

Penning "THE CHERNOBYL DIARIES," Part One

Written by Phil Brown

Wednesday, 23 May 2012 14:12



Currently amassing brand name recognition in the genre, Oren Peli is easily one of the great indie horror success stories of the last decade. After all, the guy went from directing a movie in his house for a budget that would barely cover salty snacks on most film shoots, and ended up with a worldwide hit. Speaking with him during a visit to Toronto, you can tell he's still shocked and thrilled by the success, allowed into that special club of people who make millions by scaring the pants off of adoring audiences.

He hasn't exactly been twiddling his thumbs since *PARANORMAL ACTIVITY* hit either, supervising two sequels (and counting), helping bring *INSIDIOUS* and Rob Zombie's upcoming *LORDS OF SALEM* to the big screen, directing the mysterious *AREA 51* project under levels of secrecy appropriate for the title, and creating his own genre TV series in ABC's *THE RIVER*. This week, Peli has yet another project coming out in *CHERNOBYL DIARIES*, a film that he co-wrote and produced about a group of twentysomething tourists who decide to visit a crumbling city abandoned after Chernobyl's notorious nuclear disaster and end up discovering more than just creepily empty streets (aka spooky kids and supernatural shenanigans). We got a chance to chat with Peli about his latest movie, his commitment to a realist horror aesthetic, his ever-growing low budget horror empire, and attempted to prod him about the many future projects bubbling in his head.

FANGORIA: When did you first get the idea for *CHERNOBYL DIARIES*?

OREN PELI: It was probably a couple of years ago. One day, I was just browsing on the internet and found some photoblogs and videos of people who actually did go into Prypiat. I knew about the disaster in Chernobyl, but I didn't know about this unique city. It's a ghost town that was abandoned by people who didn't even have a chance to gather their belongings when they were evacuated. I didn't know that people were now allowed to go back in there and supposedly it's pretty safe if you go with a tour guide, avoid certain areas, and don't stay for too long. I did a little more research into it and thought it was such a fascinating place. The images

Penning "THE CHERNOBYL DIARIES," Part One

Written by Phil Brown

Wednesday, 23 May 2012 14:12

that I found were so haunting and creepy. Then, at some point I was having dinner with a friend and mentioned that it would be a good setting for a horror movie and he went crazy and told me I had to do a horror movie there. I said, "I don't really have time, I've got a lot of things going on." But he just basically said, "Oh, you can get a director to do the hard work. You just have to work out a story." He basically talked me into doing it on the spot.

FANG: Were there any movies that you had in mind as an influence on this project?

PELI: There wasn't anything specific. The main thing that was appealing was starting in a very grounded form of realism, so that you feel like the characters are a group of people that you might know. On a whim, they decide to take a trip to Prypiat while visiting Europe and then quickly the bad things begin. Just the whole concept of being stranded in a foreign country is bad enough. Here, you're not just in a foreign country, but in an abandoned city effected by radiation. You're supposed to be alone there and then in the middle of the night, you here a scream of something that might be human or inhuman. That was the grain of the idea that seemed terrifying and we just built from there.



FANG: Was it difficult to recreate the unique look of Prypiat? I'm assuming you weren't able to shoot there?

PELI: Originally, we did want to shoot there, but in 2011 no one was allowed in. They were doing construction or something. Of course, now you can go back. But, we were stuck and had to come up with another strategy. It ended up being a combination of two things. First of all, we found some amazing locations in Hungary and Serbia for the exteriors and interiors. Secondly, our director Bradley Parker is a genius with special effects. He had a background as a visual effects supervisor, so he could look at all the different locations we had and figure out how to

Penning "THE CHERNOBYL DIARIES," Part One

Written by Phil Brown

Wednesday, 23 May 2012 14:12

make everything flow and find all of the settings that we needed. He would look at a location and say, "it has this element that we really need and then through visual effects we can make it perfect." It was very important for us to faithfully recreate the location, because in many ways it's the main character of the movie.

FANG: What sort of creative relationship did you have with director Bradley Parker?

PELI: We were very fortunate to find him. We met him and instantly liked him, first as a human being, just such a nice guy and very smart. He had a great vision for the movie that was very much in line with what we had in mind. It was a very collaborative process between me, Brian Whitten the producer and Brad. We really got along and everyone could contribute ideas. Brad brought ideas to the story and we suggested how to do certain things visually. We worked as a very tight-knit group. We didn't really have a studio to answer to, so there were no notes to get from anyone. It was really whatever the three of us wanted to do. Because it was such a collaborative project, once Brad started shooting, we kind of knew what was going to happen. For the most part, it ended up being very faithful to the idea that we originally had.

FANG: Were you concerned at all about setting a supernatural horror movie in around a genuine tragedy?

PELI: That was never really a big concern. What we were doing was always obviously fictional, and we never intended to offend anyone. We aren't trying to say it's a documentary or something that really happened. It's a fictionalized horror film. We always assumed that people would just take it for what it is and it seems like the overwhelming majority of people have accepted it that way.

TO BE CONTINUED