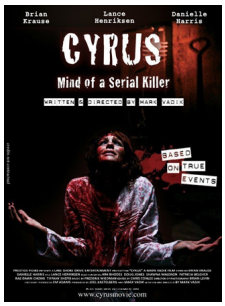
With such recent releases as PARANORMAL ACTIVITY, CLOVERFIELD and the [REC] films, documentary-style horror is more popular than ever, and CYRUS: MIND OF A SERIAL KILLER is one of the latest entries in the subgenre. Written and directed by Mark Vadik (and no relation to the other CYRUS currently playing theaters), the movie centers on a small, independent news crew investigating a series of unexplained disappearances in the isolated Midwestern county of Arkham Heights.

In the course of pursuing their story, Maria, played by HALLOWEEN and HATCHET 2 scream queen Danielle Harris (pictured), and her cameraman Tom (Tony Yalda) interview Emmett (genre vet Lance Henriksen), who knows all too well about Cyrus (SLEEPWALKERS’ Brian Krause), a.k.a. “The County Line Cannibal.” The more Emmett reveals, the closer Maria comes to the story that could be her big break—if she survives. The cast also includes Fango fave Doug Jones, Rae Dawn Chong and Tiffany Shepis.



FANGORIA: How did you come to write and direct of CYRUS: MIND OF A SERIAL KILLER?

MARK VADIK: I had actually been shopping another project, American BoogeyMan, when I was offered a script doctor gig on a horror project for a production company that shall remain anonymous. They wanted some writing samples, and CYRUS was one of the scripts I gave them. Somehow, it made its way around to a couple of producers, one thing lead to another and pretty soon we were in preproduction.

FANG: How did the idea for the film come about?

VADIK: I had been doing research on serial killings and was driving up to Minneapolis from Chicago. I passed this creepy farmhouse; it was one of those places where you just say, "Bet you someone died there." At the same time, right on the side of the road was a deer that had been killed by a car. The house and the deer and the research just kind of jumbled together, and the next day I wrote a short story called "Roadkill" that eventually turned into the script.

FANG: Since this is a documentary-style horror movie, what category would you put it in? A BLAIR WITCH-type film or something like all the recent docudramas that have been done on killers like Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, etc.? Could you explain your approach to this type of shooting?

VADIK: I'd say it's more akin to BLAIR WITCH because Cyrus is really a composite of a few serial killers, so to that extent, it's not really a biographical piece. It was really just like doing any two-camera shoot, except when I was doing the interview sequences, I was trying to get that "newsy" feel from the actors. When we see the story through Tom's camera, I was trying to get a very neo-realistic feel.

FANG: What type of films influenced you as a kid growing up? Were any of them horror?

VADIK: I've always loved the old black-and-white films, especially the old Sherlock Holmes Series, THE WOLF MAN, THE MUMMY and film noir—even as a kid. I used to stay up and watch CREATURE FEATURES and THE Late Late Show. So, those probably influence my style quite a bit on some level. The Omen and THE Exorcist absolutely terrified me as a kid, and still do.

FANG: You mentioned that Cyrus is an amalgam of a number of different real-life serial killers. Which ones are part of him, what traits carry over and why did you choose these particular murderers?

VADIK: Cyrus' childhood memories are, in large part, based on Henry Lee Lucas. His adult life is very reflective of Fritz Haarmann, his whole hunting/butchering aspect relied heavily on Haarmann's life and Albert Fish cannibalized his victims too. Fish had a very twisted method of

"consoling" people: for example, the letter he wrote one victim's mother describing her death. Cyrus picks up this aspect of Fish's psyche and a couple of others as well. There are also Ed Gein influences, maybe a little H.H. Holmes, but they aren't as pronounced as the other three. I really don't know why I focused on these specific men as opposed to others; it just seemed like the natural growth of the character. The personal histories of these three just germinated in my mind while I was writing and gave birth to the character.

FANG: What was it like working with Brian Krause, and what type of research did he have to do to prepare for the role?

VADIK: Brian rocks! He really got into the part. He was an absolute pleasure to work with, and gives a brilliant performance. He was there throughout the entire shoot, because not only did he play Cyrus, he also directed the movie's 2nd unit and did a great job with that as well.

We had discussed the role a lot before the shoot, but when he showed up on location, he had done a ton of research himself on serial killers. For example, they tend to shave off their body hair so they don't leave DNA behind. When he got to set, he offered to have us shave his arms and chest and give him a crew cut. I really wanted Cyrus to have one too, but I was waiting to ask about the crew-cut thing until we had him in Michigan. I was worried that was going to be an issue, because he normally plays the handsome good guy and shaving off all his hair wasn't going to be great for his next picture. But it wasn't a problem, because that's how he saw the character too. That speaks volumes about his level of dedication to the role.

FANG: Did you face any challenges while shooting?

VADIK: The weather had to be the biggest difficulty. We started filming and it was beautiful out, but within the first week of principal photography, we got hit with a blizzard, and the snow and cold lasted the rest of the shoot. This created some costuming and continuity issues, so we'd melt the snow when we could and throw blankets on the actors between takes. But the real problem came with stunts: There are a couple of car crashes in the movie, and the roads were coated with ice. So for safety's sake, we wound up shooting all that a few months later, after the weather cleared. This put us behind schedule on getting the movie done.

Even more unfortunately, one of the stunt players got seriously injured during one of the

crashes. That was just scary. You expect a "thumbs up" after they do the gag, but instead he started convulsing, and we were seeing a lot of blood I knew my makeup artist didn't create. Here was someone I'd been working with and the next thing I knew, he was in an ambulance going to an ER and I wasn't sure if he was going to be alive in an hour. That was very difficult for everyone on the cast and crew to go through. Fortunately, he was fine and doing another film about a month later—but until we know that person was going to be all right, it was pretty tense. I still cringe when I see that footage in the movie.

FANG: Today, the market is saturated with zombie films and remakes. How do you feel about both?

VADIK: I guess it depends how well they're done. For the most part, the flood of cookie-cutter zombie movies doesn't really do anything for me. On the other hand, I really liked 28 Days LateR. If a filmmaker can bring a new spin or make it more interesting, more power to them. As far as remakes, speaking from the creative side, I believe it's an issue of what fresh elements you can bring to the table. Is the new work going to be better, and good enough to creatively justify a remake? Are you going to really tell the story in a more interesting way? If not, don't do it.

From the financial side, it makes a lot of sense to redo a movie that already has a successful history and a lot of fans—you minimize your risk from the start. And make no mistake: When you're making a movie, there are a lot of financial risks involved. As a filmmaker, you really can't ignore either side of that equation without some very bad results. But off the top of my head, I can't really think of any remake I like better than the original.

FANG: Tell me about postproduction.

VADIK: We posted at Lighthouse and Juniper in LA. That was a blast, especially the audio mix. There's something pretty amazing and disturbing about sitting in an empty theater watching the movie while you're getting blasted with the audio effects.

FANG: Are you a fan of CGI, and will we see any in your film?

VADIK: I don't know if I'd say I'm a fan so much as I believe it's an important element in modern filmmaking. When it's used properly and done right, it's great and can really enhance a picture. There is some CGI in CYRUS; not a lot, but we definitely needed it for certain scenes. For example: There's a pretty cool shot of Vicky when she's hanging and her feet have been severed; and Cyrus takes a character's head off with a shotgun. When we knew we had a shot that required CGI, we enhanced it with practical effects while we were shooting, and that hybrid hopefully makes the end product look more realistic. So when Cyrus shoots the head off, the "victim" was standing there with greenscreen on his head, but we also shot a glob of "brains" into the face of the actor standing behind him. Then we mixed those elements in post.

FANG: Have you gone around to the different festivals?

VADIK: We've just started doing that circuit. The movie will be playing at the Arizona Underground Film Festival and Crypticon as well as the Atlanta Horror Film Festival. A few others have made some inquiries. It really boils down to the distributor's call, but I'd like it to screen at a lot of fests and let as many people as possible see it on a big screen.

FANG: Is there a sequel in the works?

VADIK: We've actually kicked the idea around and it seems to have some momentum behind it, but a sequel is really in the hands of the box-office gods.

FANG: What's next for you?

VADIK: I'm directing a nonfiction alien-abduction movie this August, and then a couple of months off before we start shooting All The Pretty Dead Girls in May 2011. That one is a psychological horror—a whodunit.

FANG: How do you think and/or hope fans will react to CYRUS?

VADIK: I hope they like it, and that it gives them nightmares for at least a week after they see it!

Check out CYRUS: MIND OF A SERIAL KILLER’s official website here .

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