Written by Brian Kirst
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For decades, horror fans around the world have been inspired by the demented genius of writer/director Frank Henenlotter (BASKET CASE, BRAIN DAMAGE, FRANKENHOOKER). More than anything, perhaps, Henenlotter's put-upon freaks of nature and sophisticated monsters have given awkward high school students and budding filmmakers characters that they can relate to.

But the humble Henenlotter was unaware of the legacy of his cinematic past until he attended screenings for his most recent film, 2008's BAD BIOLOGY. The outpouring of love stunned him and he has subsequently been reaching out to his fans via the internet and various festival appearances. As he prepares for two back-to-back film events this week in Chicago, featuring rare screenings of the BASKET CASE trilogy and BRAIN DAMAGE (see details below), Henenlotter speaks with FANGORIA about the creative process behind his most popular creations and his joy upon discovering his legacy.

FANGORIA: What was your initial inspiration for BASKET CASE and BRAIN DAMAGE?

FRANK HENENLOTTER: With BASKET CASE, I had that great image of a monster leaping out of a basket. Well, I don't know if it was great, but I just thought it was a wacky image. But when I started writing the script, I didn't get very far because I didn't know why anyone would walk around with a monster in the basket. I hadn't thought of them, immediately, as being brothers. I was just writing whatever was in my head. But, when I started being logical about it, it fell apart. Until I realized—oh, they're brothers. Then after BASKET CASE, I tried to get another film made, and nobody liked the script. Everybody just thought it was stupid and ridiculous and no one got it. And that was that. And I really wanted to make that. I was very stubborn. 'That's the one I wanna make!' So, I wasted too many years trying to make a film that nobody wanted to make. At some point, during that period, I started thinking—not intentionally of making another film—but I started thinking what if there was a monster on somebody's body, you know? It made it a little more unpleasantly personal, but I couldn't understand how. Why would anybody have a monster on their body? And there were only two possibilities. That they are possessed or they got bitten or something and have no say. Then there's the one where someone was under control of an alien influence. We've seen those films: INVADERS FROM MARS, IT CONQUERED THE WORLD. That's been done! Well, what if it is slightly different? What if it's addiction? Once I thought of that then I knew where it was going. It just seemed to flow. That was BRAIN DAMAGE. It was less about anything in my life. Although, I have had my own bouts with addiction! That's why I was able to write it. But it was less about me and more about the visuals first. And then I just filled in the blanks when I realized what the story was

going to be. It was why I made the monster talk. I needed him to be the devil in Faust. I needed him to talk. It's a Faustian bargain he makes: 'You do this for me, I'll do this for you!' But like any Faustian bargain, the devil is lying. That's what makes the story work so well.

FANG: Legendary horror host John Zacherle helped make that particular vision come together, too. His voice for Elmer in BRAIN DAMAGE is pretty memorable!

HENENLOTTER: When we went to a recording studio, he just aced it! He was funny as hell. Anytime I would say go a little crazier, he went a lot crazier! He was terrific. He was such a joy to work with. At the end of filming, I called him to find out how he wanted to be billed. Somehow in that conversation, he mentioned SAG and I went, 'Oh, no.' This isn't SAG. If we had put his name in it, he would have been fined. Not us. He would have gotten into trouble with the Union. That's why we didn't put his name on it. On a good day, I can actually do a semi-decent imitation of him as Elmer. So, he was like, 'just tell them you did it! Tell them it was you!' I actually dubbed one little line in the film. When the monster is in the sink in the flophouse, a line that Zacherle had completed didn't work with the monster. We couldn't get it to sync. So, I had to rewrite the line really fast. And I just dubbed it in just as quickly. So to this day, I don't even remember what the line is. I guess it sounded pretty good.

FANG: Rick Hearst, your lead in BRAIN DAMAGE, is truly committed to all the craziness his character, Brian, goes through. That seems impressive considering that it was his first leading role.

HENENLOTTER: The total cost for BRAIN DAMAGE was under $600,000, including all the postproduction and all that stuff. So, I shot it for a lot less than that. It was about as low of a low budget film as you could get. It's never easy working on a low budget film! There's nothing fancy. It doesn't matter if you are the star of the film. You've got to ride on the bus to get to the set and all that other stuff. He couldn't have been more enthusiastic about it all. I never heard him bitch, complain, moan, anything. He was just wonderful. And you know what else he does? One morning, he mentioned that when his stomach is empty and he drinks coffee, his stomach would make these weird sound effects. I heard it and I said, "You're gonna be the sound effects

that Elmer makes!" So, we brought him into the sound booth and put a microphone right opposite his stomach. I think he pulled up his shirt and he just recorded all types of stomach sounds. And that is all those weird gurgling sounds that Elmer makes in the film. That's Rick's stomach! They were extraordinarily loud. And that morning, I know he prepared. He said that he hadn't eaten since 9 the evening before, or something like that. He had plenty of coffee and he just went for it.

FANG: BRAIN DAMAGE is, also, notable for the appearance of Kevin Van Hentenryck is his Duane role from BASKET CASE. Is their truth to the rumor that you were going to cross over Herbst's Brian into the BASKET CASE sequel?

HENENLOTTER: Yeah, but I thought better of it. I thought that was so self indulgent on my part. I just thought, 'Nah! I'm not gonna do it!' I thought it was a good idea putting Kevin in BRAIN DAMAGE. That cracked me up. But, beyond that, nah! We actually had to get him a wig for his scene in BRAIN DAMAGE. His hair was cut short so he didn't look like the character anymore. It was a funny gag. The gag kind of worked even if you didn't know BASKET CASE. There was something odd about it. That's why I kind of let it go.

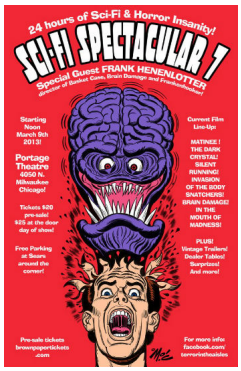
FANG: Is there anything in particular that sticks out in your mind about filming those first two movies?

HENENLOTTER: For BRAIN DAMAGE, it was just a crazy atmosphere. We shot it in a button factory on 33rd Street. One side of the street was all these commercial buildings but the other side of the street was the train tracks. At night, it was hooker central! It was surprising. It was non-stop hooker action out there, mostly involving car traffic. In the morning, the street was full of condoms. And crack vials! When we were filming, the crack epidemic really hit New York, big time. So, you'd walk down the street and under your sneakers would be crunching crack vials and condoms. It's why I gravitated to FRANKENHOOKER right away. It was on my mind! We had a pretty small place, as well for BRAIN DAMAGE. It wasn't meant for filming—especially when the heat came on. The radiators were so loud that it would often screw up the sound take. But then again, so did Elmer. He was an animatronic with so many metal wires that he screwed up a lot of the takes. Rick had to do a lot of dubbing on that. Every time he was in a scene with Elmer you would hear this metal clanging. We usually had two or three sets ready to go at the same time. So, while we were doing one, we were working on another one while they were setting up another one. So, it was cool, you know? I like working like that. I like working with a small group. I like the un-reality of night and day in a place where you are not even aware what day of the week it is or war has broken out or not, you know what I mean? We actually did FRANKENHOOKER and BASKET CASE 2 together. We filmed in an abandoned

part of the pier in Manhattan called Pier 40. Now, it's thriving, but it was abandoned at the time. The walls in there were cinderblock so there were no windows. We never knew what time of day it was. We never knew what the weather was! It just adds to the un-reality of what you're doing.

FANG: Does the legacy of these films still surprise you?

HENENLOTTER: Completely! During the 15 years that I didn't make any films, I assumed that I had been forgotten, which didn't bother me. But I also assumed the films had been forgotten, too. That kind of did bother me. When we premiered BAD BIOLOGY in England, I thought that no one would figure out that I also made BASKET CASE and BRAIN DAMAGE. I kind of liked the idea of starting all over again. I was there in the theater and all these kids were showing up with VHS box cases and DVD's for me to sign and I was flabbergasted. I missed the obvious. I missed the fact that there was a generation that grew up with these films on tape and DVD. I had been thinking only in terms of their theatrical life. About a month after, they had me appear at a store in Los Angeles called Dark Delicacies to do an autograph signing. And for three hours there was this line of fans—I was completely bowled over. Honest to god, I had no idea I had fans, other than the occasional crackpot that would try to phone me in the middle of the night, you know what I mean!? It just completely missed me. Like I said, I never realized that there was a generation who grew up with these films on tape! This makes the films timeless! I had been thinking about the dates of their release, not realizing those dates meant nothing. In fact, the most common thing I hear is that these kids rented BASKET CASE when they were 11 or 13, and I am humbled by it.



Frank Henenlotter comes to Chicago's Portage Theater

(4050 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60641 773.736.4050) with the BASKET CASE trilogy & BRAIN DAMAGE on March 8 & 9!

Here is the info for both shows:

• Friday, March 8 - BASKET CASE Triple Feature!

Doors Open At 6:30pm.

7pm -Ghost Cold Water (short film by David Scott)

7:30pm BASKET CASE

9pm FRANK HENENLOTTER Q & A

9:30pm BASKET CASE 2

11pm BASKET CASE 3

Plus: Vendor Tables, Short Films, Prizes,

Surprises and more!

• Saturday, March 9

BRAIN DAMAGE plays at 7:45 p.m. as part of Sci-fi Spectacular 7, 24 hours of Sci-Fi & Horror Movie Madness

Doors Open at 11 a.m. with movies from Noon 'Til Noon. Titles include ATTACK OF THE GIANT LEECHES, IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS, SOYLENT GREEN and more.

For more info on both days, head to the Terror in the Aisles Facebook . The triple feature is $12 in advance online , or $5 when bundled with Saturday's event.

Saturday's tickets are $20 pre-sale until March 8, $25 at the door, day of show. Children under 12 are $10 at the door. You can find tickets for the Sci-fi Spectacular here .