Written by Marla Newborn
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Here’s a case of a “little film that could…,” illustrating the importance of a “can-do”-spirit, assembling homegrown talent and, most critically, using social media promotion to get the word out on your fledgling production.

Let’s start at the beginning… First-time writer/director James Ryan Gary began casting his debut feature DEVIL’S CROSSING (subtitled “The Zombie Western”) in his home state of North Carolina. He chose the town of Love as the on-the-set location to shoot the movie, making it a very local production from its inception. Right from the get-go, word of the movie hit Facebook, a page went up for the film and people started to “like” it. Anticipation for the release of DEVIL’S CROSSING kept on building. This month, Gary began self-distributing DEVIL’S CROSSING, and the undead oater is finally available for purchase on amazon.com. Facebook support for this little indie pic climbed to over 120,000 before anyone had even seen the film!

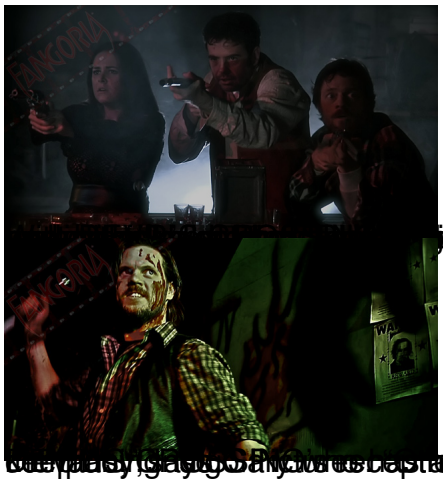
Fango caught up with Gary to find out a bit more about DEVIL’S CROSSING and to see what all the hoopla is about. “Executive producer Paul Reichelt and I had always been huge fans of the zombie genre and were passionate about adding something to the zombie lore,” Gary says. “Most zombie films take place in a postapocalyptic future, and we felt if we were going to do something that stood out, it was going to have to be completely different from most zombie films. When I first started working on DEVIL’S CROSSING, I had just gotten out of the Marines and was at home watching the Clint Eastwood movie UNFORGIVEN, and it kind of hit me right then. I called up Paul immediately, and we made the decision to move forward on a Western zombie film.”

While Gary talks about mixing genres, it seems more that he mixed three of ’em: the Western, the postapocalypse and the zombie genres. How hard was it to make this all come together? “The mix of genres was what we thought was going to grab people’s attention immediately,” Gary says. “We wanted to give zombie fans something besides your typical ‘worldwide viral infection’ story. The real challenge for us was to make something that could work as a solid film for either genre. I always thought it would be cool to see a man get in a pistol duel with the devil. I personally believe a hero in a story is absolutely nothing without its villain, and who could be worse back in the Wild West than the devil? It also gave me something besides a viral infection or some type of radiation to create our zombies in the story.

“The Devil would raise an army of the undead to attack my characters,” the filmmaker continues. “That just became the entire base of my story, and I just went from there: a movie with an army of supernatural zombies attacking a Western town with a pistol duel against the devil in it. Because Westerns, with zombies or not, need their epic showdowns, but we thought why not have a few zombies munch on a few helpless souls before then.”

The ambitious production entailed its share of hurdles for this novice director. “I was green, but everybody was great about it and I loved my crew,” Gary says. “It was my first film, and I made sure to hire a lot of people who were really good at their jobs so they had my back. I just kept telling myself, ‘I have a great crew, I have a great cast, and I am telling my story.’ And I just kept going.”

Gary was fortunate enough to find special talent in star Michael Sharpe, who has performed in a variety of regional theater and award-winning short films, as well as co-lead Patrick Keenan of DARK REMAINS. “They had great chemistry and were a real joy to work with,” Gary says. “Once I got them familiar with their characters, I didn’t really have to direct either of them too much more than tell them where to stand and say, ‘Action!’ ”

Multihyphenate Gary also ranks as a master martial artist, and he personally taught his game cast how to fight. “I came up with something very fitting to the style that was also very brutal and graphic,” he says of his technique. “It had a lot of very dangerous moves and a lot of very intricate special effects such as arm breaks, beheadings, stabbings, etc. We even have a fair amount of digital blood hits that had to be mapped out. I spent three weeks just choreographing and mapping out all of the moves to where we could film everything and every effect in a logical order because time is money and we had very little of both.”

The came the walking stiffs. “I thought the challenge was going to be the zombies,” he says. “We only worked with each of them for one day during the fights, so I spent the first three hours of some very long days just getting the zombie extras familiar with their choreography and the rest of the day shooting it. They were absolutely great! They stepped up to the challenge and knocked it out of the park. They were very easy to work with and as intense as all the fight scenes were, we were really lucky that nobody got hurt during the whole thing. It was very stressful planning, but a lot of fun to make.”