



An Interview with Courtney Fathom Sell, Indie Filmmaker, Co-Head of Ass Studios

by [Mike Haberfelner](#)
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Films directed by [Courtney Fathom Sell](#) on [\(re\)Search my Trash](#)



Your about-to-be-released collection of shorts [Ass Studios Presents: 4 Short Films by Courtney Fathom Sell & Reverend Jen](#) - in a few words, how would you describe the collection as a whole and the four films featured?

A few terms I have referred to the films on the DVD as being would be mostly "Sex-O-Tronic" or "Grimehouse". To my knowledge, I don't think either genre actually exists, but then again, these films seem genre-less! So I guess I had to invent my own terms for them. However, they seem more like cartoons to me than anything else.

What were your key inspirations when writing your shorts?

You know, most of our films for [Ass Studios](#) rarely follow a scripted narrative (surprise right!?), with the exception of a few which Rev Jen has developed over the past few months. When we plan out a shoot, it is in a very spontaneous manner. Rev and I will have spoken about what we are looking for and what our general idea is, describe it to the actors, and allow them to have their way with it. So a lot of the magic happens during editing to be honest. Though the films are pretty outrageous and semi-out of control while we are shooting, they actually become even crazier while in post-production.

There is one character in one of your shorts you just have to talk about some more: *Mangina!*

Mangina is a wonderful person, dear friend, and brilliant artist. He really stole the show in [The Sinful Bitches](#) and we could not have made it without him. He has actually starred in some more of our films including [Killer Unicorn](#) and has quickly become a favorite among our fans. Little known fact: there is actually a unreleased sequel to [The Sinful Bitches](#) starring Reverend Jen, Mangina, and Faceboy, but we may just have to keep it a secret for now!

At least to me it seems the films in the collection couldn't have been set and made anywhere else but in New York City. Would you agree, and to what extent does the city and its (counter-)culture influence your work as a director?

That is absolutely true. I agree whole-heartedly. These films would never come from LA or anywhere else I can imagine. They are strictly New York City films. It's hard to pinpoint why, but perhaps just the overall abrasive attitude and style. Being a fan of early underground films such as the work of Jack Smith, Paul Morrissey, the Kuchar Brothers, and so many others, I always enjoyed the feel of the underground films that came from New York. One film which I have continued to be inspired by for so many years is [What About Me](#) by my friend Rachel Amodeo, which I believe may be one of the best New York-based films of all time.

It Will Burn Your Brain!
ASS Studios Presents
The first sex-o-tronic epic!



FRUIT PENEYRYTOM SEXUAL DEBAUCHERY! SEX SKEWERY! & LOVS OF YROGLIT!

"I've worked with Oliver Stone and Michael Mann and Paul Haggis and Gregg Arlo, but I've never experienced greater depths of genius than what I've encountered with the borderline homeless degenerates of ASS." - Moby



REV JEN, FACEBOY, REINA TERROR, & THE MANGINA in

THE SINFUL BITCHES!
A FILM BY COURTNEY FATHOM SELL



Your directorial approach is usually described as "guerrilla" or "D.I.Y." - would you at all agree to that, do you want to elaborate on it, and how would you describe yourself as a director?

My approach to making films could certainly be considered 'guerilla'. I would have to agree with that also, though I feel rather conceded placing such a tag on myself. I have never really worked with much of a budget, even on my documentary work, so I really learned fast as to how to complete a project with whatever I had in my possession at that time. Whether it be shooting on whatever camera I can find or avoiding shooting permits and just going out and doing it, I was always in love with this style of making films. To me, and I've said it many times before, the image in front of your camera is always more important than the type of camera which is capturing the image. When it comes down to marketing, publicity, and all that other stuff, the D.I.Y. aesthetic always worked for me. In fact, when I was in High School, I was arrested for posting flyers all around my hometown which had an image of the main character from the movie vomiting all over himself. Ha! The film was entitled **Ralph**, so it just seemed fitting. They let me off later, but only if I agreed to take down every flyer. I didn't of course, and the screening was packed with people that weekend! Most of whom walked out moments afterwards upon realizing the film was terrible. Ha! Either way, I found out a way to get people to my films.

Your films are often likened to the early work of John Waters - a comparison you're at all happy with?

Sure. It's flattering of course, though that's a gigantic, high-pressure comparison. When I read that in *indieWIRE* I was pretty stunned. I certainly don't want to have to live up to such expectations, nor do I believe I could! And to be honest, I was never looking to follow in such footsteps, but I guess we must have a similar sense of humor that comes out in our work for someone to say that.

I also found quite a few old school grindhouse references in your films. Is that a genre (if you can call it that) that you're particularly fond of, and why (not)?

Of course! In fact, one of the main reasons I get such a kick out of making these films is that it excites me to think that somewhere, a bunch of people are getting drunk, laughing hysterically and enjoying this work for all its cheesiness. My Brother and I would spend hours upon hours when we were kids, watching so many cheesy exploitation and grindhouse films, and I guess I hoped to one day create something that someone could enjoy in the same way we enjoyed those early grindhouse films - with a bunch of beer of course. It is great you picked up on those homages, though once again, I must honestly admit that most were not intentional but most likely just came subconsciously due to the amount of time I've spent and sometimes wasted watching those films. I also have always been inspired by the work of William Castle, Ted V. Mikels, and early 70's sex-psychedelia. I guess the main difference between Grindhouse films and [Ass Studios](#) is the fact that up until recently, we have not shown any nudity or any gratuitous violence, which makes the films on the DVD really odd and a bit hard for someone to figure out, which is why I view them more as cartoons than anything else.



What can you tell us about your chief partner-in-crime Reverend Jen, how did you two meet, and what's your collaboration usually like?

Other than since we met, I have been the most prolific in my filmmaking than I ever have been in my entire life, it's a blast. Jen is a beautiful and incredibly inspiring person who is never afraid to follow through on even the most insane ideas - which is probably why we get along so good! At times, when we come up with an idea for a film or art project, and it becomes more and more absurd as time goes by, she is the one who will simply ask 'Why the hell not?' - which usually means we will begin working on it by the next morning.

Rev and I met on set while I was directing a commercial for her memoir *Elf Girl*, which came out through Simon & Schuster this past October. We immediately got along, got drunk, and won a bunch of cash on scratch tickets. Later that night, we decided to start a production company in order to make a slasher/soft-core porn film called **Half-Assed Satanists**, though the title has recently changed to **Satan's Bitches**. It will be our first feature.



... and do tell us about [Ass Studios](#), the production company you run together!

[Ass Studios](#) was founded by Myself, Reverend Jen, and Faceboy, who has acted in every one of our films. He is our 'Fairy Grant', and the only performer currently under a long-term, multi-million Dollar contract with us. We all began collaborating together and shooting a new film almost once a week. Soon, we had so many shorts that we decided to have an official Launch Party - which ended with many audience members being attacked with stun-guns by performers. The one thing I regret, other than seeing an old man hit the floor in tears after being shocked, is that we lost half the audience before screening more of our work! Therefore, we began screening all around New York City and eventually down in Baltimore, wherever they would host us. [Ass Studios](#) has surprisingly or not so surprisingly received an amazing amount of attention and positive reviews, though we still have a fair share of hate mail coming our way. Ha! We like to refer to it as being the 'most underfunded motion picture company on the Lower East Side', except of course for Faceboy's multi-million dollar contract.

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?

From as far as I can remember, I always wanted to make films. I began shooting films in my parents' backyard as a child and eventually got a scholarship to Pratt Institute for their Film program. I dropped out almost immediately and began traveling the country with my Hi8 video camera, hitchhiking, riding trains, staying on couches, on diner rooftops, in graveyards, and simply just using the country as my canvas to shoot film. I worked odd jobs wherever I found myself living to get by. This is where my interest for documentary filmmaking came into play. There were just so many fascinating things and inspiring people which I would stumble across and end up making a film about them. I used film as a way to further educate myself on the world. And for about ten years, I lived my life through the lens of my video camera. I lived a fast, hard life during those times, but also in doing so, met some of my best friends and have lived an incredible life thus far. And all because of my passion to make films!

Before you shot the shorts in the collection, you mainly made documentaries, right? Why don't you talk about those for a bit, and how does making documentaries compare to directing fiction?

My first documentary was a film called **No Substance Necessary**, which documented a road trip I had taken with a close friend which went terribly wrong. A lot of booze, drugs, and other debauchery ensued, causing me to never release it. In 2005, I met up with my best friend and former roommate Jac Currie in New York City, whose family had just felt the wrath of Hurricane Katrina. We decided to make a documentary, **No Place Like Home**, on his first trip back to the Gulf Coast during Thanksgiving, and capture the devastation of the storm as well as his efforts to have rebuild his hometown through his non-profit *Defend New Orleans*. When we finished it, we were fortunate enough to get it screened at numerous festivals and even win a few awards. We began self-distributing it and using the profits to donate back to other relief funds. The film was even spoken about on the *Ellen Degeneres Show*, which helped draw a lot of attention to it, for which I am extremely grateful. Afterwards, I began working with many different bands, documenting live performances and backstage foolishness, and was eventually approached by my own Father to document his last few months, as he was in the final stages of hospice. He had an aggressive form of cancer and wanted me to make a film which would help educate others on early cancer detection and share his story. The film was **My Dying Day** and is certainly my most personal piece to date. Since then, I still make documentaries, and recently just completed a short called **The Hole**, which I co-directed with Billy Feldman about a neighborhood on the Brooklyn-Queens border, home to the *Federation of Black Cowboys* and a famous mafia body dumping ground.

To compare directing documentaries and fiction is hard for me, as I am always filming. Usually my documentaries are simply moments of my own life, as I view an environment or situation personally. With documentary, I hope to educate and inspire the viewer, while with my fiction work, I simply hope to entertain them!

Any other films of yours you'd like to talk about, any future projects?

I just completed a new short with [Ass Studios](#) called **Waltz of the Bitches** about an evil count named Rick Santorum who seduces women, brings them up to his lair, drugs them, and hopes to get their vote! It's definitely the most outrageous [Ass Studios](#)-film so far, and the week it was screened turned out to be the same week Santorum dropped out of the race! Coincidence??

I have also been working on a few screenplays, one about a talking mongoose who loves Milli Vanilli a little bit to much, and also a few more documentaries happening. Rev wrote the script for **Satan's Bitches**, which is to be our first feature, so that should be happening too.



Waltz of the Bitches

As an underground, no budget filmmaker yourself, what piece of advice would you give other underground, no budget

To any aspiring filmmakers reading this, just go playground! Make the films you want to make. mail, and all the other crazy bullshit that may You can't win em' all over so don't even worry

Filmmakers who inspire you (underground favourite movies? ... and of course, films you

Like I stated before, I am really into the work of Anger, and so many others. I love Vincent Price, seen [Blood Harvest](#)? My favorite movie, **Story**. It's hard for me to say what movies I horrible remakes need to end. Other than that,

Your website, Facebook, whatever else?

www.courtneysell.com

Thanks for the interview!

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