

Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: A Very Scary Productions Interview with independent filmmaker Bruce G. Hallenbeck - ***London After Midnight*** and Beyond – January/February 2005

Bruce G. Hallenbeck is an independent filmmaker based in Upstate New York's Capital Region. He is the writer and director of the 1989 vampire feature ***Vampyre***, which was loosely based on Carl Dreyer's 1932 ***Vampyr***, and the documentary ***Fangs*** - a history of vampires in the movies hosted by Hammer horror starlet Veronica Carlson. Mr. Hallenbeck has also written screenplays for such movies as ***The Witches Of Sappho Salon***, and the Misty Mundae films ***Dr. Jekyll And Mistress Hyde*** and ***Misty Mundae Mummy Raider*** for Seduction Cinema.*

Additionally, he is an accomplished actor, having appeared in such feature films as ***Shadow Tracker: Vampire Hunter***, ***Blood Of The Werewolf*** and ***The Edge of Reality***. ** I met Bruce in the early 1990's and had one of my first acting roles in an anthology film he directed called ***Black Easter***. Several years later I was fortunate enough to be cast in his feature ***London After Midnight***, and, several years after that, I signed on as editor of the movie. This month marks the Upstate New York area premiere of ***London After Midnight***, and in this interview Mr. Hallenbeck discusses the making of the movie.

Jeff Kirkendall: The original LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT is a 1927 Lon Chaney vampire film. Besides the title are there any similarities between that film and yours?

Bruce G. Hallenbeck: The 1927 LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT is actually a faux vampire film; the vampires in fact were revealed to be actors trying to trick a killer into confessing. It was remade in 1935, also by the original director Tod Browning, as MARK OF THE VAMPIRE with Bela Lugosi. Our version has nothing to do with either film. In fact, the name "London" in our film is the name of the lead character, paranormal investigator David London. The 2005 LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT is an action-adventure-horror movie with large doses of humor that combines elements of such pop culture classics as THE AVENGERS (the 1960s TV version), THE X-FILES and the writings of H.P. Lovecraft. I thought the title was a fun play on words, and

since the original LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT seems to be a hopelessly lost film, it seemed to me that it would be nice if there was a movie with that title that people could actually see.

JK: I know your script went through several revisions and the characters were developed over time. Please talk about this.

BGH: Actually, the character name David London came into my head when I was twelve years old, when I was under the influence of the James Bond craze and the TV series THE MAN FROM UNCLE. At that time, he was a secret agent, but about 14 years later, I reworked the concept as a TV pilot called LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT. I wrote it with British television in mind, and sent it off to a company called Tyburn Productions, based at Pinewood Studios in England. Much to my surprise, they expressed interest in it, and when I went there in 1979, I was given the grand tour of the studio and was told that they wanted to film it. Unfortunately, the financing fell through and it was never filmed. But I thought it was a great idea for a series, and I rewrote the script in the late 90s as the first of a series of feature films. I also think it would make a terrific comic book, and that may come too. In any case, over the years, I added the character of Holly Gemini, London's other half, and the two of them were off and running in their fight against evil Lovecraftian demons.

JK: Filming began in 1997 and went on for approximately two years. Please discuss the shoot and talk a bit about the cast and crew and the challenges involved in making the movie.

BGH: Filming initially went very smoothly; my friend Joe Bagnardi was the Director of Photography, and I had just bought the camera--a pro Panasonic video camera--from Gary Secor, who plays one of the cultists in the film. But you could say the production was cursed; David Louis, who played David London, was diagnosed with cancer about midway through the shoot, and large portions of the script had to be rewritten around his absences for chemotherapy treatments and so on. David was a real trouper, though, and insisted on doing as many scenes as his health would allow. Another actor, who shall remain nameless, dropped out due to personal reasons, which caused more delays. Filming was finally completed in 1999, but additional footage was shot in early 2004. So it's a movie that was years in the making!

JK: You utilized many interesting, scenic locations in the movie. Talk about some of these locations.

BGH: We filmed LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT entirely in upstate New York. Some of the exteriors are of historic homes such as Lindenwald, the birthplace of the eighth U.S. President Martin Van Buren. We also used the Van Alen House as the exterior of the home of Dr. Perkins, who was played by David Baker. The Van Alen House figured in the story THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW by Martin Van Buren as the home of the character Katrina Van Tassel. In addition, we filmed in Chatham Rural Cemetery, which we also utilized in BLOOD OF THE WEREWOLF (2001). It's a nice Gothic graveyard, very picturesque. One of our best locations was The Crooked Lake House, a restaurant/hotel in Averill Park, New York that was a big nightclub in the 30s and 40s where movie stars and gangsters hung out. It's supposed to be haunted, and I wouldn't be surprised. It reminds me of the hotel in THE SHINING.

JK: LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT was shot on video on a very low budget. How did it compare to your previous films VAMPYRE and FANGS in terms of the shooting process?

BGH: LAM was shot on video, whereas VAMPYRE and FANGS were shot on 16mm, so the process was a bit different. You can set up shots a lot faster on video, so that was a big plus.

But I think one thing videomakers sometimes forget is that you still need to light the image properly. Fortunately, we had an excellent lighting kit on LAM courtesy of Gary Secor, and Bagnardi utilized it to its fullest extent, along with my assistant director Peter Hanson. They both have very good eyes. So I think that LAM, despite the fact that it was shot on analog half-inch video, has a comparable look to my 16mm films.

JK: The latter part of the movie features some eye-catching visual effects. Talk about those and how they complement the on-set makeup effects.

BGH: The latter part of the film is where the Lovecraftian stuff comes in; Holly, who is beautifully played by Prudence Theriault, causes London to vanish as he's about to be sacrificed to Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of the Wood with a Thousand Young. He disappears into thin air as he's tied to a tree. Then the demon appears in a flash of fire and smoke. The on-set makeup was done by my wife, Rosa, who plays the demon. Colin Lovelock, a friend of mine who works at the local ABC affiliate, did the special video effects, as well as the opening titles to the film. They blend in well with the physical make-up and costumes that Rosa designed.

JK: There was a long gap between when principal photography was completed and when I began editing the movie in 2003. Why did the movie sit on the shelf for so long?

BGH: Believe me, it wasn't intentional. In 1999, when we completed principal photography, we had planned to edit the film utilizing the talents of Joe and Dan Masucci, two brothers who were also making films locally at the time. They had an excellent computer system and were very eager to edit the film. They did, in fact, edit two and a half minutes of it--and their computer crashed, losing all the footage that had been done. Rosa and I pieced together the initial two and a half minutes and gained the interest of Kevin Lindenmuth, who by that time had asked me to write and direct one of the stories in his anthology BLOOD OF THE WEREWOLF. It looked like Kevin was going to do post-production, but he had to bow out due to other commitments. He suggested I contact another filmmaker, which I did, and he was set to edit the movie. But his price was out of our league. So we looked around and looked around--and Jeff Kirkendall came to the rescue! And the rest is history.

JK: Affordable digital video technology came into prominence in the late 1990s. How has this technology changed the way movies are or can be made?

BGH: Well, on a large scale, you just have to look at 1999's THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, a digital movie that was dirt cheap to make and grossed millions. The technology has opened the floodgates to those who could never before have afforded to make a feature film. It's certainly made it far easier for those of us who are working with little or no money to get a film completed without having to bring in outside investors. What would have cost thousands on 16mm now costs mere hundreds on video. It's a godsend.

JK: Even though it has only recently been completed, LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT was mentioned in a book that came out several years ago called THE INDEPENDENT FILM EXPERIENCE: INTERVIEWS WITH PRODUCERS AND DIRECTORS. How did that come about?

BGH: That book was written by Kevin Lindenmuth during the time when he had hoped to complete LAM himself. It was good PR for both of us at the time, and I was very pleased to be a part of it.

JK: Of the movies you've worked on as writer, director, producer or actor, which are your favorites?

BGH: When you're working at this level, there are always things you wish you could have done differently. I feel that VAMPYRE is a heavily compromised film; the distributors insisted that we put certain elements into it that really didn't belong there. But there are moments of lyrical beauty in it, thanks to Tony Panetta's camerawork and some of the other elements. FANGS, in some respects, is closest to my original vision, because it was written for Veronica Carlson and she delivered the lines exactly the way I'd hoped she would. I like the director's cut of DR. JEKYLL AND MISTRESS HYDE, a movie I wrote for E.I. Independent Cinema; unfortunately, that version will probably never be released. And I'm very excited about THE DROWNED, a movie that my company, Pagan Productions, just filmed late last year. That has tremendous potential, I think.

JK: Which of your projects to date would you say have been most successful--either artistically or financially?

BGH: Artistically, probably either VAMPYRE or FANGS. Financially, definitely BLOOD OF THE WEREWOLF, which made back over three times its production costs and was released all over the world.

JK: What movies have influenced you and do you have any favorite filmmakers?

BGH: That's a loaded question. So many influences: Hammer's HORROR OF DRACULA, AIP's Poe movies, the old Universal horrors, the James Bond film ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE, and on and on. Favorite filmmakers: Terence Fisher, Orson Welles, Roger Corman, Ken Russell, Sergio Leone, Tim Burton, Steven Spielberg, Alfred Hitchcock, Akira Kurosawa--the list is endless!

JK: What kinds of projects would you like to work on in the future?

BGH: I'd like to do different kinds of fantasy. Realism holds no interest for me--no serious kitchen sink dramas. But next time around, I might do a romantic fantasy, something along the lines of SOMEWHERE IN TIME. Or maybe a crazy comedy ala Monty Python. Who knows? Life has some strange twists and turns...

JK: Is there anything you'd like to add?

BGH: I just want to say that I'm eternally grateful to all the people who have helped me put my movies together, from the actors to the camera and lighting people, to the post-production folks. And to my wife, who is now Vice-President of Pagan Productions. Without all of you, these films could never have been completed.

* For those not familiar with Misty Mundae, she is an actress who has starred in a long list of films for New Jersey-based production company E.I. Independent Cinema. A good majority of these films have been adult-oriented action, horror and comedy movies that fall under the company label Seduction Cinema. In addition to *Dr. Jekyll And Mistress Hyde* and *Mummy Raider*, some other Misty Mundae films include *Playmate Of The Apes*, *An Erotic Vampire In Paris* and *Erotic Survivor*, just to name a few.

** Independent filmmaker Joe Bagnardi directed both *Shadow Tracker: Vampire Hunter* and

The Edge of Reality, as well as one of three segments of the werewolf anthology film ***Blood of the Werewolf***.