

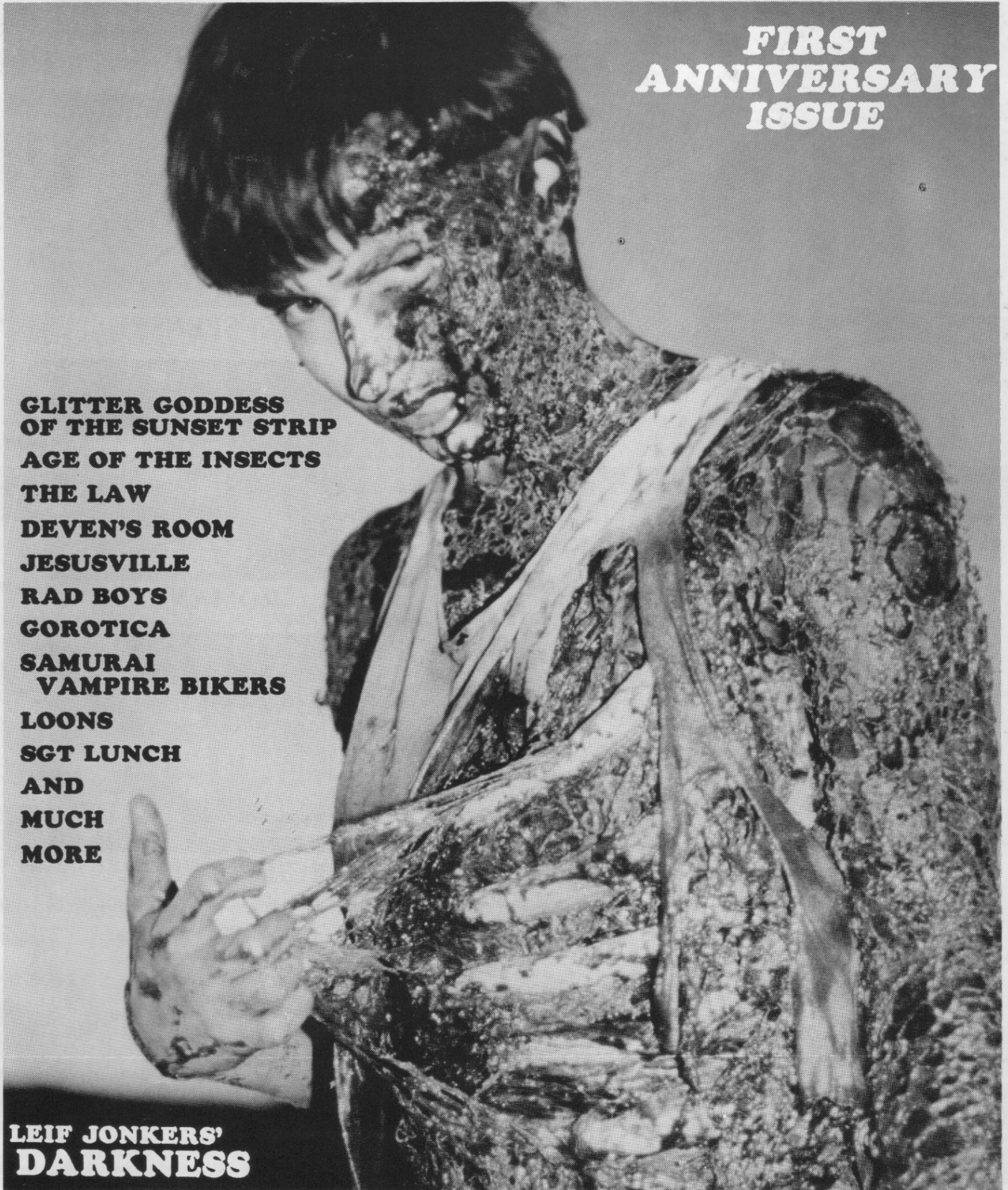
INDEPENDENT VIDEO

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**FIRST
ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE**



**GLITTER GODDESS
OF THE SUNSET STRIP
AGE OF THE INSECTS
THE LAW
DEVEN'S ROOM
JESUSVILLE
RAD BOYS
GOROTICA
SAMURAI
VAMPIRE BIKERS
LOONS
SGT LUNCH
AND
MUCH
MORE**

**LEIF JONKERS'
DARKNESS**

HEARTLANDS OF DARKNESS

an interview by Robert Collins and Sam Loomis

Writer/director Leif Jonker and FX artist/actor Gary Miller speak out on the making of their horror epic **DARKNESS** and the terrors of filming in (GASP!) Kansas. Armed with a start up budget of only \$2000.00 (\$1200.00 of which went to buying a camera) Leif Jonker and Gary Miller set out to redefine the bloodsucker genre and unleash upon an unsuspecting splatter audience, *"THE ULTIMATE IN VAMPIRE HORROR"*. Almost four years later the unrated horror/action feature *"Leif Jonker's DARKNESS"* is tentatively slated for a Halloween video release and things are looking bright for the twenty something auteurs who aim to do the same thing for their hometown of Wichita, KS that George Romero did for Pittsburgh - put it on the map as the birthplace of horror's next big thing. Brought in for a "cash spent" grand total of well under \$20,000, the flick has been compared favorably to films that cost anywhere from 10 to 100 times it's budget, with many gore hounds already labeling the "climatic meltdown sequence" and many of the films other effects set pieces as "classics". The two's response to these underground accolades? "Fang you, fang you very much!"

Question: Lief, the story of **DARKNESS** depicts an army of vampires taking over a small town, requiring many crowd scenes, elaborate special effects, multiple locations, etc, etc. Considering that you were working with a micro-budget and that this was your first film, why did you choose to do such a large scale production?

Leif - One reason was that I was a little to damn confident for my own good. I had heard the forewarnings of Sam Raimi, Scott Spiegel, John Russo, etc, etc. about keeping the first production small, but I thought that I could learn from their mistakes, incorporate my own resourcefulness and easily overcome the stigma of small budget productions being small scale. **WRONG!** Ultimately the multiple locations is what kicked us in the ass more than anything. The constant lighting setups, travel arrangements and coordination of the actors, extras and locations proved to be more daunting of a task than one guy could handle and principle filming stretched from the hoped for two months to a little over two years. My theory was that if I shot for a 12 million dollar production with a few thousand dollars that I would ultimately have, and I ended up with a film that looked like it was made on a budget of somewhere in between, then I would have accomplished that much more than my budget really permitted. In some ways I succeeded and others I didn't, but I've found that **DARKNESS** does entertain and I feel with great conviction that this is the final measure of success for any film. The best reason though, is that this was the story that I had some passion for, and I thought it would be a cool flick, so I went for it. I think that for the most part we pulled it off. If we had shied away from the more "challenging" story and gone with a smaller scale project, we may have a more technically perfect flick, but it probably wouldn't have been nearly as cool.

Question - Gary, this too was your first feature. When Leif asked you to join the production, you had just started training yourself in make-up and the most acting experience you had was from high school drama class. What was your reaction when you were asked to not only take charge of the special effects on **DARKNESS** but to also act in the lead role?

Gary - I was seventeen and still in high school, working at a local video store when Leif came in wearing a hat with a logo for **VAMPIRES** (the original title for **DARKNESS**) and we started talking. I told Leif I wanted to do special makeup effects as a career and he said he'd give me a script to see if I thought I could handle it. I read the script in English class instead of working on my final paper, and was blown away. I mean, it

was like "Mother fucker! How the hell am I going to do this shit?" The next day I saw Leif, gave him back his script and told him, "No problem." (laughs) It was a couple weeks into pre-production when he offered me the lead role of Tobe, the vampire hunter. He was going nuts trying to find someone that he felt could handle the emotional range of the character as well as be depended on to show up for filming. Strangely, he thought of me. I guess he knew at the very least that I was committed for the duration. He asked me if I thought it would be to much for me to tackle on top of doing the effects. Being star struck I again said "No problem." This would actually prove to be a big problem later, but there was no way I was gonna miss this chance.

Question - So between the two of you the positions of writer, director, producer, cinematographer, editor, editor's assistant, associate producer, head make-up effects artist, and lead role had been filled. How did you find the rest of your cast and crew?

Gary - We had a casting call. We put up these red flyers all over town that said **"VAMPIRES WANTED** for a micro-budget horror film, no acting experience needed" etc, etc. We held the call in a hotel meeting room that Leif had rented for 40-50 bucks and about 150 people showed up. Leif held videotaped auditions/interviews in a closed off room while I and a couple of my friends had people filling out question sheets and model release forms out front. Out of this call we got the majority of our vampire extras and a couple leads; Randall Aviks, Cena Donham and Jake Euker to name a few, but for the most part Leif filled out the lead roles by networking.

Leif - A lot of Gary's friend like Bill Hooper and Brian Cardwell were cast, but I actually found a good number of my actors at **THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW**. I had gone to a midnight screening of it in hopes of meeting some aspiring actors. I figured that if they were willing to pay money to get up and scream, act, and cut loose in front of an audience, then hopefully they would be interested in working on spec for me. I was right. That night I met Rob Lower who ended up playing the store clerk in the beginning of the film. Rob introduced me



Cast and Crew with "Jodie Monster #1" on the set of **DARKNESS**. Top L-R Leif Jonker and Gary Miller. Bottom L-R Jeff Waltmon, Lewis Warren, Tim Buller, Daniel Otopy, Cena Donham, Cory Donham, D. Dopps, Cara Miller, Lisa Franz and Veronica Dennen.

to Mike Gisick and Steve Brown who took on the lead roles of "Greg" and "Jodie". As far as production crew members went, anybody who was on the set became one. If they had a warm body and willing to help, it didn't matter who, how old, or how experienced they were, we put them to work. Of course through out the entire production, the only constant crew members were Gary and myself, an aspect of the production that we are going to try and avoid on the next project.

Question - What kind of problems did you run into making a movie with very little money and how did you deal with them?

Leif - There were times during the production when we literally did not have a single dollar. This made buying small unimportant things like FILM(!) rather difficult! (laughs) Other essentials we constantly ran low on were latex and stage blood. we all worked a variety of odd jobs, begging, borrowing and stealing what we could to pay the bills and keep production rolling, but this was rarely enough. Once we finished principal photography we ended up selling our camera and it's accessories at a loss, to help pay for the final film processing and begin post-production. Several times Gary and I went to the local plasma donation center and gave blood for the \$20 that they paid, just to make rent or buy whatever it was that we needed for the flick.

Question - You gave blood to buy blood?

Leif - Exactly! In fact I made my final payments on our main lighting kit with my paycheck from washing dishes at a local greasy spoon and the money I got from selling my blood. As pathetic as this sounds, our perseverance paid off as we now have a completed film, which is what the whole point of it was. There were a couple of times though that we lucked out and didn't have to scrounge nearly as badly. One of the coolest was when we were shooting the movies opening scene set in the convenience store. First off we were lucky to find any place that would let us film in their store at all. If the store wasn't open twenty -four hours then they wanted a huge rental fee or for us to have some gigantic insurance policy. Finally, we found a store that closed from 11 p.m. till 6 a.m. that we could have for one night for \$50.00. I told the owner, Larry Williamson, that we could get the scene done in one night. Well needless to say we didn't. Ultimately we got just about exactly half of the scene shot before we had to start cleaning up all the blood. I asked him what it would take for us to come back another night, hinting that we didn't have a whole lot of cash. After a couple of uncomfortable seconds he said "Bring me a twelve pack of Michelob Dry next time you come, and you can have it for another night." Pretty damn lucky, huh? For the price of a couple cans of beer we got to come back and throw blood all over this guy's store a second night. We weren't always so fortunate though, most of the time we had to improvise to get what we needed.

Gary - Like when we were filming the crowd scenes at night on the street. we had a generator, but it was too loud to run in some of the residential areas that we were near, so many times we would search the sides of stores, and assorted businesses for outdoor power outlets that we could plug our lights into, and most of the time we were successful. One time while we were sapping electricity from a bank, apparently we set off a silent alarm. Three men showed up and started checking the doors, windows, every inch of the outside of the building, and couldn't find anything. Fifty feet away there were about thirty kids, a camera and a string of lights with hundreds of feet of extension cords. They didn't find our cord plugged in, and they didn't question anyone. So, we filmed. Another example, during the same scenes, we had no dolly and we needed to get tracking shots of the crowd chasing the camera. I drove the car while Leif sat in the trunk with the camera and a light. We could get to about 20 MPH and it worked pretty well, but we had only so many hundreds of feet of extension cord. So we would stop,back up and get another shot. It actually worked pretty

well.

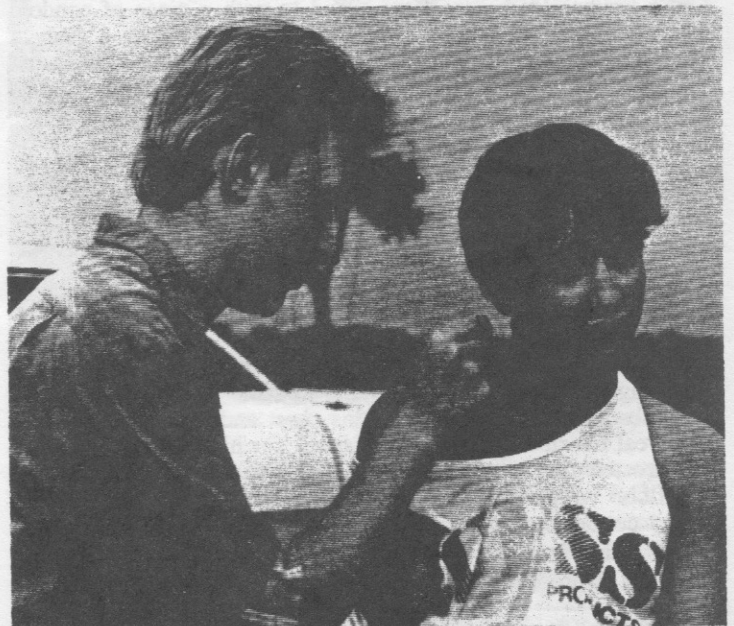
Question - Were the police ever called out on you?

Leif - All the time! Before we were done all of the third shift cops on the west side of town knew us by name. Luckily we weren't blown away. In fact we thank the Wichita police department in the end credits because they didn't blow us away! (laughs) We were filming on all of these streets and different locations without permits and licences of any type and panicked citizens were calling the police saying that somebody was getting killed by a marauding crowd, or that there were some maniacs with guns scaring people off the road. It got to be pretty surreal when the cops showing up became part of the daily schedule. Once we were shooting, out in this field, with the burned Jodie monster on top of a car. We were getting some extra shots of it before we blew it's head off when all of a sudden we were surrounded by cops. Somebody had reported that a group of satanists were holding sacrifices out in the fields. Oh well, it kept things interesting.

Question - The movie has bullet hits, multiple bite wounds, burned flesh, a chainsawed hand, a shotgunned head, a vampire that's crushed under the tires of a speeding truck, stabbings, choppings, arterial sprays that hit the ceiling, semi-animatronic heads, full corpse torsos and what was described in THE NEW YORK TIMES as "possibly a world record for exploding heads, for the climatic meltdown sequence."HOW?!

Leif - I refuse to answer that question on the grounds that it might incriminate us! (laughs)

Gary - When I first started I was thinking of everything in terms of what I had read, the tried and true or "correct" way. I started a couple of things and they didn't look so hot. They came across as kind of a conservative and Leif kept on saying "No man, I want viscera! Huge gaping holes! Massive bite wounds! Not clean fang marks!" Now we didn't have the bucks to do this type of stuff the "correct" way so I had to "unlearn" what I had learned and figure out how to accomplish it guerrilla warfare style - cheap, fast and gritty. There were some molded appliances but no foam was used, we couldn't afford it. Liquid latex was what we had, so that's what we used. Everything else was built from scratch, odds and ends around the house. many things were made of cotton, cardboard, scraps of wood and pipe, and lots of hot glue. Tons of chunks of flesh was used. The only time money was spent was for the latex.



Head make-up effects artist and star of "Darkness" Gary Miller applies a neck wound to co-star Steve Brown



Actor Steve Brown as "Jodie" during the climatic meltdown sequence.
FX by Gary Miller

Question - It's one thing to pull off a couple of interesting effects on a shoestring budget - but the meltdown sequence?

Gary - When we first started doing the meltdown, I thought okay, we're gonna melt some vampires. No, no. Uh Uh. I have to create a multiple stage burn/transformation from vampires to screaming skeletal demons that would then explode. It seemed insane to even bother trying it without money. First we got some group shots with the crowd and the appliances, then needed to go further. What's further? I didn't exactly know so I just tried to come up with gorier and gorier shot that looked like burning flesh was happening. I duct taped blood tubing and condoms all over people and would cover it with latex and cotton and paint it to look burnt. Break away pieces were built in so they could be torn off, or fall off, and "chunks of flesh" were stuck in any tear of the make-up. Thin tubing with holes in it was glued to people and smoothed over with flesh colored cake frosting or mashed potatoes so when the blood was turned on it looked like it was bursting out of the flesh. (This was Leif's brainchild that he later added to with a piece of condom that would bubble under the skin and then burst with a gush of blood.) Then we moved onto the puppets which were all scratch-built of mostly the same materials, we pumped blood through them, moved them around and pulsated the condoms, then we shotgunned them in the head for explosives.

Question - What's your favorite effect that you pulled off on **DARKNESS**?

Gary - Probably the best example of the cheap make-up that looks great was on Steve Brown as Jodie. He's completely burned over half of his body, his skin is already crisped down to a layer of mangled red flesh, suddenly he finally gives in to the sun and begins to convulse while a stream of blood is pumping out of his heart. Not able to stand the pain any longer he grabs a fist full of tissue on his chest and starts tearing it off to reveal his ribcage. This "appliance" for his chest and ribs was constructed on the chest of one of my friends while he lay on the floor wrapped in saran wrap. It was made completely of latex, cotton, and paper towels. Even though it cost less than \$10.00, that make-up is now considered the key image from the film and is probably going to be used in most of the advertising.

Question - Aside from the films make-up FX, the movies soundtrack stuck out as being exceptionally effective. How did you manage such a striking score on such a non-existent budget?

Leif - We were lucky! While we were in post-production we met

Mike Curtis. He won't let me tell you what band he's in, but it's a very cool, dangerous, counter-culture group that gets most of it's play in dark seedy German bars and discos. We showed Mike our five minute teaser that we had cut together to find post-production support and luckily he dug it and committed to working on the project on spec (just like the rest of the crew). We first scored the teaser and then, once we had finished our first cut, moved onto the feature. Mike had a bank of synthesizers all hooked up to a sequencer that we slaved to a VHS copy of **DARKNESS** that had time code on it's audio tracks. All we had to do was push play on the VCR and the music would chime in perfectly synced. Mike had very specific ideas about what he wanted to do with the score but was flexible enough to listen to my input making it an ideal working relationship. As a lot of horror fans have noted, the score was "John Carpenter" inspired but it's definitely it's own music and the one area of the film that we didn't have to compromise at all and I owe that to Mike. Great musician. His music and the effects are the best parts of the movie, plain and simple.

Question - I also liked how you used the rock music.

Leif - Yeah, pretty cool stuff huh? When I decided I wanted some heavy metal songs in the flick, (a la Argento) I found the three best bands in the Midwest and begged them to trade a little publicity for their tunes, and they were more than happy to oblige. The songs by **APOSTASY** and **THE GRUNGE** were originals taken from their pre-recorded albums but the end credit song was an original written for the film by this wicked new group called **KNIGHT**.

Question - You both believe that the "golden age" of horror films was from the mid-seventies to the early eighties. Did the films from this period influence you on **DARKNESS** and why do you hold them in such high regard?

Leif - Influence **DARKNESS**? **DARKNESS** wouldn't exist without those movies. Truth is, I wouldn't want to make horror films if it wasn't for those movies. **DAWN OF THE DEAD**, **TEXAS CHAINSAW**, and **EVIL DEAD** were profound inspirations, but the flicks that gave me my personal slant towards **DARKNESS** may be a little less obvious. Walter Hill's **THE WARRIORS** may not be a horror film but it's got great action and style with an awesome "night" aura to it. Don Coscarelli's **PHANTASM** series also made an indelible impression on me, but the one inspiration that most fans won't recognize right away is Frank LaLoggia's **FEAR NO EVIL**. That flick actually inspired me to write the original story that **DARKNESS** is a quasi-sequel to. I think **F.N.E.**'s a wild little flick on it's own right, depicting the anti-christ and his attempt to unleash hell on earth, but I felt it was too small in scope for it's subject matter. However, if it had been a **VAMPIRE** movie, I thought it would have been perfect. So as a freshman in high school I wrote a huge, epic, vampire, war story in reaction to my feelings about **F.N.E.** Five years later I needed a story to do for my first, ultra-low budget flick, so I wrote **DARKNESS**, a scaled down prequel to set up the larger film. Also, many moments in **DARKNESS** are admittedly lifted right out of several John Carpenter flicks, but like I said earlier his most noticeable influence would have to be the films score. I've been a huge fan of Carpenter's movies and his musical style ever since I saw **HALLOWEEN** almost fourteen years ago. I was 10 years old and that flick blew me away!

Gary - If **ALIEN** and **FRIDAY THE 13TH** hadn't existed I wouldn't be doing make-up now. **ALIEN** scared me, and that's when I knew this was my choice of business, but when I started seeing the original slasher/gore epics like **FRIDAY THE 13TH** that is when I started getting into make-up and became, like many others, a loyal follower of Tom Savini. Once I got a hold of his book I was in business.

Leif - It's just the natural progression of things. Just like how the original **THE THING**, **FORBIDDEN PLANET**, **INVADERS**



Jake Euker and Veronica Dennen await the arrival of "Liven"

FROM MARS and CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON influenced Hooper, Romero, Carpenter and Cronenberg when they were young, so are these guys flicks influencing a whole new generation of young filmmakers.

Gary - Damn they don't make movies like those anymore, it sucks not being able to go to the drive-in and see a triple feature of DAWN OF THE DEAD, PHANTASM, and SCANNERS. It's almost unimaginable now, because the only thing coming out any more is formula designed crap, and the fuckin' morons at the studios can't figure why audiences aren't going to them anymore. Put out a good movie and they might.

Question - What do you see for the future of horror films?

Leif - The reason that horror films are in a slump right now is because the majority of the people making them are visionless whores that have no respect or passion for the genre. Thankfully, the only reason they're making these types of flicks is because they were making money not too long ago and once they stop making money (excluding a few exceptions they already have) these assholes will stop grinding them out, leaving the market open for those of us who love the genre to go out there, do their stuff and get it seen. Of course once this new wave of cool flicks begins to make money, all of the hacks will try to sneak back into the market, but until then we'll be seeing some fairly drop dead, kick ass, passionate shockers coming out! This whole business is cyclical and everything is in the perpetual motion of coming full cycle. Sooner or later horror flicks will be "hot" again and with the new computerized motion picture technologies available to help realize the visions of the hungry young up and comers out there, watch out!

Question - Any advice for the other "up and comers" about to start their first feature?

Leif - My technical mistakes I learned from are too numerous to list, but a few personal lessons would be - 1. Stick to the script as much as possible. 2. Remain diplomatic and regard everybody's feelings as very sensitive, no matter how tough skinned you think you are. 3. Plan your shots and adhere to those plans. 4. Rehearse your actors as much as possible. 5. Listen to and if needed, accept the input of others, but never loose faith in your own vision. 6. Don't lose confidence in yourself or the production. No matter how bleak the future may look, if you truly want to make your movie it's just a matter of time before you do. 7. You can kick yourself in the ass for all of your fuck-ups later, just get the damn thing in the can!

8. The most important thing that I learned though is that character development is MORE important than the effects sequences! Also, your visual style should be just as interesting for the dialogue scenes as the action. Trust me.

Question - Gary, what advice would you give an aspiring make-up artist about to start his first feature?

Gary - Don't be afraid of trying different things. Experiment with stuff, see what you can pull off without making an investment in expensive supplies. Just because you're told, "this is how to make a mask", or "this is how to make a zombie chipmunk" doesn't mean it's the only way to do it. Creativity is going to be your most important tool. The whole point of effects is to make something that's not real look real, so, if it's not real, what does it matter with what or how it's made?

Question - What do you see for the future of NORSEMAN PRODUCTIONS?

Leif - DARKNESS is in essence a glorified version of WITHIN THE WOODS, the short film that Sam Raimi produced to raise money for the feature length EVIL DEAD. In contrast to that short, our "DEMO" film is a big scale, feature length flick that's going to be released onto video. Right now our first priority is to get the flick distributed and then we're going to dive head first into the next project. All of the movies we've got cooking in pre-production right now are fright flicks, but are of wildly varied styles, subjects, and settings. supernatural westerns, futuristic zombies, a demonic apocalypse, and a necrophilia shocker are just a few of the stories we plan to let loose in the next couple of years. What do I see for our future? Well, until we come out and do it, it's just bragging, but keep your eyes open, because once we get the means to start making these flicks the way we want to, you'll be looking at the next golden age of horror. As cliché'd as it sounds, you better believe it when I say, you haven't seen nothing yet!



Actor Chris Michael gets devoured by the bloodthirsty undead while vampire Timo Gilbert stares on. FX by Gary Miller

Note: Leif and Gary invite all inquiries and/or correspondence to be directed to NORSEMAN PRODUCTIONS, P.O. Box 3484, Wichita KS, 67201-3484. If you are a horror fan, aspiring filmmaker or FX artist that would like to collaborate, chat or argue, please write! We're in KANSAS for god's sake!

Robert Collins has written for MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY MAGAZINE, HELIOCENTRIC NET, VOYAGES SF, and TODAY'S FANTASY/FUTURE TECHNOLOGY. Sam Loomis co-wrote this article and co-painted the DARKNESS promotional art.

EVEN

"MEGA-GORE...SKULL-SHATTERING CLIMAX...NOT FOR THE SQUEAMISH FOR SURE."

FILM THREAT VIDEO GUIDE

THE

"...A WORLD RECORD FOR EXPLODING HEADS, FOR THE CLIMACTIC MELTDOWN SEQUENCE..."

THE NEW YORK TIMES

DEAD

"...INDEPENDENT SHOCKER APPLIES VAMPIRES TO THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE..."

DRACULA - THE COMPLETE VAMPIRE

WILL

"IF YOU SEE THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES OF ONLY ONE MOVIE THIS YEAR,
IT SHOULD BE THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES OF THIS MOVIE." THE WICHITA EAGLE

SCREAM!

LEIF JONKER'S

DARKNESS

THE ULTIMATE IN VAMPIRE HORROR

NORSEMAN FILM PRESENTS GARY MILLER, MICHAEL GISICK AND CENA DONHAM IN

LEIF JONKER'S

DARKNESS

ALSO STARRING STEVE BROWN, LISA FRANZ, BILL HOOPER, CHRISTOPHER OWEN MICHAEL,
JAKE EUKER, VERONICA PAGE DENNEN AND RANDALL AVIKS AS LIVEN

MAKEUP EFFECTS BY GARY MILLER ORIGINAL MUSIC BY MICHAEL CURTIS

FEATURING SONGS BY APOSTASY, THE GRUNGE!" AND KNIGHT

WRITTEN, PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY LEIF JONKER

HORROR/ACTION/UNRATED/VHS/90MIN.

WARNING: THIS FILM CONTAINS SCENES OF EXTREMELY GRAPHIC VIOLENCE.

UNLEASHED SOON!