

## D. Kerry Prior: His Irreverent “REVENANT,” Part Two

Written by Michael Gingold  
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Continuing our interview with D. Kerry Prior, writer/director of THE REVENANT, the knockout black-comic horror movie currently in limited release (see part one [here](#)), the filmmaker talks capturing big locations and FX on a small budget, the joys of festivals and a truly bizarre-sounding follow-up project...

**FANGORIA:** You mentioned making LA into a character in THE REVENANT, and you use the locations really well. Was any of the movie shot on the streets guerrilla-style, or was it all done on the level?

**D. KERRY PRIOR:** [*Laughs*] No, it wasn't on the level. Initially, it was sort of on the level, but then we went out and stole a lot of 2nd unit, a lot of establishing shots. A tremendous amount of stuff was filmed against greenscreen, and when we did that, I just went out and shot plates all over Los Angeles—places we never could have shot [the actual scenes].



The big location we used was the LA subway exit right on the corner of Hollywood and Highland, at the big mall complex there. During preproduction it was suggested, “Let’s go downtown, we can use another subway exit down there, and it’ll be a lot cheaper.” But I felt it was important that number one, it be a huge landmark that tourists go to, and number two, that

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it be a big, bright, flashing neon place, so that this whole story that has been sort of underground, in the back alleys of Los Angeles and Hollywood, is suddenly forced out in the open in this big, recognizable site. It was a lot more expensive and people fought me on it—for legitimate reasons—but then when the movie played at Screamfest, which takes place at the Mann’s Chinese Theatre right in that complex, after the movie was over, everybody who was there from out of town went down and stood out in front of the subway exit and looked at the location. At that point I was like, “Perfect, that’s what I wanted.”

**FANG:** You have a long résumé as a visual FX artist; I imagine that made it easier for you to pull off THE REVENANT.

**PRIOR:** With the budget we had to make this movie, we couldn’t have done it unless I was acting as the effects supervisor. If I had had to translate everything through another effects supervisor, it would have jacked up our budget exponentially. Just going into it from a writing standpoint, when I was starting the script, I was thinking, “OK, how can we do this?” And if we’d had to hire another company to do that... Especially when we ran into trouble and didn’t make our shooting schedule, and had to shoot stuff against greenscreen and then composite everything later on...

And I’m not taking all the credit; part of it is the digital technology. If we’d had to shoot this on film 10 years ago, we never could have made it for that price. It just revolutionized filmmaking.

**FANG:** Your makeup FX are also very impressive. Who created those?

**PRIOR:** It was Silver Shamrock Studios, Chris Mills and his wife Amy Mills. And we also brought Jason Collins in to do the Miguel makeup. He did a fabulous job on Miguel, and really knocked it out of the park. I’m proud of all those effects; everybody did a great job.

**FANG:** The movie’s had quite a festival run over the last few years; what have been some of the highlights?

**PRIOR:** You know, it’s ironic; if the film had been picked up right away, we never would have

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had the opportunity to go to all those festivals. Maybe it's a double-edged blade, but it's so much fun going to those events; I had no idea, it was my first experience doing that.

The first one we went to was the Zompire Film Festival in Portland, Oregon. They had contacted us, and we must have sent them an early screener; the movie wasn't done. But they called us and said, "We've got one slot left, and we'd love to have the movie if you can do it." And I told them, "Well, the problem is we're not finished, we still have effects that aren't done, and I don't think we can make it." And they said, "Look, we'll screen a rough cut if you can get up here." So we slapped it together and went up to Portland, and I was actually still rendering the digital print in my rented car on the way to the festival!



So we got it in there, and I guess I had been so rushed to finish the movie, and so focused on postproduction, it hadn't even occurred to me that there was going to be an audience, and people would be watching it. But when we tested the print in the theater—the Hollywood Theatre in Portland, this gorgeous old 350-seat house—it was thrilling to see it projected for the first time; it took on the natural ambience of the place, it gave it that reverb, it just sounded big and felt like a movie. And then watching it in front of a packed house, with 350 avid zombie fans, people dressed up in costumes and the whole thing, was just really fun. And it was the first response to the movie; I'd never projected it in front of an audience before, and these guys were just primed to see a zombie movie, so they ate it up, they went crazy. I was kind of stunned and thrilled at the same time; it was a great experience.

Since then we've been to Fantastic Fest, and Tim League puts on a great show; I spent a week just going to movies there. The Chicago Film Festival was another great one; we went to Fantasia in Montreal, and that was definitely the most vocal audience. That was an 800-seat house, and again, it was a huge group of completely passionate genre fans, and they go to each one of these screenings ready to have their asses kicked. So when a movie hits, they go berserk, and I was at a couple of screenings where they did just that. It was so much fun and really thrilling to have 800 people yelling and screaming and cheering for my movie. That

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festival is outrageous, just out of control.

**FANG:** Is REVENANT in fact your first feature?

**PRIOR:** No, it's not. I directed another feature years ago called ROAD KILL, which basically died on the vine. There were production financing problems, we dealt with the Mob, it was this whole adventure. A few years later I directed a film called THE BLAIR RABBIT PROJECT, and ended up in a lawsuit over that one, so again, it died on the vine. So you might say this is the first one that has actually hit home and gone out to audiences.

**FANG:** What do you have coming up?

**PRIOR:** I have a few scripts I'm working on right now. One of them is called MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM ME AND BUBBLES, and it's about a guy who is seeing a shrink, who has ordered him to go and adopt a dog from the pound, because he's having trouble relating in a positive way with other people, and his shrink feels this would be a great training ground for him. The problem is, this guy hates dogs. So he goes to the pound and adopts the most decrepit, old, sickly dog he can, in hopes that it'll die soon and he'll be relieved of this duty. But as it turns out, he falls in love with this dog, he's crazy about it and he feels there's actually a deeper emotional connection they can have. So he goes to a pet psychic, and one thing leads to the next, and pretty soon he wants to try to create a sort of extrasensory bond with this dog. And he learns that by trepanating yourself, you can gain a lot of mental power, so he decides to do trepanate himself and the dog.

Now, if you're not aware of what trepanating is, it's the oldest surgical procedure known to man, where you drill a hole in your skull to relieve the pressure on your brain. So he does this to himself and the dog, and as soon as he does it to himself, he's immediately transported into another dimension, an alternate universe where he meets his other-dimensional self. And through meeting his other-dimensional self, and his extrasensory perception with his dog, he's able to foil a terrorist cell that's happening in the city, and re-bond with his ex-wife and his child, and...I won't go into any more, but it gets complicated!