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# Indie Horror Films

All genres of suspense, terror, and horror will be reviewed by Richard Gary. His address to send preview copies supplied upon request to rbf55@msn.com.

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## Interview with Brooklyn independent horror film director Sean Weathers

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In David Cronenberg's *Scanners* (1981), the title-afflicted character of Benjamin Pierce (Robert Silverberg) was "rehabilitated by art." Similarly, one could say the same thing about Sean Weathers, an independent filmmaker from the Bedford-Stuyvesant (Bed-Sty) area of Brooklyn, who uses the neighborhood as both an influence and his palate to paint gritty urban stories.

Born in Guyana in 1980, his family moved to New York when he was a very young age, where Sean became involved in various nefarious gang-related activities. Somehow, he managed to claw his way out of the real violence into one of a cinematic nature, with the help of his camera.

At 16 years old, in 1996, he brought his first finished full-length product, to fruition, a horror film called *House of the Damned*. Currently, he has six films available from his Full Circle Filmworks, which have recently been released (or rereleased): they are also available at MVD. My previous reviews of the five I have seen can be found [HERE] and [HERE]. *They All Must Die!* has been nominated for Best Taboo Erotica DVD at the 2012 TLA Cult Awards (also it's was also No. 1 on their site in DVD sales!). The full list of his released films is as follows:

*House of the Damned* (1996)

*They All Must Die!* (1998)

*Lust for Vengeance* (2001)

*The Unfinished Works of Sean Weathers* (2004)

*Hookers in Revolt* (2006)

*The Big Trade Off* (2012)

A lifelong fan of various horror and exploitation genera, each of Sean's films fits into a different sub-genre (blaxploitation, Italian *giallo*, etc.), showing that he is knowledgeable about the kinds of films he shoots.

The following questions, asked and answered by email, are meant to be both informative, and with a strong sense of humor at the same time.

*You were 16 when you made your first (released) film [House of the Damned, (1996)]. Had you been making shorter films before this?*

Yes. As a troubled youth, when I was in gangs I had stolen a camera and after I decided that lifestyle wasn't for me, I used that camera to shoot my friends and different documentary-styled experimental films before I would go on to shoot *House of the Damned*.

*Have you had any formal training in film since you started making films?*

I worked on a few documentary-typed projects before high school when I realized that I wanted to get into movies. After high school, I bypassed college and went the self-taught, out of pocket route. However, Aswad did go to film school.

*How did you meet Aswad Issa and George Lopez (who worked on many of Sean's films)? Is it difficult to maintain both a friendship and working relationship with them?*

Aswad and I first started working together when he agreed to be my cinematographer for *House of the Damned*. Because of his previous experience in film and that being my first movie, I looked to him for a lot of advice. This eventually led to us collaborating on each others films, creatively. Our relationship can be stormy at times because we are two different, creative minds. However, our mutual respect and love of film has kept our working relationship and friendship going through the last 15 years. I met George on the set of *House of the Damned* through Aswad. George's involvement was primarily when we needed a second cinematographer



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on set.

*How do you think you've grown as a filmmaker from House of the Damned until now?*

When I first started out, I was just trying to do outrageous things in my films, such as a rapping zombie, longest rape scene ever, most realistic sex and drug scenes. Now, I'm more focused on the story I'm telling and developing and the characters I'm telling it with rather than the shock value.

*How satisfied are you looking at House of the Damned now, and is there anything you would do differently if you filmed it presently?*

In regards to what we see in front of the camera, there would definitely have been more nudity and gore. In terms of the technical aspect, it's Murphy's Law on set, "what can go wrong will go wrong." So I would've definitely spent more time in pre-production planning scenes and shots out better and rehearsed more with the actors. During production, I would have done less takes. Part of my trademark as a director today is minimal takes. Also in post-production for this film, I spent months searching for editors and working with editors that didn't pay off for me at all. To date, I've edited all of my films.

*What progress do you see from House of the Damned to Lust for Vengeance to Hookers in Revolt?*

They're all very different movies content-wise and I leave it up to the viewers to decide which is more entertaining. For me, I can only look at progress made from the technical side of things, more locations, better acting, more polished scripts, more fleshed-out characters, better equipment, etc.

*If you had a larger budget, what would you do differently as a filmmaker?*

I work with a skeleton crew with all of my productions, with 1 to 2 crew members on most shooting days. With a larger budget, I would get more hands on deck and a full crew. In addition, I would get better actors, sets, locations, equipment, etc.

*What medium did you use for House of the Damned, and what do you use now?*

For my first few films, I used a Cannon GL1, which was broadcast-quality at the time but a far cry from today's technology. Currently, I use the Panasonic DVC Pro HD, which shoots High Def footage at 24 frames per second for a more film-like quality.

*Most of your filming has been done in Brooklyn and occasionally in Manhattan. Are you thinking about widening your scope?*

Brooklyn, as a borough, is bigger, more diverse and more populated than a lot of cities [Brooklyn has been called "the third-and-a-half largest city in the U.S. - RG]. As much shooting as I've done here and as many locations that I've used, I barely scratched the surface. As for Manhattan, I've shot in many historical sites, but even with that borough, there are still many locations I have yet to use. If you took my films out of the city, they wouldn't be the same films.

*Do you bring anything from being from Brooklyn into your films, other than locales?*

Myself. Simply surviving to this age is something I never thought I'd do because almost everyone I grew up with is either dead or doing life in prison. I was in and out of gangs since I was 12 years old. I saw things happen that most people only read about in the newspapers or see on the 10 o'clock news; watching someone get shot right in front of me, getting hooked on drugs, constantly getting into fights, almost killing someone, free-basing, using needles, and falling victim to just about every trap there is for a young, single-parent black kid in the inner-city. Those experiences I had in my younger days permeate through my scripts, my directing style, and my acting.

*How do you audition your actors?* I can generally tell within the first few seconds of meeting an actor whether they're right for what I'm looking for or not. If I see someone that interests me, I try to find out more about them to see if it's worth doing a follow-up. It's more about the look and the personality rather than how well someone can do a cold reading.

*Who of your actors would you Kill? Fuck? Marry? And why? [the first three are questions Sean asked one of his female actors in the extras for House of the Damned - RG]* I would kill all of them, skull-fuck their corpses, and marry myself.

*Good save! What actor(s) would you like to work with, e.g., appear in your films?*

Certainly if I have the right size paycheck, I can get any actor I want. Listen, if Megan Fox, Scarlett Johansson, or any of those young, hot famous actresses in Hollywood were willing to do a nude, blazing love scene of course I would have them in my film... yesterday!

*Are there any other films around currently that you like?*

Of course, I'm a big fan of films. Without being more specific, it would be impossible for me to just start naming them.

*How do you distribute your films?*

I currently have a deal that started in October 2011, with MVD (Music Video Distributors). Currently for sale are *House of the Damned*, *Lust for Vengeance*, *Hookers in Revolt*, *They All Must Die*, and *The Unfinished Works of Sean Weathers*.

*Do you attend horror conventions?*

I have yet to do the convention circuit but it is something I look forward to doing in the near future.

*How do you pay for the films?*

Investors.

*Do your films play at festivals?*

I have yet to enter any of my films into a festival.

*How has the reaction been to your films from the public? Critics?*

Most fans and consumers love my films because they're pretty much straight-forward and I give people what I say I'm giving them so they're not disappointed when they get it. In regards to critics, it's been a mixed bag. Some critics appreciate my non-traditional storytelling with its dark themes, social commentary, bleak and cynical outlook on humanity and ambiguous endings, while others do not understand it. The one major reaction that I've gotten in person to one of my films was the screening to *They All Must Die!*. It was screened at a local bar in Manhattan to a mixed crowd of whites, blacks, men, and women. People were offended before the rape scene even took place. At the end of the film, when the thugs got away with the rape, it was like the reading of the OJ Simpson verdict. Some of the black people started applauding and this led to several fights breaking out, the cops coming on the scene and multiple arrests. Three years before getting my deal with MVD I was dropped from my previous distribution company once they got a look at *They All Must Die!*, one executive even said to me, it is one of the most "disturbing, depraved, and disgusting films ever made."

*What is it about horror films that you find so attractive?*

Most people are superstitious whether it be religion, karma, Scientology, voodoo, aliens or ghosts. So believing in the supernatural and loving horror films is easy. However, even for us non-believers, I feel we have all had moments of doubt where fear has sunken in and taken over our better judgment, and we've thought we've seen a ghost or something other-worldly. For me, the best horror films are the psychological ones that blur the line between reality and fantasy.

*How about Giallo?*

It's an interesting sub-genre that has a lot of elements that I love. *Lust for Vengeance*, styled after Gialli, is the first and only true Giallo film ever made in the U.S. to date. It combines murder, eroticism, nudity, mystery, and whodunits, with stylish visuals. I locked myself in a room for over a month watching over 100 Italian thrillers for inspiration for this film. The predominant themes are complex murder mysteries that emphasized stylish visuals, techno scores, the whodunit element, violence, gore, and large amounts of melodrama via Italy's long standing tradition of opera drama. They also generally include liberal amounts of nudity and sex.

*How do you feel about exploitation films in general? (Note: meant as a genre, not "exploitive.")* I love them. The thing I love about exploitation films is that they are straight to the point. Whether they're exploiting taboo subjects, popular movie trends, or pop-culture movements, they're pretty straight-forward in that they tell you what they're giving you and then they give it to you.

*Who is your favorite director(s)?*

There are so many directors I love. However, if I did have to single a few out, they would be Stanley Kubrick, Orson Welles, Andrei Tarkovsky, Sergei Eisenstein and of course Aswad Issa.

*Mario Bava or Dario Argento?*

Bava

*Lucio Fulci?*

He made films for over 40 years and I would love to do the same.

*As a liberal (small "l"), it's actually hard for me to ask this question without white guilt, but here goes:*

*How does race factor into your vision of your films?* It doesn't, unless it's vital to the story-line, as in *They All Must Die!*. All of the characters on screen in the film are based on real people I knew growing up; real situations that happened, real feelings and emotions. Back then, black people in the inner city felt that whites had taken everything from them and all they had left was the ghetto. It didn't matter if the white people who entered the ghetto were a part of interracial dating, coming to buy drugs, or even teachers that taught in local schools. They all got it in the end if they overstayed their welcome, or said or did the wrong thing to the wrong person. The only white people that made it out safe were the cops... The only reason for that was because they were armed and stayed in groups.

*How do you go about writing the music for the films?*

Honestly, it just comes to me.

*Who is your greatest musical inspiration?*

Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach.

*Do you play any instruments other than electronic keyboards?*

Piano.

*In House of the Damned, the main character makes a snide remark about rap. Are you a fan?*

A moderate fan, I actually knew Biggie Smalls. He grew up in Bed-Stuy, not too far from me. I listened to him freestyle a few times. I tried to talk him into doing some music for one of my soundtracks and he came in *They All Must Die!*, in the scene in which my other rapper friend, Illa [Glenn "Illa" Skeete appears in a number of Weathers' films - RG], buys drugs. However, his people wouldn't let him do it... at least, that's what he told me. Then he died the next year and I took it pretty hard.

*How much of Goblin [Dario Argento's band] is an influence on you?*

They never really had any influence on me. I've heard them play before and they're pretty good though.

*Which aspects of filmmaking do you like best (feel free to put in order of importance, and explain why)?:*  
writing, filming, directing, and composing the score.

Putting them in order from most important, I'd say No. 1 is filming because ultimately the footage you shoot is the movie you're gonna make. No 2 is directing. Even though in my more recent films, I have been acting in virtually every scene and doing less on-set directing, the job of a director as a whole is the most important job. No. 3 is writing. It's hard to have a good film without a good foundation and the script is the foundation for every film. Lastly, it's writing the score. I feel the music is an incredibly important aspect of putting a film together. The only reason I would put this at No. 4 is because most of my films don't have scores. I chose to go with no music at all for *They All Must Die!*, and in my four most recent films, I used actual songs.

*In House of the Damned, why didn't you show what happened in the basement, other than Liz and her boyfriend's reaction?*

A) I couldn't afford to show a monster on my budget. B) I wanted to be as mysterious as possible as to what was actually chasing them and C) I was inspired by a similar scene in *Evil Dead*.

*Why is They All Must Die! indicated as an "unauthorized" film?*

Legal reasons.

*Why does it have no credit at the beginning or the end?*

The impact that this film has had on my personal and professional life, I would not put on anyone else. The stress and hardship I've had to endure over the last 13 years with my personal and professional life, I wouldn't put on anyone. So yes, this film has no "credits," only blame...and I deserve all of it.

*Was Spike Lee any influence on this film, as it has a bit of a Do the Right Thing vibe to it?*

No. Although we do tackle similar themes in our respective films, I believe we go about it in very different ways.

*You said that you like to use very few takes. Was the attack scene in They All Must Die! filmed in a single take?*

No. I do minimum takes for several reasons. One of them being, that if you can get ahead of schedule you can allocate more time for the scenes you build your movie up to. So for the rape scene I did take my time.

*How does Illa feel about his junk being briefly shown in the rape scene?*

I think you may be confusing some of the actors [*this is true – RG*], which is understandable since there were no credits in the film. But Illa only had a brief cameo in which he bought drugs. The actor that did flash his junk requested that his junk be flashed to add realism to the scene and a sense that anything can happen.

*What message were you trying to give with the quick clips of southern racial killings that are interspersed through the film?*

The message is up for interpretation. I think one of the most detrimental things a filmmaker can do is tell a viewer how they should interpret their film.

*Is the violence against the woman justified by the images of abuse of blacks by whites?*

In my eyes no; however even though I'm the filmmaker I'm still only one opinion. But, I could see why some people would view it that way.

*There is no likeable character in the movie, especially the men (including the landlord). Do you think this could be seen as a negative stereotype, even if they are based on people you knew?*

It's up to the viewer to find if they see anything likable in the characters. But, the characters are very likable to each other. The thugs are life-long friends and the landlord and his wife, despite breaking up during the course of the film, were happily married.

*Back to Lust for Vengeance, why did you name the character after Michael Richards, and what did you feel after his outburst?* It's actually a tribute to Michael Myers, the last name was made up. In regards to Richards' outburst, I saw it and I wasn't offended; it was just two guys yelling at each other.

*In some of the scenes in Lust for Vengeance, it seems like the killer was played by a smaller, female (such as on the back cover of the DVD) than the actor who played the Richards character? Am I imagining this?*

Although the actor that played the killer was hardly in the movie, no he did not have a stand-in. He was only substituted by using P.O.V. shots.

*Why do we not see Lisa's demise?*

Because she wasn't killed. Although Michael wanted his revenge and wanted them all dead, he rationalized killing them based on their behavior. From him stalking them, he judged that they didn't deserve to live. However, he simply couldn't justify killing Lisa.

*How much of the fooling around with the linear story line was influenced by Pulp Fiction?*

None. The first cut of the film was linear. However, at the screening I realized that the sex scenes and death scenes took the viewers off guard because they all happened during the last third of the film. I simply needed a way to spread them out. Therefore, I adapted the "sequence approach."

*Putney Swope... discuss.*

The name comes from the 1969 film. The only scene the character appears in is the scene in which Beth has sex with him in exchange for drugs. We see this after Beth uses the drugs in a flashback.



*In The Unfinished Works of Sean Weathers, of the three film parts, why start with what you and Issa consider a dud [as is stated in the commentary]?*  
Because I would hate for that movie to be the last one someone saw.

*How comfortable are you shooting sex scenes of other people? Or of yourself, as in Hookers in Revolt?*

My approach is what ever is required for the character is required. As an actor or a director, the last thing on my mind is comfort level; I'm just trying to get the scene right.

*I know this is a silly question, but I really want to know: in "The Erotic Adventures of Samson and Delilah" section of The Unfinished Works of Sean Weathers, why do all the men have short hair? Isn't the point of the whole seduction of Samson about the hair?*

The point of Samson was he gave into weakness and exposed the secret to his powers. From there, it was a story about redemption. The bible is filled with references to the "sun god" and therefore the strength of my Samson was the rays of the sun and not his hair.

*In the same film, the clips from "Gangz vs. Cults" looks like a really interesting premise. Are you thinking about revisiting this story for a future film?*

It's hard to say. I love the concept, it's one of my favorites. However, it's unlikely at this point... But you never know.

*Illa's persona, who is in the gang half of the title "GvC," is named Cult Snake. Isn't that confusing, even if it is a great character name.*

It is a little confusing because it's just a few scenes from a very elaborate script. To clarify things, Glenn "Illa" Skeete plays Jamal, the character who has his wife stolen by the cult. Buddy Love plays "O.G. Killa" Snake. I believe he calls himself "Cult Killa" Snake while boasting.

*I notice that when you have couplings in your films, it's black men and black women, black men and white women, but no white men with black women. Is this purposeful? Subconscious?*

No. There was going to be a white actor and black actress love scene in "Escape from Bloodbath Island" had I finished it.

*After hearing your commentary about the filming of that, I'm guessing you won't be returning to film at Floyd Bennett Field...*

I might, but it would have to be a shoot where field audio isn't that important to me. But, I'm still haunted in my nightmares to this day about those grown men playing with those damn toy airplanes.

*And am I correct that the lesbian scene from "Escape from Bloodbath Island" is what appears out of context in Lust for Vengeance?*

Yes, you are correct "homie."

*Actually, there are lesbian scenes in a lot of your films. What's the fascination?*

Maybe it's a hood thing or maybe it's a New York thing. I don't know, it's not really something that I view as out of the ordinary.

*In Lust for Vengeance, was there a purpose connected to the plot for the lesbian scene told in the Jennifer segment?*

*Lust for Vengeance* is a visceral film. With the sex and drugs, there is a message that I'm trying to send through the characters to the viewers.

*There is also a near-lesbian scene in House of the Damned. Care to elaborate?*

That scene involved the lead actress, Valerie, and the supporting actress Kendra. Towards the end of the movie, after Kendra was killed she comes back as a zombie and to defeat her Valerie locks her in a closet. Therefore, putting her back "in the closet."

*In Hookers in Revolt, the character you play is named Gene Simmons.*

*Named after the bassist of KISS? If so, are you a fan of the band?*

No, my character is not named after him, but I am a fan of the band.

*Is it me, or is there less nudity during the sex scenes of Hookers than in your previous films?*

Yes, I tried to make *Hookers* more "mainstream" and toned down the sex and racism purposely in that film.

*From your scenes, it's obvious you're quite buffed. How often do you work out?*

Quite often; it's not easy but when you're going to put yourself in front of the camera, you need to keep up that image.

*Which has been your favorite film to date? Favorite scene?*

It's hard to say because my favorites are my more recent HD films, *The Trade Off*, *Tortured by Regret*, *Scumbag Hustler*, and *Ace Jackson is a Dead Man*. These films, I've already finished principle photography on but have been delayed because of the re-release of my older films with my new distribution deal. It's hard to judge these films since none of them have a final cut to them and they haven't been screened. In regards to the films that are currently on DVD, my favorite film would be *Hookers in Revolt* because it is the most



polished and my favorite scene would be the rape scene in *They All Must Die!* because of the intensity, emotion, and realism.

*How did you break away from the violence of your youth, and what influence do you think it has with the tolerance towards violence in your films?*

I abandoned the gang lifestyle when I started playing organized sports. I started to get a feeling of purpose and responsibility. I began setting goals and the gang lifestyle didn't fit me anymore. Honestly, I don't know the influence this had on the tolerance of violence.

*Are your films done "guerilla" style, or do you get permits from the city?*

I'm the guy that directed *They All Must Die!*, Do you think I care about my own safety? Guerrilla style.

*What are you working on now?*

Right now, I'm about to release a DVD of short films called, *Something Strange*. Shortly after, I will then be releasing an erotic drama called, *The Trade Off*, that was shot in HD. Later this year, I will be going into production again, for the first time in over 2 years, for the murder mystery *A Deadly Affair*.

*Favorites: fast zombies or slow zombies?*

Fast. For the record, I was the first one to ever shoot fast zombies with *House of the Damned* in '96.

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