


ET WEEK EXCLUSIVE:

First Look: Tom Skerritt
Deciphers THE GRID
By: Iris Wiener



In the wake of September 11, 2001, American television viewers wondered who would be the first to take the most daring of plunges, and bring the tragic events of the terrorist attacks to the small screen. When would the timing be appropriate? What content would be acceptable as television programming for a nation still in the throes of war? Would this 'day' ever be suitable for the likes of an entertainment venue?

Beginning with a two-hour premiere on July 19, TNT brings an all-new limited series into the homes of America, as it undertakes one of the most controversial issues of modern times. *THE GRID* explores both sides of the war on terrorism, and in doing so demonstrates that these acts can be definitively relevant for prime-time when used in a tactful and educative manner. Tom Skerritt (*PICKET FENCES*) sat down with *ETW* to discuss his compromising character in *THE GRID*, never losing sight of the reality of his current project.

"Sensitive subjects are ongoing. I was listening to CNN and the whole FBI alert about possible terrorism on July 4, it's all sort of a part of *THE GRID*," Skerritt says vehemently. "This show is a reflection of what is going on now. The script is the ongoing reality that we're living unilaterally."

Skerritt takes on the role of C.I.A. Deputy Director of Counter-Terrorism, Acton Sandman, with incredible ferocity. The premiere shows Sandman at his worst as he undermines his counterparts with a hard tongue. "I think what you bring into a character is really what you're liv-

ing- especially in this case. And what we're living is ongoing," Skerritt says with slight consternation. "All I can bring into his character is his zealous professionalism, and how precious he is with the information that his agency has, and his drive not to share it with someone else. That's a human trait that he shares with all of us to a lesser extent. The events don't necessarily blueprint for me. The reality does."

Skerritt's reality does seem to have a resolute spin. "I would love to think that ultimately we're going to get to some level of having dialogue. We have nothing to gain by being as aggressive and antagonistic as we are with other countries. Yes, we're a strong country, we don't have to assert it, strength comes in the presence rather than in the action," he says as he reflects on the sentiment to be found in *THE GRID*. But the conflict within does, at the very least, make for a good story. "I hope that viewers will be taken by the drama of the personalities in conflict with each other. Hopefully everyone will have an evening of good drama."

THE GRID is gripping in its intensity and indisputable basis in fact. America will be ready for the judicious story, and will leave the show having learned something relevant to their own being. "We're having to learn a new language in all of this, aren't we?" Skerritt asks. "There is no resolution, there is no end to this, it's ongoing. I think that's the most we can give."