering that the FX remains of a dog are also lying around the set, the JACK ATTACK team clearly feel no restrictions in terms of whom they victimize. “It’s funny,” Norton says. “If

100 people are massacred [in a movie], no one cares. But then you show a dog in jeopardy… But this wasn't an attempt to be like, 'Ooooh, barrier breaking!' I just thought it would be funnier, in a dark sort of way, to have this happen with the babysitter, because if it happened to me—if my charge was choking and I had to do this—my first instinct would be, 'Oh my God, I'm gonna get in so much trouble!' She's trying to help the kid, she's about to give him a tracheotomy and she's like, 'Your mom's gonna kill me!' "

For Rogers, who previously dealt with up-close-and-personal makeup FX on V/H/S (see interview here), this sort of situation "really is a fun challenge," she says. "They can create physical obstacles and technical limitations that have nothing to do with my craft as an actor and could be detrimental to the performance, but I actually usually find that it adds a fun, different element; it kind of gives me a scene partner that I didn't have before." As for her other scene partner, "I've been having a lot of fun with Tyler, who plays Jack," Rogers says. "I think my most important role on this set—other than the basics, like knowing my mark and being on time—is developing a trust relationship between myself and the actor playing the kid. And he's great, he's so much fun."

Rogers, who reunited with her V/H/S "The Sick Thing That Happened to Emily When She Was Younger" director Joe Swanberg on the upcoming thriller 24 EXPOSURES and has appeared in numerous stand-alone short films, enjoys the experience of small indie projects like JACK ATTACK. "Especially on something so effects-heavy, there's so much creativity on a low budget. I mean, I don't want to knock high-budget—because I don't really have any experience with them, so I wouldn't know [*laughs*]—but it is really fun to see what you can make with so little. Bryan is leading that department and Antonio is working more with the actors, so they complement each other well. They have different strengths."

This is, in fact, Padovan's first time directing scare material, and he's relishing the experience. "On our first day of shooting, it was just a normal scene of two people talking in a room. And those are harder to direct, in a way; this is more fun. You have to deal with different problems, but in a way, you can have a little more control than when you're relying on actors."

Working with performers in extreme states of emotional distress was a bit of an eye-opener for Padovan, according to his co-director. "It's funny," Norton says, "this is the first time Antonio has been on set where someone is screaming and crying in agony. He was like, 'What an amazing actress,' and I was trying to tell him that's a fairly easy thing to play. He was like, 'Wow, she's incredible,' and meanwhile, after her dramatic scenes, he was like, 'OK, cut, moving on,' " [*Laughs*]

Norton and Padovan were admirers of Rogers even before they cast her in JACK ATTACK; in fact, her turn in "The Sick Thing" led them to reconceive the short's lead role. Originally, the central characters were imagined as a mother and son, with the former part to be cast with an age-appropriate genre favorite. "It was going to be written for someone I grew up with as a horror fan," Norton explains. "Kristy Swanson, Angela Bettis, Catherine Mary Stewart, who's an old friend; we looked at so many people. Then we saw V/H/S and were like, 'Let's write it for a babysitter.' "

In addition to his co-writing and co-directing duties, Norton has taken charge of the makeup FX as well. (SPOILER ALERT: the discussion and photo below reveal specifics of JACK ATTACK's ending.) This, he claims, was not by choice, but out of necessity. "I've had some bad experiences with effects people," he says. "There are a lot of unscrupulous ones out there. "I'm a film teacher, and I see my students hiring these people and paying them hundreds if not thousands of dollars for effects that look like they came from Woochie. And when we were writing it, we were looking on the Internet, like, 'How do you make pumpkins burst from someone's body?' [*Laughs*] There's no tutorial. But it was fun trying to figure out ways to do it."

Norton also contributed FX to another New York Film Academy-spawned horror short, Jorge Godinez's THE HIERARCHY (look for more on that one on this site very soon), and hopes to put it together with JACK ATTACK (which was edited by Mike MacLean and scored by GIALLO and COLOUR FROM THE DARK's Marco Werba) and more similarly themed minimovies in an eventual anthology release. The theme of Halloween in the Village, he believes, would be "a much less random way to put them all together" than in some other omnibus horrors, and Padovan points out. "Not many horror anthologies, to my knowledge, are set in a city like New York. They're usually in suburbia or someplace like that."

“It's funny; I was talking to Roger Corman the other day,” Norton concludes, “trying to convince him to take three or four short movies that exist already and put them together, and he steadfastly maintains that anthologies do not work. But I don’t agree with that.”