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## DUSTIN MILLS – DIRECTOR OF PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE

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One of the goals of Daily Grindhouse is to help new projects get off the ground, and if they are off the ground, give them the legs they need to tackle an audience. This weekend I had a chance to catch up with Dustin Mills who directed THE PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE. It's a about a group of teens who are challenged to spend a night in the Wagner mansion on the edge of town. Little do they know the owner has concocted a monstrosity in the basement where all sorts of fucked-up puppet mayhem takes place. Yes. We're serious, and this film RAWKS! It's smart, violent, and isn't afraid to flash a little puppet tit. Dustin is a cool cat and this film is worth your dollars so hit the link after the interview and pick one up and pass it around. This is some good shit.

What was the first film you saw that changed your life?

Dustin: Honestly I think it was the original KING KONG. I saw KING KONG with my grandmother, she had it on at her house when she was babysitting me when I was really young. After KING KONG was over they had a special about how Willis O'Brien and RKO Pictures had created the effects and things like that. Seeing the making of the movie which I had never seen before was just really inspirational to me. Seeing real working people putting things together and hearing how it was all accomplished It just made sense and clicked in my head and I was sort of addicted to that behind the scenes stuff after that. Which was cool because I grew up when JURASSIC PARK and TERMINATOR 2 where coming out so there was stuff all over the news about how they accomplished special effects and I ate that up.

Was there a scene in KING KONG that you remember specifically?

D: In KING KONG the scene that I always thought was amazing was the POV shot of one of the bi-planes speeding toward Kong. That was a pretty dynamic shot, it was something you didn't see a lot of. To see Kong swatting at it was just awesome.

Where you a kid who was a Theater Rat or did you watch your stuff on VHS?

D: I watched my stuff on VHS. When I was growing up we didn't have a ton of money. We went to the theater occasionally but more than anything, and I hope the statute of limitations has expired, my mom would bootleg VHS like crazy. We had two players in our living room and she would make a copy of whatever she brought home. I had this huge library of all kinds of stuff and at that time in life, not so much anymore, my mom was a huge horror fan, I mean anything she could get her hands on. So we had this huge encyclopedia of horror movies crowded around the TV that I would watch constantly.

Do you remember the name of the video stores you hit?

D: There was a few of them: The Video Shop, The Video Connection, and Hollywood Video, which I don't think was part of the chain it just happened to have the same name.

What movie theater was close to your house?

D: We had one rinky-dink theater which was called The Ritz.

G: Isn't funny that whenever something is called The Ritz it's usually some piece of shit place?

D: Oh man it was awful, it's still awful, it's still there. Half the movie is projected on the wall and there's something wrong with the audio so it sounds like everybody has been inhaling helium and the pitch is just too high. But yeah, any movie I saw in a theater was in that shitty little place.

So you grew up on a steady diet of horror films and that really defined your cinematic perspective. At what point did you decide this is what I want to do?

D: Well I don't have memories of wanting to do anything else. There was a time when I only wanted to do special effects so any book or behind the scenes video I could get my hands on I would read or watch and just absorb the techniques. I had the "Grand Illusion" books by Tom Savini you know, learning how to do make-up effects but also getting into THE ABYSS and TERMINATOR 2 and learning about CGI and how that all worked. So that's what I wanted to do but as I got older I realized what I was really interested in was telling stories in some way or another and to me, film is the best way to tell a story it combines so many art-forms... that's why movie making is so fascinating to me. That's the best way to tell a story.

What filmmakers do you follow today?

D: I am a huge, huge, huge, Robert Rodriguez fan just because I love his philosophy on how to make a movie. He understands the balance of being cost effective and making something awesome and that just because you are limited by money doesn't mean you can't make something amazing. So I am a huge fan of his, doesn't mean I like every one of his movies but I just love that philosophy.

He is somebody who is always reaching for these fantastic moments and most of the time it works.

D: And even when it doesn't work he is still being creative and embracing new technology. He was the first to embrace Digital Backlot which is the way we shot PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE and he embraced 3D way before the rest of the industry. He's been doing that for 5 years now. He shot on HD-Video before anyone else, as soon as he gets a new technology he learns it and I really respect that about him.

What are some of his films you dig?

D: I love ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO, I think that is one of the greatest modern action movies and I love SIN CITY and PLANET TERROR is amazing and oddly, I love THE FACULTY. I don't even know if people know that's his but I think it's the best one of those 90's student horror films.

Another influence is Guillermo Del Toro, I have been following him for a long time, since he made CRONOS. I think I discovered him through MIMIC and then watched CRONOS and I have seen every one of his movies and even the ones he produces. His imagination is... the dude is just a walking ball of imagination. The crazy shit that escapes his brain and makes it onto film is amazing to me. I try to model the way I tell stories after him because he's no holds barred, he just lets it fly. I think a perfect example of that is PAN'S LABRYNTH. The sheer amount of imagination in that film is astounding. It's something that a lot of mainstream directors don't have. They can think of special effects and they think that's an idea but they don't create worlds. Del Toro will create a creature with an entire century long backstory that he doesn't even approach but it's apparent in every spec or scar on that creature.

So let's jump to PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE, tell me how this came together.

D: In no budget land, you can't pay people and when you can't pay people they really don't show up unless they are really into what you're doing. I put my faith in a lot of people who you know, they didn't care as much about this garbage as I did. I would never get anything accomplished, I would try and try and nothing would happen. A long time ago though I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my best friend from High School talking about potential movie ideas. At the time, we were trying to think of movie ideas we could make for a \$1,000 which by the way is sort of ridiculous not because it's impossible to make a movie for a \$1,000 it's because ideas get away from me and the movie becomes too big for \$1,000.

One of the movies we talked about was PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE which was going to be like a Troma movie... skip ahead to age 24 and I am working a 9-5 and my brain isn't wired for it, it's not meant to do the daily grind for someone else and I sort of had a breakdown and decided I was going to make a movie, life is too short and I need to do this. So with the support of my girlfriend Erica (Kiseberth who plays Mona in the film) I just started putting the thing together. We worked on it for a year and most days it was just me and my assistant director Brandon Salkil (Wilson) in my living room running sound, cameras, doing puppets and like I said, it took a year but here it is, it's finally out and that's it.

What did your mom think about the film?

My mom loves the movie and is really proud of me. I wasn't sure how she would react to the film, but she is completely elated. I think it helps that she was involved in it. She made most of the puppets and we wouldn't have much of a movie without her.

What was that like to hold the final product in your hand?

It was kind of surreal to hold the finished product. I was excited, but at the same time I was aware how much work was coming. Finishing the film is half the battle... maybe less. Distribution is a long process, and its hard to adjust to the slow pace after the whirlwind speed at which you worked to make the actual film. It is ultimately very rewarding, though. Especially when people actually are interested in the film.

What are you working on now?

D: I am working on a movie called ZOMBIE A-HOLE, it's really a blood and boobs kind of movie. Not to undersell it or anything.

You can't undersell it when you are talking about boobs and blood man.

D: (Laughs) Well it's not on the same scale as PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE, I kind of want to do it as a grindhouse romp, something I could take to the conventions and people would think it's really fun. We had to take a hiatus on filming but we are starting again at the end of the month.

Oh wow so you're already in production?

D: Yeah, I would say half the movie is already in the can.

And so is this interview, thank for the time Dustin.

Dustin Mills, DIRECTOR: PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE

EDITORS NOTE: Dustin wanted to thank Bill Zebub for helping him steer through the channels of distribution. DailyGrindhouse wants to thank Bill Zebub for having a fucking awesome name.

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See you on forty deuce,  
G

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