

Format war! Exclusive news on “HI-8” horror anthology

Written by Michael Gingold
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With the second movie centered on VHS headed for theaters, a challenger has emerged in the form of HI-8, an omnibus fright flick with a number of shot-on-video veterans involved. Read on for their exclusive words.

Produced by Brad Sykes and Josephina Sykes (CAMP BLOOD, PLAGUERS) of Nightfall Pictures and Tim Ritter (TRUTH OR DARE?, WICKED GAMES) of Twisted Illusions, HI-8 will feature segments directed by Brad Sykes and Ritter, along with 100 TEARS' Marcus Koch, Ron Bonk of THE VICIOUS SWEET and CLAY, filmmaker/journalist Donald Farmer (CANNIBAL HOOKERS, CHAINSAW CHEERLEADERS), ZOMBIE BLOODBATH's Todd Sheets, Low Budget Pictures/Warlock Video's Chris Seaver (FILTHY McNASTY) and Tony Masiello (creator of the upcoming documentary SOV: THE TRUE INDEPENDENTS). Many of these participants have been in the biz since the early days of shot-on-tape movies, including Sykes.

“At the end of last year, I was working on a VHS/DVD release of my old SOV movie THE PACT, made in 1995 when I was in film school and shot on Hi-8 video,” he tells Fango. “While spending time re-editing and re-scoring the movie, I started thinking about how much fun it used to be back in the day when you’d just go out with a group of friends and a video camera and have fun shooting a movie, without worrying about budgets, fundraising, distribution, promotion, etc. Just making films for the sake of making films. It turns out a lot of other indie filmmakers were thinking the same thing, and missing those days too. I saw a post on the SOV: THE TRUE INDEPENDENTS Facebook page by Tim Ritter, talking about doing an anthology called HI-8: horror, independent, eight filmmakers). It sounded like a great idea, so I got in touch with Tim right away and we started talking seriously about making it happen.”

“Having spent four years getting DEADLY DARES: TRUTH OR DARE PART IV produced and distributed [by Bonk’s SRS Cinema], I was pretty exhausted,” Ritter recalls. “I was looking for something to do next that was a little more collaborative in nature, and naturally, an anthology

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movie with different directors came to mind. I was talking with a bunch of other like-minded SOV moviemakers on the SOV Facebook page, and someone mentioned that with all the talent interacting there, maybe we should pool our resources and try to do something together. So I threw this concept out there publicly, and Brad contacted me a few days later. We were right on the same page from the beginning.”

The key to setting HI-8 apart from V/H/S, its follow-up S-V/H/S (recently rechristened V/H/S/2) and similar movies lay in the filmmakers not making the format part of the storylines. “We want to keep the stories told in the traditional narrative format,” Ritter explains, “like it was when we all started making video movies back in the early ‘80s or ‘90s. No point-of-view narratives strictly from the camcorder, no found footage or ‘reality cams,’ since that’s been done so much now. We also agreed that we should shoot our segments lo-fi, on the old-school analog formats we started with, preferably Hi-8 video or SD MiniDV, taking things back to the roots of the whole shot-on-video trend. Our goal is to kind of go back to the original classics that inspired us to make movies to begin with, and try to rekindle the passion from that time in our lives.”

“One thing we did right off the bat to make HI-8 stand out is create an ‘8 Simple Rules of HI-8’ document that I passed out to all the filmmakers,” Sykes adds. “For example: no found footage allowed, no CGI, greenscreen or heavy post. Shooting formats will be intentionally low-tech, and they will be shot on location, with practical makeup effects. But within those parameters, everyone has total creative freedom in terms of story.”

Sykes’ own contribution to HI-8 will be “a Polanski-style tale of paranoia and madness, shot in the Mojave desert on some of the same locations where I shot my features EVIL SISTER 2 and MAD JACK.” Ritter’s segment will be the tentatively titled “Switchblade Insane,” which he describes as “in the vein of old-school rape-revenge thrillers like THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT and I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE. That will be challenging to tackle, especially in the short form. Wes Craven’s original LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT has always been a big inspiration, being one of the original ‘backyard horror movies’ that made such an impact on aspiring horror videomakers—especially when it hit VHS in 1985.”

Scripts are being delivered to the filmmakers this month, with the segments to shot this spring/early summer. Sykes says the plan is to complete HI-8 by the end of the summer, and then begin the festival submission process. “We’ll see what can be pulled off—figuratively and literally!” Ritter says. “At the end of the day, everyone should be having fun: the producers, the writers, the directors and the audience. That’s the whole point of this endeavor.”

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“A lot of these guys have been making movie since the 1980s, and were some of the very first SOV filmmakers,” Sykes concludes. “They were the original independents, in a way: shooting on video, making movies regionally when no one else was doing it, just for love of the game. It doesn’t get more indie than that. It was an exciting, risky, dangerous time for movies, and we want to recapture those days with HI-8.” You can keep up with the project at its [Facebook page](#)