

Long Live the New Flesh: Director Joseph Christiana, Part Two

Written by David Pace
Sunday, 19 June 2011 07:02



Continuing my interview with independent filmmaker Joseph Christiana, creator of THE NIGHTMARE, begun [here](#) ...

FANG: Did you ever want “in” to Fortress Hollywood, or do you think the future is going to be about finding ways to subvert it?

CHRISTIANA: Well, I’d certainly be interested in working with some sort of a budget. There’s something to be said for the creative virtues of working within a certain set of constraints, but having even just a little freedom could bring forth an energy that’s almost giddy in nature, an energy that could be translated into something entirely fantastic.

That said, I’m lucky enough to be in a position where I don’t have to make a sale to Hollywood in order to live. I can continue making whatever type of films I want to without feeling compelled to compromise in any significant way. It’s probably both a blessing and a curse. But I know that if I somehow find myself within the walls of the castle, it’ll be on terms I’m comfortable with.

The thing is, through my day job as an industrial-design creative director, I’ve learned how commerce interacts with artmaking on a very intimate level, and I have resolved, somewhere along the line, to set my tolerance for compromise very low when it comes to film. I have the luxury of keeping something sacred in my life. And I’m grateful for that.

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And of course, there are interesting films, subversive films, being made within the system as well. If “the system” is defined internationally, rather than just by Hollywood, the artists making these subversive films are either foreign filmmakers, like Herzog, Haneke and von Trier, those who’ve broken through the gates with more conventional modes of filmmaking, virtuosic anomalies like Aronovsky and P.T. Anderson or moonlighters like Soderbergh.

In any case, the walls aren’t impenetrable. And there will always be periods of rebellion against the system, this being one such period, and some will be ushered inside *because* they’ve figured out ways to work around the system. The strongest of the subversives will be able to continue being subversive from the inside. Their will must be iron.

FANG: With content creation and delivery power moving more and more into the hands of everyday people, what is the future as you see it for the industry? Will the indies ever take it down, or will there be two systems?

CHRISTIANA: I’m no authority on this, but anyone watching carefully would probably see that the film industry is on a very similar path as the recording industry before it. And I don’t think that’s a bad thing, necessarily. The music *industry* has suffered greatly, obviously, but music has gotten better because of it, in my opinion. The music I’m talking about isn’t in the mainstream, of course. And what’s happening now outside of that mainstream, as far as I can tell, is that musicians are making music because they want to make music, not because of the lures of fame and money. They’ve actually become liberated from the tyranny of the industry, and the focus is once again on the music. They might not be getting paid what they were when they were being exploited—but it sounds to me like there’s a renaissance quietly and diligently burgeoning just under the radar.

My guess is that there’ll be similar shiftings in the film industry. Like the nonsense that still exists on mainstream radio, the cineplexes will be filled with more and more nonsense as the studios squeeze every last drop of blood out of the tried and tired formulae, but there will be an increasing amount of good film out there for anybody to watch, or make, if so inclined.

FANG: Many would argue that the reason we have studios and publishing houses acting as gatekeepers is largely quality control. With millions of people out there putting their work on the web, we kind of have to acknowledge that a lot of it still isn’t of the caliber we’d like to see. Do

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you think this is an adequate argument for the continued existence of a creative establishment that curates everything for us, or do you think it is time for something else?

CHRISTIANA: I think it's a valid point that there's more shit out there because anyone can do it. But the notion of "studio as quality-control gatekeeper" is laughable. At the upper echelons of the studio system, somewhere, maybe, there are producers who are truly interested in making good films. But my—admittedly limited—experience with the industry almost entirely contradicts that notion. For example, over and over, for a script that's even firmly rooted in genre, I've had comments such as this: "It's very well-written, intelligent and elevated, but not commercial, so we're going to pass," or—I shit you not, this is an exact quote from a producer—"It's too intelligent for what I'm looking to do." This could just be my opinion, but these don't sound like people who are looking to make good films; they sound like people looking to make a buck by churning out hackwork.

OK, disclaimer: There's nothing wrong with making a buck. But making a buck means minimizing risk. And, as mentioned above, that's always in direct opposition to making a good film. Again, it's commoditization.

If we go back to the music industry again as a point of reference, we see that the shifting trends have created new forms of curation. It's not the music producers and studios who are curating—and reducing the form to their most simplistic, marketable common denominator—but indie Internet radio, word of mouth, social media, etc. These things are all bringing attention back to the music because the people doing the curating are more interested in the music than all the other nonsense that the industry built and came crumbling down around them. I still think there's a long way to go to perfect the filtering system, but the job's been started.

I think similar things will happen with film. The festivals, the good ones, will begin collecting and curating good films, using respective unifying criteria. There will be word of mouth. The streaming-video sites will get more selective to suit audiences hungry for something other than talking oranges.

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With luck, the movie studios will shoot themselves in the foot by becoming obsessively territorial about their “product,” shutting down the on-line channels...which in turn will seek out well-produced content by outsiders. If the programmers of those on-line channels are smart, they’ll seek innovative material and not film-school-apes-Hollywood hackery. We’ll begin to see marked changes in the form then. To that end, I think the notion of webisodes is ripe for outsider innovation; it’s something I’m actively developing, actually. In any event, redefining the landscape is always painful, but it usually signals good things on the horizon.

FANG: If pop culture keeps looking to the underground to get ideas, what keeps really subversive ideas out? How do the best ideas always seem to get co-opted, and what is it that you are trying to infect the pop landscape with, if anything?

CHRISTIANA: Truly subversive ideas are impossible to market. Quasi-subversive ideas are perfect to market. They become the “unique identities” a mallrat can pick off a shelf. I’m not sure I’m trying to infect anything. I’m just trying to tell an interesting story the only way I can.

FANG: Who is the peer of yours who is out there making incredible stuff that nobody really knows about?

CHRISTIANA: I collaborate with one of the guys who contributes to this [blog](#). His poetry is unlike anything I’ve seen. It astounds me.

[Laurent Rochelle](#)

, a French musician who contributed a lot of the music to MOTEL AMERICANA VOL. II. It blows my mind that this guy isn’t widely known. When I listen to his stuff, I can close my eyes and I see movies.

[Ron Muga](#)

. He is a dear friend of mine and an incredible indie-folk musician. We’ve written hundreds of songs together.

FANG: What is the most important thing you want us to know about Joe Christiana?

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CHRISTIANA: He hopes you find his work amusing or interesting, or both.

FANG: Do you have any advice for people reading this who have ideas and ambitions and are struggling with where to start or finding the motivation to start?

CHRISTIANA: Personal trauma is a good place to start. So is beauty.

FANG: What are you currently working on?

CHRISTIANA: I'm working on a feature-length script about a serial killer, the nature of self-deception and the hypocrisy of the found-footage genre. I've just been invited to co-host a new horror podcast with the team that created Planet Macabre. <http://www.planetmacabre.com> There I'll pitch a Kickstarter project involving the serial-killer movie mentioned above. I'm also working on an animation about a little suburban girl and her family's efforts to keep up with the Joneses by feigning to have contracted the bird flu.

Finally, I'm currently working on an interview for Dave Pace of FANGORIA...just finished.

My thanks to Joseph Christiana for taking the time with us. I assure you this is not the last we have seen or heard from him in this space. Before I go, I really wanted to share one last thing I think the FANGORIA Faithful will appreciate. I found it while looking for other indie movies to feature here. It's over eight minutes of old VHS horror-movie covers, and it is oddly engrossing. There are movies you remember, movies you own, movies you always wondered about at the video store but were too young to rent or even look at too closely. There is a comforting nostalgia for the dying empires of the neighborhood video-rental place and the movies that

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were mostly forbidden to you. I'd sit down and watch all of these—the ones I haven't seen, at least—in some twisted marathon. It might kill me, but at least I'd get to see what the hell STUFF STEPHANIE IN THE INCINERATOR is all about, and how exactly you sustain that premise for 90 minutes.

{youtube}1nIAH7fBCEQ{/youtube}