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HP Lovecraft's The Thing on the Doorstep Gets the Indie Treatment

Posted by: Drew Toop in Featured Articles, Interviews, Read Online 21 days ago 0



Hollywood has not been kind to H.P. Lovecraft, a writer who, despite being more popular now than he ever was in his own lifetime, seems perpetually unable to find writers and directors willing to give him his due. But where Hollywood has failed to show an interest, the world of independent filmmaking has stepped in to provide infamously obsessive Lovecraft fans the movies they crave. 2005's *Call of Cthulhu* and 2010's *The Color of Outer Space* seem to have ushered in a new wave of fresh, true-to-the-source, low-budget independent adaptations; the latest of which is *The Thing on the Doorstep*, directed by Tom Gliserman and adapted to the screen by Mary Jane Hansen, who also stars in the film.

Thing, as the Lovecraftians reading already know, tells the story of a mysterious hypnotist Asenath and the young man she enchants, as well as the friend who has to kill him after unspeakable things happen. Today, Gliserman, Hansen and producer Will Severin join Diabolique to discuss their project, now available through MVD and Midnight Pulp.

Diabolique: Are you all into horror, or is horror just the project of the moment, to do *Thing on the Doorstep*?

Tom Gliserman: I'm in the middle, I think. I like a good horror movie every now and then, you know. It's like, I enjoy it, I love watching it. Am I one of those total horror geek kinda guys? Not entirely. That you'd have to talk to Will about.

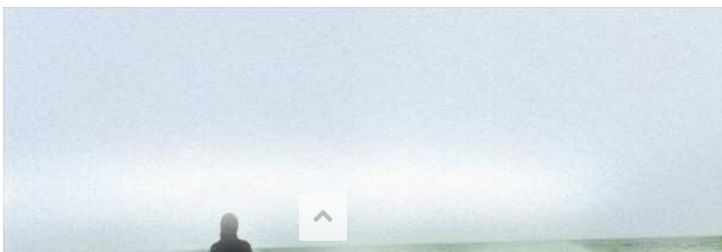
Will Severin: I am totally the horror geek of this group. I fly that flag proudly. The whole Lovecraft idea, really, I guess I started that ball rolling as far as a story we were wanting to adapt or an author we were willing to approach. Yeah, that's probably more my bag and Mary's probably the furthest away from that.

Mary Jane Hansen: Yeah. And yet, I end up writing a lot of horror poetry and histories that are based on those stories and have that element in them. I'm drawn to that dark side, just not as overtly as some.

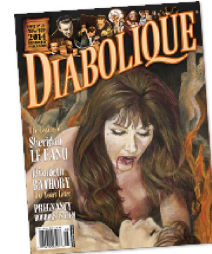
TG: The Lovecraft aspect of it also crosses over into a lot of areas for us. We call it a psychological horror film when we put it in our description. It's certainly not a slasher film.

MJH: The psychological aspect of it, the historical, the literary element of it – I love H.P. Lovecraft – that drew me to it I think.

TG: I think that's the common denominator, these different aspects to it that all stem from the fact that it's Lovecraft.



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Diabolique: I have been reading Lovecraft since I was a kid, so I wanted to ask you guys, why specifically Thing on the Doorstep?

WS: We looked at a couple stories, but Thing on the Doorstep, as far as adapting to a film, really does have more of the traditional three-act structure; it really does have more of a beginning, middle, and an end. Many of his other stories would be much harder to adapt.

MJH: There are some things he does that are just in the imagination, just on the page—so this is something where we could show action, but we didn't have to show too much.

TG: And, also the fact that it did seem to update to modern day quite nicely.

Diabolique: At what point in the pre-production process did you decide not to do a period piece but to set it in the present era?

MJH: I'd say it was almost instant.

TG: We'd looked at quite a fair amount of Lovecraft work and we didn't want to do that whole period thing for a couple of reasons. First of all, we wanted to update it. And, we didn't have the resources to make a period piece in the way we'd want to.

MJH: And I also enjoyed the fact that we were updating it but it still felt rooted in the past.

Diabolique: Stephen King accused Lovecraft of being unable to write a scene. Did you find there wasn't really a lot of scene material in this story, or did the scenes just naturally flow out of the story?

MJH: Well, I think you have to take the kernel and elaborate. Take it from the telling and put it in the doing. I think what happened over the course of [the adaptation], I got a little self-conscious about if there was enough going on. And, what sort of happened was it sort of blew up. We ended up going back in the other direction, closer to what Lovecraft had written, and found that to be the best telling.



Diabolique: Have you guys enjoyed any other Lovecraft stories? I assume you've read Mountains of Madness, that sort of thing.

WS: We read a fair amount. We actually considered Pickman's Model, but it didn't seem to have as much on its bones. The Thing on the Doorstep seemed to have more to offer. One of the things we hadn't talked about was how it was one of the only stories with a strong female presence.

MJH: That was very important [laughs], and we had such a good time with the Lovecraft fan base.

Diabolique: I was curious about your experience with Lovecraft fandom. It's an interesting group of people.

TG: We had a lot of interaction on social media with the fan base. They are a very interesting group of quirky, intelligent, funny, loyal sort of people. They're really not pushovers, and they really love Lovecraft. They don't want you to muck around with Lovecraft. Our jump into Lovecraft fandom was at some of the film festivals.

WS: We won Best Feature at the H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival, which was great. Brian, Gwenn and Aaron put on an awesome fest, and it's very true, a lot in that fan base are purists, insofar as what they expect from their adaptations. But, a really cool group of people, man, very supportive and we made some new friends. I've always been a big horror fan since I was really little. You know, I was reading Famous Monsters, Fangoria, etc. But for me, it was interesting; it's kind of a subset of the main horror group. They're more into the literary aspect.

MJH: More well-read.

TG: It's interesting. I was at the NecronomiCon Conference in Rhode Island last year. Listening to [Lovecraft scholar] S.T. Joshi and the lengths he went to into examining Lovecraft. The decades he spent hoping up comparing two manuscripts, comparing the differences between two versions, it's crazy.

Diabolique: It's funny too, because, it's been almost a century since the man was working, yet I think Lovecraft is bigger than ever. It's even become an Internet meme.

WS: From where we stand, absolutely. I think it's because there's a timelessness to what he wrote. One thing we all think about Lovecraft is there's that sense of the unknown. It's never spelled out for you, and you're imagination is at the forefront. He doesn't totally illustrate it for you because he doesn't spell it out. That's one of the things I think is really appealing.

MJH: What was it we were talking about...This is edging on the inappropriate right now, but we were at a strip club and we were talking about how it's a little bit like stripping. He'll go to lengths to lure you in but not show you everything. There's that excitement.

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TG: Yeah, Get a group of Lovecraft fans going to a strip joint and they'll all end up talking about Lovecraft (laughs)

MJH: Go figure.

Diabolique: I wanted to ask, going more into the film specifically. You guys were working on a small budget – what was the final tally?

WS: It's certainly a micro budget. It's one of those things...there's out of pocket costs as well as the time we spent in post-production, It becomes a very confusing question.

TG: Let's put it this way: We never put any money on any credit cards.

MJH: Basically a wedding money shoot. [laughs]

TG: But there was never anything owed, either.

WS: At the outset, when we decided to do this, it was really the issue of calling our own shots. We didn't want to go out in search of investors. It really was, 'Let's go out and do this ourselves. Let's produce this ourselves.'

MJH: It's (also) an enormous benefit to have people who can do multiple jobs and can do them really well. You know, your editor, your photographer, your sound designer, your composer. That's who we are.

TG: Between us, we covered so many different bases that we can absolutely move forward on these things and do something we really want to do.

MJH: We paid our actors, but we didn't pay ourselves.

[all laugh]



Diabolique: With that kind of budget, how long did it take you from start to finish to complete the project?

TG: Forever!

[all laugh]

TG: It probably took five, six years. Start to finish. We knew each other and we knew each other for a long time, and we'd all heard stories about making an independent feature, and the horror...

[more laughter]

WS: We said, well, we'll keep going as long as this is fun.

Diabolique: How did you find your distributors? I see you have MVD and Midnight Pulp.

TG: It was, you know, starting down that long road of starting to understand, doing the festival game and trying to make a stir, and showing it to people. And really, you start pushing over rocks.

WS: We ended up partnering with Leo Mark Studios in Los Angeles and they're basically the ones responsible for finding a home for this. They've been pretty supportive about the whole thing. It's a small niche market, and it's a small, niche film, but they've been supportive with it.

TG: And frankly, I think the fact it's a Lovecraft film played a large part in our success in attracting a distributor.

WS: No question. The name itself – you said it yourself, Drew – it's seems like it's so popular it just grows and grows every year. He's way more popular now than he ever was in his lifetime.

TG: The distributors are looking for something that's going to attract a niche market. If they see something where they can say, 'You know, that might be something we can work with there,' as opposed to starting from scratch.

Diabolique: Mary, for your character (Asenath), I was hoping you could share where you drew your inspiration from for your depiction of her.

MJH: There are so many levels to the character and there are so many people with all the body switching that's going on. There's part of her as Edward Derby, and in that case I channeled the actor who was playing Edward Derby. And, for Asenath, I think there's part of her that's really misunderstood, but then there's something much darker and much older.

WS: That's one of the things you and Tom discussed, you're never playing it like the villain.

TG: Then there's certainly the first part of the movie where there's the Asenath that's very confident and controlling and a lot of that goes away (later) in this movie.

Diabolique: Going back to the shoestring budget – you used a lot of digital effects in this film. What program were you using, and how easy or how difficult did you find it to add those effects and special shots?

TG: It's a constantly evolving thing. All the things I used on that movie I don't use anymore, because everything changes every two years anyway. I've always tried to keep the toolkit ever enlarging, so that you can do the things you wanna do. It was a pretty standard Final Cut Pro, Apple (pro) workflow to create the movie. Compared to even two three years ago, when this movie was finished, it's just constantly evolving. What you can accomplish now is just incredible. Being in this business now and seeing what's possible. and

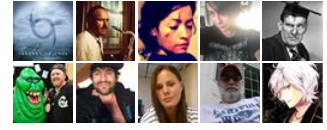
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remembering paying exorbitant amounts of money on effects and equipment that I now can make in my pajamas, in my office, in five minutes, is incredibly liberating for filmmakers.

Diabolique: Will, I was impressed by the ending credits when your name kept popping up a bunch, especially with sound and music. You're the producer, but you're also the composer, which I suppose when you're making a project like this is not that unusual, but how did you juggle all those different responsibilities?

WS: It's interesting because we all juggled a number of different responsibilities all through the process. But, being on the set, setting up shoots, that's one hat; but, producing music and the sound, that's the time when I got to play. Tom finishes with the shoot and goes home to edit and I get to have fun with that.

MJH: And, you're actually much closer to the project than most composers, because you're there, every day, knowing what the director's looking for, what the writer was going after. Plus there's a John Carpenter sort of precedent.

WS: Everybody plays guitar [laughs]

TG: Will's a great producer, but he's an exceptional composer. Really, if Will could do whatever he wanted, there'd be a lot more music around.

WS: As far as composing is concerned, the whole genre thing, and the fact that we went down the Lovecraft road, making a horror film...that's my wheelhouse. That's what I was looking forward to. Though I did have a lot of fun doing the location audio. You know, I'm working in a group; you develop a kind of shorthand. I know what's up with Tom, Tom knows what's up with me, Mary knows all that as well. Communication is a whole lot easier and it makes for a much smoother process.

Diabolique: Who should watch your version of *The Thing on the Doorstep*?

WS: I think that it appeals to fans of classic horror and even mystery fans.

MJH: It goes without saying that if you're a true Lovecraft fan, then this one is for you.

Diabolique: Do you have any advice for aspiring indie filmmakers?

TG: So many of the technical obstacles have been removed so that anyone can approach making a film, I would say, find a compelling story then go out and shoot it.



For more information please visit their [Facebook](#), or to purchase the film please visit [MVD](#). The film is also now streaming as part of Midnight Pulp's VOD platform.

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ABOUT DREW TOOP



Drew Toop is a writer and aspiring filmmaker formerly based in Taipei, Taiwan, but now working in Seattle, Washington. His documentary Goodbye, Night Market, Goodbye aired on Taiwanese television, and he hopes to develop new projects in the near future. When he isn't working (whether his day job or his creative jobs), he is busy exploring his new city and watching really bad (but oh so good) low-budget horror films.

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