

An Interview with Ron Bonk, Director of *Ms. Cannibal Holocaust*

by **Mike Haberfelner**

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Your new movie *Ms. Cannibal Holocaust* - in a few words, what is it about?

It's about tenants in a condemned building who suddenly find themselves mysteriously under siege by a cannibal cult and their preacher-like leader known only as *The Woman*, played by Nicola Fiore. They are cornered in the building and all hope seems lost when a strange girl, played by Kellyn Lindsay, shows up with an agenda against the cult.



What were your inspirations when writing *Ms. Cannibal Holocaust*?

Probably the biggest inspirations were *Assault on Precinct 13* and other early John Carpenter films.



Both title and poster art of *Ms. Cannibal Holocaust* are very reminiscent of grindhouse cinema of the 1970's and early 80's. Was that a conscious influence, and what can you tell us about your directorial approach to your story?

I knew from my own distribution company female revenge flicks were doing well. I had made *Clay*, which had gotten great reviews, even from *Fangoria*, and won at some good sized fests, but it had undersold in my opinion, so I wanted to do something more out and out flashy and sellable.

Ms. Cannibal Holocaust features plenty of excessive violence. Was there ever a line you refused to cross in terms of violence and gore? And what can you tell us about the gore scenes in

your movie?

Not in *Ms. Cannibal Holocaust* there wasn't. I'm not sure if I have one, as long as it fits the movie. But in *Ms. Cannibal Holocaust* I wanted you to not only fear for the tenants but see what might happen to them should they fall. I hadn't really ever made an out and out gory film, but loved them, and figured it was about time!

Ms. Cannibal Holocaust also features quite a few rather elegantly handled fight scenes. What can you tell us about the fight choreography and stuntwork on your movie?



We did most of it on the spot based on sequences I mapped out alone ahead of time. I had ideas from my own training, but we would work thru that and add more on set, and then I'd roll camera. We'd do it in pieces, and I'd cover it from whatever angles I needed, and I just made sure the actors did it the same way every time... and in the final movie it looks like we had multiple cameras set up at the same time... but no, just one, with me running it. It was great to see it come together so well, which was also a credit to the editor, Jonathan Straiton.

A few words about *Ms. Cannibal Holocaust* herself, Nicola Fiore, and what was your collaboration like?

I had a great time with Nicola. She had worked on a movie I produced called *Terror at Blood Fart Lake*, and through that movie's director, Chris Seaver, I contacted her. She



Nicola Fiore

Quick

Alio

Wond

Bat

Em

Bom

Jung

Bul

Drum

Captain

Charli

Dick

Dr. M

Docto

Dra

Emma

Flash

Frank

Fr

Annett

Party

Freddy

Fu M

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Gar

Go

Her

El Hom

Incredi

James

Jekyll a

Jerry

Jung

Kekko

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O

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Miss

Mr.

Mister

Mo

Phanto

Op

Quate

Robin

El S

was on board immediately, and the only debate I had was whether to cast her as *The Woman* or *The Girl*. Originally I wanted *The Woman* to be blonde and *The Girl* to be a brunette, and it came down to two potential combos with different actresses. Nicola was game to play either, she just wanted to be in the movie and loved the concept and script and left it up to me which role I'd put her in. In the end I felt she would have a better presence as the villain, and she definitely did a great job in the role. Every time she is on screen she comes off so bad ass!

What can you tell us about Kellyn Lindsay as Nicola's main adversary?

Kellyn contacted me after seeing my call for actors, and she had almost as much experience in Tae Kwon Do as I did, so it made showing her the moves that much easier. *The Girl* does the most fighting, so it made more sense to put her in that role, but she also brought strong acting skills to the table. She keeps moving up the Hollywood ladder with roles too! Anyway, she was a total pleasure to work with, very easy to direct, lots of fun on set, and created a great dynamic with Nicola.

A few words about the rest of your cast and crew, and about the on-set atmosphere?

Ms. Cannibal Holocaust was one of the funniest shoots I had ever been on. The first week was rough because we fell behind schedule, but once the bulk of the cast was done we just had a great time. Jonathan and I work well together, but we also joke well off each other, and tend to tease just about everyone on set. There was tons of laughs, but when it came time to shoot everyone was professional and did a great job. There's always some things that don't come out as you hoped, but overall I'm pretty much pleased with **Ms. Cannibal Holocaust**. It's much different than **Clay** in terms of story and shooting style, and I'm just trying to make each movie a lot different than the last one...



Kellyn Lindsay



As we speak, **Ms. Cannibal Holocaust** has only just been released. What can you tell us about audience and critical reception so far?

At both fest viewings I did at my own fest, it got a great response. Many of my friends and regulars liked it the best of all my movies or found it the most watchable in terms of it just being a straight-forward story, not heavy on subplots or themes. I had some gore fans there I strictly wanted to appeal to and they loved it! One guy even asked for the screening disc we should, which had a temp score. I knew when they were excited - fans of gore horror movies, flashier horror movies, action horror movies - I had hit my target well.

I know the story doesn't really suggest it, but if there was demand, would you ever consider doing **Ms. Cannibal Holocaust 2**?

Sure, I do have an idea for how *The Girl* would come back. Or I would consider a prequel. But I doubt I'd be doing one... I have a lot of other ideas for movies I want to make first.

Let's go back to the beginnings of your career: What got you into filmmaking in the first place, and did you receive any formal training on the subject?

I grew up acting out my favorite movies with my friends, and then making up new ones we acted out. After going through four years of college in accounting and criminal justice, and not excited about where my life was headed, I got inspired to become a filmmaker after my younger brother was taking film and video classes in college and shooting short stories I wrote. It suddenly made perfect sense, and I think the intimidation factor of trying to become a filmmaker had held me back from pursuing it sooner. But I knew that's what I wanted to do and then went after it. And no, no formal training... I learned by watching movies and reading books and then shooting stuff... and my early efforts show it! They are really rough and bad but I grew with each one and I get better at least in some ways with each one...

I've read somewhere that your first film, so to speak, was actually an instructional video on the antique business called (if I'm not mistaken) *What a Deal!*. Would you like to talk about that one for a bit?



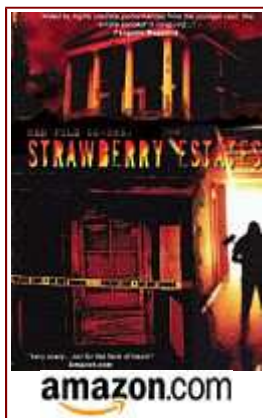
Yes, it was. I was working down in Florida, had my new S-VHS camera, and was eager to shoot something. My dad had written this book on buying and selling antiques and so I took it and shot a video of it and it sold great!

Your first feature film *City of the Vampires* - a few words about that one and lessons learned from it?

Horrible, problem-filled production, horrible movie, but I did get my first movie done, it did teach me a lot about what it takes to make a movie, especially when you're pretty much the entire crew including FX, and I learned a lot about distribution with it as it sold quite well (I shelved it after a few years once I had learned enough from it... I didn't want to victimize any more customers who bought it!!). I did learn one big lesson - I didn't love the script when I made it and given how much work it takes to make a movie, I'll never start another production unless I love the script from the onset.

You got into self-distribution pretty much from square one - why is that, and what can you tell us about your company **SRS Cinema**?

There was no one really handling these shot-on-video movies. *Tempe Video* was getting out of the business, and I had felt like they were my one option, so I decided to launch my own distribution company. I had released **What a Deal** already but sold it to library outlets to great success, but not video stores so much. It was around 1996 when I fully invested myself into distribution and since then have handled well over 200 movies and dealt with hundreds of filmmakers in many different ways - from distribution to my film fest to just general advice...

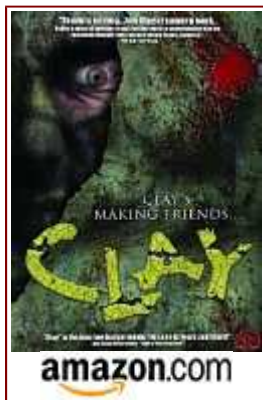


What can you tell us about your films since *City of the Vampires*, and your evolution as a director?

Well they've gotten better in most cases. **City of the Vampires** was the worst. **Dark Descent** was much, much better, and I had vowed if it wasn't an improvement over **City of the Vampires** I was getting out of the filmmaking business. **The Vicious Sweet** was another HUGE improvement and got a lot of great reviews and I've always felt like it was my first real movie, as I put the most time, prep and effort into making the movie I wanted to make, despite setbacks.

Strawberry Estates didn't have the depth of **The Vicious Sweet** nor as good of a story, but it was a fun movie to shoot and it was different in that it has a lot of humor spoofing other SOV flicks where the prior movies had been pretty humorless (except for some dark humor in **The Vicious Sweet**). **Clay** was miles above all else, again it was very close to the movie I envisioned from the start and I felt had my best story.

Ms. Cannibal Holocaust was a bit of a set back... I knew going in it didn't have as deep a story as **Clay** and it was made to sell, period. But some things went wrong on production. Photography-wise, it looks the best, and it was my first 24p production. I like a lot of it, and enjoy watching it, which is rare for me and my own work. But towards the tail end of the movie I see some things I didn't get how I envisioned them and it bugs me... but as I said before, most every one seems to like it, so maybe it's just me being too hard on myself! I'm almost done shooting **She Kills** and it's got a lot of humor and is definitely THE most over the top movie I've made, but I love the story and am really pleased with the footage so far and it may end up topping **Clay** as my favorite among my own flicks.



You have also over the years become quite a prolific producer of films directed by other people. How would you describe Ron Bonk, the producer, and would you care to talk about a few films you have produced?

Mostly, I've been hands off, like with Tim Ritter, Eric Stanze [[Eric Stanze interview - click here](#)] and Chris Seaver. I knew if I gave these guys

an idea and a title they'd get the movies made, and they have. As far as hands on, I did work a lot with Jerry O'Sullivan on **Gut Pile**, and that was a lot of fun, I even got to act a little, and I was happy to help Jerry get his vision down on screen. Most recently I was hands on with **Night of Something Strange** with Jonathan Straiton, and again, same story, it was Jonathan's vision, but I was even more involved with this one, even co-writing some of it, and it was interesting to see ideas I came up with or added to be shot by someone else. I was on his set 24 days, more than I'll be on **She Kills**,

more than possibly any movie I've worked on, and I really was just there to help Jonathan, who can make a great movie without

me, polish his vision that much more. It's hard to find quality help, even harder to find dedicated help, and I just tried to be that for Jonathan as he had been on my productions.



She Kills

Any future projects you'd like to talk about?

Currently, just **She Kills**, which I mentioned prior. Still shooting it but it is coming out great. It's really one of the most over-the-top movies ever and I'm not trying to pat myself on the back... it just is! The dialogue, the gore, the deaths... and I put a lot of crazy shots in it I've never been able to fit in any movies prior. In other movies, like **Clay**, if the angles or placement or camera moves got too crazy it would distract from the story being told there, in my opinion at least. But in **She Kills** I could be as crazy as I wanted to be. And then the icing on the cake is I've gotten some amazing acting in the movie - way better than I could have hoped! Jennie Russo, Trey Harrison, Michael Merchant, Jody Pucello, David Royal, etc, etc, right down to the extras, everyone did such an amazing job. I don't know if it's just the comedy in the script, played straight but funny, but maybe being goofy just unleashes people's true acting ability as even the non-actors did great and will make people laugh and quote them and so forth. I'm excited to cut it and polish it up, it will definitely be the best looking flick I've ever done.

Filmmakers who inspire you?

There are so many, but Alfred Hitchcock, George Romero, John Carpenter, Peter Jackson, Christopher Nolan, Sam Raimi... those are just a few.

Your favourite movies?

Star Wars of course, the original **Dawn of the Dead**, and just about any B-movie, from gore to exploitation to comedy to even documentaries. I love watching old **Mystery Science Theater 3000** episodes too.

... and of course, films you really deplore?

Ah, I don't want to put any down, even the really bad ones are enjoyable, if only because they're so bad.

Your website, Facebook, whatever else?

www.srscinema.com, or find me and the *SRS Cinema, Syracuse International Horror Film Festival*, **Ms. Cannibal Holocaust** and **She Kills** fan pages on Facebook - I do a lot of contests for SRS and the film fest, so "like" those pages to win some swag, plus be up to date on our latest production and distribution happenings!

Anything else you are dying to mention and I have merely forgotten to ask?

Nope, all set!

Thanks for the interview!

Thank YOU!

