

## “WHY WON’T VALERIE DIE?” Find Out Here!

Written by Michael Gingold  
Tuesday, 03 August 2010 14:06

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Veteran Florida exploitation filmmaker William Grefé (pictured left), best known for the '70s animal-attack features *STANLEY* and *MAKO: THE JAWS OF DEATH*, is now resurrecting a fright feature he first developed back during that heyday. It's a supernatural chiller called *WHY WON'T VALERIE DIE?*, and Grefé and his cohorts gave Fango all the details.

The project's history dates back to 1968, when Grefé was looking for a screenwriter to develop his idea for a thriller called *NOTHING BUT BODIES*. He was introduced to Gary Crutcher (pictured below), who had just seen his first produced script with the Jack Lord/Susan Strasberg-starrer *THE NAME OF THE GAME IS KILL*, and the two wound up teaming on *BODIES* and four other screenplays, of which only *STANLEY* made it to the screen. *VALERIE* was one of the unproduced properties, and was based on what Grefé says were his real-life experiences. “We sold our house in North Miami to a couple who had moved from Tampa because their little daughter was very, very sick and they needed to be close to the hospital, Jackson Memorial,” he tells Fango. “The little girl died, and all sorts of weird things began happening. The couple would hear voices, or someone would put a cigarette down in one place and it would end up on the other side of the room...that sort of thing. So they sold the house.” When Grefé's oldest daughter later stopped by for a visit, “The new owners told her, ‘It's a nice house, we love it—except for the little girl who's always crying, and we hear footsteps all the time...’”



Inspired by these events, and a mansion in the Coconut Grove section of Miami called Vizcaya that was built in the early 20th century and had served as a location for a number of movies (including *HAUNTS OF THE VERY RICH*, which Grefé worked on), the director came up with the *VALERIE* story and turned it over to Crutcher to flesh out. The plot focuses on Sarah Kinsman, a woman recovering from a nervous breakdown who moves into the aforementioned house with her new husband Elliot and her 8-year-old daughter from a past marriage. When Elliot, a U.S. Army general, is called away to Vietnam, Sarah begins experiencing spooky phenomena in her new home, and comes to believe it's haunted by the ghost of Valerie

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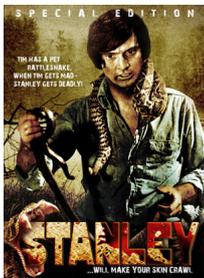
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Simpson, a socialite whose 1929 murder has never been solved. A detective named Chuck Drisler becomes involved, and tries to both solve the crime and save Sarah’s sanity.

Grefé first took the script to Ivan Tors Studio, where he had a first-look deal, but the company turned it down. It next went to Crown International, which produced and released STANLEY. “I think it was a little too rich for their blood,” Grefe says. “They were good at the girl movies like SUPERCHICK, the biker movies and the full-out horror movies, but this was something different. I pushed [the screenplay] around to a few people; I showed it to Cloris Leachman and Ed Asner, because I had just worked with them on HAUNTS OF THE VERY RICH, but then I got sidetracked. I went on to do IMPULSE, MAKO: THE JAWS OF DEATH and WHISKEY MOUNTAIN, and this one went into a drawer and I forgot about it.”



But then STANLEY saw a resurgence of exposure and interest in the last couple of years, including screenings/personal appearances and a special-edition DVD. That inspired Grefé and Crutcher to disinter their old unproduced scripts: “I figured they’d still be saleable, especially NOTHING BUT BODIES,” Crutcher says. The two hooked up at a 2009 FANGORIA convention, to which Grefé brought all the surviving materials. “The funny thing is that NOTHING BUT BODIES didn’t impress me that much anymore,” Crutcher continues, “but WHY WON’T VALERIE DIE?—I thought *that* was a classic! It’s great! I wouldn’t have even thought I wrote it! [Laughs

] “It’s a real Ross Macdonald-style thing. It opens in 1929 and then goes to 1971, which was when it was written, so an audience now would be viewing it from three different time periods. It’s just a great mystery in the old style.” Adds Grefe, “When I showed it to Gary, he flipped over the thing. He thought it was the best thing he’d ever written.”

There was just one problem: That last copy was missing the last 20 pages, though Grefé still had a six-page synopsis of the complete story. They agreed that the final act could be rewritten, but Crutcher decided against tackling that task himself. The duo knew just who to ask, though: Chris Poggiali, a writer for numerous genre magazines and websites (including Fango, for which he profiled Grefé in 1998) who had impressed Crutcher with a horror script he wrote with Howard S. Berger called BLEED. “The 10 best screenplays I read while I was a story editor [at various studios and production companies] all got sold and produced,” Crutcher states. “BLEED would’ve been the 11th. It’s terrific.”

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They approached Poggiali about completing VALERIE, and he quickly came on board. “The first thing that struck me about the script was that it was unpredictable and very unique,” Poggiali says. “It’s an old-fashioned whodunit as well as a supernatural horror story, so on the surface it’s unlike anything else Gary and Bill have been involved with—yet it’s exactly the script I would’ve expected from them in 1971. Bill had just made THE NAKED ZOO at that point, which was also set in Coconut Grove, so I could see its influence on VALERIE. There’s definitely a ‘Made in Florida’ stamp on it. But at the same time, it’s pure Gary Crutcher. Fans of THE NAME OF THE GAME IS KILL won’t be disappointed. It has that same weird, unsettling vibe, and a similar RASHOMON-like search for the truth in its own backstory.

“Bill and Gary wanted the final act to be written in the same style as the rest of the screenplay,” Poggiali continues, “one that was more common in 1971 but is frowned upon nowadays. When Gary wrote scripts in the 1960s and ’70s, he basically ‘directed’ the entire film on the page, which runs counter to everything I’ve read or been taught about screenwriting. The prevailing attitude for years has been that the writer should just write the basics and let the director direct. I’d only ever written in master scenes, and suddenly I found myself ‘directing’ the movie and writing it at the same time. Typing things like ‘PULL BACK to include Sarah in FRAME’ or ‘PULL FOCUS to reveal Linda behind Chuck’ was totally alien to me, but after a while I got used to it and started to enjoy the process. It made sense, though, because Bill had intended to direct the movie himself in 1971, and this was almost a shooting script.”

There were inevitable discrepancies between the outline and the original 90-page script, so Poggiali came up with a list of proposed changes he thought necessary to keep the narrative consistent. It met with Grefé and Crutcher’s approval, as did his final draft. “Not only did he have to solve the mystery and recreate the characters the way I had created them by having them all talking the way they did in 1971,” Crutcher says, “but he had to do so in the style in which it had been written. When he said he could do it, I thought, ‘That’s impossible,’ but he did it! It’s so smooth that I can’t tell where my stuff ends and his begins.”

“It was a really strong script when it was given to me,” Poggiali says. “Now it’s a really strong script with an ending.”

Despite his rekindled interest in WHY WON’T VALERIE DIE?, Grefé no longer plans to direct the movie himself; instead, he’s producing it and currently seeking financing. “I sent feelers out to some investment groups I know, but it’s tough out there,” he says of the current independent movie scene. “With all the world affairs—the economy, the debt, the real-estate situation—it’s

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really an uphill battle. So the next step is to try and get it to some heavyweight actor, director or producer. I have some other ideas, too. I’m pretty much open to whatever comes down the pike.” Interested parties can contact the WHY WON’T VALERIE DIE team at [wwvd1971@yahoo.com](mailto:wwvd1971@yahoo.com).

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