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Local filmmakers bring horror flick to fest

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By [admin](#)



Ellen Muth, left, and Debbie Rochon star in 'Rudyard Kipling's Mark of the Beast' from local directors Thomas Edward Seymour and Jon Gorman. The film will be shown Sunday at the New England Underground Film Festival in Hartford.

By MIKE CHAIKEN
EDITIONS EDITOR

Thomas Edward Seymour of Plainville created an underground buzz as part of the Connecticut underground cinematic collective Hale Manor, which gave the world "Land of the College Prophets" in 2005. He caused people to guffaw and gasp as part of the team cinematic team that created the "Bikini Bloodbath" comedy horror series. His most recent effort is "Rudyard Kipling's [Mark of the Beast](#)." The film gets released on DVD in the coming weeks and is being screened as part of the New England Underground Film Festival in Hartford on Sunday. We caught up with Seymour and Sheri Lyn, one of his cinematic cohorts who helped adapt "Mark of the Beast" for the silver screen, to talk to them about filmmaking and, in particular their film, which is showcased in Hartford this weekend.

Observer: Talk to me a bit about what "Mark of the Beast" is about?

Thomas: It's one of Rudyard Kipling's most famous horror stories. A man desecrates a shrine and for this, a silver faceless leper in the woods puts a curse on him. His two friends try to capture the leper after unsuccessfully trying to lift the curse from their friend. I don't want to give too much away but it has a strong anti-torture message."

O: Why did the story appeal to you as a filmmaker?

T: It has something in common with "Beowulf" (the Anglo-Saxon poem by an unknown author) I think. "Beast" reads like a deep old myth. To me it's about how it's wrong to de-humanize or view enemies as monsters but it's what we do in war so that people are easier to kill or torture. In doing these things, we violate our own values and we ruin ourselves when we attempt to ruin others. It plays like a simple horror story but it has real depth to me.

O: If I remember correctly, when you filmed "Mark of the Beast," it was a marathon session. Talk to me a little about the filming process.

Sheri: We filmed for 11 days in the middle of August back in 2010 in Voluntown, Conn. (at Still Waters Pond.) Tim and Chi La Bossiere-Kulig,

executive producers of the film, let us use their property and it was the perfect location for this film. It was pretty hot and humid most of the shoot, though, and some of us had to adjust to nature life. Debbie (Rochon, one of the lead actors) and I picked up pink baseball "paranoia hats," which was our form of protection against ticks. We figured if they plopped down from the trees and onto our heads, we'd at least spot them and shoo them away. I think filming in general, no matter how fun and creative it is, is a really challenging process when you're shooting low-budget films. By far, out of the five films I have currently produced, 'Mark of the Beast' was the most difficult and I think some of that can be attributed to this being a straighter sort of film for us. We had to look at everything more critically to make sure all the elements were in sync with the story and the creepy, '70s aesthetic Jon (Gorman, Tom's co-director, a St. Paul Catholic High School graduate, and former Southington resident) and Tom were going for.

T: It was a marathon but we've used so many of the same cast and crew for so many years that we all got into a groove very quickly. It helped that we shot the whole film in the same location.

O: How do you think the lessons you might have learned from your previous work helped the process of filmmaking this time around?

T: We worked with a lot of the same actors for years now and in some cases I feel like I know their strengths so I tried to write the characters in "Mark of the Beast" for specific actors I'm used to working with like Dick Boland (who was in the "Bikini Blood Bath Films" and "London Betty") and Debbie Rochon (the scream queen who was in "Bikini Bloodbath"). Every film that you direct refines your skills in working with actors, trying to compose shots or block a scenes. Every film helps refine your skills even if it's "Bikini Bloodbath Part 4."

S: Having a smaller cast was much easier. Trying to squeeze 20 people onscreen in ("Bikini Bloodbath") with different angles and one camera versus the five to six in "Mark of the Beast" was a big difference. It allowed Jon and Tom to have more play with how the shots were set up. Pre-production is always difficult in our films because there's only a handful of us who take care of all the details in addition to working full-time jobs. One day, filmmaking will be our only jobs.

O: For your leads, what did they bring to the table in terms of making the story come alive?

S: We all love Debbie (Rochon) and getting to work with her again is always so exciting and so fun for all us. We are always so thrilled to have her onboard with any of our films. She's so inspiring to me and I learn so much just from watching her. She's also a really good person and a great friend and spending a week with her was the best part of the shoot for me.

T: Dick Boland and Debbie Rochon created two very different and very strong leading characters. I love to see them on screen together and Phil Hall just brings the film to a whole new level for me. Only Phil Hall could say lines like "I'm gorgeously drunk!" and sound completely natural.

O: Has "Mark of the Beast" been screened at other events in addition to the New England Underground Film Festival?

T: It will be playing at the Anthology Film Archives in New York City on Oct. 8. We just had the world premiere of "Mark of the Beast" at the Syracuse International Horror Film Festival. It was part of the Scare-a-cuse Horror Conventional at the Turning Stone Casino.... There was a great response to the film and I was relieved. People were creeped out at the right points and they laughed at the lighter moments when I hoped they would.

O: Why did you want to be part of the New England Underground Film Festival?

T: Underground film festivals are the best. It's always important to me to have a Connecticut premiere and a New York City premiere of our films. To me, it's a way of honoring the cast and crew's hard work because hopefully everyone shows up and you can catch up and reminisce. It's hard to believe we shot "Mark of the Beast" two years ago... For me, a successful festival run or theatrical screenings helps separate you from just doing direct to video films.

O: The film also is about to be released on DVD, how does it feel to have the film make that transition to wider distribution?

T: It feels great. It's been such a long road to get this film done. I first read Kipling's story probably about seven years ago. When I first moved to New York, I had to get a job right away so I started working at The Strand

Bookstore. I found this old dusty book of short stories and within it was Rudyard Kipling's "Mark of the Beast." I knew then that I loved the story and I knew I could make it into a feature film. The DVD is awesome. It has a documentary, director's commentary, several trailers and promotions and, of course, a really nice transfer of the film.

T: What's next for you as a filmmaker?

O: I'm halfway done writing a sci-fi noir script to be shot in New York City.

To pre order "The Mark of the Beast" go to

[http://www.seeofsound.com/p.php?](http://www.seeofsound.com/p.php?s=MVD5549D&utm_source=Rudyard+Kipling%27s+%22Mark+of+the+Beast%22+on+DVD+10%2F23&utm_campaign=Mark+of+the+Beast&utm_medium=email)

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The New England Underground Film Festival will be held Sunday, Oct. 7 at

La Paloma Sabanera, 405 Capitol Ave., Hartford from noon to 6 p.m.

General admission is \$10 and students with school ID can pay \$5.

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