

Rotterdam Q&A: Richard Raaphorst on "FRANKENSTEIN'S ARMY"

Written by Barend de Voogd
Sunday, 03 February 2013 17:28



"I hope you will be just as scared as I am right now, standing in front of you all!" Dutch director Richard Raaphorst sure knew how to introduce the world premiere of his film at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam. While FRANKENSTEIN'S ARMY might not be as nerve-racking as the première of your first horror flick, it sure is a hell-of-a-lot of fun.

Germany, 1945. The Second World War is coming to an end. Dimitri (Alexander Mercury), part of a Russian military unit, is making a Soviet propaganda film, documenting the glorious victory of the Red Army over Hitler's Evil Empire. Unfortunately, he and his comrades stumble upon the work of a certain Victor (HELLBOY'S Karel Roden). This guy is somehow related to the original Frankenstein and he is still at it. His hideous, mechanically-resuscitated Nazi zombies will be jumping at the poor Ruskis in every conceivable, and inconceivable, shape or form. Watch out for 'Mosquito', 'Four-eyes' and 'Propellerhead'.

Raaphorst's vision of mutilated zombie soldiers, armed with drill-like snouts, saws and deadly claws, capture the imagination. They are all practical FX, courtesy of Holland's best SFX studio, UnrealFX. Actually, the world already got its first glimpse of Raaphorst's fantastical Nazi Zombots in 2003. The creatures featured prominently in the teaser-trailer for WORST CASE SCENARIO. That film was never to be, and FRANKENSTEIN'S ARMY differs hugely in storyline and style, although it does point that Raaphorst and his partners were ahead of the curve on this Nazi zombie craze that sprouted films like DEAD SNOW, OUTPOST and IRON SKY (of course, for the sake of the argument, we are ignoring 1977's SHOCK WAVES).

RICHARD RAAPHORST: I did find some of those Nazi zombie films to be very funny, but unfortunately it was never more than a gimmick. I tried to infuse some psychology into my film. I said from the beginning: this is a character movie. Every Russian soldier, but also every monster, has to be unique. The Nazis or the Nazi zombie gimmick are not what this film is about. It's about people who descend into the madness of war. War is chaos, that's why I filmed it that way. And we will find the ultimate madness in this Doctor, who isn't even a real die-hard Nazi. He is nothing more than an opportunistic hobbyist. That's what war is like.'

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FANGORIA: You are pushing it pretty far. The first thing we see are these Russian soldiers, including the hero of the film, roaming through the land, pillaging, raping...

RAAPHORST: That's the reality of it. If I were to deny that, now that would be sick.

FANG: Not afraid to lose the audience?

RAAPHORST: No. I haven't given that much thought. My philosophy has been: just make sure it's original. The audience will find it eventually. Looking for a target audience? That's all bullshit.

FANG: What pointers did you give Karel Roden for his character?

RAAPHORST: We went on a journey of discovery together. What kind of guy is this? Is he the mad professor that we all know and have come to expect, or is he more like... say, an auto mechanic? I really liked that idea, that's something I haven't seen before. Karel is someone who will phone you constantly with new ideas. The Nazis or the communists? Victor couldn't care less, as long as he can do his thing. There is an irony in that. This is not a film to be taken too seriously. I tried to make up for it by really having fun with the Frankenstein archetype in the finale.



FANG: No spoilers, but I love the way Victor solves the conflict between fascism and

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communism. I visited the set in the Czech Republic in March 2012. I remember seeing your sketches and creature designs everywhere. The people of Unreal FX called it their Bible.

RAAPHORST: That's only ten percent of what I drew. When I'm in hyperfocus, the ideas keep coming. One design leads to the next and you keep seeing new possibilities. Rogier [Samuels, Special FX Supervisor for Unreal] and I constantly discussed the possibilities. We really pushed the envelope. I didn't want any digital FX. I would ask: "A guy with a head like a propeller, can we do that?" I would then make a first sketch that wouldn't be practical, we would discuss it some more and eventually we would find a design that did work. And that we could set fire to on set.

FANG: Are there any Zombots that you couldn't do?

RAAPHORST: Plenty. My computer is filled with them.

FANG: So there's enough material for a sequel?

RAAPHORST: Yes, but I'm not going to do that. If we are to do a sequel—and I have very specific ideas about that—everything will be redesigned. These designs fit this story. If we go into a new era—(smiles) say the Cold War period, then I will make new monsters fitting the technology of that period.

FANG: Did you know they already did a rip-off, ARMY OF FRANKENSTEINS?

RAAPHORST: So I heard, yeah. Fucking hell. That's great. Can't wait to see it!

Barend de Voogd is the editor of [Schokkend Nieuws](#), bi-monthly film magazine for Horror, Sci-Fi, Fantasy and Cult-movies, distributed in The Netherlands and Belgium.□