

MJ Simpson: film reviews and interviews

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Saturday, 15 February 2014

interview: Andrew Parkinson (2007/14)

*Eight years after I first interviewed Andrew Parkinson at the Festival of Fantastic Films, we were both back in Manchester. In 2007 he was there to screen his third feature **Venus Drowning** so I cornered him in the bar for a quick fourth interview. Unfortunately it seems that I only ever transcribed the start. Or maybe we got distracted by something and ever finished the interview. No matter, because in January 2014 - with *Venus Drowning* set for a belated DVD release through Julian Richards' Jinga Films, Andrew answered a few more questions by email.*

Take us through from finishing *Dead Creatures* to starting work on *Venus Drowning*.

"After finishing *Dead Creatures* I spent probably a year, 18 months playing film festivals with it. Which sucked up all my free time and left me quite drained. It was good fun though, *Dead Creatures* had been quite a tough film to make. Both financially it was quite ambitious for what money we had and it just left me feeling kind of knackered and slightly demoralised, I have to say. But the urge to make another film slowly crept back in and I thought, 'Let's do something a little more commercial this time, a little more mainstream, a little more accessible.'

"So I sat down and I wrote a script which I think was all those three things. While I was writing it, the script that I really wanted to write was going on in the back of my head and that turned out to be *Venus Drowning*. After writing it, I looked at it and thought no, I can't make this, this is ludicrous. But I had to. It wouldn't go away. So I started making it and it should have been fairly straightforward but of course life's never that simple. I probably spent about 18 months shooting and editing the film. I stupidly went straight from my edit suite onto one of the screens in Cannes.

"Screened the film to quite a full audience - and there are chunks of it which really didn't work, really didn't gel terribly well. Some of the special effects, they were good effects but we'd filmed them wrongly so they didn't work that well. So I came away from Cannes thinking, 'My God, what am I going to do with this?' Sat down, had a long, hard think about it, took a couple of months off and then reshot all the problem scenes. Same actors, same special effects, same models, same locations. Just reshot them in a slightly different style and it came good."



Do you think you needed to have that Cannes screening to see what was wrong or should you, with hindsight, have been able to spot that when you were making it?

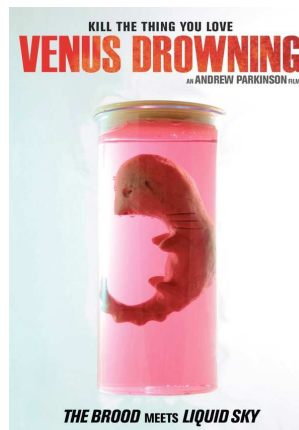
"As somebody who writes and directs and edits, I was pretty punchdrunk with the material by the end of that. What I really should have done was have two or three screenings with people who were going to be critical enough to put me against the wall and say, 'Look, mate...' The first time you see your film with an audience, you learn an awful lot about it. You sit there in a heightened state of nervousness anyway but that's what makes you really critical about it

and you suddenly realise that things that nearly bothered you a little bit in the edit but you couldn't put your finger on what was wrong - it all becomes far clearer. And I tell you, sitting at Cannes, it was very clear. It was a really tough, demoralising experience. But you've got to live and learn and move on. Don't beat yourself up too much. But the film's come good so we got there in the end."

Why did you decide to make *Venus Drowning* rather than complete a zombie trilogy, and did you consider any other projects?

"I was a bit zombie-d out after two films and *Venus Drowning* really appealed as a very different type of project. There were other projects, but *VD* was the most developed script I had and it became an irrational obsession, like these things do!"

Were you surprised or concerned that *Venus Drowning* failed to find a distributor, and why do you think that was?



About Me

MJ Simpson

I co-founded SFX in 1995 and worked there for three years then spent 15 years as a freelance film journalist writing for Fangoria, Video Watchdog, Shivers and other mags. I now concentrate on book and scripts.

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"VD took far longer to make than I'd anticipated and by the time it was finished I'd run out of steam and time, so promoting the film myself was difficult. The distributors who'd released the zombie films took a look, and thought it was too arty and difficult to market to their target audience. I was disappointed at the time, but of course most distributors are not looking for the next 'difficult' film to release. I don't regret it though, and it's great that it's finally getting an airing."

I recently spotted your credit as 'colourist' on Julian Richards' *The Last Horror Movie*. Are there any other British horror movies you've helped out with which have similarly eluded the IMDB elves?

"A few - I graded Julian's *Summer Scars* after *TLHM*. Last year I graded Sean Hogan's *The Devil's Business*, and before that *Little Deaths*. And my own films."

As someone who was there right at the start of the 'British Horror Revival', what is your take on the way that things have changed over the past decade and a half?

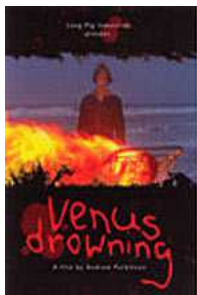
"The technological developments have made film-making more accessible, so there are films from a more diverse pool of people, which is all good. It's still demanding to produce films, and probably harder to get them seen. Audiences seem to be getting less of more. Most of all, I think, "Where did the time go?"

How did the three-way collaboration of *Little Deaths* come about, and why do you think there has been this mini-revival of horror anthologies in the last couple of years?

"I'd had a few drunken nights out with UK horror journo Jay Slater, who I've known for years. Jay introduced me to Sean - they both claim it was their idea! It wasn't mine, but I was looking for a fairly low maintenance project, so I got involved. The damn thing turned out to be anything but low maintenance! Anthologies seem to be a horror phenomenon. There is a perception that making several shorts is easier than a feature, at least from a production angle. Not always true, the numbers of cast members and locations can easily rack up causing loads of headaches. Shudder..."

Why are your three features getting re/released now, and have you done anything new for these discs of *IZ* and *DC*?

"I, *Zombie* is a complete remaster from the 16mm neg in a widescreen framing - something I couldn't afford to do originally. It looks pretty damn good. I'm not sure what will be on the disks, but I supplied the usual commentaries and 'making of' material."



Have you seen Marc Price's *Colin*, which treads similar ground to *IZ* but in a very different way, and what did you think of it?

"I did see it and enjoyed it. It took me a while to adjust to the visual aesthetic, but once I was into it I thought there were some smart and ambitious twists. And it was a masterful ad campaign."

Can we expect your next film before 2016, and what might it be?

"Last week I'd have said no, yesterday I had a meeting with a producer... So I'm really not sure. I have more family responsibilities than I used to, so I have to think twice before engaging with another reckless film project. I have a few pet projects I keep mulling over, some of which are fairly abstract. One is a silent film, a hoodie horror, and another zombie film."

Posted by MJ Simpson at 23:09

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