

THE DARKSIDE

Issue 108
£3.25

The Magazine

Fantastic



SKINNED DEEP!

FX Guru Gabe Bartalos
Interviewed!

KING OF THE ANTS

Stuart Gordon On His Most
Shocking Movie yet!

**SHRIEKING IN
TONGUES!**

Euro Cult DVD Label
Exclusive!

DVD

NIGHTMARES

The UK's Biggest Guide
To Horror Discs!

PLUS:

* Horror Guide * Censorship Watch
* Post Mortem * Loads Of DVD
Reviews & More!!!

THE DARKSIDE
\$8.25



PRINTED IN ENGLAND

SKINNED DEEP!



Top horror FX man Gabe Bartalos makes his directorial debut with *Skinned Deep*. Jay Slater interviews him on creating a gory treat!

S *Skinned Deep* is a new movie by Gabe Bartalos, a giant of a man with hands that could crush the lives out of critics who would dare grace his film with a less than enthusiastic review. Luckily that probably won't happen. This one literally screams out, kicking, punching and takes no prisoners. It really is something else; a horror movie that defies logic and conventions and takes the viewer to an area of horror entertainment they have not visited before. *Skinned Deep* is a wild bronco ride that rips and crackles with caffeine-booster energy. Think of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Think of *Eraserhead*. Think of spaghetti westerns, and think of a demented, roller coaster trip that is spattered with blood.

Jay Slater: Tell me, what inspired you to direct *Skinned Deep* and what were your aims?

Gabe Bartalos: Having grown up with a completely fanatical love for horror movies, I found myself at a very young age making my own, often quite graphic Super-8 films. I still remember quite clearly being seated at my kitchen table at the ripe age of fourteen and carving myself up for my first three minute "epic" called *The Bored Boy*. Blood was watercolour paint and my shredded flesh was derma wax. The seed was planted. I focused on the art aspect of horror films first with the creation of the make-up effects. I realised that behind every chopped-off head, decomposing mutant or bubbling slit throat was an artist, a make-up effects artist, executing his craft. I always loved sculpture, painting and films, so here was the best of all worlds. Create these illusions and then have a team film them! Armed with good luck, people who believed in me and an always growing portfolio, I was

able to start landing jobs doing just that, creating monsters and make-up effects for the movies; multiple films in New York followed by a move to Los Angeles. And getting to work with my idols – Rick Baker on *Gorillas In The Mist*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Coming To America*, *Moon Walker* and *Gremlins 2*, then Tom Savini on *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* was just amazing. Here was the art form I loved taken to a super sonic level. In 1990 I set up my own studio, Atlantic West Effects, and just dove headlong in with excellent collaborations with Frank Henenlotter on *Brain Damage*, *Frankenhooker*, *Basket Case 2* and 3, Trimark/Lions Gate studios with the *Leprechaun* Series (all six of them!) and recently with New York artist/director Matthew Barney for his amazing *Cremaster Cycle*. All great fun and amazingly talented people leading the pack. There is no way NOT to get inspired by hanging out with Frank Henenlotter and hearing him describe a scene he is proposing to me. There is no way NOT to get inspired while being on the set with Matthew Barney as he completely blows away our expectations on the reality of getting a difficult set-up. There is no way NOT to be excited when you dream up a character, sculpt it, apply it, and it becomes a franchise and spawns sequels! It's the most amazing feelings. Bottling all those feelings and taking a slug off it for me was writing, producing and directing my first film – *Skinned Deep*. I knew with the outlandish scenarios I HAD to write, that most studios first reflex might not be to invest in mutants that hurl plates and dismember with bear-trap mouths, but this is the kind of stuff I love. It is also the arena I am most comfortable with, the bizarre. So knowing how much work it was going to take doing *Skinned Deep* independently. It had to be subjects that I would never tire of, mutants, mayhem and madness. I wanted to be realistic in scripting something that I knew I could shoot, but at the same time I knew I wanted to show-off. I had Peter Strietmann lensing it for me and we just had so much fun taking the most surreal set-ups and then making sure they were cinematically beautiful; what an excellent combination! Then Al Magliochetti came on board with his bottomless pit of amazing digital effects and I knew he was the guy to fulfil my optical chal-

lenges of "The Creator". I'm so proud to say it is so well done and is the most fucked up image I've seen in years!

The talent was a combo of newcomers: Karoline Brandt as our star, Tina, and Jay Dugre as the ever suffering "Brain," a mutant with the three-foot prosthetic exposed brain, balanced by the super talent of Warwick Davis as the maniacal "Plates." What a treat to have Warwick reading the most far out lines that celebrate the excellence of porcelain, with his skill and make the absurd so damn effective! It left us all realising "Damn, this guy is good... really good!"

I love the comparisons people have been making to *Eraserhead* as that is one of my all time favourite films and David Lynch is one of the all time great directors. *Skinned Deep* is obviously a much different film, but I was interested in trying to tap the weird feeling you have in a fever-dream, or those specific haunts you can't shake as your day unfolds and you know a nocturnal journey still has a strangle hold on you.

There is that really interesting state one goes into, usually on the brink of COMPLETE physical exhaustion – either from extreme exercise or sleep deprivation where certain body functions shut down and others, maybe out of endurance or self preservation – click in, and really strange and bizarre interpretations of rather ordinary situations occur. I tried to nail THAT freaked out feeling with *Skinned Deep*.

Jay: I take it that when "Brain" ran naked through the bustling streets of New York, the authorities did not take to it kindly?

Gabe: When I first cast actor Jay Dugre in the part of Brain, I gave him my whole "take" on the character. Misunderstood mutant with a sweet face, and he HAS to play the part straight in order for it to work. Jay understood and then I brought up the OTHER tricky part about the part. His character needs to do a full frontal nudity streak with the three-foot brain prosthetic on his head through the busiest place at the busiest time on earth: Times Square, N.Y.C., Friday at rush hour! Jay laughed, thought, and then wholeheartedly agreed. I knew he would; he wouldn't have gotten this far in the casting without his good



Horses for courses - a knackered nag from Cremaster!



Are you surprised
he's Braindamaged?

devilish humour firmly in check. He knew I wanted to create "playful anarchy," no one really gets hurt, and the bottom line is, it is for the good of all cinema.

Shooting the scene was like a military operation. He sprang from a van once our Walkie-Talkies said it was crowded enough and sprinted down Forty-Third Street into a waiting sound blanket that dumped into a get-away pick-up truck. Now, I must say I use the word "get-away" loosely because we did NOT get away. Undercover cops jumped Jay and promptly arrested him amidst my frantic pleas and lies of it just being a fraternity prank, etc!

Luckily Peter Strietmann, the director of photography was already en-route to our "home-base" safely with the precious footage. Jay was released fourteen hours later with no charges against him; just some strange looks from cops who still in the end did not realise it was for a film. I think they thought he was some nut who liked to glue three-foot brain prosthetics on his head and let it all hang out for the thrill of Manhattan spectators!

Jay: And you succeeded one hundred and ten per cent! Was the film scripted or improvised? I ask, as its narrative is so off-kilter and quite literally throws the viewer at every given opportunity.

Gabe: *Skinned Deep* was most definitely scripted as well as the heavy effects sequences story boarded. Shooting in film FORCES visual responsibilities. There is too much at stake not to have a complete plan and "blueprint" for the shooting day. Everybody has to know where you are going, even if it may be a scene they don't quite understand. I love writing, and doing a script is the first step to directing. You have already "guided" your actors as to how they are going to perform by their ingestion of your written word. The better you can convey the written word, the better their understanding will be as you roll the camera on them.

Jay: Could you describe a typical day on set for *Skinned Deep*?

Gabe: A typical day on the set of *Skinned Deep* consisted of myself and director of photography, Peter Strietmann arriving to the location or to my shop an hour before call to go over my shot list. At this point I would discuss where my emphasis on the day lay; meaning if a couple of shots were expendable and our day ran out, I wouldn't be too worried while others were a must. Peter would then put together the lenses we needed and any other special camera rigs. Peter has a great talent for retrofitting existing gear or building it from scratch if one of my loony shots required a little customisation. As the crew and cast arrived, I'd assemble everyone and give a quick point-by-point as to what we were out to accomplish that day. Having everyone on board allowed individuals to pace themselves and let them know what each department was up against.

A good example would be out in the open desert; we were shooting without permits and needed to do some pretty radical shots with both vehicles battling on camera. We had many vehicles out there that needed to be low profile but there is only so much you can do to hide a two-ton "death mobile" with a young lady tied to the front and a maniac with a bear-trap as a mouth wielding a massive blade! Everyone knew if we get the run-around from the local officials, it's a waste of everyone's time, so everyone chipped in moving vehicles, rigging and taking turns driving – a nice group effort those days.

I always tried to do the riskiest shots first, that had to establish a location so if we got discovered, close-ups and inserts could be cheated elsewhere. This would happen often, because even though the film was not a studio film, I was determined to get many beautiful and oddball locations to "open" the film up.

Jay: How did the cast react to the script? Did you have any trouble convincing actors such as Davis to work with you due to the complexity and surreal nature of the narrative? Did anyone you approach turn you down?

Gabe: Everyone I approached was happy to be involved after they read the script, but the bolder ones did have to admit a bit of perplexity. Once they heard me describing the scene with a smile they were a little more relieved to see that I too was in on the joke and the level of strangeness that was being described. I had had the good fortune of working with Warwick Davis on the *Leprechaun* series, and besides gaining a mutual professional respect for each other we became friends. During the long days and nights of shooting I would always make up alternative scenes that would be fun to see, and go to the next level to create a bizarre scenario. Much of this was purely to entertain each other and I would often have Warwick laughing and saying "Oh that would be so cool. You should direct one day."

So when I had the script for *Skinned Deep* completed, I sent it to him with no introduction except that the character of Plates was written for him, and I promised not to glue anything on him. Well, he totally "got it" as the throwback I was shooting for and thought

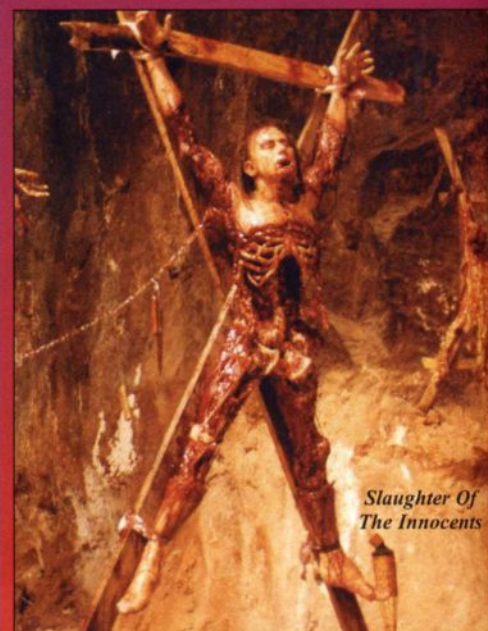
Plates was just hilarious. You can imagine how thrilled I was when he not only agreed to do it, but I felt he was really supportive of the fact that I was determined to do it independently to keep true to my vision.

Jay: You achieved an amazing result considering the low budget; did you enjoy working on such a restrictive and financial burden?

Gabe: I made a specific effort not to fall into some of the traps a lot of independent films make such as: one location (for the wrong reasons) or two cops in a car for twenty minutes describing what is happening and/or calling your film a fantasy horror film with no fantasy or horror in it! I know that these things cost money and take imagination, so sadly when budgets get pinched these are the first things to go. But that's the only reason to shoot! I went the opposite route, in that I knew an audience WANTS to see crazy shit and by all means bring on the special effects. Besides they are far more fun to shoot then two idiot roommates complaining about rent or "love gone bad" – unless, of course, you give them a three-foot exposed prosthetic brain. Now we're talking!

Shooting without the support of a studio has its ups and downs. The bad part is that you don't have their money. The good part is that you don't have their money; you can do whatever YOU as the artist feels is right. The bad part is that you don't have all their camera gear. The good part is that you don't have all their camera gear, you can make your own schedule and shoot when you want and when you are REALLY ready to shoot. The bad part is you may not be able attract name talent. The good part is that you can attract name talent, that loves the freedom you can give them as performers or technicians and they know that you REALLY want to work with them for all the RIGHT reasons.

Skinned Deep is definitely a personal project and is meant to self satisfy first, and if others like it, great! I think if more people took that attitude, you would find films with a little bit more soul and spirit and I think that is what an audience actually gravitates to. To completely groom a film to a target audience is just labelling that audience "ignorant and non-self



Slaughter Of
The Innocents



You need brains to make a movie like Skinned Deep

thinking." Most forward thinking people I know, love to scratch the surface of cinema and get psyched to embrace films that are not the same old canned shit and that you know the ending from the thirty second trailer (Bartalos raises his arms like Moses and in a mock deep voice). Do what you love and others will follow.

Jay: What feedback have you had from viewers and what do you expect from the movie to achieve in distribution?

Gabe: It's great to see that the audience loves this oddball stuff. We have been getting GREAT responses, and once people realise that all the insanity is carefully "sculpted" and it's okay to laugh at this cartoon violence and thrill to the surreal exploits, it translates into a great ride. It makes me feel good, because to me, that is the whole idea of horror films, whether it's making them and watching them; have fun!

Jay: What were your involvement with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* and what were your thoughts on director Tobe Hooper, sfx guru Tom Savini and the finished film?

Gabe: Working with Tom Savini was such a treat in that it was a lot of his gory special effects work inspired me to become an sfx artist. He invited me to join his crew in Austin, Texas for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*. How cool, I loved the first movie so this was a thrill. Tom had a crew of about five of us that rotated duties in the shop between sculpting, painting, foam running and rigging. We all ended up on set at one point or another, which was great. Watching director Tobe Hooper revisit this classic material was really interesting. There was a sequence that was prepped but never shot where a bunch of rallying football players and fans are slaughtered in a stadium parking lot. We built and tested some gruesome effects where a head is chainsawed right across; it looked great and it's too bad they didn't get around to it. In that same sequence, I was going to play one of the football players that

gets taken out, again too bad because that would have been funny.

Jay: Likewise, with *Blade*, what was your involvement with this movie?

Gabe: *Blade* came about with a rushed call from director Steve Norrington who had added a more theatrical ending involving the injecting, swelling and exploding of the evil vampire. Greg Cannom handled the bulk of the effects, and Gary Tunnickliff was knee deep in the sculpture of this finale. As time ran tight Gary needed to farm some of it out, so we were happy to help out. My shop, Atlantic West Effects, was in full production on the effects for Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 2*, so it was easy to absorb this extra work load. Both Gary and Steve are such nice guys and I was happy to be a part of it.

Jay: As you worked extensively on *Spookies*, perhaps you could enlighten readers on its over-complex production that has been shrouded in secrecy. Who was the original director and why were people sacked? And did Michael Lee, the owner of Vipco and financier of *Spookies*, direct the movie?

Gabe: *Spookies* was one of the first films I got to "key" effects for. I was working for sfx artist Arnold Gargiullo who left the project over artistic differences and turned the remainder of the effects over to me. This was done with the blessing of the original directors Tom Doran and Brendan Faulkner, who were to be replaced by Eugenie Joseph, a decision made across the sea by financier Michael Lee. I felt bad for the original writers/directors Doran and Faulkner as it really was their "baby" and they did ninety per cent of the work before things went sour. I got along with everybody there so it was too bad to see people turn on each other. Oh well, I guess things happen at executive levels that we as crew members are not privy to.

In the end, you hope to come away with valuable experiences from different films. Whether it is the crazed bonding with Klaus Kinski on *Crawlspace*, talking mutations with Frank Henenlotter on *Basket Case 3* or setting up an effect in the tiny, metallic tip of the Chrysler Building with Matthew Barney for *Cremaster 3*, I am constantly reminded how many great things come from these wild film shoots.

Jay: It must have been a blast working with legendary actor Klaus Kinski on the set of *Crawlspace*; was he a difficult actor as many of his co-performers have stated (as Lewis Collins discovered to his horror on the set of Antonio Margheriti's *Codename Leopard*)? Was the film shot entirely in Rome?

Gabe: Yes it was shot in Rome, and it was amazing to work with the late, great Klaus Kinski. He truly was a nut, but extremely funny and calculating and knew exactly the response he was looking for. My favourite day with him was when I applied a rig to his chest for the scene where he fakes his death. When the shot was completed, he just marvelled at the blood I dressed on his stab wounds and his face. It was a quiet moment of meditation for

us, where to this day I still wonder exactly what was he thinking as he admired his blood smeared face in the mirror.

Jay: *Brain Damage* is wonderfully demented entertainment. What was it like working on a low budget Frank Henenlotter movie?

Gabe: What a treat to have *Brain Damage* as the first film to work with Frank Henenlotter on. He is able to achieve what I think is the "holy grail" of horror films. Keeping it bizarre without being incomprehensible, keeping it horrifying without being repugnant, and keeping it fun while never using comedy as a safety net. Frank is able to take the most twisted tale and make it consumer friendly! Frank knows exactly what he needs on set and how he is going to shoot it, so he's easy to work with because there isn't much mystery to his demands. It was great fun to create Elmer, and Frank was right there encouraging me and keeping everyone excited on the character details.

Brain Damage featured a lot of make-up effects, from gore effects, to the various Elmer effects and the age make-ups, so from a cosmetic point of view, was quite fulfilling. It's nice now that some time has past since making *Brain Damage*, how it has really come in to its own as many people's personal favourites of Frank's films. It was shot so well, and Frank's direction is so confident, it's easy to see why.

Jay: Do you have any words you would like to express to the fans of your special effects work as well as *Skinned Deep*?

Gabe: Well, it's really a treat to be able to do something you love such as the art of effects work. Especially since you realise that you would be doing it whether it was your profession or not. To be able to take something that has its roots in personal satisfaction, find a public canvas for it and then have people enjoy it for themselves is amazing.

Going one step further and making a film like *Skinned Deep* that is generating such a swell of excitement is really a fun ride to take. We all digest so much literature and media every day, one has to really fight to keep their originality and identity when they regurgitate something back into society. I'm just thrilled that people groove on my puke called *Skinned Deep*.



Skinned Deep - and ugly with it!