



Recently, Fango had the chance to speak with underground death metal legend Kam Lee. When the genre was in its infancy, Florida was a haven for pioneering bands, and in the early '80s, Lee worked with Chuck Schuldiner in Mantas, which spawned into the groundbreaking group; Lee was the only other vocalist the latter ever had. He went on to front Massacre, and solidified a place in metal history as someone who was involved from the beginning.

After many years on hiatus, Lee returned to the scene with Denial Fiend. Today, he's covering a lot of ground, currently fronting Bone Gnawer, The Grotesquery, Broken Gravestones and Grave Wax, as well as the horror punk band Cryptidz. We asked him about genre cinema and its impact on his music...

**FANGORIA:** What were the first horror films that caught your attention before you became involved with music?



**LEE:** Well, you would have to go back to my childhood, really. When I was around 6 years old, my father would let me watch the old Universal monster films from the '30s through the '50s. DRACULA, FRANKENSTEIN, THE WOLFMAN, CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON, THE MUMMY, THE INVISIBLE MAN and all their sequels—plus a lot of Roger Corman and other classic black-and-white films from back then as well. And I grew up on the Japanese giant-monster films: GODZILLA, GAMERA and ULTRAMAN—that stuff was great when I was young, and still is to me today!

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Written by Tom Stevens  
Sunday, 04 April 2010 01:06

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Watching these films was something I did as a kid every Saturday night, as the local cable channel would air a show called CREATURE FEATURE, and my dad and I would sit up and watch all these great classic films together. Later in the '80s, as a teenager, with the introduction of VHS, I got into films like the original TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE and was also a huge fan of the slasher films from that era—MANIAC, SLEEPAWAY CAMP, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME, MY BLOODY VALENTINE and others. Plus the Romero zombie films. Also in the '80s, I discovered the Italian horror and *giallo* films, and other European horror and gore films, like CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST and CANNIBAL FEROX, on VHS at my local video store. Also the exploitation stuff such as BLOODSUCKING FREAKS, I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE and H.G. Lewis films like THE WIZARD OF GORE, BLOOD FEAST and THE GORE GORE GIRLS. I've just been obsessed with monsters, creatures, horror and gore for as long as I can remember.

**FANG:** Were you more influenced by horror for the fear factor or for the gore, or was it both?

**LEE:** I think it's a bit of both—the unknown darkness and mystery of classic films and stories, the ominous presence of evil and dark tones were things I always found interesting in both film and literature. But with movies like the original FRIDAY THE 13TH and TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE 2 and DAY OF THE DEAD—all the early Tom Savini effects stuff—that was when the visual/gore aspects hit me. I appreciated the realism that the effects could capture.

**FANG:** As a youth, did you take any shit for being obsessed with horror from your family, peers, school, etc.?

**LEE:** Not at all. My parents let me collect those old Aurora monster models and express my love of horror by putting up posters and pages out of FANGORIA all over my walls. Hell, my dad was the one who taught me to make fake blood with corn syrup and red food dye, and my mom got me the subscription to FANGORIA when it first came out, and I had the first issue with Godzilla on the cover. So my family always understood; ironically, they have less understanding of it now. I guess because they thought I would have grown out of it by now! [ *Laughs* ] Sure, my peers thought I was a freak, but I always thought that was a good thing. I'm a horror fan, after all, and aren't we all just a bunch of freaks anyhow?!

**FANG:** How about horror film soundtracks; which are your favorites?

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**LEE:** All the old Goblin stuff is just kick-ass! I really like the soundtracks they appear on; the classic Italian *giallo* films really have cool music.

**FANG:** Are you into the occult at all, and if so did you find horror to be the inspiration?



**LEE:** I'm personally atheistic, yet I've read volumes and volumes on the occult, books on the supernatural and paranormal, theology, ancient civilizations and myths—Greek, Sumerian, Babylonian mythology. A lot of study on angels and demons, and ancient culture. I find there's an underlining dark tone in all of mankind's history in both myths and legends.

I like anything to do with monsters, so the Greek myths as well as the Sumerian ones always interest me. I'm more inspired, however, by classic horror fiction writers like H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allan Poe more than by the occult. I tend to find the "real occult" stuff to be a bunch of bunk, actually.

**FANG:** How do the people closest to you now react to your love of horror?

**LEE:** They love it as much as I do... my girlfriend, friends and buddies are all as much horror fiends as I am.

**FANG:** How do you feel about CGI in modern films?

**LEE:** At first I hated it, especially the crap heap of films that came out with cheap CGI. For example: anything the Syfy channel has put out, it looks like complete utter garbage. But I also understand the logistics of it. It is a cheap, effective method that some filmmakers must use in order to make a film. It's just as bad as some of those old classic Roger Corman films with cheesy-looking rubber-suited monsters. Budgets are cut or were never there in the first place,

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producers use film-school students or people who don't have top-of-the-line equipment and no real experience with the programs and technology, and thus the film's integrity and effects suffer in the end.

But there are companies like Weta that do topnotch CGI effects. I cannot deny the great impact of computer-created characters when they're utilized the right way. I still prefer practical effects over CGI, though. The HELLBOY movies and JACK BROOKS: MONSTER SLAYER are just a few films that prove creatures created with practical effects can still look great.

**FANG:** You've mentioned a special viewing of THE EVIL DEAD with some friends way back when. Was that the first time you saw that flick, and what kind of impact did it have on you guys?

**LEE:** Yeah, back in the early '80s, a local drive-in would have special Friday- and Saturday-night "Scary Movie" double features. As teenagers, the members of Death/Mantas—myself, Chuck Schuldiner and Rick Rozz—would all cram into the trunk of one of our over-18-years-old friend's car, and we would get in to see these R-rated and unrated films. One of those times was a double feature of EVIL DEAD with NIGHTMARE as an opener. We didn't pay too much attention to NIGHTMARE, but when EVIL DEAD was on screen, we were all just captivated by it. It was such an influence on us all; we went to rehearsal the next day and wrote the song "Evil Dead"!

**FANG:** Are any of the newer films and directors showing enough promise to give you hope, in the sense that they'll make movies as good as the old days? So many haters out there seem to have no mercy when it comes to this subject. It seems like even some of the people who brought us outstanding horror in the past fizzled out, and started making what many of us feel to be inferior work.

**LEE:** I really believe Adam Green, who made HATCHET and FROZEN, has done a great job of still capturing that "true American" classic horror vibe. Also, TRICK 'R TREAT really captured the true essence of a good anthology and the classic Halloween feeling. But I'm really huge now into Japanese gore films like TOKYO GORE POLICE, MEATBALL MACHINE, VAMPIRE GIRL VS. FRANKENSTEIN GIRL and MACHINE GIRL. They satisfy my love of horror and extreme gore, and have a sort of silly, over-the-top sensibility that I really enjoy! I feel there are still a lot of filmmakers out there who will surprise even the most jaded horror fans and do something great.

However, you will always have those groups of elitists—people who will *never* be happy with anything or accept anything new. It's not the films or the filmmakers that are at fault here; the fault lies with those types of individuals themselves, who tend to shut out anything new and be trapped in their little circle of closed-minded blindness.

**FANG:** Please list your top 10 horror films and explain a little about why they are your favorites.



**LEE:** Sure...

1. **THE EVIL DEAD:** This film changed the way the world looked at horror. The cinematography, the pacing, the overall tone and feeling are just classic. It's even a comedy—hidden in a horror film, but done so “horrific” that many people miss the funny parts.
2. **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE:** The original. What more can I say? It's just perfection in horror and comedy. Still one of my favorites even to this day. Cannibals, necrophilia, and good ol' Texas barbecue. What more can you ask for?
3. **BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN:** Just a true creature classic. The Monster, the Bride, not one but two mad scientists, all wrapped up in a twisted love story from the grave. “We belong dead”...I just love that line.
4. **DAY OF THE DEAD** Still my favorite of all the Romero zombie films, mostly because of the gore and ghoulish effects, and the film's claustrophobic atmosphere and overall hopeless tone. To me, this is just brilliant! Hands down one of the most goriest and depressing zombie films ever!
5. **CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON:** Still the best man-in-a-suit movie ever made.

And the whole feeling of the Amazon River and the dark tones are classic swamp horror! Growing up and living in South Florida, I tend to like a good dose of swamp horror!

6. DESTROY ALL MONSTERS: My all-time favorite Godzilla film ever! Just a *kaiju* fest of the best—Godzilla, Rodan, Mothra, Baragon, Gorosaurus, Manda, Minya, Varan, Kumonga and Angilas all fighting Ghidrah to the death!

7. MY BLOODY VALENTINE: I still love the original, even though I really liked the remake as well. To me, the entire look of Harry Warden is iconic: the miner dressed in black overalls, with a gas mask and pickax. I'm surprised it's not as famous as Jason Voorhees' hockey mask and machete or Freddy Krueger's red and green sweater and knife-fingered glove.

8. PHANTASM: Pure cult classic. The Tall Man is scary as hell, and I actually had nightmares after seeing this film for the first time back in the early '80s—so I instantly fell in love with it!

9. RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD: OK, this is my all-time favorite zombie movie ever! It's the '80s, it's got punk-rock kids, a hot young naked Linnea Quigley, kickass "running zombies"—yes, they ran back in the '80s, people, it's not a new concept—and one of the best iconic lines spoken by a zombie: "Send more paramedics." By the way, did I mention it has a hot young naked Linnea Quigley in it?

10. RE-ANIMATOR: What can I say about this fantastic film that hasn't already been said! A true cult favorite. Nothing will ever top this film; it's just pure grossness at its best. And it too has naked zombies, but not the attractive kind at all. The gross-out meter reaches top levels in this film, and it's yet another great horror/comedy. Yes, it's a comedy hidden within a horror film. Who could ever forget the classic severed-head-going-down scene?

Actually, it was really hard for me to pick a top 10, as I love so many horror films. I neglected to mention any of the classic Italian or European films I also love, and I forgot about some of the best Asian horror movies as well. But that was a quick list of some of the flicks I've seen more times than I can count, over and over again, and still enjoy rewatching to this day.

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