Written by Ashley Thorpe
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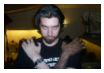


British comedy has often been tempered with a strain of melancholy, but sometimes also a little of the grotesque. In fact, the darker aspects of —often exaggerated to surreal extremes—are an essential part of the landscape of British humor, so it's no accident that the blending of horror and comedy should have become such a British pre-occupation. Horror and comedy have always been "bed fellows," but a successful union requires a rare understanding of the anatomies of each. For every riotous coupling, there's a dozen feeble fumblings.

Just when you thought horror was no laughing matter, enter writer/director Paul Davis, the London based filmmaker behind BEWARE THE MOON (dare I say the definitive retrospective on John Landis' classic AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON). Teamed with hot young producer/director James Pears (THE OTHER SIDE) and a number of seasoned industry professionals, notably Reece Shearsmith (THE COTTAGE and cult Brit comedies THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN and PSYCHOVILLE) the team are about to craft a bloody black hilarious tale of an agoraphobic serial killer, HIM INDOORS.

When Shaun of the Dead himself (Simon Pegg) starts tweeting with excitement at the project's announcement, you know you're in for "a slice of fried gold." Fango caught up with Davis and Shearsmith to learn more about making the audience laugh so hard... it hurts.

FANGORIA: HIM INDOORS has a great central concept: a haphazard serial killer with agoraphobia. Can you discuss the genesis of the idea?

PAUL DAVIS: HIM INDOORS was first born as a concept in the mid-90s when I watched a BBC sitcom called GAME ON with Samantha Janus and Ben Chapman (later replaced by Neil Stuke). One of the characters suffered from agoraphobia and was constantly doing ridiculous things in his flat—such as build an army assault course in his living room—just to keep himself from boredom. So I thought "Wow, wouldn't it suck if he was a serial killer!?" The fact that someone who's necessity to leave their home to fulfill such a desire as killing people, couldn't go outside, really tickled me. That idea stuck with me, and then while I was at University ten years ago, I was very close to actually writing something similar, but for some reason it never

happened. Fast forward many years later, a week ago in fact, and I'm presented with the idea to direct a short as a warm up. Out of the depths of my memory bank comes our agoraphobic serial killer. I wrote the script in a few hours and the rest is history, really.

FANG: What are your genre influences?

DAVIS: I've been watching horror movies pretty much religiously since I was three years old. On the whole, I find inspiration in all areas of the genre—be it THE EVIL DEAD or ONIBABA. CARRIE is one of my favorite movies of all time, and every time I watch it I can't help but sit there and visually dissect it; wonder how long particular shots took to set up and how they were achieved etc. If I could make something that looks anywhere as great as that, I'd be a very happy man. Of course, you can't mention De Palma as an influence without going further back with Hitchcock. I think that's where the dark humor in my work comes from. I don't think people give Hitchcock enough credit for how wickedly funny a lot of his horror/thrillers are. And of course, John Landis is a huge influence on my career. Not just with AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON but also THE BLUES BROTHERS, TRADIING PLACES and even THRILLER. I love comedies as much as I love horror films, so I think for me to write something that incorporates both was a natural occurrence.

FANG: Reece Shearsmith has a reputation for these wonderful 'grotesques' in comedy, did you write the part with Reece in mind, or was his casting a sudden flash of inspiration?

DAVIS: This whole thing literally started up within days. I started work on this with a producer friend of mine, James Pears (who's first production THE OTHER SIDE is about to hit the festival circuit) literally a week ago. I approached Reece on the day it was decided we were

going to do this, so, before there was even a script. I've been a fan of Reece since TTHE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN's first run on the BBC, and PSYCHOVILLE, again, is just brilliant. We both appeared in John Landis' BURKE & HARE and while we didn't meet on that, I was fortunate enough to meet with him last year and it turns out we have a very similar taste in horror movies. I mentioned to him pretty early in the development of SILENT NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD that I'd like him to be involved as one of the principal characters, so James Moran was able to write his character especially for Reece. Same thing here, I told Reece the idea, I knew that he had an interest in the psychology of serial killers etc, and so once he stated his interest, I was able to write the script with his likeness and voice in my head the whole time; which I must say, made the whole process a lot easier than it could have been. He's a remarkable talent and I cannot wait for him to bring this “interesting” character to life.

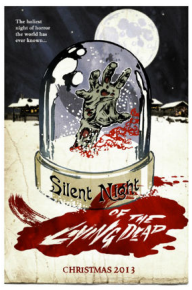
FANG: BEWARE THE MOON revealed not only a sincere love for horror but horror laced with lashings of black humor. Are you hoping to recapture something in a similar vein with HIM INDOORS?

DAVIS: Yeah. As I mentioned earlier, although I absolutely adore horror movies and love being scared, I enjoy a good comedy just as much. I've always been a bit of an entertainer at heart and love to make people laugh, so despite my desire to scare people through my work, I can't help but to include a bit of comical respite in there. The same thing happened with SILENT NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD. It initially started out as a serious horror movie, but when James Moran and I sat down to talk about the story, we kept adding these ideas that were just too hilarious for us to take it seriously. It's still very scary and graphic and violent, but the sense of humor couldn't be ignored. With HIM INDOORS, it had to be a comical. The very concept is funny: a serial killer who can't leave his home. so his victims have to somehow come to him. I littered the script with a lot of little comical moments that really intensify the insane situation the character manages to bury himself in. At the same time, there are a few moments in there that I purposely made *very* shocking. In fact, I knew I'd achieved what I set out to do when Reece commented on how shocking one particular scene was. Comedy and horror is very hard to get right, and I'm very much aware of that. I just hope I've got something here that will both make people laugh and gasp.

FANG: And you announced today that Pollyanna McIntosh (THE WOMAN) will be playing opposite Reece Shearsmith in HIM INDOORS....

DAVIS: We're so thrilled to have Pollyanna involved in this. She was phenomenal in Lucky McKee's THE WOMAN and I can't wait to see her and Reece on screen together. She has an amazing presence. You can't help but look at her when she's on screen, so when you put her

up there with Reece Shearsmith, I have goosebumps just thinking about it. It's funny because the three of us all worked together on John Landis' BURKE & HARE but I never met either of them on set. It's like we have a little reunion going on.'



FANG: With the days of the B-pictures sadly long since dead, short films are something of an anomaly in the mainstream cinema going experience, although their presence seems to be growing at genre festivals. What do you hope to achieve with your short and what do you think are the challenges faced by independent short film makers?

DAVIS: Short films have essentially become a necessity for filmmakers to get their talents seen by an audience, and these days it's incredibly difficult to get feature projects off the ground without a short to show what you can do. The biggest challenge with making a good looking short, again, is the same challenge with making a feature, the cost. Sure, it's nowhere near as much as a feature film, but it's still *very* expensive to make something that looks and sounds great. This is a particular area where I am an advocate for crowd-funding. If you're making a non-profit piece that is being created purely to be seen, then I'm all for that. I think that crowd-funding a feature is a different kettle of fish that I wouldn't touch with a 60ft pole. If you're going to be making money off of other people's generosity, no way. I'm a human being before I'm a filmmaker. It's unethical. HIM INDOORS, however, is being made to be seen. We're not selling it, we're showing it. That way, people will get something back for their kind donations. In addition, we're giving a ton of really cool stuff to people who make contributions. One person, for example, has purchased one of the murder weapons that will be used on screen, signed by Reece Shearsmith. There's still lots of great things up for grabs too, such as personal tweets from Reece (@RealReeceShears), signed scripts, DVDs and a pair of screen used gloves—which I guarantee people will *kick* themselves if they miss out on these—once they see the scene and context in which they're used.

FANG: What can you tell me about the much anticipated “yule ghoul” feature SILENT NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD?

DAVIS: Can't say too much about it at the moment. We're still funding the project, but we're in very good shape on it, and are looking to shoot early next year. We're talking to a lot of wonderful people to join Reece Shearsmith, AJ Bowen and Tom Savini on our cast. Then, of course, you've got the script by James Moran (SEVERANCE), special make-up FX by Oscar Winner Dave Elsey (THE WOLFMAN), special effects supervisor Dan Martin (SIGHTSEERS), make-up designer Jenna Wrage (STORAGE 24) and cinematographer Eben Bolter (CONFINE). I wish I could tell you more but we're really keeping as much under wraps as possible at the moment.

REECE SHEARSMITH

FANGORIA: You've carved a niche for yourself in comedy playing these wonderful grotesques that seem culled from something like HAMMER HOUSE OF HORROR. Were there any seminal influences upon you, horror or comedy?

REECE SHEARSMITH: I have always been a horror fan, and a lot of our “comedy” (I use the word cautiously!) has pillaged many of our most cherished scares. But famously THE WICKER MAN, DONT LOOK NOW and THEATRE OF BLOOD have always been particular favorites. I have always loved being surprised by horror. The unexpected is a rare thing these days. It’s very difficult to really feel frightened by something on screen. On the rare occasions that it happens, ironically, you never feel more alive.

FANG: It's interesting looking at some of your horror/comedy characters in LEAGUE and PSYCHOVILLE as they're often quite make-up heavy, mask-like, similar to the classic movie monsters. There's something of Roy Ashton in there...

SHEARSMITH: As a huge make up and special FX fan (I worked with Chris Tucker before I decided I wanted to be an actor), it was a dream come true to be able to try out lots of grotesque make up. It was never actually as much as you think (which is an unfortunate thing to admit, when you think of how monstrous I look as some of these people!), but we enjoyed creating characters that were still this side of believable, however strange their situations.

[redacted] Sopneume [redacted] Davis on Twitter [redacted]