

## The Newborn Dead: Robert Filion's Psychological Fear

Written by Marla Newborn

Wednesday, 06 October 2010 10:33

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Last year, in support of independent filmmaking, I set up a special showcase of short horror films at the FANGORIA *Weekend of Horrors* convention in Los Angeles. When I noticed they gave me a screening room that seemed miles away from the main convention area, I started to panic: “How is anyone going to find out about my show of indie shorts?” I despaired. One filmmaker whose movie was to be part of the screening noticed my anxiety and said, “I’ll help you out here,” and the next thing I knew, he cried out in a loud, powerful voice, “My name is Robert Filion and I am a filmmaker!”

These words were projected with extreme volume by a very tall young man in sight of what was now a long line of people. Everyone stopped what they were doing to look at him. You just have to picture the scene. He didn’t stop there: “My film SEE THE DEAD,” he continued, “will be showing in room 204 today at 2 p.m. and I expect you all to be there!” He was roaring as he helped me hand out flyers to about 100 people lined up to get onto the convention floor. Without any hesitation, he promoted my little event like a Shakespearean actor projecting on a Broadway stage. And thanks to his bit of publicity, when 2:00 came around, room 204 was filled to capacity, and I was beaming. From that day forward, I’ve considered him a friend as well as someone whose work I’ve supported.



As is the case with many independent filmmakers, Filion (pictured right with his wife Cindy) has worn many hats—writing, producing, directing, photographing, editing, sound-designing and creating visual FX for his works, including the multi-award-winning SEE THE DEAD, the 72-hour competition film CHEKHOV’S CHILDREN and, most recently, LOT 66. While the bulk of short horror films that cross my desk these days feature themes of the undead, bloodsucking, torture and gore, Filion’s films tend to focus, at their heart, on psychological horror. He is inclined to create scares around human dysfunctional psychology, although SEE THE DEAD is a blend. “I find the scariest place to navigate is my own head,” Filion says. “I was raised in a military family and never had longterm friends, so I never really fit in, since we moved around a bunch. Though

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very outgoing, I found the cruelty of children a bit much to take. Even back then, I wrote stories of a fantastical nature and retreated into my own world.

“My emotions no longer get the best of me...but what if they did?” he continues. “People are emotionally fragile, and the question I come up with time and again is, what if you push the right buttons? Don't all day-to-day occurrences become mitigating factors in a person's stability on some level? Even something as simple as walking your dog can be the conduit to a person's undoing. You could wind up in a traffic accident, or mauled by that dog of yours, raped while walking the dog...all of these carry potentially heavy psychological consequences. The world can be a scary place, and it's just an inch from you, not a million miles away.”

These are very deep concepts that do indeed come forth in Filion's projects. In *SEE THE DEAD*, we watch as a woman in the midst of a dark emotional struggle wakes up one day to what is now, for her, a dead world. Filion calls the making of this movie the pursuit of the ultimate horror high. He explains, “I think the closest I have ever been to achieving this high is when I was creating *SEE THE DEAD* for the American Zombie Competition in 2008. That contest asked regional and national filmmakers to create a short to be judged by George A. Romero himself. What we came up with won the competition and Romero's respect for me as a filmmaker.”



On the whole, Filion directly juxtaposes a psychologically bent reality with the one we see with our own eyes. It's a fascinating technique, and one he seems to be mastering as a writer/director. This blending of mental and emotional worlds is apparent in both *CHEKHOV'S CHILDREN* and *LOT 66*. “With *CHEKHOV'S CHILDREN*,” Filion explains, “I asked everyone to do a bit of research beforehand, and I feel we succeeded in getting the most extreme cases of OCD [obsessive-compulsive disorder] in one room—it was more about fun with the material than total accuracy.”

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Yet it feels very accurate indeed, and scary in that psychological dark manner that is becoming a Filion "thing." In the case of LOT 66, Filion says, "I wanted to push harder on the visual effects. The short on paper seemed simple, but it took a number of months to complete, as we worked harder than ever with After Effects." As far as LOT's story is concerned, once again, in true Filion style, we watch the main character backed into a corner and no longer able to avoid his psychological demons.



When Filion speaks about these demons and how the world can be a scary place, it becomes easier to make the connection between his outlook and his movies' storytelling. I tend to agree with Filion that being in one's head to an extreme degree can be equally as scary as confronting zombies, werewolves and vampires. I began to think of his own world in South Carolina—certainly a far cry from Hollywood or New York—and wondered what it's like to make movies in his neck of the woods. "The Carolinas have been great," he responds. "As a filmmaker, you need to be used to rejection, suspicion and begging for equipment, locations and talent. Large cities sometimes contain some of the highest percentages of jaded people who won't budge when an impoverished filmmaker comes knocking because filmmaking is a regular part of life. Here, people largely just want to be involved. I find it necessary to develop longstanding relationships with cast and crew so we can all benefit eventually from our hard work. These relationships ensure certain levels of commitment and word-binding...most people hate to let friends down."

Finally, I began to understand why Filion had so much confidence that day when he helped me promote Fango's short horror screening at the LA convention. He's been honing his skills in a serious fashion. Does he have any stories or problems to share? Filion concludes, "Because I came from sets which contained much disarray, disdain and scorn, I learned well what not to do. My sets have all been laid-back, with like-minded people striving toward a common goal. We always have fun with the tough work I seem to condemn us all to do. All kidding aside, I would be remiss in not stating that just because filmmakers are blacking out the windows of a house in a populated area, it doesn't mean they're shooting porn. Though we may wish we were, the reality is normally far less exciting."

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Filion's shorts can be seen [here](#) .

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