

“BEST” of the Rest

Written by Michael Gingold

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If there's anything that the DVD era has taught film fans, it's that where there's a movie, there will be deleted scenes—moments that might be noteworthy in and of themselves but didn't fit the director's (or, just as often, the studio's) vision of the piece. This is especially true on the documentary scene, where filmmakers routinely shoot double- or even triple-digit hours of footage that must be whittled down to a feature-length final product—and director Michael Stephenson (pictured) confirms that in crafting BEST WORST MOVIE, his chronicle of the TROLL 2 experience, some of the almost-best bits had to hit the cutting room floor.

Stephenson reveals, “We shot hundreds and hundreds of hours all over the world” to put together BEST WORST MOVIE, which is continuing its theatrical run across the United States (see listings [here](#)). The saga of the legendarily awful TROLL 2's creation, and the fandom that sprang up around it, gives its stars (including Stephenson himself and leading man George Hardy) and filmmakers equal face time with its devotees, and material involving both groups was among the lost. “There was more with the fan in Austria who has TROLL 2 pictures in his desk,” Stephenson reveals. “He was really neat, and we actually went to Austria to surprise him. He didn't know we were coming; he thought a camera crew was just going to interview him about his fandom. Myself and Darren [Ewing, a TROLL 2 co-star] put on goblin costumes and chased George into a restaurant where this kid was located, and George surprised him. The look on that fan's face was priceless.”



One member of the TROLL 2 ensemble whom many fans have found conspicuous by her absence from BEST WORST MOVIE is Deborah Reed, who portrayed Creedence the witch—mistress of the goblins, who creates the tainted food that turns victims into plant matter

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to be devoured by the vegetarian creatures. In a movie full of overstated performances, hers may be the most memorably insane of the bunch. So where was she in the documentary? “We didn’t get enough time with her early on,” Stephenson explains. “It was hard to coordinate. As we got a little bit further down the road, we had shot a few things with her, but by that time, it had become very clear to us that [BEST WORST’s] story was so much more about George and Claudio [Fragasso, TROLL 2’s director] and a few of the other people we had been focusing on. There was no intention [to exclude Reed]; it was just that we were happy with this story the way it was, and anything additional at that stage felt like a distraction, or a deviation of where we were going with this movie.”

Stephenson is, however, happy to share one memorable and unexpected encounter between Hardy, a successful dentist at the time of TROLL 2’s production and still today, and Reed. It occurred during the “Nilbog Invasion,” a TROLL 2 reunion staged by the Alamo Drafthouse team at the film’s original filming location of Morgan, Utah. “That was the very last event we shot for BEST WORST MOVIE,” Stephenson remembers. “Deborah called George because she had broken part of her tooth or had some other dental problem, and asked George what she should do. And George, being the type of guy he is, was like, ‘Don’t worry, we’ll get you fixed up right now.’ He called his old dentistry practice—the same office he had while he was filming TROLL 2 in Utah—and convinced them to let him use a chair. Within a half hour, it was George and the witch in there, and George was performing his dental magic. I remember just the scene of her and George talking as he was doing her teeth—it was amazing.”

Another key TROLL 2 participant who didn’t make the final BEST WORST MOVIE cut was Maurizio Trani, the veteran makeup FX artist (with credits including such Italian classics as Lucio Fulci’s ZOMBIE and THE BEYOND) responsible for the goblin getups. “We spent quite a bit of time with Maurizio, and he had lots of interesting things to say,” recalls Stephenson, who laments, “It’s hard when you’re dealing with so much footage, deciding what to leave in and what to leave out. We had so many great moments, and it was like, how do we get them into the movie and not just have it be like a DVD extra for TROLL 2?”

Which leads to the inevitable question: Will fans be able to see this stuff when BEST WORST MOVIE arrives on disc? “Absolutely!” Stephenson says. “We’re starting the DVD extras this month, and there’s so much great material that is perfect for them. We have scenes from all the different screenings we filmed everywhere; we only spend a little time on them in the movie, and we hope to give some of those cities and fans a little more time in the supplements. For example, in Seattle there was a fan who came completely dressed up as a tree, with branches all over him and standing in a pot. His friend dragged him into the theater and he watched the whole movie like that. It depends on how much space they’re going to give us, but I’ll do everything I can to get as much extra material in there as possible.”

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That'll potentially include audio commentaries: “I would love for Claudio to do one, or a critics' commentary, and involve some of the community that has been involved in this whole phenomenon.” As for who'll be releasing the DVD, “I can't announce that yet, but it should be confirmed soon. We're just going over the final agreement—one of the great things about being a producer/director is reading lengthy agreements! We're working with a great producers' rep who's been helping us put this together, and our goal is to have the DVD out no later than Halloween. Believe it or not, October is actually National Vegetarian Awareness Month; you can't plan stuff like that, it's really a sign.”



And then there's the second inevitable question: Might we see BEST WORST packaged on disc with TROLL 2 (currently available on a double-feature edition with the original TROLL from MGM)? “There is a possibility,” Stephenson says. “We're working on that, and in fact we have a Canadian deal for both theatrical and DVD, and they've confirmed the ability to [release] both. The U.S. has been a little more difficult, but we haven't given up. We get e-mails every day about it, and I'm doing everything possible to try and get those two together. Until I feel we've done everything we can, I'm not gonna give up. Having BEST WORST MOVIE combined with TROLL 2 and all the extras and putting together a great set is something I've imagined from the beginning.”

It has been said that DVD and other home-video formats have become “the new drive-in,” taking over for outdoor screens as the key venue for B-flicks and exploitation fare. Yet while the drive-in screens have largely fallen, the midnight-movie scene is stronger now than ever, with audiences in the last couple of years packing late-night screenings of not just TROLL 2, but Tommy Wiseau's deliriously wrongheaded relationship drama THE ROOM and James Nguyen's home-movie-Hitchcock flick BIRDEMIC: SHOCK AND TERROR. “There seems to be this new bad-movie zeitgeist,” Stephenson muses. “I think the experience of going to a theater and having that communal feeling is something that has been passing away lately. And so when you have these cult films like THE ROOM and TROLL 2 and BIRDEMIC, which are built on that mutual experience, people find that refreshing. It's a chance to go watch a film together and

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have a fun time. How many films—bad or good—can say that they do that?

“I also believe the sincerity in these films—in these sincere failures—is something people find a little refreshing,” he continues. “So many movies are made with cynicism and the intent of ‘Hey, let’s make some money,’ and then you look at movies like TROLL 2 and THE ROOM and see their honest intentions.”

On the other hand, he notes, “One of the few differences with THE ROOM and BIRDEMIC vs. TROLL 2 is that their directors are actually promoting their movies as a bad films. Sure, Tommy Wiseau says THE ROOM is a dark comedy now, but they’re selling them as bad movies. Claudio would never do that. He would never say, ‘It’s so bad, you’ll love it!’ And Ed Wood would’ve never done it either!”

Of course, BEST WORST MOVIE certainly points up all of TROLL 2’s laughable flaws—but Stephenson reveals that the documentary has met with Fragasso’s approval. “He saw BEST WORST MOVIE, e-mailed me and just said, ‘Beautiful, I love it,’ ” Stephenson says. “That was a sigh of relief for me, because I wanted to be fair, but I also wanted to show it like it is. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Claudio, the heart he put into TROLL 2 and everything he does in life. That’s what I was thinking about—how the hell did he make TROLL 2? He ended up in Utah with people who couldn’t act, he couldn’t speak English, all doing a story about vegetarian goblins—and he got it made somehow! And 20 years later, it’s still having an impact, so that’s pretty amazing.”

Check out a trio of video interviews with Stephenson and Hardy via our FANGORIA TV page [here](#)

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