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An Interview with Michael Fredianelli, Director of *The Scarlet Worm*

by *Mike Haberfelner*
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Your movie *The Scarlet Worm* - in a few words, what is it about?

A poetic assassin is hired to kill an abortionist. And lots of people get killed.

How did the project come into being in the first place?

A feature-length Western had been in the back of my mind for years. I would collaborate with screenwriter David Lambert [[David Lambert interview - click here](#)] on possibilities, but they would usually fall through even with a completed script in place. The main problem would be creating something practical within our budget constraints. I finally thought it best to start over fresh with a new script, and I gave Lambert carte blanche to write whatever he wanted as long as it would be something we could make within our limited resources. The result was **The Scarlet Worm**.

A very basic question:

Why a Western, and is this a genre especially dear to you? And your genre favourites?

I never really liked Westerns when I first got into film. Maybe it was just the genre being unpopular at the time, but I just didn't feel any connection there. I was mostly into crime films. It wasn't until I saw that they share similar motifs and plotlines (desperate men, the shootout, etc.) that I gained an appreciation for the genre and started to pay closer attention. It's still not my favorite, but damn close. My preference leans towards the usual suspects (Leone, Peckinpah, Corbucci, etc.), so I'll mention some lesser darlings: **The Culepepper Cattle Co.**, **The Hunting Party**, **Bad Company**, **Keoma** and the much maligned **Django Kill!** While there are some very good pre-60s entries, I prefer the visceral thrills and ambiguity the later films offer.



How would you describe your directorial approach to the subject, and did you use any classic (or no classic) Westerns as templates at all?

There was always a Spaghetti Western vibe attached to the project ever since it was casted, but it was never intended as an homage (or at least there was no conscious effort to mimic that style). To me, the script was throwback to the revisionist Westerns of the 70s, and with that in mind, the goal was to make this project look feel and sweat like one. As far as a classic template, I'll mention a favorite among the crew from pre to post production: **Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid**. Many Peckinpah techniques (long shots, slow-mo squibs, cross-cutting, etc.) were employed on set and in the editing room in addition to the moral complexity already in the script.

What can you tell me about your writer and co-producer David Lambert [[David Lambert interview - click here](#)], and what was your collaboration like?

David Lambert is an encyclopedia of Old West knowledge, and I completely trust his judgment. I'm familiar with his previous works so I knew exactly what to expect in terms of style and quality when I asked him to write the script. As for the writing process, he would write a few scenes, send them to me for comments, then he would write some more. He was very much involved in the pre-production process from scouting locations to build sets. Unfortunately, we live about 400 miles apart so all communication prior to filming was done via email and Facebook.

What can you tell us about your lead actor Aaron Stielstra, who's a regular of your movies I understand, and the very unique character plays?

Casting Print Harris required a careful combination of elegance, madness and delusion. Stielstra specializes in playing deviants, psychos, transier lunatics, et al. so there was no doubt he'd capture the more eccentric aspects of the character. There were many times I had to tell him to hold

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- Lesbian Seduction 1 2005
- House of Shame 1 2008
- Half Moon 2011
- Dead Hooker in a Trunk 2009
- Deep Above 1994
- Star Crash 1979
- Gladiator Eroticus 2001
- Strangler of the Swamp 1946



Aaron Stielstra

back in the performance to keep that sense of reality in check, but he definitely delivered in the end. It's difficult to balance that kind of big acti with the traditional leading man qualities. He made it work.

The Scarlet Worm also features quite a few spaghetti Western veterans, like Montgomery Ford, Dan van Husen, Michael Forest and Ted Rusoff - how and why did you get them, and what was it like working with them?



Dan van Husen

All these guys were accessible and everyone in the crew is big fan of their work. Many of us already established a working relationship with them, too, so it was only natural they be in movie. It also didn't hurt that they were excited with the script making it easy for us to get a commitment out them. And if van Husen had not agreed to play Heinrich Kley, we would have forced him at gunpoint. He wa too perfect. The production went so fast that working with them seems like a blur now (we wrapped Montgomery Ford's 30+ pages of script in one day). It only hits you later when you're watching some randoi Lucio Fulci movie and one of their faces pops up and you say, "hey, I directed that guy!" It's almost surreal.

A few words about the rest of your cast?



The big supporting parts such as Hank (Kevin Giffin), Gus (Eric Zaldivar) and Lee (Derek Hertig) were cast and plann far in advance. For many other supporting roles, it was a ra to find someone before their scenes appeared on the shoo schedule. Robert Amstler (who plays The Rifleman) was ca the night before he was to shoot, and to Rita Rey's credit (r plays Annabelle), she had to prepare for the female lead in about two days' time.

Not only in my opinion, one of the key elements of a Western is finding the right locations. So what can you us about yours?

instructed Lambert to write the script around locations he knew we could get: this would mostly include private property (where we also built interiors) owned by his relatives. When it came time to expand the visuals, we filmed on two big sets: Pioneertown and The Wooden Nickel. Luckily, the majority of our filming was done in and around Nuevo (which is naturally a dirty, rundown hellhole of a town) that saved us time in set dressing and gave us that old-time feel. Pick-up shots were done on the Paramount Ranch.

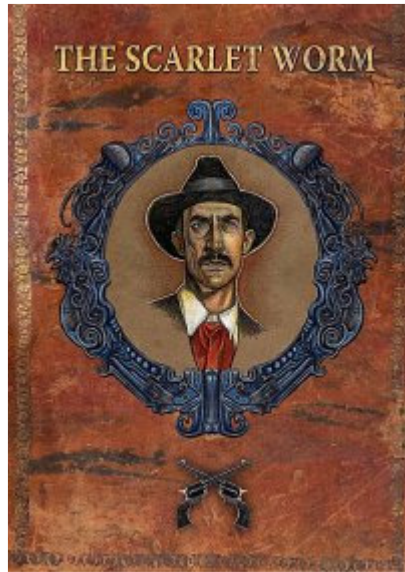


Then there's The Scarlet Worm's haunting musical score, written by your lead Aaron Stielstra, right? You just have to talk about the score for a bit!

Stielstra has always contributed music to my projects so when this one came around, it was already non-verbally established that he'd be doing the music. I was initially a bit apprehensive at the idea since his prio scores are so far removed from any kind of Western-type music, I couldn't really see how it could work. Wh the rough cut was finished, I made clear to him I was interested in more natural-sounding tracks this time around (his previous contributions can best be described as a weird hybrid of metal, synth and funk). It was difficult to imagine his distinct style applied to a Western setting, but the gamble paid off. The score has a r more organic feel than anything he's composed yet it still contains many of his old habits.

As far as I know, The Scarlet Worm has so far only played a few festivals. What can you tell us about audience and critical reception so far?

Critical and audience reception has been very positive so far. Even though the genre is still dead, there has been a small breath of theat Westerns that revived it for a short time. The window was open and timing was just right, but I think people also see it as a unique entry something different (and obscene) to offer, hence the attention from horror fans.



Let's go back to the beginnings of your career: What got you in filmmaking in the first place, and did you receive any formal training on the subject?

There was no formal training or classes or anything of the sort. My first school consisted of years of movie watching, which is fine, but it taught you nothing about how to actually make a movie. For that, you learn from picking up a camera and doing it the way you think it should be done. Enough mistakes will be made that you eventually figure out what not to do. The process will repeat itself until you're finally comfortable doing a feature. And even then, there's still a lot to learn.



Your first feature film was called *Pale Blue Balloons*, right? What can you tell us about that one, and the lessons learned from it?

As amateurish that film may look, it was still the result of about three years of practice making shorts. There was only one other person on the crew and I was wearing every hat including the lead actor. I really got a crash course from every perspective.

I'd like you to talk about a few of your other films I have chosen mostly by title I have admit ...

OK, I'll be brief.

Xenobites?

Xenobites is a surreal hybrid of sci-fi, film noir and modern crime. A private investigator is hired to retrieve an incriminating tape in the hands of the Yakuza in a futuristic society where demons have replaced law enforcement and have orders to punish with extreme prejudice.

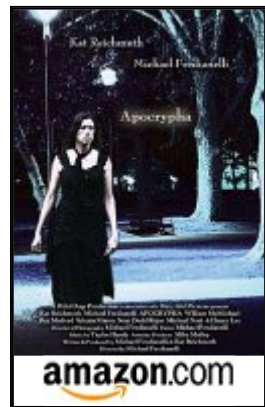
The Minstrel Killer?

The Minstrel Killer is a throwback to grindhouse exploitation about a killer in blackface makeup who murders his victims in the tradition of old minstrel shows. My first period film (set in the 70s) which may turn some viewers off due to a bleak and uncompromising look at racism and violence.



The Big Sleaze?

The Big Sleaze resembles my very first shorts. It's an irreverent, incomprehensible comedy that innocently celebrates violence and hatred in a new way. It takes a unique sense of humor to appreciate.



Apocrypha?

Apocrypha is a vampire film injected with an amnesia theme. The current backlash and contempt for vampires has become such a cliché it actually annoys me more than the worst *Twilight* movie so this one should be revisited a few years from now when all the hatred has died down.

You usually also appear in your films (and a few others) as an actor. What can you tell us about Michael Fredianelli, the thespian?

He shows up on time and never complains. The acting came out of necessity because in independent film it's very difficult to get on an unpaid actor, especially in a lead role where you'd need him at your beck and call everyday. Since I was already there to direct, I'd take on the role myself to relieve myself of the unneeded stress. Quickly, the egomaniac inside me took over and I started writing roles for myself. Though acting has still not replaced my directing ambitions.

Directors who inspire you?

William Friedkin, Sidney Lumet, Sam Peckinpah, Jean-Pierre Melville, John Frankenheimer, Billy Wilder, John Carpenter, Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma, Stanley Kubrick, Don Siegel, Walter Hill, Francis Ford Coppola, Sergio Leone, Enzo G. Castellari [[Enzo G. Castellari bio - click here](#)].

Your favourite movies?

The French Connection, To Live and Die in L.A., Twelve Angry Men, The Wild Bunch, Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia, Citizen Kane, Rififi, The Friends of Eddie Coyle, Point Blank, 2001, Psycho, **Taxi Driver**, **The Exorcist**, Dr. Strangelove, Le Trou, Le Samourai, Chinatown, The Wages of Fear, The Hidden.

... and of course, movies you really deplore?

Transformers, Superstar, The Searchers, Scary Movie 3, Thor.

Your/your movie's website, Facebook, whatever else?

<http://www.facebook.com/scarletworm>

Anything else you are dying to mention and I have merely forgotten to ask?

Yes, **The Scarlet Worm** comes out on DVD and Blu-ray April 24, 2012. Buy it.

Thanks for the interview!

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